

The Crucible of Texas Politics: An Analysis of the United States Senatorial Primaries
of 1941 and 1948

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ABSTRACT

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Lyndon Johnson's opponents used the outcome of his 1948 senatorial bid to demonstrate his dishonesty. This win by eighty-seven disputed votes gave him the derogatory title, "Landslide Lyndon." Johnson's initial senate campaigns in 1941 and 1948 are examined for Texas Politics as usual.

Upon Senator Sheppard's death in 1937, a special election precipitated with Martin Dies, Gerald Mann, Lyndon Johnson, and W. Lee O'Daniel as the candidates. Although this election has not received the notoriety of 1948, it exemplifies Texas Politics as usual where thousands of manipulated votes resulted in O'Daniel's late victory.

Johnson's next race for the senate came in 1948. He ran against George Peddy and Coke Stevenson. This expensive campaign rested upon two hundred two invalid votes from Jim Wells County. In reality, tens of thousands of manipulated votes on both sides resulted in litigation making its way to the United States Supreme Court.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most of the Presidents of the United States have held numerous elective offices during the years that preceded their election to the nation's highest office. These earlier posts provided not only a political training ground to prepare them for the Presidency but gave the individual a national platform. It is extremely important for anyone who wishes to be a successful Presidential candidate to access another political office with national press coverage and a "bully pulpit" to broadcast his/her ideas. Name recognition is vital for anyone wishing to become the Commander-in-Chief.

Congressman Lyndon Johnson was not content to remain a Congressman. The Speaker of the House is a very powerful position, but Lyndon Johnson did not aspire to the post that his good friend Sam Rayburn occupied. There were two distinct reasons why LBJ did not aspire to become the Speaker of the House. The slow methodical seniority system was not to Johnson's liking. Lyndon said that every two years the people of your home district had to continually be pleased enough with your performance to reelect you. This was a difficult feat in and of itself. The next hurdle concerned waiting your turn until others retired or died. Then, if the opposing political party had the majority of seats in the House of Representatives, one might never be able to rise to the Speakership. Johnson also considered the House to be too slow for him. His family had a history of heart attacks. He own father had died at just over sixty years old and an uncle had died at only fifty-seven. Johnson said that he thought his own life expectancy would only be about sixty years. He simply could not wait on the uncertain world of the House of Representatives to pass the baton to him.

Johnson aspired to become a United States Senator before he was forty years old. Lyndon may have wished to fulfill a prophecy his grandfather made on the day he was born in 1908. His grandfather Johnson had ridden all throughout his hill country hometown in Texas yelling that a U.S. Senator was born today. Whether it was the grandfather's prophecy or Johnson's love of power and ambition, he did aspire to the senate in 1941. He had only been a Congressman since the spring of 1937. This was to be an emotionally taxing campaign. As the initial poll tallies were reported to the Texas Election Bureau, it appeared that Johnson was the Senate nominee for the Democratic Party. He and his staff of mostly young aides were to learn a valuable lesson. The W. Lee O'Daniel forces had played Texas politics as usual in a close election. Vote tallies were manipulated from east Texas where votes were taken away from a losing candidate and placed in the O'Daniel column after the polls had closed. In addition, these changing vote totals kept coming in days after the election. Johnson had to go back to Washington as just plain old Congressman Johnson.

Lyndon was determined to learn from this experience. He told political associates in Washington that he and his staff would not be caught unprepared again. He wanted to run for the senate again. The prospects for a second senate bid did not seem likely with Tom Connally well entrenched and the brand new senator W. Lee O'Daniel, a young man. His chance came after the Second World War when O'Daniel had proven himself to be incompetent. O'Daniel had become extremely unpopular in Texas since he most often voted with the Republican delegation in Congress when he was a Democrat. Although the competition in 1948 was substantial, Johnson finally decided to run for the senate once again.

The 1948 campaign would be a hard fought contest. During the primary, Johnson faced Colonel George Peddy from Houston and ex-governor Coke Stevenson from Kimble. The July primary produced a most exciting runoff between Stevenson and Johnson. Johnson was to ultimately emerge victorious by a mere eighty-seven votes. This was the election that produced the less than complimentary title, “Landslide Lyndon” for Senator Johnson.

These two elections deserve special consideration for two primary reasons. First, the hard fight of these two campaigns molded and solidified Johnson’s reaction to hard political realities. The same tenacity that Johnson exhibited in dealing with the Vietnam War was evident here in these two senatorial primary campaigns. Second, the election to the United States Senate launched LBJ on his way to the Oval Office. As a senator, only ninety- five other people held such high office. He was a natural leader of men. As such, this crucial 1948 election placed him in a position where he could quickly become minority and then, majority leader of the senate. As majority leader, he often met with the President, Vice-President, and Speaker of the House. He was indeed a political force with whom to be reckoned. He was in a position to gain in national stature. The press would cover what Lyndon Johnson did. If Lyndon Johnson had not won the 1948 senatorial contest, it was unlikely that he would have become the President of the United States in November 1963. Senator from Texas was Lyndon Johnson’s calculated stepping-stone to acquire his ultimate political prize, the Presidency of the United States of America.

CHAPTER 2

THE MAKING OF A SUPERIOR POLITICIAN

President Lyndon Baines Johnson's personality was fraught with contradictions. He was one of the most active individuals to ever hold the nation's highest office. LBJ lived in a frenzied campaign mode. He acted as if some demon was close on his heels, and if he slowed down for a moment that the demon would win. Winning was everything for Johnson.

Either compassion or intimidation could accompany his deluge of activity. The compassionate side of LBJ acted to improve the lives of countless rural farmers by providing their homes and farms with electricity and better sanitation. As a teacher at Cotulla, Texas, LBJ had been disgusted as he witnessed the lack of educational opportunity available to his Mexican-Americans pupils. He worked to improve the lives of many poor students throughout the United States by developing Pell Grants, which to this day help disadvantaged youths attend college or vocational school. The flipside of Johnson could intimidate even the most seasoned politician or businessman.

LBJ's forceful six foot three and one-half inch frame towered over its intended victim. Ben Bradlee from the Washington Post recalled that LBJ "never just shook hands with you. One hand was shaking your hand; the other hand was always some place else, exploring you, examining you."¹ Being an extremely skilled articulate attorney offered no immunity to Johnson's ability to bend people to his will. Abe Fortas attested to LBJ's force of will when he attempted, unsuccessfully, to decline the nomination for Associate Justice to the Supreme Court. The White House photographer caught the President and

¹ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

Abe Fortas in a typical pose with Lyndon Johnson towering over Fortas, who looked like “a slim reed in gale-force winds.”² In fact, Fortas never really changed his mind about the appointment as Associate Justice. Johnson simply ambushed him.

The personality contradictions that came to identify President Lyndon Johnson are not easily understood. “All of Lyndon Johnson’s accomplishments and all of his public visibility do not complete the picture of the man.”³ The creation of the adult man, Lyndon Johnson presents a complex puzzle. How did LBJ develop such a fierce, personal will where winning was the only acceptable standard?

Many friends, foes, and associates attested to LBJ’s incessant need to win. Estelle Harbin, who worked with Johnson in Congressman Richard Kleberg’s office during the early 1930s, stated that LBJ “couldn’t stand not being somebody.”⁴ Johnson took every advantage of being the secretary to the college president at San Marcos to dominate other students, bending them to suit his will, and to give orders rather than take them. A boyhood friend said, “if he couldn’t lead, he didn’t care much about playing.”⁵ During his boyhood years, while his father was still a part of the Texas state legislature, he might be the only boy on the playground to have a baseball. If the other children refused to let him have the primary role as pitcher, he would take the ball home so, no one could play.

The active-negative personality of LBJ can be explored on the basis of nature vs. nurture. What role did his parents play in producing this hard driving persona? Johnson was a witness to the idealism of his mother and the political populism of his father.

² Bruce Allen Murphy, *Fortas: The Rise and Ruin of a Supreme Court Justice* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1988), 161.

³ Keith Wheeler and William Lambert, “First of a Two-Part Portrait: The Man Who Is President,” *Life*, Vol. 57, No. 7, August 14, 1964, 24.

⁴ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 22.

⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 22.

LBJ's father was Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr. LBJ learned the glad-handing ways of a rural populist politician from his father. Rebekah Baines Johnson was a Baylor University graduate who was ambitious and transferred that ambition to her first-born son. His mother made Lyndon the center of her universe and showered attention on her bright boy; however, if Lyndon refused to live up to her expectations the attention could be suddenly withdrawn. She developed a very close relationship to LBJ and nurtured his intelligence. Rebekah bragged "that little Lyndon knew the alphabet blocks when he was two, was reciting Mother Goose rhymes and poems from Longfellow and Tennyson at three, and could spell almost anything he could hear as a 4-year old."⁶ "In this environment, LBJ developed the skill of bringing conflicting parties together and acquired his lifelong taste for the spotlight."⁷

Lyndon Johnson was an extremely insecure person. He had many self-doubts. If Johnson could be the best at everything he attempted then, he could keep his insecurities hidden. How could a man who rose to become President of the United States be filled with nearly debilitating insecurities? What was the root cause of his insecurities?

The heritage of the Bunton, Baines, and Johnson crowd provided Lyndon with a source of pride but proved to be a measuring stick by which the hard task master inside LBJ would measure his own self-worth. The young LBJ "reveled in stories of Johnsons and Baineses who'd fought marauding Indians, of old uncles who drove cattle up the famous trails, of hardy pioneer spirit in his genes."⁸ He said that he had been descended

⁶ "Today in Texas History: Rebekah Baines Johnson, LBJ's Mom, Born on June 26, 1881." <http://blogs.chron.com/txpotomac> (accessed December 24, 2010).

⁷ *From American Experience: The Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson*, PBS, First aired on September 30 and October 1, 1991 (accessed December 23, 2010).

⁸ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13.

from a long line of preachers, teachers, state legislators, and signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

The Johnsons came to Texas from Georgia. Lyndon's great, great grandfather was John Johnson, who had received a land grant in Oglethorpe County, Georgia for his service during the American Revolutionary War. John Johnson's third son, Jesse, would be Lyndon's great grandfather. Jesse was the first politician among the Johnson clan, as an elected sheriff of Henry County, Georgia. Despite the fact that Jesse was forty-six years old, he decided to move to Texas in 1846, shortly after it was annexed as the twenty-eighth state. Jesse brought his considerable family including his wife, Lucy, eight of their younger children, and four of their grandchildren who belonged to widower son, John Leonard.⁹

Jesse's sons, Andrew, Tom, and Sam, migrated to the hill country west of Austin to seek their fortune by raising cattle. The Civil War interrupted the young men's experiment to seek their fortune. In 1864, Tom Johnson purchased a three hundred twenty acre spread along the Pedernales River. Sam Ealy Johnson, Lyndon's grandfather, joined his brother Tom after fighting with the 26th Texas Cavalry to successfully defend Shreveport, Louisiana during the Red River Campaign. The free ranging cattle of the hill country had multiplied during the four year struggle of the Civil War. Tom and Sam Johnson rounded up these cattle and bought others at prices as low as two dollars a head. Between 1867 and 1870, the Johnsons made a fortune making the annual five week long trip up the Chisholm Trail to the railhead at Abilene, Kansas. The Johnson boys returned

⁹ Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Johnson's Boy: A Close-Up of the President from Texas* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 3-4.

home, in 1870 with their saddlebags stuffed full of twenty dollar gold coins, a total of \$100,000 from their trip to Abilene.¹⁰

Lyndon's grandmother was Eliza Bunton Johnson. The Buntons had served in the Scottish Parliament before coming to North Carolina where they fought in the Revolutionary War. Eliza's ancestors became congressmen from Kentucky and one was governor of the state. Eliza's uncle, John Wheeler Bunton, joined with many fellow Tennesseans to move west to Texas in 1833. John Wheeler Bunton signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, helped to write the constitution of the Texas Republic, and authored the bill that formed the Texas Rangers.¹¹

John Wheeler Bunton had participated in the three days of bloody fighting to establish the Republic of Texas. He had made a wild charge into San Antonio. At the Battle of San Jacinto, Bunton's tall frame could be identified by a fellow officer penetrating far into the breastworks of the Mexican Army. Lyndon grew up hearing the stories of his great granduncle's exploits in the War for Independence and of his exploits fighting Indians. A friend of the Buntons' wrote that "to the present generation of Texans the name of this honored man is, perhaps, but little known; but in the day long gone by, it was a household word in all the scattered log cabins that dotted the woods and prairies of Texas."¹²

John Bunton had three brothers who followed him to Texas. One of the brothers was Robert Holmes Bunton, who was to become the great grandfather of Lyndon Baines Johnson. He was six feet three inches tall and weighed about two hundred sixty

¹⁰ Rober Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 15-16.

¹¹ Lance Morrow, *The Best Year of Their Lives: Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon in 1948: Learning the Secrets of Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 90.

¹² Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 4.

pounds.¹³ Robert married Jane MacIntosh. This marriage produced Eliza Bunton Johnson who was to be Lyndon's paternal grandmother.¹⁴

Lyndon inherited the look of his Bunton ancestors. All of the Bunton men were over six feet tall. Lyndon's aunt, Kate Bunton Keale, was the first to observe that little Lyndon had inherited the milky white magnolia skin of the Buntons. He also possessed the Bunton piercing eyes, which were so dark brown that they almost appeared black. He possessed the characteristic large nose and ears with heavysset eyebrows that accompanied the other Bunton characteristics.¹⁵

LBJ's grandmother Eliza was herself something of the ideal heroine of the Old West as she rode along the Chisholm Trail with Sam and Tom braving stampedes and river crossings with thousands of cattle. She was the embodiment of the strong, resourceful, and brave frontier woman. Once when Sam was away from the home, she spotted Comanches coming through the mesquite brush near their home. Only the year before a young couple had been scalped alive and killed by a Comanche raiding party. Eliza took her baby daughter, Mary, into the cellar. She dragged a braided rug with a stick over the trap door and tied a diaper over the baby's mouth to keep her quiet. The Comanches drove off their stock and ransacked the house, but she and Mary survived. These stories of romantic heroism were told and retold to the eager Lyndon on his grandfather, Sam Sr.'s front porch.¹⁶

Lyndon got his middle name of Baines from his mother's side of the family. LBJ's great grandfather Baines was George Washington Baines, Sr. born in 1809. He

¹³ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 6.

¹⁴ Booth Mooney, *The Lyndon Johnson Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), 11.

¹⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 3.

¹⁶ Lance Morrow, *The Best Year of Their Lives*, 91.

was a Baptist pastor, editor, and educator. He was a third generation Baptist minister. He moved from North Carolina to Georgia to Alabama while still a child. He attended the University of Alabama and was ordained as a minister in Alabama. In an effort to recover his health from dyspepsia, he moved to Arkansas in 1837. While founding three churches in Arkansas, he served as a state legislator for one term during the 1840s. He then moved the family to Louisiana where he ministered in several churches during his six years in the state. His final move brought him to Texas at Huntsville where he cultivated a friendship with the famous Sam Houston. He was the editor of the *Texas Baptist*, a newsletter that went out to all the congregations throughout the state. He directed Baylor University through the financially difficult period at the beginning of the Civil War.¹⁷

Lyndon's grandfather was one of ten children born to George Washington Baines, Sr. and his first wife, Melissa Ann Butler Baines while the couple lived in Louisiana during the middle 1840s. He was named Joseph Wilson Baines and was primarily reared and educated in Texas. He was a Civil War soldier, teacher, lawyer, and publisher of a weekly newspaper in McKinney, Texas.¹⁸ His daughter, Rebekah, received his instructions in civic duty and morals. He served the state of Texas as its Secretary of State during the 1870s and later was a member of the state legislature for many years. It was he who encouraged his beloved daughter, Rebekah, to attend Baylor University and

¹⁷ Travis L. Summerlin, "BAINES, GEORGE WASHINGTON, SR.," *Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fba14>, (accessed January 11, 2011).

¹⁸ Booth Mooney, *The Lyndon Johnson Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), 11.

major in literature. This was unusual for Texas women at the turn of the twentieth century to attend college, let alone graduate.¹⁹

LBJ was understandably proud of his ancestors who were the leaders of his state since it became the Lone Star Republic, but the trajectory of the family was heading in the opposite direction. By the time Lyndon was born, “his family [was] not nearly as distinguished as it pretended to be.”²⁰ Fortunes had always been fleeting in the hill country. Tom and Sam Johnson’s good fortune in 1870 had been counteracted by a bust the following year, as cattle prices plummeted. Rebekah Baines’ father, Joseph, who had exposed his daughter to the genteel niche of Southern gracious living in Blanco, Texas was ruined by four years of drought. He was forced to sell the columned Southern style mansion that had been the family home. In part, his abundant kindness to his tenant farmers by continuing to credit their accounts had brought him to financial ruin. While Rebekah was a student at Baylor in 1904, her family lost their holdings in Blanco and had to move to a much smaller home in Fredericksburg.²¹

Financial misfortune continued for the family during Lyndon’s childhood. Lyndon’s father lost the family farm in September 1922. He moved his wife Rebekah into a house in Johnson City. Sam could not afford even this small house. His two brothers, Tom and George, co-signed his \$2,000 mortgage and paid the back interests payments so that the family would have a place to call home. Sam suffered from nervous exhaustion, boils to the skin, or some said drunkenness after losing the family farm.

¹⁹ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 20.

²⁰ David Pietrusza, *1960 LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon: The Epic Campaign that Forged Three Presidencies* (New York: Union Square Press, 2008), 19.

²¹ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 51.

Neighbors brought in food for the family since it became common knowledge that there was no food in the home.²²

The stories of a grand ancestry helped to enhance ambition and industry in the young Lyndon Johnson. At the same time, the cold hard reality that his father had lost the ability to provide for his family made Lyndon feel insecure. A sharp divide had been created between what the family was and had become to the people of the hill country. These financial reverses left a “crack [that] became a conspicuous fault line in Lyndon Johnson’s own nature.”²³ It helps explain how LBJ could act in such contradictory modes, one minute acting to give educational opportunity to tens of thousands of underprivileged students and in the next accepting money from the Brown brothers to advance his personal fortunes. Lyndon Johnson’s mother’s lack of ability to keep a proper house, can vegetables for the family, and cook on a regular basis left the family open to small town ridicule. Lyndon vowed that he would be solvent and financially secure in the future. He also would be less of a dreamer and more pragmatic than his mother. He came to realize that her genteel upbringing had not allowed her to make a good helpmate for Sam in the way that his Aunt Kitty had been for his Uncle Tom.

Rebekah was attracted to Lyndon’s father, Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr. because they both loved politics. Sam was glad to have a female friend who liked to talk about “principles.” The death of her father in 1906 left her with a deep void that Sam Johnson filled. Their whirlwind courtship consisted of Confederate Reunion speeches, trips to the

²² Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 90.

²³ Lance Morrow, *The Best Year of Their Lives*, 86.

state legislature where Sam filled the seat once occupied by her father, and hearing the great orator, William Jennings Bryan.²⁴

Rebekah was attracted to her husband Sam because of politics, and Lyndon would be smitten with all things political, as well. “Lyndon loved the taste and odor of politics.”²⁵ Lyndon began to come to the Texas capitol building where the state legislature met when he was about ten years old. Lyndon was there so often that the other members of the legislature thought he was a page. They began giving Lyndon messages to carry throughout the capitol building. It was Lyndon’s first introduction to “the seat of power in knowing that the governor’s office was on the second floor of the Statehouse and you could get a good look at Governor Pat Neff almost any day you were there.”²⁶

The one activity that Lyndon enjoyed more than going to the Statehouse in Austin was campaigning with his father. LBJ recalled that they drove a Model T Ford all through the ten counties of the district that his father represented. They stopped at each farmhouse. Lyndon enjoyed watching his father bring the farmers up to date on the workings of state government. Lyndon liked the little extras that came his way too, in the form of a bowl of homemade ice cream during the summer months or a hot cup of tea when the weather was cold on the re-election campaign trail. “Christ, sometimes I wished it could go on forever.”²⁷

As a politician Sam had no desire for national office. He was perfectly content to stay in his beloved hill country. Going to the state legislature in Austin, a trip of seventy

²⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 51.

²⁵ Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Johnson’s Boy*, 28.

²⁶ Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Johnson’s Boy*, 28.

²⁷ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 37.

miles or so from home, was far enough for Sam. Rebekah had always been much more interested in the grand debates of national politics than in local road projects and pensions for veterans. Lyndon followed his mother's aspirations for national office, particularly the Congressional seat that her father had aspired to attain.²⁸

The competing demands of Lyndon's parents added to his insecurity. The parents were as opposite from one another as fine silk is from coarse wool. His mother, who fostered his intellect and cultural advancement with the hope of salvaging some of her own thwarted dreams, meted out her approval depending upon how satisfactorily Lyndon met her goals for him. Lyndon found it impossible to satisfy both his parents simultaneously because Sam considered intellectual and cultural pursuits to be unmanly.²⁹

Lyndon Johnson learned that his mother's expressions of satisfaction and love had to be earned. In his letters to his mother, he often sought her approval by making detailed descriptions of his industrious endeavors. While at Southwest State Teachers' College, Lyndon wrote this to his mother. "My school work has many extra duties and my work with the bankers is going to demand no little attention. I'm just like a machine from early in the morning to late at night."³⁰ "Thus, as Johnson grew up, he identified the success of his performance as the source of love."³¹ LBJ learned to perform continually for his mother's gratification since past performance was quickly forgotten. In order to ward off

²⁸ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 35.

²⁹ Doris Kearns, "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 91, No.3 (Autumn, 1976), 386.

³⁰ Letter from Lyndon Johnson to his mother Rebekah Baines Johnson from *Letters From the Hill Country: The Correspondence Between Rebekah and Lyndon Baines Johnson*, ed. by Philip R. Rulon (Austin: Thorp Springs Press, 1982), 16.

³¹ Doris Kearns, "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality," 386.

rejection and the insecurity the rejection fostered, Johnson became a whirlwind of activity and limitless ambition.

Lyndon's mother could withdraw her love and support from her children just as easily as she gave it. Lyndon did not like violin lessons or dance lessons. He absolutely refused to practice the violin. These lessons were of short duration. When Lyndon defied her wishes, she "walked around the house pretending he was dead."³² If his mother did speak to him when she was aggravated with him, he said her voice was like a "terrible knife" that caused him considerable anguish.

Lyndon was not a particularly good student, and upon completion of high school he considered his formal schooling inside a building to be complete. His mother, a college graduate herself, was deeply disappointed and refused to accept LBJ's refusal to attend college. Lyndon was resolute in his decision to decline any further schooling. If LBJ was satisfied with his educational attainment, Rebekah was not and she refused to look at her first born son, and speaking with him was out of the question.

Lyndon tried to fulfill his ambitions on his own terms through a trip with four friends to California. He had hoped to get training in law from a cousin on his mother's side, Tom Martin. During the 1920s, both California and Nevada were enhancing their requirements to enter the bar; therefore, Lyndon's plans to apprenticeship in law did not work out. After twenty months in the West, LBJ came back home. He still did not immediately agree to attend college. It took a few months working on a road gang in the Texas hot sun to convince Lyndon it might be better to use his brain than his muscles. According to his cousin, Ava Johnson Cox, the decision to attend college came out of a fist fight with a German farm boy at a dance in Fredericksburg in February 1927. Ava

³² Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 37.

said, “It made him realize he wasn’t the cock of the walk.”³³ By morning, his mother’s badgering about how her eldest son could allow himself to be satisfied to live in such a manner convinced Lyndon to relent. He told both his parents that if they could get a college to accept him that he would go.

While Lyndon’s mother’s encouragement provided a great source of security, it was strangely bound to his greatest source of insecurity. The cold indifference that Rebekah showed her eldest son constituted a form of manipulation. Early on, she figured out that her bright boy could be swayed by withdrawing her attention. Johnson said that this was made worse as he “had to watch her being especially warm and nice to my father and sisters.”³⁴ Lyndon also manipulated his mother in certain situations. He later practiced this same tactic with his staff, as he emulated his mother who was a master at taking love and giving it in measured doses.

Lyndon’s mother even admitted that she sometimes withdrew from those she loved very deeply. His mother was writing to Lyndon to praise him for his election to the United States’ Congress during the summer of 1937. In a postscript, she said, “The only difference between you and me is that I restrict my helpfulness to my own and your great heart takes in them all. So, don’t blame me precious.”³⁵

Another source of insecurity for Lyndon Johnson was what he and others considered his third rate education. Johnson attended Southwest Texas State Teachers’ College at San Marcos. When the school was established in 1903, it was a normal school strictly for the preparation of teachers for the public schools. By the early 1920s, the school had become accredited as a four-year liberal arts college. In 1927, when Lyndon

³³ Robert Dalleck, *Lone Star Rising*, 61.

³⁴ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 22.

³⁵ *Letters from the Hill Country*, 31.

entered the college, there were ten buildings, fifty-six instructors, and approximately seven hundred students. The background of the most of the students was small town white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants, who lived within fifty miles of San Marcos.³⁶

The college at San Marcos “wasn’t much of a college,”³⁷ but it was all that the twenty-four thousand square miles of Texas hill country possessed. The library was in such poor repair that the enlarged reference section on the second floor had begun to cave in under the weight of several sets of encyclopedias. The encyclopedias had to be relocated to the first floor. Since the teachers at San Marcos were paid less than high school teachers from the local area, it was difficult to attract and retain competent faculty. Often the professors had no formal degree in the subjects that they taught and were teaching at San Marcos because they could not secure employment at another school. It was known as “a poor boy’s school [because] most of the kids were there because they couldn’t afford to go anywhere else.”³⁸

Southwest Texas State Teachers’ College “was, and still is, on no one’s list of top colleges.”³⁹ His educational background made LBJ feel insecure “around the Ivy-leaguers and intellectuals that he dealt with in Washington.”⁴⁰ Johnson often invited these highly educated individuals to his ranch for meetings so that he could be on more familiar ground and could throw them off balance by going hunting on the ranch and insisting that these Harvard and Yale graduates accompany him in the shooting.

³⁶ Randall B. Woods, 50.

³⁷ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 141.

³⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 142.

³⁹ “Students: Lyndon Johnson’s School Days,” *Time*, Friday, May 21, 1965.

<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,901708,00.html> (accessed December 24, 2010).

⁴⁰ “Texas White House,” <http://www.nps.gov/lyjo/planyourvisit/twh.htm> (accessed April 4, 2011).

Lyndon's brother, Sam Houston Johnson, related a story about Lyndon playing dominoes against educated men, especially the Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and M.I.T. graduates. Dominoes was played and practiced to an art form in the hill country of Texas. Sam Houston stated that LBJ had played dominoes so much that he had a very complicated strategy and counter strategy for winning. Any guest at the ranch was hard pressed to "get away without receiving the 'Johnson treatment' at the domino table."⁴¹

Education in Johnson's view was a way out of poverty for the masses. Coming from the hill country of Texas where most folks were poor and undereducated, Johnson held aristocrats in contempt. These "blue bloods" aroused his ire, and his competitive spirit caused him to act out to gain the upper hand. He stood in awe of the Bundys, Saltonstalls, Kennedys, and Lodges. This anti-intellectual snobbery brought out the worst in Johnson. In an often-recounted story, Lyndon tells of being at a Democratic Leadership Banquet where he was able to gracefully bow low to honor President Truman while he pushed his backside within an inch of Adlai Stevenson's face.⁴²

Johnson was an anti-intellectual. He believed that feverish work and practicality were superior to the theory taught in the Ivy League colleges and universities. The problem lay in that he needed acceptance from the very intellectuals he scorned, which was a hard sell. Although, he outwardly scorned the attainment of graduate degrees and the facility for picking out just the precise word, he remained insecure about his limited school experiences. LBJ told Doris Kearns, "My daddy always told me that if I brushed

⁴¹ Sam Houston Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon* (New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1969), 2.

⁴² George Reedy, *Lyndon B. Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews and McMeel, Inc., 1982), 23-24.

up against the grindstone of life, I'd come away with far more polish than I could ever get at Harvard or Yale. I wanted to believe him, but somehow I never could."⁴³

The insecurities fostered by his family's declining position, the contradictory expectations of his parents, and his lack of a first rate education created LBJ's need to dominate people. By whatever means he needed to employ, he would get them to defer to his opinion. The theme of Johnson's life was a search for power, which unifies "all of his disparate sides."⁴⁴

Lyndon always needed to win at everything he attempted. For him there was no second best. He drove himself to the point of exhaustion and beyond it. He thought if he did everything possible within the realm of human endurance that he could attain the political power that he so much desired. The campaigns that he participated in often resulted in a trip to the hospital for bronchitis, pneumonia, appendicitis, or kidney stones. If he did not win, he was often physically ill. Johnson's ambition to attain political power by attaining higher and higher elective office was unrelenting. Lyndon's brother Sam said, "he hates to lose, period."⁴⁵

Johnson had an instinct for isolating the power structure within any organization. When he had been at home, he was the man of the house when his father was away, and he enjoyed delegating the chores to his sisters and brother. At his first elementary school, he thought the power lay in sitting in the lap of the teacher. Thus, he would not attempt to read his lesson unless he was in Miss Kate's lap. At San Marcos, he identified Dr. Cecil Evans's office as the nerve center of the campus. He was working in President Evans's

⁴³ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 42.

⁴⁴ Rowland Evans & Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1966), 4.

⁴⁵ Sam Houston Johnson, 3.

office within a few weeks of his arrival on campus. As a Congressional secretary, he located the "Little Congress" for influence and his mentor Sam Rayburn. He was elected the president of the "Little Congress" over secretaries who had far more seniority. The United States Senate had Senator Richard Russell to emulate as he learned how power was distributed. He was the youngest majority leader in the history of the Senate.

Infiltration of the power structure of the organization became Lyndon's specialty. His favorite cousin, Ava Johnson Cox, related a story from the time when both she and Lyndon were students at San Marcos. LBJ told Ava, "The first thing you want to do is to know people...and don't play sandlot ball; play in the big leagues...get to know the first team..."Why, Lyndon, she said, "I wouldn't dare to go up to President Evans' office!" He replied, "That's where you want to start."⁴⁶ Johnson was dissatisfied with the first work he was given to do on the campus, picking up trash, so he appealed directly to Dr. Evans for a better job. Dr. Evans assigned him to be the assistant to Leandro Gonzales, janitor of the science building. Lyndon worked with Mr. Gonzales for a short time, but Lyndon desired more influence than he could gain as a janitor's helper so, he once again went to the president with a plan. He asked to help Dr. Evans' secretary, Tom Nichols. The president agreed to this arrangement although no one had ever held the position.

Lyndon became quite influential at San Marcos by running errands with messages from the president to all the departments on campus. Lyndon placed his desk directly in front of the president's door in order, to prevent any visitor from gaining

⁴⁶ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 66.

access to Dr. Evans without encountering Lyndon for assent. From outward appearances Lyndon Johnson now controlled access to the president and was running the show.⁴⁷

Johnson gained valuable political experience while at San Marcos. The “Black Stars” was the most influential student group on campus. They were athletes who garnered such privileges as going ahead in the cafeteria and registration lines, as well as missing chapels without penalty.⁴⁸ Lyndon first attempted to join the “Black Stars,” but they would not have him regardless of his roommate, Boone Johnson’s attempts to gain this scrawny non-athlete membership. LBJ countered by forming his own group the “White Stars.” Beside the fact that the “Black Stars” garnered the prettiest girls as dates, the main emphasis for Johnson was the power to allocate funds for the activities on campus. Since the “Black Stars” were athletes nearly all the funds were going to football, basketball, and baseball. Johnson wanted to change this. If he could get his “White Stars” elected, activities like debate and drama could obtain more funding. “Lyndon organized a campaign to elect Bill Deason student council president on the slogan ‘Brains are just as important as Brawn.’”⁴⁹

Johnson manipulated the outcome of his first election while a college student. Lyndon used the resentment of the privileged athletes to his advantage. Since many of the students at San Marcos never bothered to vote in student council elections, this was a new constituency that the “Black Stars” had not taken into account. The night before the election the head count still had Deason behind by about twenty votes. These twenty votes represented ten percent of the total available. This seemed insurmountable, but

⁴⁷ William C. Pool, Emmie Craddock, & David E. Conrad, *Lyndon Baines Johnson: The Formative Years* (San Marcos, Texas: Southwest Texas State College Press, 1965), 99.

⁴⁸ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 75.

⁴⁹ Tony Kaye, *Lyndon B. Johnson* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 34.

LBJ began making the rounds in the dormitories to use his instinctive style to look the person in the eye and get them to see things his way.⁵⁰ The next morning Deason was the student council president by a few votes.

Lyndon took advantage of a loophole to win senior class representative of the Student Council. He realized, as few others did, that the meetings to elect class representatives were very informal affairs that required no proof that a student was a member of a particular class. No one knew if the student was a senior or not. It was quite common for students at San Marcos to have to drop out for one or more semesters to take a job to earn more money to then return to school. Thus, Johnson and several of his “White Stars” made the hurried rounds to all four class elections. Horace Richards was handpicked by Lyndon to run up to the speaker’s podium and use his persuasive voice to get a member of the “White Stars” nominated and quickly elected. In 1948, when the controversy about the senatorial election was in a fever pitched mode, Horace Richards said of it, “I felt that I had been in on the beginning of history. Because I was in on the first election that Lyndon Johnson stole.”⁵¹

When LBJ made his way to Washington, D.C., he was quick to learn the ways of the House of Representatives. Congressman Richard “Kleberg, as had Cecil Evans at San Marcos, often wondered exactly who was working for whom.”⁵² Kleberg, an heir to the King Ranch, had brought Lyndon to the capital as his secretary in December 1931, after a special election had given Kleberg the tenth Congressional seat. During the four years that Johnson was his secretary, he practically acted as the Congressman.

⁵⁰ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 83.

⁵¹ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 180.

⁵² Philip Reed Rulon, *The Compassionate Samaritan: The Life of Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 46.

It proved fortunate for Johnson that he was strapped for cash upon his arrival in Washington. Lyndon found quarters at the old Dodge Hotel where two young men working in government jobs at the Capitol could share a room for twenty dollars a month. He soon found out that he could not have had a better residence for gathering information about his new job. “The Congressional employees who stayed at the Dodge formed an intelligence force on national politics.”⁵³

Johnson not only got to know about the professional and personal lives of the Congressmen, he also sought recognition as the leader of the “Little Congress.” When Lyndon began to work for Congressman Kleberg, the legislative secretaries belonged to an informal discussion group known as the “Little Congress.” What had once been a prestigious group had languished into a social club with mostly elderly secretaries as its members.⁵⁴ Johnson decided that he would lead this group during his first introduction to the club. He was aware of the great number of new secretaries that had come to Washington with their newly elected Congressman. The flood of new faces on Capitol Hill accompanying Franklin Roosevelt’s election as president provided LBJ with a chance to practice his political craft. Johnson took advantage of this situation. He did not want to arouse suspicion among the old members of the “Little Congress,” so he used the phone extensively to get in touch with these new secretaries and ask them to vote for him as the Speaker of the “Little Congress” at their April meeting.⁵⁵

Johnson worked behind the scenes with his usual energy and ingenuity. He found that there was an unused cache of votes. Although, Congressional secretaries had made up the bulk of members of the “Little Congress,” LBJ found that “the organization’s

⁵³ Alfred Steinberg, 67.

⁵⁴ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 77.

⁵⁵ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 262.

bylaws actually made any person on the “legislative payroll”-which included Capitol Hill mailmen, policemen and elevator operators appointed under congressional patronage-eligible, so long as he paid his two-dollar dues.”⁵⁶ He employed the motto of secrecy among the mailmen and elevator operators about attending the meeting so, the elderly secretaries who had taken for granted that one of their own would be elected speaker would not garner more of the old rank and file to the meeting. The strategy worked and Johnson took the gavel.

Stella Gliddon, a childhood friend, is quoted as saying, “With Lyndon, there was an incentive that was born in him to advance and keep advancing.”⁵⁷ Lyndon Johnson’s persona was part of a whole that presented a productive, thin-skinned, self-dramatic, manipulative, power driven individual. A personality profile of Lyndon Johnson done by Paul A. Kowert revealed all of these traits to have a high correlation coefficient. These traits were combined with Johnson’s lack of control over his impulses, an inability to relax, and a need to be first in all things. His score on submissiveness was extremely low. The conclusion from this study said that, “Johnson’s low scores on submissiveness, straightforwardness, and consistency in relating to others appear to describe an individual sensitive to others’ power and willing to use deception to maximize his own.”⁵⁸ Johnson had earned identification as a “man who had clawed his way to the top of his profession.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 262.

⁵⁷ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 77.

⁵⁸ Paul A. Kowert, “Where “Does” the Buck Stop? Assessing the Impact of Presidential Personality.” *Political Psychology* Vol. 17 No. 3, September, 1996, p. 432. (accessed through JSTOR January 2, 2011).

⁵⁹ Robert Sherrill, *The Accidental President* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1967), 11.

CHAPTER 3

DREAM DEFERRED

Along the Pedernales Valley, the story of Lyndon Johnson's grandfather riding out on his horse announcing the birth of his grandson is something of a legend. While there would be nothing unusual about a proud grandfather going out among his neighbors to proclaim the birth of a nearly ten pound offspring, the message he delivered was unusual. He shouted the news that "a United States Senator was born today, my grandson."⁶⁰ By the spring of 1941, that grandson, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was indeed campaigning with fury for the United States Senate.

Johnson had been elected to the United States Congress by a special election in 1937. He had expected to take the reigns of power in the House of Representatives by his ingenuity and bravo just as he had done at San Marcos and with the "Little Congress." He was to find that the seniority system of the House of Representatives could not be manipulated as easily as he had imagined.

LBJ began his Congressional experience on an extremely high note. Since Johnson had campaigned as a solid Roosevelt supporter, even supporting the Court Packing Plan, FDR asked to see the Congressman-elect. Johnson was invited to meet FDR at the conclusion of a fishing holiday on the Gulf Coast. This was an honor accorded to few newly elected Congressmen. In fact, not many of the four hundred thirty five House members had been given the opportunity for a one on one meeting with the President of the United States.

⁶⁰ Pool, Craddock, and Conrad, 50.

Lyndon Johnson had two primary objectives when he met FDR. He wanted a photograph shaking the hand of the President, and he wanted to ask for an assignment to the powerful House Appropriations Committee. Johnson was alongside Governor Jimmy Allred when FDR's party reached Galveston. A prearranged picture was made with LBJ shaking the President's hand with Governor Allred between the two. This picture would be used in future campaign billboards with the governor removed. FDR refused to allow Congressman-elect Johnson to obtain a plum assignment to which others had waited decades to attain; however, he gave him Thomas G. Corcoran's phone number with the indication that he would help Johnson to gain a favorable committee assignment.

During the train trip from Galveston to Fort Worth by way of College Station, the President and LBJ had time to size each other up. During this day trip, the President agreed to assign Johnson to the House Naval Affairs Committee where he was expected to be a reliable vote to strengthen the peacetime navy. Johnson immediately requested the possibility of building a new naval facility at Corpus Christi. FDR predicted after Johnson left the train in Fort Worth that he could one day become the first truly Southern President.⁶¹

The moment Lyndon acquired his own Congressional seat he was striving to ingratiate himself with the President of the United States. He began by courting not only the President directly, but his son James and Marvin McIntyre, FDR's personal secretary. He asked for autographed pictures for his constituents. As a gesture to the President, Johnson sent him the most enormous turkey that he could obtain in hopes that flattery would help to budge the stubborn rules of seniority, which seemed impassible. Johnson profusely thanked FDR for the time and effort the President had extended to him as a

⁶¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 159-161.

freshman Congressmen. Johnson's over the top note said, "I want to tell you that one of the reasons my own Christmas is so pleasant and joyous is due to the fact that with a million things to do, you have also had time to take a youngster on the hill under your wing when he needed it and to give him a lot of help, encouragement and advice."⁶²

Johnson's claim to special access to the President was not justified. During the first two years of Congressional tenure, LBJ had been in the Oval Office just once. He was granted five or ten minutes with the President to celebrate the accomplishments of the Pedernales Electric Cooperative. MacIntyre was fond of LBJ; however, MacIntyre's opinion of Johnson was not gaining him access to the "chief." Perhaps the President had been irritated by the intimate relationship that several Texas papers had spun for Johnson. Johnson was coming to the realization that access to the President of the United States was not as easily obtained as when he had entered the President of San Marcos's office on demand. LBJ had to resort to a formal written request to invite Roosevelt to the dedication of a Texas public works project and was told that he might be able to see the President about six weeks later.⁶³

With the aid of Tommy Corcoran, Johnson was appointed to the House Naval Affairs Committee. As witnesses were called before the committee, Johnson and fellow new committee appointee, Warren Magnuson, began to question the witnesses. It did not take long before these two new Congressmen were introduced to the pecking order within the committee. Chairman Carl Vinson ran the Naval Affairs Committee as if it was a fiefdom and he was the king. He called both Johnson and Magnuson down for asking the witnesses too many questions. Both were given to understand that during the House

⁶² Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 536.

⁶³ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 536-537.

member's first year on the committee he could ask only one question of a witness and during the next year the member could perhaps ask two questions. Chairman Vinson's autocratic ways earned him the nickname "the Admiral."⁶⁴ Johnson and Magnuson were mere "ensigns" in the study of the great admiral.

Johnson had initially played the role of subordinate in an institution in order to master the workings of the organization and quickly move into the leadership position himself. The United States Congress did not lend itself to such self-study with the quick acquisition of power. Lyndon learned quickly to his chagrin that the rule of seniority in the House of Representatives was hard and fast. Johnson wanted an appointment to the powerful House Appropriations Committee. He hoped that his close association with House Majority Leader Sam Rayburn could supersede the seniority of Congressman George Mahon. This did not happen because regardless of how fond Rayburn was of Johnson, "Rayburn followed the rules."⁶⁵ Mahon got the appropriations committee assignment. Johnson quickly learned that "the great issues of the day would be immune to his influence."⁶⁶

Johnson became convinced that "the House was no institution for a young man in a hurry."⁶⁷ Without the quick advancement that LBJ had become so accustomed to achieving, he became terribly restless to the point of anguish. He was not content to wait for the years that were required to possibly gain a House chairmanship, which was uncertain at best. Every two years the representative had to stand for reelection in his home district which might throw one out of office altogether. If one survived year after

⁶⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 537.

⁶⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 541.

⁶⁶ Tony Kaye, 45.

⁶⁷ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 93.

year with the voters, then there was a real possibility that the other party could be in control of the House when senior committee member status was attained. The path to power in the House was never assured.

Johnson had another reason for wanting to advance rapidly along his objective towards increasing power and responsibility. His genetic makeup and his lifelong habit of smoking several packs of cigarettes a day did not produce a long lifespan. Most of his immediate relatives had heart problems. Lyndon's father had died following complications of a heart attack only a few months after his elder son's election to the House of Representatives. He was just sixty years of age. To make LBJ more cognizant of his own potential mortality, his Uncle George Desha Johnson died of a heart attack in 1939 at the age of fifty-seven.⁶⁸ Johnson became convinced that he could not wait on the slow grinding wheel that led to the top spot as committee chairman in the House of Representatives. He needed to be a senator where the seniority system was not so rigid and insurmountable.

During the 1930s, Texans had placed little thought into who would represent them in the United States Senate. They had Tom Connally and Morris Sheppard. Sheppard and Connally both were nationally known figures with strong support, neither of whom had any serious opposition at election time.⁶⁹ In 1930, Morris Sheppard had received 526,293 votes of the 740,683 cast in the Democratic Primary for the Senate. A similar situation resulted in the 1936 Democratic Primary where he received 616,293 votes of the

⁶⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 544.

⁶⁹ June R. Welch, "The Texas Senatorial Election of 1948," (master's thesis, Texas Technological College, 1953), 2.

954,628 total votes cast in a field of six serious candidates.⁷⁰ It appeared that there was little hope of Johnson getting a seat in the upper chamber for at least another ten years because of the relatively young ages of the senators.

This situation changed early in the morning on April 9, 1941, when Dr. George W. Calver stated that Texas Senator Morris Sheppard had died from a slow hemorrhage into the brain. He had suffered the stroke on April 4, 1941, but had not been taken to Walter Reed Hospital until after he became unconscious. Senator Morris had served in the Senate since the death of his father in 1913. During his twenty-eight years in the senate, he was a loyal Democrat supporting Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁷¹

When Senator Sheppard died of a cerebral hemorrhage, many Texas politicians were caught unawares, but not Lyndon Johnson. “No sooner had he won the Tenth District seat than he was trying to leave it-as rapidly as possible.”⁷² Lyndon viewed the Congressional seat as a stepping-stone to the senate. Johnson read newspapers from all the large Texas cities. He broke an unwritten rule among Congressmen. He declared that the other districts in Texas were “his by adoption.” Johnson had asked for an increase of funds for the Reserve Officers Training Corps at Texas A&M University, regardless of the fact that Luther Johnson was the representative for the College Station area. Since LBJ had friends in all the New Deal offices, he would receive notification of when any part of Texas had received federal projects. Lyndon would then announce the project for

⁷⁰ “Election of U.S. Senators from Texas,” *Texas Almanac*, http://www.bexar.org/commct/cmpct14/History/Texas_Senate.pdf (accessed January 29, 2011).

⁷¹ “Death Takes Senator. Morris Sheppard,” *The San Antonio Light*, April 9, 1941.

⁷² Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 531.

Fort Worth or Lubbock, giving the false impression that he had procured the project for the people back home while their Congressman was simply bypassed.⁷³

Johnson had hoped that Governor Wilbert Lee O'Daniel might appoint him to fill the unexpired seat of the late Senator Sheppard. LBJ understood the implied advantage to being able to campaign with the title senator already attached to all of his appearances and campaign literature. This was not what happened. Governor O'Daniel turned out to covet the senate seat as much as, Johnson did. The battle lines were drawn when on San Jacinto Day, April 21, 1941, Governor O'Daniel appointed Andrew Jackson Houston to occupy the senate chair from Texas until a special election was held in June. O'Daniel had succeeded in finding "someone of some prominence who would like to be senator but would not run against him in the special election."⁷⁴

It was obvious that Andrew Jackson Houston, Sam Houston's only surviving son, at nearly eighty-seven years of age would not be a candidate in the special election to fill the seat left by Morris Sheppard. "He thus, became the oldest member of Congress in the nation's history, political observers noted that Sam Houston's feeble son would not run in the June 28 election to fill the post permanently."⁷⁵ Houston was recovering from influenza and was so ill that he could not receive visitors after his historic appointment. Claude Gilmer, a conservative legislator, said of Houston, "Well, that old man probably couldn't tell you whether the sun was up or had gone down. I mean he was in his dotage."⁷⁶

⁷³ Robert A. Caro, *Path to Power*, 532-533.

⁷⁴ Green, George N., "HOUSTON, ANDREW JACKSON," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fho69>. (accessed January 26, 2011).

⁷⁵ "Texas Battle Lines," *Newsweek*, May 5, 1941, 19.

⁷⁶ George Norris Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 34.

Adding to the confusion surrounding the nomination, Houston was being criticized because he had been a member of the Republican Party and was appointed to replace Democratic Senator Sheppard. He had even run as the Republican nominee against Democrat Governor Jim Hogg in 1892.⁷⁷ Against the wishes of his daughters, Houston made the arduous trip to the Capitol, where he was sworn in and attended one committee meeting. Just two days before the special senatorial election and five days after turning eighty-seven, Houston died.

The special election to replace Senator Sheppard had taken on the characteristics of a sombrero sideshow, the likes of which P.T. Barnum would have been proud to call his own. The nominal fee of one dollar and an application filed on time were all that were required to run in this special election.⁷⁸ There were no party nominations, primaries, or runoffs to master. By early June, there were nineteen certified applicants whose names would appear on the ballot.⁷⁹ Within another week, the number of aspirants had climbed to twenty-nine.⁸⁰

The campaign was notable for more than the number of participants. This Texas shindig was done up right. The campaign tactics were as diverse as its aspirants. The thirty days of June provided Texas a stage for “a star-spangled, bull-fiddle United States Senatorial race that would shame the efforts of a battalion of Hollywood gagmen.”⁸¹

The free entertainment provided by the candidates was enough to draw large crowds to the bandstand or the courthouse square in towns across Texas. Added to the usual campaign speeches, billboards, and pamphlets were hillbilly bands, sound trucks,

⁷⁷ June R. Welch, 6.

⁷⁸ Roland Young, “Lone Star Razzle Dazzle,” *The Nation*, June 21, 1941, 722.

⁷⁹ “Sombrero Sideshow,” *Newsweek*, June 2, 1941, 15.

⁸⁰ Roland Young, 722.

⁸¹ Jack Guinn, “Screwball Election in Texas,” *The American Mercury*, September 1941, 275.

orchestras, free mattresses, radio addresses, parades, patriotic singers, black-faced comedians, swing bands, dancing girls, cash drawings, and raffles for national defense bonds. Regardless of a slow beginning due to heavy rains, this special election “was probably the biggest musical comedy and floor show in the history of political entertainment.”⁸²

The assortment of minor candidates running for the junior senator’s chair was as varied as any box of chocolates. The election “featured a goat-gland doctor, a self-styled admiral, a Prohibitionist, a tin-can reclamer, a laxative maker, and two optimistic Republicans.”⁸³ In addition, a Communist, a grandson of David Crockett, and a cousin of the famous Judge Roy Bean all announced their intension to make the race.⁸⁴ A Baptist preacher was running on a prohibitionist plank while retaining an alcoholic press agent. There were two bearded men who claimed that their main qualification for becoming a senator was their prophetic insight into the future. One naval academy graduate ran urging the immediate declaration of war on Japan. This colorful group was further enhanced by an admitted bootlegger and kidnapper.⁸⁵

While the minor senate aspirants did not affect the outcome of the election, they did add flavor to the mixture. Dallas citizen, O.F. Heath Sr., campaigned from his rocking chair. His platform called for the deportation of aliens, prevention of immigrants crossing into Texas, and keeping cool in the shade of the live oak trees. Edwin Waller III was the son of a decorated Civil War veteran. Waller’s grandfather was the first mayor of Austin. He conducted his campaign through the mail, and his platform called for

⁸² Jack Guinn, 276.

⁸³ “Sombrero Sideshow,” 16.

⁸⁴ Seth Shepard McKay, *W. Lee O’Daniel and Texas Politics, 1938-1942* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Technological College Research Funds, 1944), 410 & 431.

⁸⁵ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 209.

larger old age pensions. Starl G. Newsome, Jr. campaigned with the slogan, “I would rather be right than a Senator.” He was a gentleman farmer with sixty-one tenants to do the hard labor on his farm. He was adamantly opposed to the Congress of Industrial Organizations. He supported the American Legion and wanted the United States to immediately enter into the war. Perhaps, two of the most colorful of the contenders were “Cyclone Davis” and E.A. Calvin. Davis lived under a viaduct in Dallas. He believed through prayer that providence would place him in the senate. Mr. Calvin campaigned in a barrel that he labeled as Will B. Johnstone’s Taxpayer. He wanted Congress to cut one billion five hundred million dollars from the nondefense budget of the United States.⁸⁶

None of these minor candidates had any real expectation of winning the coveted senate post; therefore, the four main candidates were Martin Dies, Gerald C. Mann, Lyndon B. Johnson, and W. Lee (Pappy) O’Daniel. O’Daniel had the advantage of being Governor of Texas. Mann had been popularly elected as the Texas Attorney General. Thus, it was a good political bet that Mann and O’Daniel started with better name recognition than either Johnson or Dies. Both, Dies and Johnson were Congressmen who were well known in their respective districts but not across the entire state.

Congressman Martin Dies was from Orange and had been elected to the Second Texas Congressional District ten years before and had continuously served in that capacity since 1931. He was a born in Texas, obtained an undergraduate degree from the University of Texas, and later graduated from the National University in Washington, D.C. with a law degree. He had practiced law in Orange and had lectured at East Texas Law School prior to his time in Congress. Dies had come to national attention as the

⁸⁶ “27 Candidates Seek Senate Seat in Screw Texas Race,” *Life*, June 30, 1941, 28-29.

chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities.⁸⁷ The forty year old Congressman was running on his record of ferreting out Communists. Dies had become famous or infamous dependent upon who was asked.

Gerald C. Mann was the first of the major four candidates to announce for the position. He was well known for his athletic ability. He had played football at Southern Methodist University. While a part of the S.M.U. Mustang backfield, he was twice named to the All-Conference football team. He had continued his education at Harvard where he completed his law degree. After practicing law with his brother, he ran for statewide office as attorney general and won. At the age of thirty-four, he was a young man on the rise in Texas politics.⁸⁸

The third major candidate to announce his intention to run for the seat was Congressman Lyndon Johnson. He had seemed to be a “wonder kid” of Texas politics. He had helped Richard Kleberg get elected as a Congressman from the fourteenth district and later went to Washington to learn the secrets of the Capitol. After being the “Boss of the Little Congress” while secretary for Kleberg, he returned to Texas as the youngest head of a state New Deal program, the National Youth Administration. Two years later at twenty-eight, he had prevailed in the race for his own Congressional seat from a field of a dozen more seasoned candidates. Johnson had curried favor with the Democratic establishment in Washington by restoring the centralized financing of the party and delivering several uncertain seats to the Democratic fold in the 1940 elections.

⁸⁷ Seth Shepard McKay, 416.

⁸⁸ June R. Welch, 7.

Lyndon Johnson had become so accustomed to successful endeavors that with FDR's blessing he was off and running hard to be the youngest senator on Capitol Hill.⁸⁹

Many political observers in Texas thought that Johnson would run for Senator Shepard's unexpired term because he was the most likely candidate to receive the endorsement of the administration. Johnson had given FDR his total support, even during the contentious judicial reorganization controversy. Several influential newspaper editors began to suggest that Johnson would run and touted his closeness to the New Deal and his energy and vitality as reasons for him to represent the state of Texas as its new senator.⁹⁰

Johnson was excited about the possibility of running for the senate when he was told of Senator Sheppard's death at seven in the morning on April 9, 1941. LBJ cancelled all of his appointments for the day to find out about financing such a campaign. Lyndon's aide, Walter Jenkins, said that his boss was immediately interested in the job since he would not be required to give up his Congressional seat to run for the Senate.⁹¹

LBJ was concerned about getting the public blessing of the Roosevelt administration. FDR was somewhat reluctant to openly support candidates for Congress because of the poor performance of the candidates he had tried to help in the 1938 off-year election. Johnson went back to Texas to assess his political standing. After he delivered a speech in support of FDR's foreign policy before a joint session of the Texas legislature, Roosevelt agreed that Johnson would be a better choice than the other likely candidates. Presidential adviser, Harold Ickes, also told the President that other

⁸⁹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 3.

⁹⁰ Seth Shepard McKay, 421-422.

⁹¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 207

candidates for senator from Texas were “anti-administration, anti-New Deal, and particularly anti-Roosevelt.”⁹²

Lyndon Johnson announced his bid for the senate on the steps of the White House. Johnson had arranged to visit the President shortly before FDR was to hold a press conference. Inevitably, Roosevelt was asked about whether he was endorsing Congressman Johnson for the Texas Senate seat. Although, FDR refused to outright endorse Johnson, little room was left for arguing that Roosevelt’s choice among the major candidates was indeed Lyndon Johnson. FDR coyly stated simply, “Lyndon Johnson is a very old, old friend of mine.”⁹³

Political prognosticators all agreed that Governor W. Lee O’Daniel was likely to place his hat in the ring for the special election for the senate. Once he had nominated Andrew Jackson Houston, there was little doubt that he indeed wished to go to Washington as the junior senator from Texas. O’Daniel had “wanted a legislative triumph of some sort so that he could leave the Governor’s mansion without losing face.”⁹⁴ The Texas legislature was slow to enact any of the five proposals that he sent to them in the spring of 1941. He finally got one measure approved by the legislature and settled for a compromise on two others. Finally, on May 19, 1941, he officially declared his candidacy for the senate with a ninety-minute speech during a drenching rainstorm.

W. Lee O’Daniel had been a flour salesman, a radio announcer, and a Yankee from Ohio. When he ran for governor in the late 1930s, he had confessed to the public that he knew nothing of politics and even less about governing the state. He began campaigning for governor after he had asked his radio audience if they thought he should

⁹² Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 208.

⁹³ Seth Shepard McKay, 422.

⁹⁴ June R. Welch, 8.

run for the state's highest office. The response was overwhelmingly favorable to an O'Daniel bid for governor. He campaigned with a hillbilly band composed of his three children, a sound truck, and small flour barrels to collect campaign contributions. This novel entertainment and his midday radio program garnered him thirty thousand more votes than the other gubernatorial candidates.⁹⁵

The platforms of the four major candidates were nearly indistinguishable. They all promoted Americanism and defense preparedness. This was understandable with headlines of all the newspapers filled by news of the ever-widening war in Europe and Asia. The other constant in the campaigns of Dies, Johnson, Mann, and O'Daniel was some type of old age pension.⁹⁶ Often the sums of the pensions would have equaled more than the total state budget, but on went the campaign promises because older voters went to the polls.

Both Martin Dies and Lyndon Johnson would have difficulty in running a statewide race. Both were Congressmen who represented a small portion of the state and had to become widely known outside their district in a time span measured in a few weeks. The campaigns were waged between late April and June the twenty-eighth. Johnson had little statewide support at the beginning. Near the beginning of the campaign, LBJ showed fellow Congressman Hale Boggs the results of a poll which showed he would only garner nine percent of the vote. Boggs told Johnson, "Well, I don't see how you can run under those circumstances."⁹⁷

What assets did Lyndon Johnson possess and how were they to be organized to give him a chance of winning the statewide race when he had begun with only nine

⁹⁵ J.P.McEvoy, "I've Got That Million-Dollar Smile," *American Mercury*, October 1938, 202.

⁹⁶ "27 Candidates Seek Senate Seat in Screw Texas Race," 29.

⁹⁷ Ronnie Dugger, 226.

percent support and only about ten weeks to accomplish the task? First, LBJ possessed the support of the Houston Harte and Charles Marsh newspaper chains. He could raise substantial amounts of money in cash from powerful business interests. The National Youth Administration state organization of loyal young supporters would campaign exhaustively for Johnson. Jake Pickle said the members of the NYA constituted the organization for the grassroots campaign. Johnson was also secure in the knowledge that President Franklin Roosevelt wanted him to be in the Senate to support military preparedness.⁹⁸ The President could twist arms to get things accomplished that he could not. The final substantial advantage was that Johnson would tirelessly campaign and use his uncanny sense of a room to determine who was for him and who was against him that he had learned from his father.

Representative Martin Dies's campaign never seemed to click with the voters. He conducted super-patriotic speeches. His lack of a grass roots organization also hurt his chances of being elected. The actions of his committee in Washington and his reputation for hunting down spies formed the nucleus of his campaign.⁹⁹ He claimed that there were saboteurs and fifth columnists everywhere.¹⁰⁰ Dies continued to pound the theme of subversive elements, especially among the colleges and universities. He lacked the charm and appeal of Johnson or O'Daniel. To make matters worse, his austere and aloof campaign manner did little to enhance his vote totals.¹⁰¹

Johnson proved to be quite a showman. John Connally had helped Lyndon to combine his legitimate message with the finest entertainment money could buy. The

⁹⁸ Christie Lynne Bourgeois, "Lyndon Johnson and Texas Politics, 1937-1945," (PhD. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1992), 317-319.

⁹⁹ Roland Young, 723.

¹⁰⁰ Seth Shepard McKay, 439.

¹⁰¹ "27 Candidates Seek Senate Seat In Screw Texas Race," 29.

choreographed show put on by LBJ and John Connally was first rate. “Congressman Johnson, fueled with an estimated half million dollars from George and Herman Brown’s construction firm tried to ‘out Pappy’ the governor.”¹⁰² A full-page advertisement was purchased in all the local papers before a scheduled appearance. This advertisement invited everyone to come to a patriotic rally, which began with a swing band outfitted in dapper white coats. Next, a large woman would be introduced as “The Kate Smith of the South.” She usually sang *I Am an American* dressed in a white evening dress with red, white, and blue ribbons. A young woman dressed in Texas cowgirl style would perform her rendition of *I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart*. The hefty woman would then, perform *Dixie* and *The Eyes of Texas*. The cowgirl singer came back for her adaption of *San Antonio Rose*. Thus, Johnson had hedged all bets, if the voter was not particularly patriotic to the stars and stripes, he had countered with Robert. E. Lee, the Alamo, and allegiance to the state.¹⁰³

A former radio announcer appeared after the inspirational singers with his build up to LBJ’s campaign speech. He primed the audience with a reminder of how bad the Hoover times had been and how that the election and reelections of Roosevelt helped out their economic woes. Just before Johnson was announced, the looming troubles abroad were remembered with appropriate mood music. In this hour of need, Roosevelt needed a man in Washington who loved his country and would support the President. As *God Bless America* played Lyndon Johnson ran out onto the stage. In this way, the electorate

¹⁰² L. Patrick Hughes, “Only in Texas; Ma, Pa, and Pappy” (presented at Austin Community College, Austin, TX, March 27, 2000). <http://www.austincc.edu/lpatrick/his1693/mapa.htm> (accessed January 14, 2011).

¹⁰³ Jack Guinn, 279.

was primed for whatever patriotic rhetoric that Lyndon wished to pronounce.¹⁰⁴ The last act was what most of the assembled crowd wanted, by the luck of the draw the money in the squirrel cage got distributed to the crowd to help meet expenses for the coming week.

W. Lee (Pappy) O'Daniel was one of the most persistent, ambitious, and persuasive politicians in Texas. He was called "Pass the Biscuits Pappy" O'Daniel from his days as a flour salesman. He was originally from Kingman, Kansas. He had taken a hillbilly band made up of his two sons Patty Boy and Mickey Wickey and his daughter Molly and made a huge success on the radio at twelve thirty when rural folks were eating the noon meal. He admonished his listeners to be mindful of the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. His radio show was so successful that his flour sales had made him plenty of the folding green, as well.¹⁰⁵

O'Daniel's campaign was full of extemporaneous harange. He alternately complained about "influence peddling politicians" or the inept state legislature. He constantly complained about the Washington crowd who had plunged the United States into a horrible debt. He attacked Johnson and Dies as being these professional politicians who "couldn't run a peanut wagon."¹⁰⁶ O'Daniel appealed more to the rural constituency of Texas than to other portions of the electorate. He often spoke extemporaneously about his humble upbringing and how that a politician could not be trusted if he had gotten any further in school than the seventh grade. Most of the rural electorate thought of "Pappy" as a good man because of the Sunday morning radio program where he admonished them to go to church and tell the truth.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Guinn, 280.

¹⁰⁵ Jack Guinn, 275.

¹⁰⁶ Jack Guinn, 277-280.

O'Daniel was financed by big businessmen. The small flour barrels where he collected a few dollars at rallies were in place to help O'Daniel maintain the façade that he was a man of the people. His supporters included E.B. Germany of Dallas, Mayor C.K. Quin of San Antonio, and Orville Bullington of Wichita Falls.¹⁰⁷

When asked by Johnson, O'Daniel denied that he would be a candidate for the senate; however, on June second as many astute political observers had guessed, O'Daniel threw his hat in the ring. O'Daniel began his campaign with a ninety minute speech in the drenching rain. O'Daniel had been disappointed by the smaller than expected crowd of about twenty five hundred. When the clear skies gave way to the pesky late spring rains, which had plagued the other campaigns throughout May, the crowd dwindled down to only about five hundred of the faithful. His daughter Molly stood stoically by her father.¹⁰⁸

According to "Pappy," his platform had the "100% approval of the Lord God Jehovah, widows, orphans, low taxes, the Ten Commandments, and the Golden Rule."¹⁰⁹ The family band singing *That Old Time Religion* became a staple of his rural campaign. This sounded eerily similar to his two previous gubernatorial campaign platforms.¹¹⁰ W. Lee O'Daniel claimed that his New Deal opponents were a "gang of back-slapping, pie-eating, pussy-footing professional politicians who couldn't run a peanut stand."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth Bendalin, "John Connally's Role in Lyndon Johnson's 1941 Senatorial Campaign," Paper for Professor Lewis Gould, History 350L, University of Texas at Austin, Spring, 1992, LBJL.

¹⁰⁸ "27 candidates Seek Senate Seat In Screw Texas Race," 28.

¹⁰⁹ William J. vanden Heuvel, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Baines Johnson: Architects of a Nation" (An address given at the LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, TX, March 14, 2000). http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/library/pdfs/vh_fdrlibj.pdf (accessed January 20, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Archie P. McDonald, "LBJ and East Texas Politics," <http://www.texasescapes.com/AllThingsHistorical/LBJ-and-East-Texas-Politics-AM105.htm> (accessed January 15, 2011).

¹¹¹ James Conaway, *The Texans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 35.

Gerald C. Mann was garnering the support of Methodists throughout the state and numbers of amateur politicians. He referred to his record of putting away criminals while Texas Attorney General. At thirty-four, Mann had maintained his trim and muscular football frame and was a good orator. Mann's strength was in North and East Texas. He advocated increased speed toward preparation for war. He also wanted a mediation board to be set up to quickly settle disputes between labor and capital.¹¹²

In late May, Mann began an offensive where he charged that all three of the other major candidates were still receiving government salaries for jobs that during the campaign they were unable to perform. Mann had refused any salary as Texas Attorney General while he campaigned. He argued that Lyndon Johnson should be in Congress providing the President with the advice that he claimed he was so capable of dispensing. He argued that the governor should not have left his post vacant at a time when the country was edging ever closer to war. Mann continued to pound this theme as he spoke to crowds from six to eight times a day.¹¹³

Mann tried to argue in forty-two major speeches during the second week of June that the race had narrowed down to a contest between himself and Governor O'Daniel.¹¹⁴ This proved to be an illusion according to the Belden Poll, which was released in mid-June. Congressman Johnson who had definitely begun a poor fourth had steadily gained support each week. He was now in the lead by a little more than one percentage point over the governor. The Texas Surveys of Public Opinion during the tenth week of the campaign showed Johnson with 26.5%, O'Daniel with 25.2%, Mann with 24.5% and

¹¹² Seth Shepard McKay, 445.

¹¹³ Seth Shepard McKay, 456.

¹¹⁴ Seth Shepard McKay, 465.

Dies with 22.6%.¹¹⁵ This made for a mad scramble for the three percent of Texans who remained undecided.

Lyndon's rise in the polls from fourth to a slim lead was due in part to the less appealing campaigns that his three opponents were running. Martin Dies had been a surprisingly weak candidate. He had hammered away at the super patriotic theme and focused exclusively on his work with the House Committee on un-American activities. He was quickly identified by the electorate as a "Johnny-one-note" with limited appeal. Gerald Mann could not compete with Johnson's hoopla and the vast sums of money available to the Johnson campaign. Mann had also pledged to his fellow Texans that he would not run for another elective office during his time as state's attorney general. Although, O'Daniel was Johnson's primary competitor, his race had not been handled as effectively as his past gubernatorial races. He had been tied to Austin until the legislature adjourned which hampered his campaign, and Johnson's sideshow out distanced the hillbilly show of the former flour salesman. Johnson's ties to FDR also hurt O'Daniel even though he tried to emphasize his support of the Roosevelt administration by pointing to a song he had sung for the President in an earlier race.¹¹⁶

Johnson gained some advantage from O'Daniel's constant claim that his opponents "couldn't manage a peanut stand" by reminding Texas voters of the New Deal legislation which he had helped to pass in Congress. Johnson pointed out that O'Daniel was assailing such men as Cordell Hull, Sam Rayburn, Wendell Wilkie, and Henry Wallace. Johnson threw in Jesse Jones and Tom Connally for good measure.¹¹⁷ These

¹¹⁵ Seth Shepard McKay, 471.

¹¹⁶ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 220.

¹¹⁷ J. Evetts Haley, *A Texan Looks at Lyndon: A Study in Illegitimate Power* (Canyon, Texas: Palo Duro Press, 1964), 19.

comparisons helped Johnson neutralize O'Daniel's attacks about leadership qualities of his opponents.

The Johnson and O'Daniel campaigns reported ridiculously low amounts spent on their campaigns to the United States Senate. On July 21, 1941, O'Daniel reported that he had amassed contributions totaling \$4,611.90 during the campaign. His little flour barrels passed around at rallies had netted him \$2,664.40 of this amount. The O'Daniel campaign had extensive radio broadcasts, which could not have been paid for with four thousand dollars. No mention was made of contributions by one of O'Daniel's main supporters, Carr P. Collins. The Johnson financial accounting to the United States Senate was completed on July 28, 1941. The total reported contributions for the Johnson campaign was \$19,970.50. The largest single contribution listed came from Mrs. Clara Driscoll for \$4,500. No mention was made of any of Johnson's large contributors, which included the Browns, Sid Richardson, and Charles Marsh. Johnson's accounting said that the Texas Quality Network and Texas State Network were paid a little over seven thousand for radio broadcasts and the traveling show manager was paid a little over two thousand dollars.¹¹⁸ The residents of Texas in 1941 were well aware that both campaigns cost much more than either was admitting to the United States Senate.

The official spending limit for a senatorial campaign was \$25,000. The Johnson candidacy cost many times more than this figure. The Brown brothers were Johnson's largest source of campaign money. When George Brown was asked about helping to finance campaign expenditures for Johnson, he flatly stated that he had freely spent his own money to help elect Johnson as senator.¹¹⁹ Congressman Johnson had been

¹¹⁸ Pre-Presidential Confidential File[PPCF], Box 5, [1941 Expense Accounts {Campaign}], LBJL.

¹¹⁹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 310.

instrumental in getting the Brown brothers' company, Brown & Root, the contracts to build rural electrification projects and the naval base at Corpus Christi. They reasoned that if a Congressman could help them acquire such lucrative contracts, how much greater would be their reward if Johnson became a senator.

George Brown said, "I did everything I could do to help him get elected." He maintained that he did not raise any money for the Johnson campaign, but that he freely spent his own money to help Johnson get elected. Where the Brown brothers had any organization or worksite, they used their employees to help the Johnson campaign.¹²⁰

Creative was the rule for financing the Johnson campaign through back channels at Brown & Root. A subsidiary of the company was Victoria Gravel Company. The IRS found that false profit distributions went to attorney, Edgar Monteith. Victoria Gravel Company paid Monteith a sum of \$12,500. Monteith distributed \$10,000 of this as profit between himself and his business partner. Next, the partner wrote a check of \$10,000 back to Monteith who proceeded to pay campaign expenses against this sum.¹²¹

Suspicious bonuses were paid to several high-ranking officials at Brown & Root during the height of the Johnson bid for the senate. A purchasing agent, an office manager, a vice-president, and a secretary were paid a total of \$24,500. Mysteriously, all of them had immediately cashed the checks, but none could give an accounting of what they purchased with the funds.¹²²

Much larger sums of money were funneled into the Johnson campaign through the Brown brothers. The company's Christmas business meeting minutes showed that extraordinarily large bonuses were approved for four vice-presidents and one treasurer of

¹²⁰ George R. Brown, Oral History, Interviewed by David G. McComb, August 6, 1969, LBJL.

¹²¹ Ronnie Dugger, 229.

¹²² Ronnie Dugger, 229.

the company. The minutes were probably falsified to make it look as if these sums had been paid out to corporate official before the death of Senator Sheppard. The bonuses of the vice-presidents totaled \$133,000 and the treasurer was paid \$17,000. Much later one of the vice-presidents admitted that he had made a cash contribution to the Johnson senate race, but he was unable to recall the amount of the contribution.¹²³ An unwritten rule of the Johnson campaign was no paper trail for campaign funding. Most bills were paid in cash from anonymous contributors who simply believed in the candidate's message.

Such creative campaign financing enabled LBJ to completely overwhelm the competition. One could hardly drive any distance along a country road without seeing a huge billboard with FDR and LBJ shaking hands. The billboards stressed the bonds of unity that the Congressman had with the President of the United States. The hundreds of thousands of dollars in available cash made purchasing radio addresses and commercials particularly easy. Full-page newspaper ads were done throughout the campaign in daily, as well as, weekly papers. Wherever a Texan went it was nearly impossible to not be bombarded by images of Lyndon B. Johnson. With all the ready cash, the shows before a Johnson speech were second to none. Finally, not a single soul would leave before the cash prizewinners were announced. After an LBJ appearance, the audience could expect to have \$175 in cash giveaways. In 1941, that was a powerful reason to hear the candidate speak.

The last opinion survey of voters was completed only thirty-six hours before balloting began. It showed that Johnson had increased his lead to 31.2%. These results showed that LBJ had cut into the support of all three of his major opponents. The *Dallas*

¹²³ Ronnie Dugger, 229.

Morning News published the results of the new survey on the day of the election. The editorial comment accompanying the poll results stated, “The voters of Texas Saturday will more than likely send Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson to Washington as their junior Senator.”¹²⁴

On Saturday June twenty-eighth, the voters went to the polls with the race too close to call. The race was believed to be so close that the weather might influence the outcome. Some managers of the leading candidates were interested to find out if the fields in the rural areas would be dry enough for plowing. Since there had been late spring rains, much of the crop had not been put in. If the farmers were busy plowing all day on Saturday, then O’Daniel would lose several votes. Some of Johnson’s support would also be siphoned off by fair weather in the farming sections. It was thought that the fair weather forecast for June twenty-eighth might give the election to Gerald Mann.¹²⁵

Newspapers across the state reported a heavy voter turn out for this special election. The front page of the *Breckenridge American* reported Sunday, June twenty-ninth that the first scattered returns showed Johnson in the lead with an estimated total of eighty-five to ninety percent of the eligible voters in Stephens county showing up to vote. Johnson continued the barrage of supposed communication between FDR and himself to remind the voters of his close ties to the President right up to the election balloting. According to the paper on election Saturday, “Latest bombshell dropped on the campaign which had been built to an oratorical crescendo was by Lyndon Johnson when he read a telegram from President Roosevelt calling an O’Daniel defense scheme for a separate

¹²⁴ Seth Shepard McKay, 484.

¹²⁵ Seth Shepard McKay, 485.

Texas army and navy preposterous.”¹²⁶ Johnson continued to do all that was humanly possible by giving a speech from his home in Johnson City as the balloting proceeded.

Just prior to the voting, there had been lots of political maneuvering, which had come to identify Texas politics. According to George Sessions Perry, former Governor Jim Ferguson had helped to ensure that the outcome favored the liquor interests of which he was a part. Perry visited Ferguson in his three room office in the Nalle Building in downtown Austin sometime in 1942. Ferguson told Perry the following version of events concerning the election of O’Daniel as senator in June 1941. “Son, one of the best pieces of political strategy I ever pulled off was last year when I put Lee O’Daniel in the United States Senate to serve Senator Sheppard’s unexpired term, and Coke Stevenson in the Governor’s chair.”¹²⁷

Ferguson said that he was aware of how easy it would be to get Coke Stevenson placed in the governor’s mansion. Since Stevenson was lieutenant governor, he would automatically become governor if O’Daniel was successful in his bid to replace Senator Sheppard. The problem, as ‘Old Jim’ portrayed it, was that the O’Daniel campaign was losing steam. Ferguson and his liquor interests wanted to get O’Daniel to Washington D.C. because one senator could do little about the whole nation’s “wet” or “dry” status; however, Governor Stevenson could do quite a bit to ensure that liquor was readily available to thirsty army and navy bases in wartime.

Ferguson maneuvered to help the O’Daniel campaign win. Ferguson got Stevenson to volunteer to campaign and make speeches on O’Daniel’s behalf. At first,

¹²⁶ “Eligible Voters Casting Heavy Texas Ballot,” *Breckenridge American*, Sunday Edition, June 29, 1941. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:67531/metaph131405/m1/1/zoom/?q=june> 29 1941 (accessed January 31, 2011).

¹²⁷ George Sessions Perry, *Texas: A World in Itself* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942), 155.

the O'Daniel campaign turned down Stevenson's offer. Ferguson called down and asked, "How come you're foolin around and gonna lose this election?"¹²⁸ Someone at the O'Daniel office told Ferguson that the main problem was a lack of funds to buy time on the radio to compete with Johnson. Ferguson gave them money to buy a radio speech for a Temple, Texas audience, and later he sold some of his hogs to raise another seven hundred dollars toward campaign finances. The seven hundred dollars was used to print an article in several papers saying that Stevenson supported old age pensions as much as O'Daniel did. Ferguson was able to call in favors from several state legislators and got an old age pension bill approved thus, encouraging the electorate to send O'Daniel to the senate and Stevenson to the governor's mansion.

O'Daniel was not attracting the same attendance at his hillbilly shows as he had during his two gubernatorial bids, although he was somehow gathering in the vote totals. O'Daniel benefited from two faithful blocks of voters. There were those who loved him dearly and had twice voted to elect him governor. There were also those citizens who wanted him out of Texas.¹²⁹ He could not harm the brewers if he was a United States Senator. The brewing interests began to employ Texas politics in high gear to get their man out of the governor's chair. "It was said widely that the Establishment supported Pappy O'Daniel for the Senate simply to get him out of the state."¹³⁰

The state establishment had been alarmed during the 1941 state legislative session where gridlock seemed to be the rule rather than the exception. O'Daniel further exhibited some personal instability. With his pledge to prohibit the sale of beer and hard liquor within a ten-mile radius around any military base, the liquor lobby had been served

¹²⁸ George Sessions Perry, 156.

¹²⁹ Jack Guinn, 275.

¹³⁰ T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 657.

notice that “Pappy” was not their friend. “Beer, Inc.” stood to lose tens of millions of dollars if the governor could not be replaced quickly. The brewery lobbyists went to work late in the election to elect O’Daniel the junior United States Senator from Texas.¹³¹

The *New York Times* reported on Sunday, June twenty-ninth, “the victory of Representative Lyndon Johnson over Governor W. Lee O’Daniel in the Senatorial election to complete the term of the late Morris Sheppard was indicated by the Texas Election Bureau.” Attorney General Mann and Representative Martin Dies had already conceded their defeat. When the counting stopped for the night, only about fifteen thousand ballots remained to be tabulated.¹³²

Early returns throughout Texas on June twenty-eighth buoyed Johnson and his campaign staff. They made a fatal mistake. When it appeared late on the night of the election that Johnson led by more than five thousand votes, John Connally told the counties in central and south Texas to go ahead and release their official vote totals to the election commission. This gave the O’Daniel opposition the exact tally of votes that they needed to “find” in order to defeat Johnson.

In an extremely rare moment of over confidence, Johnson had allowed the Mexican-American precincts that he controlled around South Texas and San Antonio to report their tallies within hours of the closing of the polls. Johnson had forgotten the unwritten rule of Texas politics. The election was not over until all the “ballots” had been counted. This mistake allowed the liquor interests to deliver the election to

¹³¹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 169.

¹³² “Johnson Leading in Texas,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1941, 19.

O'Daniel. Johnson's lead was overcome "with late reporting figures from the rural precincts [that the liquor interests] had bought in East Texas."¹³³

Walter Jenkins reported that Johnson was uncharacteristically careless about the Rio Grande Valley precincts because he really wanted to control the headlines in the newspapers the day after the election. Johnson wanted banner headlines that proclaimed his stunning victory. The counties where the vote totals would be heavily in Johnson's favor were encouraged to report their vote tallies as quickly as possible to enhance Johnson's strong showing over O'Daniel.¹³⁴ This naivety did not demonstrate the savvy that had gotten Lyndon Johnson every elective aspiration since he was the organizer of the "White Stars" back at San Marcos.

It was easy to comprehend Johnson's, Wirtz's, and Connally's exuberance when on election night with ninety-six percent of the votes tallied their candidate held a lead of over five thousand votes. This was all against the backdrop that a few weeks before the special election, he was predicted to only garner nine percent of the votes, and some Texans did not recognize Lyndon Johnson's name. At this point, a critical mistake cost Johnson the election. Alvin Wirtz told Connally on Sunday Morning, the day after the election, that election rules required all the counties to report their official returns. Connally, Wirtz, nor Johnson questioned the need to report because it was in black and white in the election book. Connally remembered instructing the county chairmen to "tell me what they are first, then report them." This was proper procedure, but in Texas politics it was political suicide.¹³⁵

¹³³ Robert Westbrook, "Landslide Lyndon," *Christian Century*, August 22-29, 1990, 767.

¹³⁴ Christie Lynne Bourgeois, 354.

¹³⁵ Kenneth Bendalin, 25.

The slow erosion of Johnson's lead came as at least a dozen counties in east Texas began to send in "corrected returns." The east Texas counties continued to trickle in votes greatly favoring O'Daniel in areas that were known to be Dies's strongholds. In an effort to counteract Ferguson's effort on behalf of O'Daniel, the LBJ campaign contacted George Parr to appeal for any additional votes that he could muster. Parr had already reported 1,506 for Johnson to 65 for O'Daniel and he refused to do more.¹³⁶

Jim Fritts, one of Governor O'Daniel's top aides, went to the mansion to help the governor prepare for his normal Sunday radio broadcast on the morning after the election. He was surprised to find the governor in such good spirits since he remained behind by over five thousand votes. O'Daniel said, "Well that don't make any difference." Coke Stevenson had told him not worry that he would come out ahead when "all" the votes were counted.¹³⁷ The story goes that Coke Stevenson and his associates were stealing votes in east Texas as Johnson affiliates were coming up with fraudulent totals in the south Texas region.

One official from the Texas Election Bureau stated that "barring a miracle" Johnson had won the election.¹³⁸ "O'Daniel announced that he and his family had prayed for a miracle. He also asked his followers to pray. They did and the "miracle" happened."¹³⁹ A twist of irony had caused Johnson's lead of 5,150 votes on Saturday night to turn to defeat by a little more than one thousand votes. Politics is indeed a blood sport where elections can be stolen. The gambling, liquor interests, and horseracing fans

¹³⁶ George Norris Green, 37.

¹³⁷ Ronnie Dugger, 233-234.

¹³⁸ Archie P. McDonald, 1.

¹³⁹ Jack Guinn, 280-281.

had coalesced their efforts together to get rid of O’Daniel and in the process they denied Johnson the seat he had worked so diligently to obtain.¹⁴⁰

Lyndon and his supporters were so confident of victory on Saturday night that campaign staff was carrying LBJ around the Stephen F. Austin Hotel on their shoulders. While Johnson was celebrating victory, other forces were confident that they could shape the election to suit their wishes. Several Texas state legislators along with “Pa” Ferguson had conspired to get the votes that O’Daniel needed to win. Since Congressman Martin Dies could not win, the legislators conspired with local election officials to switch the votes that O’Daniel and Dies actually received. Dies would not contest the switch due to his poor fourth place finish among the major candidates. A few hundred votes here and there mattered little to Congressman Dies.¹⁴¹

An analysis of the vote by pollster Joe Belden was sent to John Connally on July 11, 1941. He characterized O’Daniel’s sudden upswing in vote totals from east Texas where only about eighteen thousand votes remained to be tallied as “somewhat unnatural.” Belden’s post-election canvas of east Texas voters was also revealing. He stated that there was “an amazing change of votes” from the Dies’s column to the O’Daniel column. In Angelina County, Dies was reported in corrected returns to have claimed forty-four percent of the vote to O’Daniel’s thirty-four percent. When Belden went to ask voters how they cast their votes, the more realistic count was fifty-two percent for Congressman Dies to only twenty-two percent for Governor O’Daniel.¹⁴²

Houston attorney, Sam D.W. Low, who worked for Johnson in the campaign, believed that Coke Stevenson traveled over to several east Texas counties after the polls

¹⁴⁰ William J. vanden Heuvel, 10.

¹⁴¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 222.

¹⁴² Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 222-223.

were closed and asked that they hold out their vote totals. Stevenson had several family members and close friends who were election officials in the area. He asked them to hold out their vote tally until Monday. If at that time, Congressman Dies could not win then, an exchange in the count for O'Daniel and Dies would be made. Thus, Johnson himself told Sam Fore that he had been defeated by a long count.¹⁴³ George Brown said, "He got counted out of it, he didn't lose it honestly."¹⁴⁴

When "all" the votes were tabulated O'Daniel became the new senator from Texas by 1,311 votes over Lyndon Johnson. O'Daniel's diatribes against the liquor interests had resulted in an ironic twist of fate. The "wet" candidate, Johnson was defeated by "wet" liquor interests to eliminate the "dry" sitting Texas governor. "Their reasoning was that one dry senator in Washington could do them little harm, but one dry governor in Texas, determined to run them out of the state, could destroy them."¹⁴⁵

All four of the major candidates reported to the Secretary of the United States' Senate ridiculously low totals for the conduct of their campaigns. Lyndon Johnson reported contributions adding to \$9,645, while he admitted spending \$11,818.53. Lyndon reported that Mrs. Claudia (Lady Bird) Johnson had contributed \$2,500 of her own money to the campaign. Attorney General Mann maintained that his expenditures were \$7,131.65. He stated that his contributions amounted to \$4,695, and that he owed \$1,456.66. Gerald Mann said his brother, Guy L. Mann had given him \$1,000 toward campaign expenses. Congressman Dies divulged \$2,000 in contributions and maintained that the campaign had spent \$11,774. Most ludicrous of all was Governor O'Daniel's expenditures during the weeks of campaigning amounted to only \$1,783.30. He claimed

¹⁴³ Ronnie Dugger, 234.

¹⁴⁴ George Brown, Oral History, LBJL.

¹⁴⁵ Christie Lynne Bourgeois, 355.

that he had amassed contributions totaling \$3,244.65.¹⁴⁶ These fictitious reports would hardly have paid for the billboards that the candidates placed along the thousands of miles of Texas highways.

The ample evidence of skullduggery by the O'Daniel campaign caused many of Johnson's supporters to encourage him to contest the election results. The confusing ballot in Harris County (Houston area) had resulted in at least ten thousand votes not being counted. Voters were supposed to cross out all the names on the ballot, leaving only the one person for whom they wished to cast their vote unmarked. In Harris County, the ballots were printed with the party names at the head of each column. Many of these ten thousand voters had crossed all the Democratic names off except Johnson's. This indicated that the person wanted to vote for Johnson; however, the votes did not count due to the fact that the voters had forgotten to cross off the two Republican candidates, the one Communist, and the one Prohibitionist. There was, of course, little likelihood that the voter intended to cast a ballot for any of the latter list, but it resulted in no vote being tallied. Wichita Falls had a similar situation. Alvin Wirtz advised Johnson against any challenge to the election.¹⁴⁷

Lyndon refused to contest the results of the election. Sam Houston Johnson, Lyndon's brother, recalled that LBJ absolutely refused any form of a recount or contest to the election results. He told his brother, "You can't win 'em all, Sam. There's always another ball game."¹⁴⁸ To his campaign staff, he said that's the ballgame and would not entertain the notion of investigating the late returns attributed to O'Daniel. "He said, if you contest an election, even if you win the contest, you go into office under a cloud, and

¹⁴⁶ Seth Shepard McKay, 495.

¹⁴⁷ Alfred Steinberg, 181-182.

¹⁴⁸ Sam Houston Johnson, 72.

you haven't won anything." In addition, Johnson had campaign irregularities himself. The south Texas block vote was bought and paid for on behalf of Johnson by the *patrónes* who ran the counties close to the border. The machine counties in the Rio Grande Valley had turned in fantastic vote totals for him, and the campaign coffers of the LBJ camp were more suspect than any of the other candidates.¹⁴⁹

O'Daniel's campaign financing first attracted the attention of a state senate committee. The first item to interest the committee was the production and distribution of the *W. Lee O'Daniel News*. O'Daniel's campaign had not considered this to be a campaign expense. A total of \$18,000 of radio airtime was not included in O'Daniel's campaign expenses. The primary radio station that had granted O'Daniel access was XEAW. It was just across the border in Mexico and was owned by Carr P. Collins, a prominent O'Daniel supporter. Collins maintained that friends of the campaign had purchased the airtime in cash.¹⁵⁰ This theme of cash payments was familiar in Texas politics. If an item was paid for in cash there was no paper trail left to follow. Collins was well aware that any foreign or domestic business was prohibited from donating any item of value to a political campaign. It was convenient to take cash and not ask from where the cash was obtained.

Lyndon B. Johnson vowed that he would fight for the Senate in another election that he would not lose. He put the best possible face on his defeat. Lady Bird recalled what resolve he displayed when he caught the plane to return to Washington from what he described as a vacation. She said he was "very jaunty, and putting extra verve into his step." She related that this period of return to the capital as just plain old Congressman

¹⁴⁹ Christie Lynne Bourgeois, 356.

¹⁵⁰ George Norris Green, 35-36.

was a dark time for him. Even the levity of the President, as he teased Lyndon about learning to sit on the ballot boxes next time, did not relieve his depression. Tommy Corcoran said that Lyndon compared the election to a shooting gallery with circular discs where the rabbits repeatedly turn up again for a shot. Johnson told Corcoran, “Well, when you miss one the first time you get a second chance. And the sonofabitch who trimmed you will always come up again. And then you can get him.”¹⁵¹

Lyndon’s mother wrote her son concerning the outcome of the election. She encouraged him by reminding him of his youth, after all he was only thirty-two years old, and she reassured him that there would be other opportunities to compete for the senate. She assured him that he retained many loyal friends, who were already planning for a new senate contest. She added her philosophical outlook by saying, “to deserve the honor you sought is greatly to be preferred to winning without merit so you are far the most fortunate after all.” Mrs. Rebekah Johnson’s description of Senator W. Lee O’Daniel as shallow and inefficient would echo like the sound of a prophet.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 224.

¹⁵² Letter from Rebekah Johnson to Lyndon B. Johnson, July 1, 1941 from *Letters from the Hill Country*, 68.

CHAPTER 4

CLOSING IN ON THE PRIZE

Mrs. Rebekah Baines Johnson was not the only one to judge the new senator from Texas as shallow and inefficient. Directly after the results of the election became public knowledge, *The Nation* announced “the senate has acquired a new buffoon and demagogue with the election of Governor O’Daniel.”¹⁵³ The new senator soon learned that Washington was not so easily charmed as his constituents had been back in Texas. He found “Washington allergic to his dimpled smile and his hill-billy songs.”¹⁵⁴

It was little wonder that O’Daniel decided to remain in Texas for the remainder of July. He maintained that it took quite a while to pack up and move the considerable distance to Washington, D.C. In addition, his daughter Molly was getting married, and he needed to attend to the festivities. He also closed up his offices in Austin and attended several farewell barbecues. The new junior senator may have had misgivings about what type of reception awaited him in the nation’s capital.

O’Daniel had run against the Washington establishment throughout the campaign. He had maintained that the “President was surrounded by professional politicians who were incapable of running a peanut stand.”¹⁵⁵ He had alienated other senators and Congressmen by contending that he would propose a bill to outlaw strikes, and anyone who refused to vote for the bill would be publicly denounced on the radio. He also condemned the federal budget for running a deficit and claimed that he knew how to put the national government on a cash basis. These boasts and proclamations had preceded

¹⁵³ *The Nation*, July 12, 1941, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Wayne Gard, “Bringing O’Daniel to Judgment,” *The New Republic*, July 13, 1942, 49.

¹⁵⁵ Seth Shepard McKay, 501.

O'Daniel to the Hill because national newspapers and magazines had covered the Texas senate race.

O'Daniel's train trip to Washington by way of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Ohio was billed by some of his supporters as the beginning of an O'Daniel for President grass-roots movement. Senator O'Daniel wasted no time in speaking before the whole body. On the second day of his tenure, O'Daniel clarified his position about supporting President Roosevelt. He declared that as long as the President was operating within the powers assigned to him by the Constitution he would have his total support. The problem, according to O'Daniel, would come when the Chief Executive sought to expand his power beyond the scope of the Constitution then, he was not "a 'yes-man' or a rubber stamp for anybody."¹⁵⁶ The Roosevelt administration learned that O'Daniel was not only cool toward its policies, but outright hostile. O'Daniel was not Lyndon Johnson.

Senator O'Daniel was shunned by his colleagues, and his proposals were ignored. His staunch attitude of the preacher came through to those around him who described his holier-than-thou air as offensive. It was difficult to understand why he wanted to run for reelection in 1942. The only likely motive was that he had been "deeply bitten by the bug of political grandeur."¹⁵⁷

The *Congressional Record* consistently reflected how at odds O'Daniel was with his senate colleagues. He often prefaced speeches by saying that he believed that every senator had the right to be heard on the floor regardless of how many people disagreed with his opinion. During June of 1946, Senator O'Daniel filled the *Congressional*

¹⁵⁶ Seth Shepard McKay, 503.

¹⁵⁷ Wayne Gard, 49.

Record with over ninety pages of telegrams and letters from his friendly constituents.¹⁵⁸

This eight-hour filibuster was an attempt to end price controls, which had been in place since the beginning of the Second World War.

Senator O'Daniel had also come under scrutiny because of some dubious real estate dealings. O'Daniel had purchased a four story apartment building at 115 Second Street, Northeast for the sum of \$52,500 in 1945 when the war had produced an extremely tight housing situation. Office workers often doubled up in order to have a bed in which to sleep. The daytime workers occupied the apartment at night, while the night shift of secretaries would come into the apartment during the daytime to relax and sleep. This "broom-closet tight" housing situation did not matter to O'Daniel. The senator evicted the fourteen tenants of the building by saying that his large extended family needed the space.

Soon "Pappy" was busy donning his overhauls to renovate the building as Mrs. O'Daniel refurnished the nine apartments that they redecorated in a cross between antique French and modern Hollywood styles. Interestingly, O'Daniel claimed that after the nine apartments were completed that his large family had broken up, and he would no longer need the forty rooms within the building. He sold each of the apartments for between \$10,000 and \$13,000. With this tidy profit, the O'Daniels settled down in a single family home near the Capitol.¹⁵⁹ This action gained O'Daniel notoriety but not the kind that would keep a politician in office.

Senator O'Daniel had always drawn his main support from the old folks, farmers, and the poor. When he found his way to the senate, he acted contrary to the wishes of his

¹⁵⁸ June R. Welch, 18-20.

¹⁵⁹ "The Capital: Putter with Profit," *Time*, August 18, 1947, 21.

support base. O’Daniel’s popularity was already diminishing when he gained the senate seat by a whisker with only about thirty-one percent of the vote in 1941. As O’Daniel continued to oppose war spending legislation and did not maintain close contacts with his constituents back home in Texas, his popularity further waned. Since his acts won him few friends among his fellow senators, he could not get things accomplished for the folks back home.

Another sore spot with the voters was how consistently he had voted with the Republicans. “His voting record was more Republican than most Republicans.” As proof of how truly Republican O’Daniel’s actions in the senate had been, the Republican Convention nominated a candidate for the United States Senate with the understanding that if Senator W. Lee O’Daniel stood for reelection that he would drop out of the race to endorse O’Daniel. This caused most of his Democratic financial backers to have second thoughts since their money had procured more of a Chicago styled Republican than the Democrat they thought they had supported.¹⁶⁰

The one thing that was clear about the upcoming 1948, senate race in Texas was that O’Daniel had suffered a monumental decline in popularity over the ten years since he first ran for governor. He had become so unpopular that other Democratic Senators avoided him, as if he were the bubonic plague. He was regarded by most as a crackpot. His extreme ideas on isolating the United States, returning wage earners to some bare minimum of existence, and his attacks on all Democrats made him stand out like a sore thumb. “Pappy’s” antics had stopped being amusing, and he had been pelted with rotten eggs and tomatoes as he tried to speak in Texas.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ V.O. Kay, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 268-271.

¹⁶¹ Alfred Steinberg, 235.

Senator O’Daniel had become a pariah to Democrats, and he had lost credibility with the rural people who had once loved him. A political poll released in early June 1947 proved that O’Daniel had lost much of his appeal. Storm clouds continued to rise for O’Daniel as the Belden Poll showed that he had only twenty-one percent of voters supporting his retention for the senate. He trailed both Coke Stevenson and Lyndon Johnson in the poll. Stevenson, who had returned to life as a rancher after he left the governor’s mansion the year before, polled at fifty-five percent. Congressman Johnson came in with twenty-four percent.¹⁶² He tried to reconnect with Texas voters with weekly radio addresses, but this attempt failed, and he did not stand for reelection. Finally, Senator O’Daniel read the signs that he could not defeat any potential opponent. “The *Lubbock Avalanche* labeled O’Daniel’s decision to retire voluntarily as ‘the one most constructive act in his ten years in politics.’”¹⁶³

Coke Stevenson announced his intentions to run for the senate vacancy on New Years’ Day 1948. His announcement for the senate was made just prior to the Penn State-Southern Methodist football game. It was carried by a fourteen radio station hookup that reached most Texans.¹⁶⁴ The timing was perfect because so many Texans were tuned in to hear the Cotton Bowl Game. Coke had picked a propitious moment to announce his intentions to replace Senator O’Daniel. Stevenson maximized his audience because a huge percent of the voting population had positioned themselves by their radios to cheer on the Southern Methodists Mustangs at kickoff time.¹⁶⁵ Stevenson stated no platform but indicated that he would run on his record of five and one-half years as Texas

¹⁶² Alfred Steinberg, 238.

¹⁶³ George Norris Green, 112.

¹⁶⁴ June R. Welch, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Alfred Steinberg, 238.

governor. This was a good bet for the former governor because he had polled seventy-one percent approval of his administration just before he left the governor's mansion.¹⁶⁶

All three of the major candidates who would vie for the junior senator's seat from Texas were self-made men. Coke Robert Stevenson, George Edwin Bailey Peddy, and Lyndon Baines Johnson all came from fairly humble beginnings. Each had ambition and a taste for politics. Each would earnestly strive to be the newly elected Texas Senator for 1948.

Coke Robert Stevenson began life as the impoverished son of an itinerant school master. He was the eldest of eight children. Although, the family lived in a frame house, his mother returned to the log cabin home of her parents to give birth to her first-born child. Coke believed that his mother was not envisioning any political career for her first-born child when she returned to have her mother help with the delivery of the infant.¹⁶⁷ He was named for the famous Texas Governor Richard Coke. He had been the governor who restored Texas home rule at the end of Reconstruction. Governor Coke had driven the hated Carpetbaggers out of the state.¹⁶⁸ Thus, Stevenson began life with a respectable namesake but poverty as a companion.

Stevenson's family situation caused him to have little formal schooling and early work experiences. Regardless of the fact that his father was a school teacher, Coke received only about twenty-two months of formal education.¹⁶⁹ This was nothing uncommon for a boy reared in the hill country of Texas or for that matter in any rural southern or western state in the late 1800s. By ten years of age, Coke was working for

¹⁶⁶ Booth Mooney, 57.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis Nordyke, "Calculatin Coke," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1944, 39.

¹⁶⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 146.

¹⁶⁹ June R. Welch, 34.

nearby ranchers digging ditches and mending fences. He learned to be a cowhand by age twelve, and he was working as a cowboy on the homestead of his parents by the age of fourteen.¹⁷⁰

Many Texans called Coke Stevenson “Calculatin Coke.” From his days as a youth, he was always frugal. His mother recalled that no matter how small the payday, Coke always put back a little money. He was industrious and at sixteen he began “driving a six-mule freight wagon over seventy-five miles of rough road between the railroad at Brady and Junction.”¹⁷¹ The roundtrip usually took the youngster a week. He was able to realize a much greater profit than the forty cents on a hundred dollars that most freighters realized. He accomplished this by hauling ready-made coffins. Most wagoners refused to haul empty coffins because of their superstitious nature. Young Stevenson thought that the one dollar per hundred of profit was reason enough to defy such superstitions.¹⁷²

Notwithstanding the difficulties of driving a team of six mules over a one hundred fifty mile journey each week, Stevenson became known for his reliable deliveries between Brady-Junction where the railroad ended and his home in Junction. The rain, mud, broken axles, and loneliness did not stop Coke from his deliveries.¹⁷³ As he began to make a profit of forty dollars a month, he began to long for something better that did not require the physically exhausting driving of teams for twenty miles each day.

Stevenson wrote away for information on bookkeeping. He had heard that a bank was to be opened in Junction, and he wanted to be in charge of the bank’s accounting.

¹⁷⁰ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 146.

¹⁷¹ Lewis Nordyke, 39.

¹⁷² June R. Welch, 34.

¹⁷³ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 147.

When Stevenson was finished with his supper, by campfire he taught himself the art of bookkeeping. The banker did not believe that Coke had acquired the necessary skills to be the bookkeeper by simply reading on the trail. The janitor's job that the banker offered Coke only paid half the amount he had made as a freight hauler, but Coke believed in the distinct possibilities at the bank. When the bookkeeper fell ill, Coke took over and after proving his competence, he became a cashier.¹⁷⁴

Stevenson pursued other interests in the next few years. While Stevenson worked at the bank, he found time to acquire some law books for self-study. He asked a local attorney in Junction if he could study at night in his law office. The attorney consented, and locals reported that some nights the lights were on all night as Stevenson studied. Stevenson fell in love with the local doctor's daughter, Fay Wright, and the two were married. He tore down two older frame houses to construct their home between his job at the bank and his studying for the bar examination. In 1913, Stevenson journeyed to San Antonio to take and pass the bar.¹⁷⁵

Coke's entry into politics was somewhat accidental. He became county attorney in 1914 with the expressed purpose of prosecuting the thieves who had been rustling the livestock from the sheep and goat ranches around Junction.¹⁷⁶ This was more of an undertaking that might have been imagined. The suspected leader of the rustlers was the son of a prominent family in the area. Stevenson and famed Texas Ranger Frank Hamer went to the hills at night to catch the rustlers. It, indeed, proved to be the son of a prominent family. Against public opinion and objections by the young man's family,

¹⁷⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 148.

¹⁷⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 149.

¹⁷⁶ Lewis Nordyke, 41.

Stevenson pursued his prosecution and conviction. Coke had remained stoic and said nothing during the trial, which netted the perpetrator a lengthy prison term.¹⁷⁷

Local citizens kept calling on Coke Stevenson to fix washed out roads to the west of the hill country. When that was done, he was called upon to run for County Judge with the hope of getting roads that were capable of giving the farmers adequate access to the bigger cities to sell their produce. He personally attended to the actual construction of the highway between Junction and Kerrville.¹⁷⁸ His friends had campaigned for Stevenson to become Kimble County Judge. Then, the local leaders decided that he would be the perfect candidate to represent them in the Texas State House in 1928. He often campaigned very little for himself and allowed his friends to do most of the politicking.

Stevenson was a member of the Texas House from 1929 to 1939. While in the House he worked to benefit his community through better roads and markets for his farming and ranching constituents. He became Speaker of the House in 1933 by defeating A.P. Johnson. He was reelected to the Speaker's post in 1935. In fact, he was the only Speaker of the House to succeed himself in the entire history of the state of Texas.¹⁷⁹

Next, Stevenson ran for lieutenant governor against Dallas representative Pierce Brooks in 1938. Although Brooks led by nearly fifty thousand votes in the first primary, Stevenson prevailed in the runoff. Coke's winning margin was over forty-six thousand votes after Governor-elect O'Daniel made a personal plea for Stevenson to be the new

¹⁷⁷ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 150.

¹⁷⁸ June R. Welch, 35.

¹⁷⁹ Robert A. Caro, "My Search for Coke Stevenson," originally published in *The New York Times Book Review*, 7, February 3, 1991. <http://id3468.securedata.net/robertacar/CokeStevenson.html> (accessed June 25, 2010).

lieutenant governor. O'Daniel said in part, "I feel that I can better carry out your wishes and give you the kind of government you want if you will vote for and elect the following men: Walter Woodul, for Attorney General, C.V. Terrell for Railroad Commissioner, Bascom Giles for Land Commissioner, and Coke Stevenson for Lieutenant Governor."¹⁸⁰ Stevenson easily won reelection as lieutenant governor in 1940.

Coke Stevenson was elevated to the governor's chair when Governor O'Daniel achieved his aspiration to be a United States Senator. O'Daniel went to the senate after the controversial win over Congressman Lyndon Johnson in the summer of 1941. Stevenson served two additional terms as governor after winning the elections of 1942 and 1944. Coke's time as governor was somewhat underrated because most people were deeply concerned with the Second World War. When John Gunther interviewed Stevenson in early 1947, he asked what his greatest decisions as governor had been, Stevenson replied, "Never had any."¹⁸¹

Regardless of his understated manner, Coke Stevenson was a political force with which to be reckoned. Stevenson's primary victories for governor garnered him a higher percentage of the vote than any other aspirant had ever achieved. In one of the primaries, he received a majority of the vote in all the state's two hundred fifty-four counties.¹⁸²

Whoever decided to oppose Coke R. Stevenson faced a formidable task. He had been described as "Mr. Texas," and as he rode a horse in parade after parade he certainly looked the part. He was not merely a popular public official who had been elected to all three of the state's highest offices, he was a folk hero. As a Hill Country ranch owner

¹⁸⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1938.

¹⁸¹ John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 841.

¹⁸² Robert A. Caro, "My Search for Coke Stevenson."

who had been born poor and made good, he was the “living personification of frontier individualism.”¹⁸³ He was truly a man of the Texas people.

On January tenth, George Edwin Bailey Peddy announced that he was also a candidate for the junior senatorial seat in Texas. He was a Houston attorney who was known statewide. He had gained a reputation for fighting the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁸⁴ He was the seventh son of Laura Gertrude Chambers Peddy and William Henry “Buck” Peddy. His thirty-four year old widowed mother had a difficult time making ends meet on a farm with seven children to feed after his father’s death. He had to help out with farm chores from the time he was big enough to carry a hoe to the fields. He worked during planting and harvesting time while attending school during the winter months. He grew to be a tall Texan. He was about six feet three inches tall and as an adult weighed around two hundred fifteen pounds.

Peddy used his initiative to earn money to attend school. He worked for the local family doctor in his hometown of Teneha in Shelby County. This job provided him with enough money to afford his textbooks and school supplies to graduate from high school. He paid for his room and board at the University of Texas by washing dishes. This job plus loans from a few friends allowed him to complete the first two years of college. Just as many poor students would do for years to come, he left school to teach. He taught at a three room school where he was principal in Shelby County. From his salary of ninety dollars per month, he saved about three hundred dollars during the school term so that he could return to finish his education at the University of Texas.

¹⁸³ Robert Westbrook, 767.

¹⁸⁴ Randall B. Woods, 196.

Peddy was elected to the Texas House while still attending law school. He was very popular with fellow students and represented them as their student body president. The First World War intervened, and Peddy spent two years overseas. After being discharged as a captain, he finished law school and married Gertrude Erwin whom he had met at the University of Texas.¹⁸⁵

The senatorial election of 1922 was Peddy's first experience in a statewide race for the position he sought again in 1948. Peddy was only a thirty-one year old attorney when he ran as a Republican in the general election. Running as a Republican happened due to a very odd set of circumstances.

Texans were faced with three Democrats who wished to occupy the Texas senate position in 1922. The incumbent was Charles Culberson who wanted a fifth term in the senate despite his advanced age and ill health. Culberson's two opponents in the primary were Jim Ferguson and Earle Mayfield. Ferguson was a former governor who had been convicted of malfeasance while he was governor. Mayfield was a railroad commissioner who favored the Ku Klux Klan.

Ferguson and Mayfield received higher vote totals than Senator Culberson, but neither had a majority of the vote. Thus, Ferguson and Mayfield were required by law to face each other in a runoff election. The electorate was not particularly enthusiastic about either a convicted felon or a Klan sympathizer as their next senator. Although Earle Mayfield was nominated by the Democratic Party as a result of the runoff election, Peddy offered himself as a candidate to represent a group of malcontent Democratic supporters in Dallas.

¹⁸⁵ June R. Welch, 43-45.

Peddy had always been a rousing speaker, and he outdid himself in front of four thousand at a Baptist church in Fort Worth. Peddy could not possibly run as an Independent Democrat because of the red tape that went along with an independent candidacy. It required him to have forty-eight thousand qualified voters who did not participate in either the original primary or the runoff to sign his petition to run. The time to get this accomplished was measured in days plus, the notary fees for the affidavits amounted to more than twenty-four thousand dollars. The only rational choice left for Peddy was to run as a Republican while he proclaimed that he had not abandoned the Democratic Party or its principals. It was simply the only way to have his name printed on the ballot for the November election.¹⁸⁶

Peddy received nearly half as many votes as the Democrat Earle Mayfield. Many of these were in the form of write-in votes because most Southerners refused to vote for a Republican. Many of Peddy's one hundred thirty thousand votes were scribbled in with a pencil handed to them by poll workers, which read, "hold your hand steady. Vote Peddy."¹⁸⁷ This run as a Republican candidate, regardless of the reason, came back to haunt him as he ran against Lyndon Johnson and Coke Stevenson in the Democratic Primary of 1948.

Peddy waged most of his campaign by radio. The focus of his campaign concerned United States foreign relations. He had fought in both world wars and was a successful Houston criminal attorney. He was expected to be an important factor in the primary. He had a large family in east Texas and was well respected in veterans' organizations.

¹⁸⁶ June R. Welch, 46-47.

¹⁸⁷ June R. Welch, 48.

Peddy could logically expect to garner a number of the votes that otherwise would have gone to Coke Stevenson. Peddy's uncompromising conservative views were in line with the part of Texas closest to the Louisiana border, thus he was likely to get their votes.¹⁸⁸ By attracting the votes in the densely populated areas of east Texas, he could deny either of the other candidates the fifty percent that was needed to prevent a runoff.

Lyndon Johnson finally declared his candidacy for the United States Senate at a news conference from the penthouse of the Driskill Hotel in Austin on May 12, 1948.¹⁸⁹ Johnson opportunity to run a second time for the prize he so dearly wanted had been a long time in coming, seven years. He realized that if he took the gamble for the senate and lost that he would not have the comfortable House seat waiting for his return. When he had run for the senate in 1941, it was a special election and when he lost he simply went back to being the Congressman for the tenth district.

This time LBJ either had to file for reelection to his safe House seat or give that up for a grueling campaign for the senate over a state that measured over eight hundred miles in length and width. Jake Pickle said he "remember[ed] particularly one night we had a conference out on his lawn at 1901 Dillman, and Claude Wild, Sr., Tom Miller, Gordon Fulcher, Buck Hood, Paul Bolton, Ox Higgins, of course John Connally, Kilgore, and some others who I can't remember at this point, gathered. We had to decide. Would we challenge Coke? Could we win it?"¹⁹⁰ LBJ was falling into deep despondency. Johnson told biographer, Doris Kearns, that he just could not bear the thought that he would lose everything.¹⁹¹ He knew that he could be a successful businessman or

¹⁸⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 179.

¹⁸⁹ Alfred Steinberg, 242.

¹⁹⁰ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, June 17, 1970, LBJL.

¹⁹¹ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, 100.

lobbyist, but politics was his lifeline. Politically, the senate race was an all or nothing gamble.

The *Austin American Statesman* determined that Johnson's announcement for the senate "assures one of the hottest races in Texas political history." Johnson emphasized in his announcement that he was young enough to do the work of a senator. "Like most Texans, I believe our senator should be young enough to have energy for the work." He made sure to compare his relative youth at thirty-nine to Peddy's late fifties and Stevenson's age of sixty. He also characterized his opponents as has-beens. "Texans don't have much patience with people who play only cinches. You and I know that right now nothing is safe and easy. You're fed up with has-beens who want to sit things out." Johnson promised in his opening announcement that Texans would know his stand on every issue.¹⁹²

LBJ was facing stiff competition with Coke Stevenson as an opponent. Several Belden Polls added to Lyndon's gloomy countenance. The poll taken in February 1948 showed Stevenson's support to be greater than all the other candidates combined. To make matters worse, the press ran stories that enhanced Stevenson's chances of winning the primary outright without the need for a runoff primary in August.¹⁹³ Johnson's platform at the beginning of the campaign in May had not made a dent in Stevenson's support. The poll in May showed Stevenson remained the choice of sixty-four percent of the electorate while Johnson was supported by about twenty-eight percent. His kickoff

¹⁹² "Hot Contest Assured For O'Daniel Job," *Austin American Statesman*, May 13, 1948.

¹⁹³ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 179.

speech at Woolridge Park and his swing through the Panhandle had not changed his perception among the people.¹⁹⁴

The appearance of kidney stones almost cost Johnson his chance to continue his campaign. For several days at the end of May, Johnson continued to campaign with alternating fever and chills. Finally, he had to be hospitalized and the decision was made to fly him to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. A doctor there had a new procedure where if the stone was low enough in the ureter, it could be removed with a short hospital stay. This method was successful and Johnson was able to continue with the primary campaign. Johnson had to file for the Texas state primary while he was in Minnesota recovering from the kidney stone. His official campaign manager, Claude C. Wild, sent Mrs. Lyndon Johnson the official filing paperwork at the Kahler Hotel in Rochester, Minnesota. The line where a Texas Notary was to sign the form was crossed out and C.W. Fitzgerald affixed his notary seal and wrote in Olmstead, Minnesota with the date June 1, 1948.¹⁹⁵

Lyndon, the candidate, had changed markedly since his first campaign for the senate in 1941. He was not running as a New Deal liberal. The time had long passed when that kind of campaign would have been effective. With President Roosevelt's passing, Johnson began the movement toward a more conservative stance. This was done to bring Lyndon more in line with what his constituents back home expected. Ever the adroit politician, Johnson was mindful of what the people of his home state wanted and expected of their Congressman and he hoped their future senator.

¹⁹⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 207.

¹⁹⁵ PPCF, Box 6, [1948 Campaign] [Primary Campaign], LBJL.

The midterm Congressional elections in 1946 proved to Lyndon that he could not be elected to the upper house unless he could convince his constituents of his conservative conversion. The electorate had ended the twenty-eight year majority for the Democrats. The House at the beginning of 1947 had fifty-eight more Republicans than Democrats, and even the relatively stable Senate had a six-seat advantage for the Republicans. Johnson set about to carve out a conservative track record as a basis for his senate campaign in 1948. He acted and voted with the conservatives with respect to labor issues, civil rights, and tidelands (off-shore) oil on the Texas Coast.¹⁹⁶

Johnson needed to court the support of large business corporations and the white voters in Texas if he wished to become their next senator. Labor unions throughout the nation were striking and advocating strikes. Anti-labor sentiment was growing in Texas. During four months of 1945, the ten major metropolitan newspapers across the state carried nearly three hundred hostile labor editorials compared to only four that were positive. The Texas legislature also approved nine laws that curtailed labor strikes and mass picketing, as well as, forbade closed shop activities. Even if Johnson had been totally in support of the labor movement, it would have been difficult for him to act on because the principal architect of these Texas laws was Herman Brown of Brown and Root.¹⁹⁷

Lyndon and his brother, Sam Houston, had an argument midway through the campaign about LBJ's position in favor of the Taft-Hartley Act. Lyndon told Sam Houston, "I've read every word of that bill-several times-and it isn't what labor says it is.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 287.

¹⁹⁷ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 288.

It's a good law, and I'm voting for it."¹⁹⁸ Johnson supported the right to work portion of the Taft-Hartley Act. This angered labor unions, but the unions had never been particularly strong in Texas. Lyndon remarked, "Labor's not much stronger in Texas than a popcorn fart."¹⁹⁹ Thus, he stood to gain more votes by supporting Taft-Hartley than he would lose. Walter Jenkins, one of LBJ's closest associates, said that the vote for Taft-Hartley was a decisive factor in the 1948 campaign. That vote helped convince voters that Lyndon was not too far left, and that they could support him for the senate.²⁰⁰

The Fair Employment Practices Commission was set up by President Harry S. Truman. Its purpose was "to insure that Negro or other minority groups were not refused employment simply on the basis of color or race."²⁰¹ Johnson campaigned from a states' rights platform. He shouted from every platform or bandstand available to him that he was for leaving to the states those things that directly affected them, such as civil rights. He declared that he had voted against the F.E.P.C. because "if a man can tell you whom you must hire, he can tell you whom you can't hire."²⁰²

Lyndon went on to tell the Texas conservative white voters exactly what they wanted to hear from their candidate. He declared that the President's civil rights legislation was "a farce and a sham." He proclaimed that a police state would be the product of such legislation. He also maintained that it was the province of the state to repeal poll taxes that they had enacted. There was also no special need for a national anti-lynching law because the states, Texas specifically, already enforced laws against

¹⁹⁸ Sam Houston Johnson, 74.

¹⁹⁹ David Pietrusza, 26.

²⁰⁰ Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 121.

²⁰¹ June R. Welch, 31.

²⁰² Merle Miller, 118.

murder.²⁰³ An individual state should be allowed to act freely to determine the relations of its citizens regardless of their race, color, or creed.

The Lyndon Johnson of 1948 exhibited paternalism toward black people in his state and nation. Alvin Wirtz, an attorney who campaigned for Johnson, proclaimed that people who wished to eradicate the social injustices that plagued Negroes were “profoundly unwise.” He recalled that the Reconstruction era in the South produced the worst discrimination for the very people it had been designed to help. Johnson particularly deplored the F.E.P.C.’s “unconstitutional attempt to interfere with the sanctity of contract.” Lyndon emphatically insisted that it was as much his right to choose a white secretary as it was his colleague’s to choose a black secretary.²⁰⁴

Johnson continued to give mixed signs concerning the rights of black southerners. At times, he could be very solicitous. He spoke of his black cook proudly as a college graduate, and on the streetcars of Capitol Hill it was not at all out of character for him to give up his seat to a black woman. At other times, a black waiter in his home could be berated in front of other influential Congressmen and senators. Around 1948, LBJ told Horace Busby, who worked for Johnson, that the Negroes had fought and worked for equality during the Second World War and that the system needed to respond to their desires.²⁰⁵

International relations loomed large in 1948. Just three years after defeating the Fascists foes of democracy, the problem of Communist Russia was a concern that was discussed throughout the nation. There were distinct schools of thought regarding how Russia should be handled. “Some felt we should attack Russia and get it over with, that

²⁰³ Merle Miller, 118.

²⁰⁴ Randall B. Woods, 188.

²⁰⁵ Randall B. Woods, 189.

war was inevitable. And there were some who felt we could safely ignore Stalin and live side-by-side with Russia.”²⁰⁶

Anticommunism and “Russophobia” were common themes in much of the country as midcentury approached. Johnson had been for strong defense and had touted a seventy air group defense.²⁰⁷ Coke Stevenson had been rumored to be in the isolationist camp, which did not help him in his quest for the senate from Texas. Further, he aggravated the charge by denying it during his Cotton Bowl speech before a statewide audience.

Coke argued that he was not an isolationist. His comment was that no nation could prosper without international friends and customers. He did not do himself any favors by mentioning a possible attack for other candidates. Thus, began the isolationist controversy. Stevenson had tried to anticipate and refute a possible problem, instead he had thrown the opening salvo of a controversy that might never have been explored.²⁰⁸

Johnson hit Stevenson hard concerning his position on international relations. Especially difficult for Stevenson to explain was his reason for deleting a paragraph from his New Years’ Day announcement where he denounced Europe. In this paragraph, which Horace Busby retained for the Johnson campaign, Coke had said that spending on the Marshall Plan was like casting pearls before swine.²⁰⁹ It was difficult for Stevenson to refute what had been in his announcement speech.

²⁰⁶ June R. Welch, 28.

²⁰⁷ June R. Welch, 57.

²⁰⁸ June R. Welch, 64.

²⁰⁹ Randall B. Woods, 209.

Lyndon bragged that he was “old enough to know how and young enough to get the job done.”²¹⁰ He touted his experiences in the nation’s capital, flying on bombing runs in the Pacific, and suffering a political defeat gracefully. These were good reasons why the people should elect him as their next senator. He complained that Coke Stevenson was too old to take on the responsibilities of leadership in the senate at sixty. Johnson described him as a has-been.

The two major candidates’ campaigning styles could not have been more different if scripted for a Hollywood movie. Johnson was flamboyant and excessive. Stevenson was casual and laidback. Stevenson traveled throughout the state in an old Plymouth with his nephew, Bob Murphey, as the chauffeur. Johnson traveled by helicopter and swooped down on country folks who had probably never seen such a flying contraption.²¹¹

Stevenson’s style of campaigning relied heavily on the ex-governor’s record as a fiscal conservative who had turned a large budget deficit into a budget surplus after five and one-half years in the office. He bought only five dollars worth of gasoline for the old Plymouth at each station so that he could frequently stop at gas stations along the way to shake hands with the attendant and get acquainted with the local folks.²¹² He often stopped by the courthouses in each county seat where he would inevitably find someone there who knew him from his days as county attorney, judge, legislator, or governor to talk over fond memories.

²¹⁰ David Pietrusza, 26.

²¹¹ Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles, and Chalk: The Wondrous World of Texas Politics* (Austin: Texas Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), 86.

²¹² Jimmy Banks, 86.

Stevenson was quite reserved for a politician. His nephew, Robert Murphey, said that his uncle “never did mix and mingle like a typical politician would.”²¹³ He absolutely refused to campaign in any different fashion. When it was brought up by some of his supporters that they could get him an airplane for campaigning, Stevenson said flatly that he would keep his campaign on the ground. When supporters suggested a musical presentation to accompany his speeches, he totally refused the suggestion. When his advisers attempted to have him campaign more like Johnson was doing, he said, “he would not prostitute himself to a sideshow to get elected to public office.”²¹⁴

By mid-June as the campaigns blossomed, charges especially in regard to Coke Stevenson’s isolationist stance were rampant. The *Dallas Morning News* reported on June sixteenth that Mr. Stevenson refused to attack his opponents in the same fashion that he was being attacked. He said he would not reply in a like manner. “I am running on my record and merits and not on somebody’s demerits...If my record of public accomplishments does not warrant my election to the Senate then I ought to stay home.”²¹⁵

Stevenson remained passive with regards to the attacks of his opponents. The *Dallas Morning News* reported that the ex-governor had always made it his policy “to avoid making any statements designed to stir up hatred, fear, personal animosity or uneasiness among the people.”²¹⁶ Coke Stevenson thought the electorate was an intelligent group that could decipher where a candidate stood without being told repeatedly.

²¹³ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, Interviewed by Ted Gittinger, November 22, 1983, LBJL.

²¹⁴ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

²¹⁵ June R. Welch, 80-81.

²¹⁶ June R. Welch, 88.

The coverage of the Stevenson campaign in the Texas state papers became sparse during June and July. The most important reason was that Stevenson did not say anything new. The reporters covering his campaign grew tired of writing the same story of him driving through the countryside and stopping to talk with acquaintances at the local courthouse. Coke often issued press releases from Junction because he was at home. He participated in shearing the sheep and branding of cattle on the ranch. Stevenson spoke on the radio for the third time on July sixteenth. Even this radio address garnered little coverage in the media because they said he simply stated what he had said on countless courthouse squares. He was counting on his many friends throughout the state to vote for him again.²¹⁷

Allan Shivers, former Texas Governor, indicated that Stevenson barely campaigned. Johnson's three hundred seventy speeches in nearly every county in the state far outdistanced Stevenson's old-fashioned campaign with a few statewide radio addresses. Shivers said that Booth Mooney traveled with Stevenson as both a driver and a speechwriter. Mooney was totally in charge of Stevenson's schedules and itineraries.²¹⁸ Stevenson's loosely connected county offices had little of the organizational detail that the Johnson staff acquired.

Johnson's well-financed campaign made use of every strategy that could be devised by the candidate or any of his friends, family, or staff. Every bit of energy that Lyndon could muster was put into the campaign. The women of his immediate family, including his mother, wife, and two of his sisters, divided up the Austin phone book on

²¹⁷ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 238-239.

²¹⁸ Merle Miller, 123.

primary day and called every residence they could.²¹⁹ Literally, no stone was unturned in this gigantic push to not lose another senatorial election.

At the end of the unsuccessful 1941 senate campaign, Johnson was promised that finances would not be a difficulty should he choose to campaign for the senate in the future. George and Herman Brown financed Johnson's campaign even more elaborately in 1948 than they had in 1941. Cash poured in from a number of other benefactors, as well. Corporate interests and big oil also donated to the Johnson campaign. In particular, Clint Murchison and Sid Richardson made considerable contributions to elect Johnson.²²⁰ Whatever amount of money LBJ needed, it was made readily available. Other financial backers of Johnson included Wesley West of Houston, Amon Carter of Fort Worth, and Harris Melasky of Taylor. John Connally told stories of the huge amounts of cash that he, or Walter Jenkins, or Woody Woodward would fetch for campaign expenses. When asked to give a dollar amount of the cash they handled in one hundred dollar bills, Connally simply said, [It] "was a hell of a lot."²²¹

Another campaign tactic was the out and out buying of votes. This was certainly not a new practice in Texas politics. It had become so common place that it was simply expected on both sides of hotly contested elections. During the 1934 Congressional election of Maury Maverick, Lyndon Johnson had been the person who went to the Plaza Hotel in San Antonio and spent the day peeling off five-dollar bills to buy the votes of Mexican-American households. In some cases, an election judge could be persuaded to leave the ballot box unattended for a time so that the names of all those who had paid a

²¹⁹ Sam Houston Johnson, 76.

²²⁰ Lance Morrow, 150.

²²¹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 274.

poll tax could be affixed to the approved candidate's name after the polls had officially closed.²²²

The George Parr vote producing machine had been active for two generations in South Texas. His father, Archie Parr, had been able to control the Mexican-American votes from the border counties since 1911. Robert Murphey said of the votes "everybody noticed when the returns came in that it was always lopsided for one candidate down in that area of the state." He also said "ballot tampering in South Texas was accepted with 'a shrug and a wink.'"²²³

The Johnson campaign used scientific polling to enhance their chances of being elected. Normally this type of statewide polling was only done monthly because of its expense, but the Johnson campaign did not quibble about the six thousand dollar cost. If the poll suggested that the electorate was "touched" by an issue, it was adopted by the campaign. Even before LBJ formally announced for the senate, extensive polling had been done of his behalf. A whole slate of questions had been asked to pinpoint specific strengths and weaknesses that could suggest victory or defeat for Johnson. Lyndon learned that almost twenty percent more Texans believed that someone with experience in Congress was preferred to gubernatorial experience.²²⁴ Such nuances were ferreted out by the Johnson campaign.

Johnson used the media in unprecedented ways. He saturated the air waves with constant speeches and advertisements. He used producers to add just the right mix of narration and patriotic music. Print advertisements were not neglected.²²⁵ There were

²²² Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 181.

²²³ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

²²⁴ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 296.

²²⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 192-193.

lots of page advertisements in the local newspapers and hardly a mailbox could be opened during July without a handbill for Johnson. The handbills reminded the people of what Johnson had done for them while he had been in Congress and how much more he could do for them as a senator.

Johnson had been sidelined in the hospital for several days in Texas and then, for more than a week at the Mayo Clinic with a kidney stone at the beginning of June. He realized that he must do something to catch up with Stevenson in the polls. His strategy was to attack Coke personally. It was pretty much say anything and see what would stick.

When Johnson returned from Minnesota he went on the attack. Lyndon began by assaulting Stevenson's opposition to a federal appropriation, which would have given every public school teacher a raise. While Stevenson had been concerned that the federal government would interfere with local public schools, Johnson stretched Coke's opposition to encompass veterans' benefits. Next, Johnson attacked Stevenson for what he called pardoning dangerous criminals. In reality, many of these were only furloughs, sometimes under guard, to make deathbed visitations to immediate family members. Some of Stevenson's pardons had been problematic. W. Ervin "Red" James credited Roy Hofheinz with engineering Johnson's ultimate victory in 1948. Hofheinz went about the thirty-five counties where he was influential with a speech entitled "Pardon Me." He had found an incident of a convicted child molester was pardoned by the governor, then, within three days of being released from prison he raped two little girls.²²⁶ Johnson also

²²⁶ W. Ervin "Red" James, Oral History, Interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, February 17, 1978, LBJL.

questioned the oil leases that Stevenson had acquired from the Magnolia Petroleum Company for his ranch.²²⁷

Woody Woodward had become familiar with helicopters during the Second World War, and he suggested to Johnson that he thought the helicopter would help in the campaign. It was a good gimmick to attract attention to the Johnson campaign. It was called the “Johnson City Windmill.” The logistics of keeping the helicopter in the air was a nightmare for the ground crew and the mechanic, but it helped Johnson become known throughout the state. Jake Pickle, one of Johnson’s key campaign strategists, said the helicopter was intended to draw attention to Johnson’s name again since he had not been involved in a statewide race since 1941. Pickle admitted that helicopters were not safe in 1948. Finally, Warren Woodward was able to get in touch with Joe Mashman who had flown helicopters. Mashman was “in Fort Worth and had flown some of the boys (referring to the Second World War).”²²⁸

Johnson always threw out his white Stetson hat at each stop. Sometimes his staff had to pay a dollar or two to retrieve it. It proved to be an effective gimmick to produce a crowd wherever it landed. Jake Pickle stated that it was not as easy as it might seem to retrieve the big white Stetson hat. “Usually a kid would pick it up, and felt it was his. We had to wrastle with a few to get it back!”²²⁹

There were actually two different helicopters that LBJ used during the course of the campaign. The first was larger and more comfortable for Johnson to rest inside, but it proved to be more problematic and was replaced by the smaller Bell helicopter. Joe Mashman, who piloted the Bell helicopter, worried that Johnson would fall out of the

²²⁷ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 209-210.

²²⁸ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe. B. Frantz, June 17, 1970, Interview II, LBJL

²²⁹ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, LBJL.

open doorway since he often fell asleep between towns. LBJ was often so exhausted that he slept on board with one leg dangling over the skid of the helicopter. Mashman was instructed by LBJ to wake him if they saw a farmer in a field so, he could say, “Hello, down there, this is Lyndon Johnson your next Senator.” Mashman said that he thought the “Johnson City Windmill” often scared these country folks more than it impressed them. A farmer in a small town carefully observed Lyndon as he maneuvered around the swirling blades of the helicopter. He said that Johnson might make a fine senator if he could manage to not be sliced in half by the propeller blades.

The use of the helicopter did not guarantee that anyone would vote for Lyndon Johnson; however, it caught their attention so, that the candidate had the chance to convince them that he deserved their vote. Walter Jenkins, who ran Johnson’s Congressional Office during the campaign in Texas, said the turn out in each town was tremendous. “We were getting a thousand people in a town of a thousand, and Coke Stevenson would come there and meet with ten in the lobby of a hotel.”²³⁰ Frank “Posh” Oltorf, a district manager for Johnson, probably expressed the value of the helicopter best when he said, “the helicopter drew a clear line of demarcation between the old Texas goat rancher...and the modern politician.”²³¹

Lyndon’s helicopter excited the electorate. What might have been a sleepy campaign during the hot Texas summer was transformed into a whirlwind of activities. As the word spread that the “Johnson City Windmill” would appear tomorrow, the crowds grew and grew. Robert Caro insists that LBJ craved the “respect and affection that he found necessary due to his youthful anxiety and shame and humiliation” over his

²³⁰ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, August 14, 1970, LBJL.

²³¹ Frank “Posh” Oltorf, Oral History, Interviewed by David G. McComb, August 3, 1971, LBJL.

father's financial difficulties.²³² Whatever Lyndon's reason for using the helicopter, whether deep seated need for recognition, the realization of how far behind in the race he was, or just a quirky gimmick that give him an advantage to talk with many people, it was effective. Thomas G. Corcoran said, "Of course, mostly they came to see the helicopter. They'd never seen one before, Christ, it was brilliant as hell."²³³

It was impossible to travel any road in Texas without being bombarded by Johnson's picture. Lampposts, telephone and electric poles, and car radiators had placards with his likeness printed on them. Highway billboards proclaimed that Johnson needed the support of every voter in the upcoming primary. The campaign wanted to make sure that the electorate was well aware of their candidate's name and image. If a person in Texas did not know that Lyndon B. Johnson was running for the United States Senate, then he/she must have been unconscious. The radio, newspapers, highways, store windows, and farm wagons became media to get out the message that Johnson wanted to be their next senator.²³⁴

Johnson had a tremendous amount of printed material made available to his campaign district and county offices. The printing and mailing costs alone must have added up to more than the ten thousand dollars that the campaign was allowed to spend by law. Within town limits, a placard with Lyndon Johnson your next senator printed on it was attached to nearly every lamp post. A campaign memorandum from his headquarters discussed how workers needed to post themselves at busy intersections to

²³² Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 212.

²³³ Merle Miller, 119.

²³⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 223-224.

gain the permission of as many car owners as possible to place a sticker on their bumpers. Of course, the bumper sticker proclaimed Vote Johnson for Senator.²³⁵

One of the slickest pieces of printed material that Johnson used during the 1948 campaign was the *Johnson Journal*. It was designed to look just like one of the small weekly newspapers of the rural Texas countryside. It was often about eight pages in length with catchy headlines proclaiming such things as “Communists Favor Coke.” Headlines such as this one were tremendously helpful to gather converts to the Johnson fold from the three hundred forty thousand rural households. Many of these people thought that their weekly papers were honest and since this looked so much like a real newspaper it could be believed.²³⁶

Johnson decided that his approach to Stevenson would have to be bold and audacious. Stevenson would have to be attacked on his strong points. He would attack his reputation, conservatism, honesty, character, and even his anti-Communist credentials.²³⁷ This type of attack was necessary in order to have a possibility of overcoming a nearly three to one advantage in the polls at the beginning of June 1948.

An unsolicited endorsement came to the ex-governor when the Texas American Federation of Labor endorsed Stevenson as their candidate. This was in retaliation for Representative Johnson’s support of the Taft-Hartley Act. Stevenson’s nephew, Robert Murphey, said that Stevenson was surprised by the endorsement and did not know what to do about it, but he decided that he would accept their support.²³⁸ Gingerly, Stevenson

²³⁵ Memorandum to All LBJ Leaders on Johnson for Senator Letter Head, Pre-Presidential Confidential File [PPCF] Box 5, LBJL.

²³⁶ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 287.

²³⁷ Lance Morrow, 274.

²³⁸ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, Interviewed by Ted Gittinger, November 22, 1983, LBJL.

said of the AFL endorsement, "I am glad to receive the support of all those who think I have succeeded."²³⁹

Union labor endorsement for Stevenson proved to be very embarrassing for his campaign. Labor unions were not very strong in Texas, or the South for that matter. Many people actually regarded labor unions as something sinister. This provided an opening for Lyndon to attack Coke for having made a secret deal with the labor unions.²⁴⁰

Stevenson did not want to come out to clarify his stance on a number of issues. He tried to defer to his record as governor and said the people of Texas already knew where he stood on the issues. This issue was one that Lyndon Johnson would not let go off easily. "Stevenson tried to ride the fence on Taft-Hartley all through the campaign with Mr. Johnson hitting him several times a day, demanding that he tell them where he stood, and finally when he was smoked out took the same position in a weaseled sort of way."²⁴¹ Robert Murphey credited Johnson with being an adroit politician who took advantage of any avenue open to him. "Whether there was no fire where the smoke was didn't really make any difference if you could get up enough smoke."²⁴²

As Johnson threw every wild accusation imaginable Stevenson's way, the first that make an impact was the secret deal with labor. The irony of the matter was that Stevenson's endorsement by the Texas State AFL netted him little financially, while Johnson profited handsomely from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Welly Hopkins, a prominent attorney for the United Mine Workers, organized workers and obtained funds for the LBJ campaign.

²³⁹ June R. Welch, 85.

²⁴⁰ June R. Welch, 84-85.

²⁴¹ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, LBJL.

²⁴² Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

The Johnson camp had edited some of Stevenson's radio speeches to make him appear as much like a Neanderthal as possible. This was to elicit campaign contributions from Wall Street and big business interests in the east who did not wish to have Stevenson as an ultraconservative senator for the next six years. Northeastern liberals gave large sums of money to the Johnson campaign through Tommy Corcoran and Jim Rowe in Washington, D.C.²⁴³

Perhaps George Peddy may have blamed Coke Stevenson's campaign for the charge that Peddy was a Republican. On June twenty-ninth, the *Austin American Statesman* reported that Peddy was fighting mad because "someone who wants to best me" had distorted the facts of the 1922 Senatorial race to his advantage. The next day Peddy did an uncharacteristic thing. At Corsicana, Peddy called out Stevenson by name. Peddy claimed that Coke Stevenson had made "secret promises to union labor leaders to secure their endorsement at Fort Worth."²⁴⁴

Johnson and Peddy joined forces to criticize Stevenson. Johnson accused Stevenson of being against teachers and education. A Houston speech in early June found LBJ calling Stevenson "a calculating, do-nothing, fence-straddling opponent of mine, who three months ago said he had no platform, got off the fence for the first time to oppose the teacher salary increase."²⁴⁵ Lyndon next stretched the attack to include five hundred thousand veterans' pensions, which LBJ implied that Coke was against. Peddy

²⁴³ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 225-227.

²⁴⁴ June R. Welch, 90.

²⁴⁵ "Steam Sizzles From Senate Caldron as Johnson, Peddy Land on Coke," *Austin American Statesman*, June 8, 1948.

was speaking in Nacogdoches and called Stevenson a “cautious, calculating, fence-riding, gum-shoeing, pussy-footing professional office holder.”²⁴⁶

Johnson continued to emphasize his theme of preparedness, which would lead to peace and progress. Both Johnson and Peddy rejected Coke Stevenson’s description of them as warmongers. Johnson challenged Coke to tell the public where he stood on the Marshall Plan for rebuilding Europe after the Second World War. Johnson resented Stevenson saying that he was attempting to scare Texans into voting for him. Peddy resented Stevenson calling him an apostle of fear. Johnson charged Stevenson to tell his long-time corporate sponsors that it would be necessary to tax them twenty billion dollars to maintain the peace. The end of LBJ’s Houston speech jabbed at both his opponents when he said, “This is no time for pokey matters or petty things.”²⁴⁷

Johnson, the shrewd political observer, thought that Stevenson would not come out publicly to answer his charges one by one because of his immense sense of inner dignity. Some of Johnson’s most trusted inner circle was astonished at this strategy of attacking Stevenson on his strongest character points. LBJ’s speech in Houston on June eighth was to become the model of the perverse vehicle that he would use to characterize Stevenson throughout the summer primary and the runoff that followed. Many voters throughout Texas began to wonder if Coke’s silence was “a sign of guilt and shame and weakness.”²⁴⁸ This was a poker hand played perfectly by Johnson.

Warren Woodward was responsible for transferring Lyndon’s Silver Star onto his lapel before an appearance. LBJ favored having a veteran, perhaps an amputee, to make his introduction just prior to coming on stage. Johnson liked to play up his own war

²⁴⁶ *Austin American Statesman*, June 8, 1948.

²⁴⁷ *Austin American Statesman*, June 8, 1948.

²⁴⁸ Lance Morrow, 275.

experience, which culminated when General MacArthur awarded him a Silver Star. At first, Johnson composed a letter saying that he did not deserve to be awarded the Silver Star. He quickly changed his mind about the award and frequently made reference to the award in his campaign appearances. He had flown one mission with a bomber crew in the South Pacific as an observer. This flight resulted in the bombs being jettisoned before the target was reached and a Japanese Zero shot at the bomber. None of the ordinary crew was even given a citation for bravery, but the Congressional observers got Silver Stars. Needless to say, Johnson did not mail the letter of protest to the proper authorities, and during the 1948 campaign bragged about the award.²⁴⁹

Lyndon became quite the showman on the campaign trail. He often mocked Coke Stevenson with a set where Lyndon played both the role of reporter and Ol' Coke. When the reporter asked whatever question concerning an issue of the campaign, Lyndon would sway back and forth with his hands on his hips and a corncob pipe in his mouth saying that he believed in constitutional government. This mocking of Stevenson in regards to teacher raises, veterans' pensions, and seventy air groups got the crowd to make a lot of noise in favor of LBJ.²⁵⁰

The *Austin-American Statesman* reported on Johnson's act entertaining the people of South Texas. Lyndon asked to borrow a pipe from someone in the audience. LBJ declared that Stevenson "with one eye on the labor bosses in Fort Worth and one eye on the millionaires in Houston he sits and smokes." Then, with the pipe still in his mouth he would swing back on his heels and declare, "I'm for states' rights."²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 229.

²⁵⁰ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 231.

²⁵¹ June R. Welch, 88.

Coke Stevenson took the comedy sketches in stride. He released a statement stating that he still smoked a pipe. As the press release continued it said, "It's much better to do that than to have pipe dreams as some people in politics do."²⁵² This was about as much of a response as Stevenson ever gave to either of his opponent's backhanded jabs

Johnson simply believed that if he and everyone around him did everything humanly possible then, victory was inevitable. Both helicopter pilots, Chudars and Mashman, attested to this. Lyndon was not at all concerned with the workings of the helicopter, it was simply an expedient to him. Mashman said, LBJ flew closer and closer to the edge with small safety margins. "He landed so late he could barely see the ground." The helicopter was simply "a means to an end" with victory as the ultimate goal. Mashman, who was the pilot of the smaller Bell helicopter, said Johnson "was focusing on his goal with the intensity that left no room for other considerations."²⁵³ Jesse Chudars said that he believed that Lyndon was comfortable flying in the helicopter from the very beginning, and that Johnson saw the helicopter as a way of drawing a big crowd to hear him speak.²⁵⁴ LBJ understood the potential votes that could be attracted by being able to shake people's hands and speak to people once the helicopter gathered them into the town.

The Johnson campaign used missionaries to spread rumors about Johnson's opponents, particularly Coke Stevenson. These were actual employees of the campaign who generally were paid between twenty-five and fifty dollars a day to go into a local

²⁵² "Steam Sizzles from Senate Caldron as Johnson, Peddy Land on Coke," *Austin American Statesman*, June 8, 1948.

²⁵³ Joe Mashman, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, March 28, 1974, LBJL.

²⁵⁴ Jesse H. Chudars, Oral History, Interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, October 2, 1981, LBJL.

establishment and quietly plant rumors concerning old age pensions, Taft-Hartley labor matters, or Coke's pardon and parole record. The local bar, restaurant, post office, or grocery store made good locations for these missionaries. The county or district managers would attempt to find local residents to do the work. When someone bought a round of beers at the local bar and then, he said something bad about Stevenson he was likely to sound believable. The campaign was also picking up the tab for the beers because the missionary was reimbursed for any incidental expenses that were incurred while spreading the gossip.²⁵⁵

A fundamental difference of governmental philosophy existed between Stevenson and Johnson. Stevenson was a state's rights candidate who believed that local and state governments should take care of the needs of the citizens. Coke's often quoted expression that politicians were "trying to move the courthouse from Junction, Texas to Washington"²⁵⁶ exemplified this perfectly. Johnson wanted the federal government to spend large sums of money to prepare the nation to defend itself. He argued that no state or local government was capable of this action to make way for peace and prosperity. He argued that Stevenson's isolationist ideas had helped to usher in the Second World War because backwards thinking politicians tried Stevenson's arguments to no avail.

Lyndon Johnson acquired the support of Miriam "Ma" Ferguson. Since her husband had worked closely with Coke Stevenson during the 1941 senate election, one might have assumed that she would have been a Stevenson supporter. This was not true according to several sources because Stevenson completely ignored the Fergusons during Jim "Pa" Ferguson's lengthy final illness. This was not the case of Congressman

²⁵⁵ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 284.

²⁵⁶ Robert T. Sakowitz, "The 1948 Texas Senatorial Campaign and the Crisis in the Democratic Party," Masters' Thesis, Harvard College, April 11, 1960, 98.

Johnson. Daughter of the Fergusons, Ouida Ferguson Nalle, said that Lyndon personally visited the former governors every time he came to Austin. After Mr. Jim's death, Ma wrote the Congressman a letter stating, "If I can ever be of help to you let me know."²⁵⁷

Mary Rather, one of LBJ's secretaries during the furious 1948 campaign, said that Lyndon's acquisition of Mrs. Ferguson's help "was a feather in his cap because she wasn't for him in 1941."²⁵⁸ Ma delivered radio addresses for Lyndon, and she wrote letters to her close contacts to get them to be at the State Democratic Executive Committee meeting, which Lyndon only won by a vote of 29-28. She provided Mary Rather and the campaign coordinator, Claude Wilde, with all the Ferguson files. These were the key to influencing the outcome in East Texas. It gave the campaign the names of important people to contact by phone and letter. In some cases, the person might have died since Ma last spoke with them, but it was a good bet that the family was still influential. The old Ferguson machine cranked up for its last hurrah to help Lyndon acquire the prize he was aspiring to in 1948.

The last Belden Poll just before the balloting of the primary began showed a surge for Representative Johnson. Belden had conducted a poll of likely voters. The survey, which was published on primary day had "41.4% of the ballots going to Johnson, Stevenson getting 40.1, Peddy 15.6, and the other candidates polling 2.9% together."²⁵⁹ This poll was welcome news to Johnson and his staff. To them this indicated that all the eighteen hour days since the announcement for office in mid-May would now pay off with a good runoff position.

²⁵⁷ Doram D. Brown, "First Woman Governor," *Discovery-The University of Texas at Austin* vol. 13 no.3, 38-44, LBJL.

²⁵⁸ Mary Rather, Oral History, Interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, Interview V, September 9-10, 1982, LBJL.

²⁵⁹ June R. Welch, 111.

Primary election day proved to be a disappointment to Stevenson, Peddy, and Johnson. Stevenson garnered 477,077 votes of the 1.2 million cast. This was forty percent, but not enough to keep him from having to face a runoff, which would involve a hard fight for an additional thirty-five days of campaigning. Peddy received 237, 195 votes, which equated to twenty percent. This knocked him out of the race. Johnson tallied 405,617 votes for a thirty-four percent share of the total. This put Lyndon into a runoff with Coke Stevenson but just barely. He had to make up a deficit of over seventy one thousand votes in the five weeks of the runoff. Johnson's worries were enhanced by the fact that the Peddy vote was expected to go to the other conservative candidate, Coke Stevenson. Johnson had finished third in all the fourteen counties where Peddy had won. Even Lady Bird was distressed by the result. Lady Bird said, "We thought we were going to come out of it winning or be real close to the top...and we were overwhelmingly, vastly, horribly behind."²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 318.

CHAPTER 5

THE GATHERING STORM, THE LANDSLIDE, AND THE DREAM REALIZED

Regardless of Johnson's campaigning "with the fervor of a thirsty desert wanderer headed for a water hole," he was nearly counted out.²⁶¹ The July twenty-fourth primary results had sent George Peddy back to the private sector, and Lyndon Johnson had barely forced a runoff. If only a little over one percent of the voters had chosen either Peddy or Stevenson, Johnson too would have been a private citizen.

Sunday, 25 July was a very gloomy day for the Johnsons and their campaign staff. The backyard of the Dillman Street house in Austin provided the backdrop where Johnson's future status as a candidate had to be determined. Those in attendance were Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson, John and Nellie Connally, Everett Looney, Alvin Wirtz, Claude Wild, Willard Deason, and Charles Herring. Lady Bird recalled that her husband was utterly exhausted and dreaded the outcome of the runoff campaign to come. He thought that most of the over two hundred thousand votes that George Peddy had tallied would almost certainly move to the Stevenson column in the runoff.²⁶²

Willard Deason said that at the Dillman Street backyard meeting several of Johnson's advisers recommended throwing in the towel. They did not believe that it was mathematically possible to make up the vote tallies in such a short period of time. Johnson would have four weeks to make up the difference of over seventy thousand votes. Also, they suspected Stevenson to gather in most of Peddy's support since he was the other truly conservative candidate in the race.²⁶³ "Because Peddy had waged his

²⁶¹ "Neck & Neck," *Time* September 13, 1948, 23.

²⁶² Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 319.

²⁶³ Willard Deason, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, April 11, 1969, Interview III, LBJL.

campaign on anticommunist and pro-states' right planks, pundits theorized that in the runoff his supporters would flock to Stevenson."²⁶⁴

Lady Bird was adamant about continuing the campaign. She urged her husband to continue the fight. Lady Bird said she told Lyndon, "I'd rather put in our whole stack, borrow anything we could, work eighteen hours a day, and lose by sixty thousand, than to lose by seventy thousand, or maybe we could hew it down to fifty thousand, or maybe we could even conceivably win." She said she was determined to continue through the runoff and was nearly belligerent about it.²⁶⁵

The decision was made to continue the campaign. Johnson told his staff, "We can win it if we're willing to work hard enough to do it."²⁶⁶ That was always the Johnson sentiment, and it seemed that Mrs. Johnson had acquired Lyndon's can do spirit. Lady Bird said she was determined to at least narrow the margins during the runoff. She said she wanted this for Lyndon but also for their many supporters who had "shoveled so much love and sweat and time and money into the campaign." She said the 1948 campaign was an endurance contest.²⁶⁷

Both candidates were now off to Washington, D.C. Lyndon was heading back to the Truman special session of the eightieth "do nothing" Congress. Coke Stevenson was going to see some influential senators and department heads to learn about foreign affairs. LBJ prepared a press reception for the former governor's short course on international relations.

²⁶⁴ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, "Lyndon Johnson's Victory in the 1948 Texas Senate Race: A Reappraisal," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.109 no.4: 1994, 596.

²⁶⁵ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 319.

²⁶⁶ Willard Deason, Oral History, Interview III, LBJL.

²⁶⁷ Ruth Montgomery, *Mrs. LBJ* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 37.

As soon as Coke arrived in Washington, he met with four people knowledgeable about foreign relations. He spoke with the senior senator from Texas, Tom Connally, Democratic leader who had vast foreign affairs experience. He also met with the ranking member of the foreign affairs committee on the Republican side, Senator Arthur Vandenberg from Michigan. The cabinet members with whom Coke met included Undersecretary of State, Robert Lovett, and he chatted briefly with Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal.²⁶⁸ At the conclusion of these meetings, he declared that international relations were nonpolitical. Stevenson contended that a successful United States' foreign policy should be bipartisan. "This is a question of patriotism, not politics."²⁶⁹ There was in his estimation no reason for this to be a substantial campaign issue.

Coke Stevenson took the train to Washington while Lyndon Johnson flew to the city. This provided the time for Johnson to have his press friends give the former Texas governor a proper introduction to reporters on the Washington beat. Walter Jenkins who ran Representative Johnson's Washington office during his absence said, "We did our best to manage his appearance in Washington." Jack Anderson's press conference questions were designed to take the initiative away from Stevenson.²⁷⁰

The questions were designed to reveal Coke Stevenson's position on Taft-Hartley. Instead of giving a direct response, Stevenson tried to straddle the fence on the issue. He said he had come to learn a little about international affairs while he was in Washington. Finally, he said he would have to look at his notes to give a complete answer on the Taft-Hartley Labor Law. Drew Pearson's by line contained the article that Jack Anderson

²⁶⁸ Merle Miller, 122.

²⁶⁹ June R. Welch, 123.

²⁷⁰ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, LBJL.

prepared about Stevenson's dodging and weaving through the questions at the press conference. Pearson said he simply wanted "to hep" Lyndon out in the runoff election.²⁷¹

Coke Stevenson was not accustomed to handling the hardened press core members he encountered on his Washington trip. Coke had used the local Texas press in Austin as a virtual "kitchen cabinet." His relationship with these capital reporters was very personal. He even solicited the reporters' advice and council about the problems of running the state during the Second World War. The press conferences that Stevenson was used to having were "easy-going give-and-take affairs."²⁷²

Lyndon's brother, Sam Houston, said the number one thing that made the difference during the weeks of the runoff was the Drew Pearson article appearing in "The Washington Merry-Go-Round."²⁷³ Jake Pickle said that he thought it was Coke Stevenson's undoing when he came to Washington with an LBJ prepared reception.²⁷⁴ When Anderson asked Coke about how he stood on the Taft-Hartley Law, he hedged and mouthed platitudes about how everyone in Texas already knew how he stood on the matter. Once Stevenson had finally admitted that he did not know how to answer the question without his notes, this gave the Johnson campaign what it needed. The article was reprinted and distributed by the LBJ campaign for the next four weeks all over Texas.

Les Carpenter's story of Coke Stevenson's press conference revealed that the ex-governor had been asked directly five times to characterize the Taft-Hartley Law as a good or a bad law. He simply dodged the question. He told reporters that they could

²⁷¹ Drew Pearson, Oral History, Interviewed by Joe B. Frantz, April 10, 1969, LBJL.

²⁷² Fred Gantt, Jr. *The Chief Executive in Texas: A Study in Gubernatorial Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 253.

²⁷³ Sam Houston Johnson, 75.

²⁷⁴ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, LBJL.

look up his answers on file in the Texas daily newspapers. When asked if he would amend or repeal the Taft-Hartley Law, he simply said he had never made any promises regarding the subject. About the only substantive answer that the press core received from Stevenson was that he did intend to vote for the Truman-Barkley ticket in the fall.²⁷⁵

Stevenson had made another mistake while he was in the nation's capital. Several Texas newspapers captured an image of Coke "standing in the United States Senate gallery pointing to a seat in the chamber as if it were already his."²⁷⁶ Stevenson acted as if his victory in the runoff was only a formality. Perhaps his seventy-one thousand vote advantage over Johnson, plus the expected conservative votes from Peddy had caused Stevenson to become prematurely overconfident of victory on August twenty-eighth. The average Texan may have concluded that Coke Stevenson was taking their vote in the runoff for granted. This picture may have helped many to stay at home because "Mr. Texas" was already acting like he was a member of the senate. Lyndon's friends shaped Coke's Washington reception and helped LBJ to take the initiative back when he returned to Texas.²⁷⁷

There were several predictions by journalists and campaign staff members regarding the results of the primary at the end of July. Vernon Singleton, Stevenson's campaign manager, was extremely confident that Coke would overcome Johnson in the runoff with little difficulty. He said that Stevenson's strong showing was because "the voters believed in performance rather than promises."²⁷⁸ Lyndon Johnson's aides were publicly confident of the ultimate victory, but privately wondered how the majority of

²⁷⁵ Complete Text of Les Carpenter's Story of Coke Stevenson's Noon Thursday Press Conference, Washington, D.C. Pre-Presidential Memo File Box 10 Folder Austin-Miscellaneous [1948], LBJL.

²⁷⁶ Randall B. Woods, 210.

²⁷⁷ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, LBJL.

²⁷⁸ June R. Welch, 114.

three hundred thousand votes could be switched in about one month of campaigning. Once again once Johnson had made up his mind to continue with the runoff election he put his whole body, mind, and soul into the task. He told his staff at the beginning of the runoff that a win could be secured if everyone worked all the time as hard as they could. Often, the Austin headquarters never turned of the lights all night long.²⁷⁹

Allen Duckworth, a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, later sounded like a prophet. He predicted that the runoff election would not poll nearly as many votes as the original primary had. He said that Beauford Jester would not be drawing people to the polls to vote for governor since no runoff was necessary in his race. The only statewide office on the ballot was the senatorial election. Duckworth explained that many people would assume because Stevenson was the only true conservative left in the race that he would garner most of Peddy's primary support so, there was little need to return to the polls to vote for Coke Stevenson. Duckworth said that a very light turnout would favor LBJ "since he had a better organization than the ex-governor."²⁸⁰

The statewide organization did get out the vote for Lyndon Johnson in the runoff. There are numerous notes attesting to this fact in the expense folders for the 1948 campaign. A typical example might have been handwritten or typed, but the gist of the message was the same. The notes began by saying how happy the individuals were to have given their time and energies to the campaign for the senate. Next, the individuals asked to be reimbursed for the gasoline and oil for their vehicles. Some notes included the number of voters who were personally carried to the polls by this grass-roots worker. Most apologized for asking to be reimbursed these small amounts of five to twenty

²⁷⁹ Willard Deason, Oral History, Interview III, LBJL.

²⁸⁰ June R. Welch, 114.

dollars, but all would admit that they needed it because times were tough to feed and clothe a family. Most of the letters ended by congratulating Lyndon on his election to the United States Senate.²⁸¹

Johnson began to work on getting the Peddy votes, which amounted to more than two hundred thirty thousand while he was still attending the special called session of the eightieth “do-nothing” Congress. He claimed that George Peddy’s platform was very similar to his own. He said that he had already heard from several Peddy supporters who offered to help with the Johnson for Senate campaign.²⁸² Johnson’s first speech of the runoff in east Texas was attended by three of Peddy’s brothers.

Since Lyndon was not ready for an “LBJ funeral,” he worked with vengeance. This time he concentrated on the big cities. He appeared with big name movie stars as often as possible.²⁸³ Alvin Wirtz told Johnson how that Texas was becoming increasingly urban. If he wanted to take a majority of the three hundred thousand possible votes that he needed to win, he had to campaign hard in the larger cities. Thus, the helicopter was abandoned and rural voters would mostly be courted during the runoff with the *Johnson Journal*, handbills, car caravans of staffers, and radio addresses. His personal appearances would primarily be in the urban areas where he could make the acquaintance of many people.

The counties where George Peddy had run the strongest appeared to be one of the keys to an LBJ victory on August twenty-eighth. He devised a three-prong strategy to try to get the Peddy vote which seemed logically to fall into the Stevenson conservative camp. He courted Miriam “Ma” Ferguson for her whole-hearted support. Secondly, he

²⁸¹ Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 9, Folder [Expenses in Connection with 1948 Campaign], LBJL.

²⁸² June R. Welch, 115.

²⁸³ Jimmy Banks, 87.

appeared over and over again throughout the east Texas counties delivering speech after speech and attending barbecue after barbecue. He also attempted to heal the rift between Maury Maverick and Jesse Kilday in San Antonio.

Mrs. Ferguson proved to be of vital help to Lyndon Johnson. The times that he had taken a few minutes to go out to her Austin home to offer his help during Jim Ferguson's lingering illness paid off in a powerful way. Ex-governor Stevenson might have regretted not finding the time to attend Mr. Ferguson's funeral. During the runoff she wrote letters to her supporters and asked that they vote for Lyndon Johnson.²⁸⁴

Johnson began his runoff campaign in earnest at Center with a speech on August sixth. Johnson commented that Colonel Peddy's platform and his own were very much alike. As he praised Colonel Peddy, three of his brothers were on the speakers' platform with Representative Johnson. Two of Peddy's brothers endorsed LBJ for the senate during the runoff. Johnson continued to hammer Stevenson about where he stood on Taft-Hartley. He always made a big point that the people of Texas had a right to know how the candidates stood on the issues, and that a fence straddler could not be trusted. Johnson tied the threat of creeping Communism to the labor interests, which had endorsed Stevenson.²⁸⁵

The Stevenson campaign tried to label Johnson as insensitive to the Communist threat. Stevenson tried to play on public fears about the creeping Communist threat and the shared fear that a new war would be caused by Russia. He challenged Johnson's Congressional record on Communism and asked what had Johnson done to thwart the effort of spy rings. Stevenson even tried to tie LBJ to Henry Wallace and his leftist

²⁸⁴ Randall B. Woods, 210.

²⁸⁵ June R. Welch, 126.

backers. Without evidence, Stevenson accused Johnson's campaign of accepting money from Henry Wallace associates and tried to link Johnson with Vito Marcantonio, the Communist Congressman from New York City's Harlem District.²⁸⁶

Stevenson supporter, former Congressman Thomas L. Blanton from Albany, Texas, attacked Johnson for his close associate with Henry Wallace. Blanton went on the campaign trail for Stevenson denouncing Henry Wallace for having fraternized with Communists and emphasized Johnson's attempt to have Wallace nominated with Roosevelt in 1944 for the vice presidency. Blanton said if Johnson had gotten his way that Henry Wallace would now be the President. He blamed Johnson and Wallace for giving the Russians the secret of the atomic bomb.²⁸⁷

Johnson managed to pull together two warring factions in the critically important city of San Antonio. Lots of money was required to help insure that Sheriff Owen Kilday and his deputies were well paid to produce thousands of Mexican-American votes for the runoff election. The Kilday organization was able to supply sheriff's deputies and their cars to bring the Latin citizens to the polls. The organization made sure that these Mexican-American workers voted as previously agreed. Somehow former Mayor Maury Maverick was persuaded to ride on one side of LBJ while Congressman Paul Kilday rode on the other. This flag draped procession rode through many of the main streets of San Antonio the day before the polls opened. By appearing with Lyndon Johnson, both political factions were endorsing Johnson's candidacy for the Senate.²⁸⁸

While Johnson campaigned throughout east Texas, in Center, Longview, and Houston, Stevenson was back at the ranch in Kimble County. He was busy arranging for

²⁸⁶ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 325.

²⁸⁷ J. Evetts Haley, 23.

²⁸⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 305-306.

the annual shearing of the goats and rounding up stray cattle.²⁸⁹ When Stevenson did go out to campaign several of his aides did not remember him directly asking anyone to vote for him. It was usually a pleasant conversation about ranching or some remembrances from a trial rather than a straight forward meet and greet to vote for me. Allan Shivers said, “Stevenson barely campaigned.”²⁹⁰ Shivers also remembered that Booth Mooney wrote most of Mr. Stevenson’s speeches and often traveled with him. He said that Mooney constituted about all the campaign staff that Coke needed. “Stevenson, apparently over confident and always deliberate, failed to step up his campaign in keeping with furious tempo and grandstand tactics of the Johnson elements.”²⁹¹ One of Stevenson’s staff remembered the runoff this way: “Our big trouble was that we had a candidate who really preferred to say nothing and an opponent who was determined to say something and keep saying it. And what he said hurt.”²⁹²

The outcome of the election hinged on Stevenson’s ability to get those who had supported him in July to come out to vote for him in August. It was critically important to get his urban and rural supporters back to the polls. The runoff results would likely be a function of which candidate worked the hardest to get voters to turn out for him.²⁹³

Johnson believed that a supreme personal effort could turn around his poor third place showing in the six counties of Jasper, Nacogdoches, Sabine, San Augustine, Newton, and Shelby. Johnson spent considerable time and energy in the piney woods

²⁸⁹ June R. Welch, 127.

²⁹⁰ Merle Miller, 123.

²⁹¹ J. Evetts Haley, 23.

²⁹² Booth Mooney, 63

²⁹³ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 599.

counties of east Texas close to the Louisiana border. LBJ was convinced that if he hit the stump often there that he could make a difference in the expected Stevenson tally.²⁹⁴

Coke Stevenson's campaign slipped into a malaise. He took for granted not only picking up most of Peddy's support in east Texas but also determined that he would garner the overwhelming support of the Panhandle. He was so confident of the Panhandle's support that he cancelled an appearance at the annual XIT Ranch Reunion where he was supposed to be the star attraction. He provided the reunion with only a few hours notice to find his substitute. The lack of runoff primaries in two west Texas counties, Hansford and Kinney, showed the lackadaisical approach that Stevenson displayed in the runoff election. The plurality of four hundred votes produced by these two counties in the primary could have secured a victory for Stevenson.²⁹⁵

Newspapers were an especially critical element during the 1948 campaign. Most citizens got their information about the candidates from either the radio or the newspaper. Many Texans read the newspaper from cover to cover. It was the authoritative source about current events. The international, national, state, and local news could be found in this one source. Most of the papers' readers accepted what was written in the newspapers to be true. This caused all the candidates to covet a paper's endorsement. A boost in vote totals could be expected in the area where a local paper endorsed a particular candidate.

During the primary, several large papers had difficulty deciding which of the two conservative candidates, Stevenson or Peddy, they should support. During the runoff, Stevenson was the only conservative remaining in the race. Stevenson had the support of

²⁹⁴ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 600.

²⁹⁵ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 602.

the *Dallas Morning News*, *San Antonio Express*, and the *Amarillo Globe News*. The staff of the *Houston Chronicle* favored Stevenson in some stories, but the printer, J.B. Sparkman, tried to run stories favorable to the Peddy campaign during the primary. Lyndon Johnson received the endorsement of the *Austin American Statesman*, *Fort-Worth Star Telegraph*, *Lubbock Avalanche*, and after the primary received support from W.P. Hobby's *Houston Post*.²⁹⁶

Every day of the runoff, Johnson made an appearance and continued on the attack about his opponent's stand on the Taft-Hartley Act. Finally, when Johnson accused him of being gagged by labor dictators, Stevenson declared that the effect of Taft-Hartley had been good. The only trouble with his statement was that it was given to his old friend, Sam Braswell, Jr. of the *Kerrville Times*. This was a regional paper and was not widely circulated throughout the state. This statement that the Taft-Hartley Law had been a good thing to curb labor's monopoly did not stop the attacks by Johnson.²⁹⁷

Johnson was determined to use whatever means necessary to convince Texans that Coke Stevenson "was a secret supporter of big city labor racketeers and had made a secret deal to repeal the sacred Taft-Hartley Act."²⁹⁸ Longview publisher, Carl Estes, who was well respected in east Texas delivered a radio address that Alvin Wirtz had written. It proclaimed the CIO-PAC-AFL labor bosses were plotting to defeat Lyndon Johnson because of his vote on the Taft-Hartley Act. The speech accused Coke Stevenson of being soft on Communist labor bosses who would invade Texas if Stevenson was elected as the new senator. Wirtz was pleased with the speech and had it

²⁹⁶ June R. Welch, 105-107.

²⁹⁷ June R. Welch, 131.

²⁹⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 276.

rebroadcast all over the state. Full-page advertisements in local papers reprinted the speech throughout the state.

Lyndon was on the attack about where Coke Stevenson stood on Taft-Hartley every day of the runoff. He said if Coke had promised the labor bosses to repeal Taft-Hartley, the people of Texas had a right to know. Lyndon said the rank in file members of the union should ask their leaders why that they had broken a fifty-year precedent by endorsing one particular candidate. LBJ launched into an attack about Stevenson's lack of courage as governor when he refused to either sign or veto a vicious anti-labor law in Texas. Every city that Johnson visited was treated to the same accusations about secret deals with the labor racketeering Communist labor leaders made by "Calculatin Coke."²⁹⁹

The key to making the public believe that Stevenson was influenced by the big labor bosses and soft on Communism was to keep repeating the charge over and over again. Johnson declared the one part of Taft-Hartley that he would not amend was the portion where any labor leader had to swear that he was not a Communist. "LBJ red-baited and labor-baited with vengeance." The *Johnson Journal* was sent out to the unsophisticated rural voters declaring that the big labor unions up North are full of admitted Communists, and they are in favor of Coke being the next senator. The articles ended with catchy phrases such as, "Don't let the Reds slip up on you!"³⁰⁰

Stevenson had no "secret deal" with labor racketeers, and Johnson knew the charges were false every time that he uttered them. Lyndon Johnson continued to hammer the charge in every public appearance because this was the one charge that had seemed to stick to Coke Stevenson. As the runoff continued, Lyndon managed "to

²⁹⁹ Sam Houston Johnson, 76.

³⁰⁰ Randall B. Woods, 210.

create, to spin, great dust-devils of plausibility that jittered and whirled around Stevenson's good name." Johnson implied Stevenson had sold his soul for the labor vote in Texas. Using a figure of speech that all Texans understood, he said "He's a yearling with the labor boss brand on his hip."³⁰¹

Stevenson had tried to make inflation an issue from the beginning of the campaign. By mid-August, Johnson called on President Truman to compose an anti-inflation board. The board was to be chaired by respected General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Johnson said that a study should be done to see what could be done to hold down inflationary pressures. Stevenson attacked Johnson for not doing anything to counter inflation during his eleven years in Congress. Stevenson asked a crowd gathered at Center if Mr. Johnson had introduced any legislation to control inflation, lower taxes, or reduce the national deficit of nearly forty billion dollars.³⁰²

Johnson charged that Coke Stevenson's ambition to go to Washington had been a recent revelation. Johnson had found an article from the *Dallas Morning News* where Stevenson had asserted a little more than two years before that he did not ever envision himself to be a candidate for Congress or the Senate. He was quoted from June of 1946 as saying that, "I cannot think of anything in the world which would be interesting to me in Washington." Johnson was proving to be a much better speaker on the stump without prepared remarks for presentation. He made effective political use of Coke's own characterization of not being "fitted for" the Washington pattern. Johnson made a joke out of Stevenson's statements by saying, "I believe him. How about you?"³⁰³

³⁰¹ Lance Morrow, 277.

³⁰² June R. Welch, 132-133.

³⁰³ June R. Welch, 134.

Stevenson's record of granting pardons became an issue during the runoff. Riley Wyatt accused Governor Stevenson of granting an unusually high number of clemencies during his tenure in Austin. Wyatt stated that eight thousand five hundred convicts were released during the five and one-half years that Stevenson was governor.³⁰⁴ Roy Hofheinz spoke in about thirty-five counties to get all the attention he could to one pardon the governor made. The pardon involved a child molester who subsequently raped two little girls on Buffalo Bayou. The town was understandably upset by this pardon.³⁰⁵

Stevenson answered Riley Wyatt's attacks by reminding the citizens that most of his time as governor had been during the Second World War. He maintained that many of the pardons were done so that the convicts could enlist in the military to fight in the war. He said that other governors were releasing prisoners with a few months left on their sentences, and he was simply doing the patriotic thing. He said that Mr. Wyatt was concerned with the clemency matter of a man named Claude Henry. There was some two thousand dollars that had been paid to an attorney to try to secure clemency from Governor Stevenson. The matter was unclear, but it appeared that Riley Wyatt had written Stevenson seeking clemency for Henry, and that Governor Stevenson did not have knowledge of any monetary transaction regarding the clemency.³⁰⁶

Both candidates had many powerful wealthy contributors, but both began to sling accusations about the other having illegal political slush funds. Johnson benefited from strong support of the aircraft industry since he was at the time forcefully arguing for a seventy air group as part of his preparedness platform. While retired General Ira Eaker

³⁰⁴ June R. Welch, 138.

³⁰⁵ W. Ervin "Red" James, Oral History, Interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, February 17, 1978, LBJL.

³⁰⁶ June R. Welch, 139.

visited relatives in his boyhood west Texas home, he made several campaign appearances on Johnson's behalf.

Both candidates began to question the cash flow of each others' campaigns. Stevenson claimed that General Eaker's appearances were proof that the Hughes Aircraft Company was contributing large amounts of money to the Johnson for Senate operation. Stevenson said this was evident because General Eaker was an employee of the company. This brought out Johnson's ire, and he attacked Stevenson for violating the ten thousand dollar spending limit. He asked who was paying for the many three hundred thirty dollar billboards and the eleven hundred dollar full page advertisements that the Stevenson campaign was having printed.³⁰⁷ A group of panhandle oil executives had recently made large contributions available to the Stevenson for Senate operation. Financial contributions on both sides would have far exceeded the legal limit. Private contributions, especially cash payments, were never logged on official receipts of the campaigns and could be spent in anyway to benefit the candidates.

No pretense of a ten thousand dollar spending limit was evident in the private accounting of the 1948 campaign. Sometime after the runoff ended, there was an accounting of expenses by the Johnson campaign, which listed a total of \$44,425.31 still unpaid. The first item was a bill from Southwestern Bell Telephone Company for \$7,956.00. There were other bills marked paid in the folder to the phone company prior the bill for nearly eight thousand dollars listed above. It appears that Johnson's campaign had paid more for the use of the telephone than the total allotted legal expenditures should have been for the entire campaign. There were other references to John

³⁰⁷ Alfred Steinberg, 254-255.

Connally's evading a phone company representative because he did not have the funds on that day to pay what was owed to the company.³⁰⁸

During the month of the runoff, Lady Bird flew to large cities and small towns all over Texas to have tea with the local women's clubs. Marietta Brooks was the official head of the Women Volunteers for Johnson, but the drawing card was Lady Bird. All the women wanted to meet Mrs. Johnson. Although flying made her sick to her stomach, she flew in order to help her husband in this down to the wire campaign.³⁰⁹ The day before the polls opened Lady Bird and Marietta Brooks were on their way to one of these women's club teas at San Marcos when a truck ran them off the road. Mrs. Johnson was bruised as the car rolled over and Mrs. Brooks was hospitalized, but Lady Bird arrived in San Antonio on time to make her radio address. This was the only speech that she gave during the campaign, but she was up early on election day to divide up the phone book with Lyndon's relatives for a day of calling with rotary dial phones to get out the vote in Austin.³¹⁰

Stevenson's actions during the early part of August had confounded his handlers. He had been at the ranch chopping wood and dipping stock. When reporters asked Stevenson why he was not campaigning, he asked them, "Did you ever see a stump tailed bull in fly time?"³¹¹ This was Coke's way of saying that these things really needed to be done on the ranch.

By mid-August, Stevenson was once again earnestly in campaign mode.

Stevenson was developing a platform of sorts, making promises, and delivering lots of

³⁰⁸ Pre-Presidential Confidential File [PPCF]. Box 9, [Expenses in Connection with 1948 Campaign], LBJL.

³⁰⁹ Alfred Steinberg, 255.

³¹⁰ Randall B. Woods, 211.

³¹¹ Randall B. Woods, 211.

stump speeches. He admonished Johnson for not taking stronger anti-Communists stances in Congress. Stevenson wanted to know where all of Johnson's helpful legislation for the farmers of Texas had been during the eleven years of his tenure in Congress. Stevenson harkened back to Lyndon's support for the New Deal and criticized his conversion to conservatism during the two years since 1946. Coke criticized LBJ for being the candidate for hire by the CIO. Stevenson indicated that Johnson was being bought by sinister slush funds that he would be beholding to when he returned to Washington, if he was elected.³¹²

Several prominent citizens endorsed the Johnson candidacy during the last week of the runoff. On August twentieth, Hal Collins publicly endorsed Johnson. This undoubtedly meant that Johnson also had the support of his wealthy brother, Carr P. Collins. Both brothers had supported George Peddy during the primary. Will Clayton, former Undersecretary of State decided to support Johnson. Congressman John Lyle endorsed LBJ shortly before the election at a rally in San Antonio. Mrs. Miriam Ferguson delivered a statewide radio address on Johnson's behalf.³¹³

The runoff was one of the closest statewide elections in United States' history. The saga of the vote tallies and the courtroom drama that resulted was political high drama. Lady Bird said of the 1948 campaign that it just did not end. "This time there was the runoff and then one crisis after another right on up to the swearing in."³¹⁴

Walter Jenkins said that he went back to Austin to received reports from each county throughout the state on election night. He said the Johnson campaign had better information from their committee chairmen in each county than the Texas Election

³¹² June R. Welch, 143.

³¹³ June R. Welch, 140-146.

³¹⁴ Merle Miller, 124.

Bureau had.³¹⁵ George E. Reedy said that the Texas Election Bureau produced very unofficial tallies. The totals were gathered by various newspaper reports. The vote totals were often coming from the various campaigns themselves, which made the totals especially suspect. Reedy said that well-heeled Texas politicians knew to hold back some of their support. This was done so that the other candidate would not know how many votes they needed to out distance their opponent if the election was close.³¹⁶ Close was not a good descriptive adjective for this run-off, it would be a photo finish with the winner being called by an eyelash.

John Connally was determined not repeat the mistakes of the 1941 campaign. Perhaps, as many as fifty election judges were holding back their exact vote tallies.³¹⁷ Campaign insiders for Johnson had learned to keep secret the exact number of votes in at least fifty counties where they led. Walter Jenkins said, “In 1948 we learned better, and we didn’t rush the people in the counties where we had strong votes. We rather hoped that they would hold back, so if there was...any sort to fraud” the Stevenson side would not be aware of the exact totals they needed to overcome our totals.³¹⁸

Johnson’s organization sent ballot watchers out to every precinct. Johnson believed that a critical factor in the election could be Stevenson’s control of the party apparatus. Stevenson had been governor only two years before and had installed many of his relatives and friends as county chairpersons. Sam Houston Johnson met with a group of south Texas campaign workers. He told them that his brother was fearful that Stevenson would attempt to steal the election. In Lyndon’s brother’s opinion, the only

³¹⁵ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, LBJL.

³¹⁶ Merle Miller, 124.

³¹⁷ George Norris Green, 114.

³¹⁸ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, LBJL.

way to prevent this was to be vigilant at the polls. A campaign directive was sent to all Johnson county chairmen asking them to get a prompt read on the vote totals but not to report it and to post someone to stand guard at the polling places.³¹⁹

Coke Stevenson's lack of campaign central coordination cost him many votes during the runoff. By mid-August, Johnson, his brother, and other highly placed staffers were finding poll watchers who would keep close tabs on the vote tallies. Stevenson was telling his "lead men" that it was fine for them to leave Texas for their annual hunting trips to Canada to escape the oppressive Texas heat in August. Some offered to stay and campaign but were told it would not be necessary. The rural county judges and former legislators who supported Stevenson were left to their own devices to promote the candidate. Almost no communication between Stevenson's Austin headquarters and the rural counties took place.

To illustrate how out of touch the Stevenson campaign was in the rural counties of Texas, the ex-governor did not even know that two counties in the panhandle were not holding runoff primaries. The first primary results from Hansford and Kinney Counties had given Stevenson a plurality of over four hundred votes. Due to the strong showing for Stevenson in the primary, these two counties had elected to save their counties the money that was needed to hold a runoff election. Stevenson was not aware that a runoff was not being held in the two counties until the returns started to come into the Texas Election Bureau.³²⁰

This runoff primary had national implications. This was a presidential election year. When the Democrats had held their July party convention in Philadelphia, the fight

³¹⁹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 327-328.

³²⁰ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 286.

over the platform was robust. The liberal wing of the Democrats, led by Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey, wanted a strong civil rights plank with fair employment practices, anti-poll tax language, and strong anti-lynching wording. When the plank was adopted by the liberals at the convention, the conservative Democrats walked out of the convention. These southern Democrats formed the States' Rights Party or Dixiecrats.

The Dixiecrats gathered at Birmingham, Alabama with Confederate flags waving and proceeded to nominate a candidate of their own for President and Vice-President of the United States.³²¹ Two governors from deep Southern states occupied the top of the Dixiecrat ticket. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina vied for President and Fielding Wright from Mississippi ran for Vice-President.

The first convention of Texas Democrats held in May had produced a slate of electors that favored the national ticket with Truman at the top. The conservatives, Texas Regulars, tried to gain control of the September convention to replace the electors selected in May. The conservatives stormed out of the convention thus, signaling the beginning of the end of single party rule in Texas.³²²

President Harry Truman and his running mate Alben Barkley were in the fight of their lives. They needed the support of Texas in the 1948 Presidential Election. It was certain that at least four and possibility five Southern delegations would be voting for the Thurmond-Wright ticket. Harry Truman was willing to accept Lyndon Johnson with his less than perfect civil rights legislation, if Johnson could secure a loyalist Democratic slate of electors from Texas. Truman reasoned that a Johnson victory was more likely to

³²¹ Randall B. Woods, 194-195.

³²² V.O.Key, Jr., 258-259.

keep Texas in the Democratic fold than a victory by conservative states' rights advocate Coke Stevenson.³²³

The earliest election returns came in from three of the big cities, Houston, Fort-Worth, and Dallas, because they used voting machines and their numbers could be tallied quickly. The results showed about a twenty thousand-vote lead for Stevenson. The results from San Antonio were slower to come in, but it was expected that the results might be similar. It appeared at this early hour that Stevenson's substantial lead might make him the new senator from Texas.

When the San Antonio vote came in, it was not the anticipated several thousand-vote plurality that the Stevenson campaign had anticipated. The late infusion of cash by the Johnson campaign plus the united front presented by Kilday and Maverick had turned the expected tide. Quietly Kilday's deputies and Dan Quill had delivered the west side of San Antonio for Johnson. In addition, a push had been made to get the black community to vote for Johnson. This time the San Antonio tally was fifteen thousand five hundred eleven for Stevenson and fifteen thousand six hundred ten for Johnson.³²⁴

By midnight after the polls closed, the Stevenson lead had been cut to less than two thousand votes. The total as Sunday morning began was 470,681 for Stevenson to 468,787 for Johnson. Now everyone was certain that this would be a very close race. The hectic nature of the vote tallies added to the confusion surrounding these days of counting ballots.³²⁵

Over the next several days, there were ups and downs for each of the candidates. On Sunday morning, Johnson jumped into the lead when Duval County reported four

³²³ Jimmy Banks, 88.

³²⁴ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 308.

³²⁵ June R. Welch, 149.

thousand one hundred ninety-five to thirty-eight in favor of Johnson. By late Sunday evening, the lead had switched back to Stevenson. As of Sunday night, about seven hundred votes separated the candidates.³²⁶ This was an incredibly close election where vote totals were nearing nine hundred eighty thousand. The election was to be decided by less than a one-tenth of a percentage point between the aspirants.

The lead seesawed back and forth from Saturday night through Tuesday with no clear winner in sight. With nearly one million votes cast, mostly on paper ballots that had to be counted by hand, recorded in the county seat, and then, reported to the Texas Election Bureau, a fair amount of confusion was understandable. The vote totals were sent by either telephone or telegraphed through Western Union. Some of the tabulation sheets had Lyndon Johnson's name first while others had Coke Stevenson's name first. This lack of standardization resulted in several instances of transposed votes that ultimately would be found and corrected. According to the *State Observer*, there were at least eight different individuals who would tabulate and report the votes before the official tally was made. If everyone involved in counting the votes was perfectly honest, there was room for a lot of errors.

Lyndon Johnson's organization was very thorough in its canvassing of the vote after the election in each county down to the precinct level. The campaign often had better information available to it than did the Texas Election Bureau. There are hundreds of notes both typed and handwritten that show the meticulous detail with which the Johnson campaign had reported the tallies to headquarters in Austin. Examples such as the reported vote from Ellis County said "Clifton Carters calls and reports: Unofficial count sent to Texas Election Bureau was Johnson-3035 Stevenson-3838. Official

³²⁶ June R. Welch, 150-151.

Canvas: J-3008 and Stevenson-3860. Canvased this morning. Our man Warrick Jenkins, and an attorney with C.T. Randal and McCaskill were all present when the canvas was made. Signed Mack De Geurin.”³²⁷

It had become standard Texas politics in close elections to alter precinct results throughout the state. Coke Stevenson’s supporters realized that they had been remiss in not getting out the vote for their candidate in an effective manner during the runoff. They now made a vow to rectify the situation. They were now working frantically to assure that the “recounting” would come out in their favor. They were also doing the best that they could to guard against Johnson supporters’ attempt to add unjustified votes to their column.³²⁸ Both sides tried to keep certain precincts from reporting so that the other side would not be aware of the exact number of votes that they possessed. This was a game of cat and mouse with high stakes.

On Sunday night around 9P.M., Johnson had a slight lead of six hundred ninety-three over Stevenson. As Coke Stevenson’s lead disappeared, the barbeque on the Llanos came to a halt. More bourbon was gulped by those in attendance. Charles Boatner, who attended the barbeque, said that everything got really quite and the next morning Mr. Stevenson’s car “came by just hell-bent for Austin.”³²⁹

On Monday evening, Stevenson had regained a slight lead over Lyndon Johnson. On September second, the Texas Election Bureau reported its final forecast of the vote with Stevenson ahead by three hundred sixty-two votes. The newspapers reminded their readers that this was an unofficial count. The State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC) would meet in Fort Worth on September thirteenth to receive the official count.

³²⁷ PPCF, Box 6, [run-off primary Returns] [1948], LBJL.

³²⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 309-310.

³²⁹ Randall B. Woods, 212.

The following day the state Democratic Convention would confirm the final vote received at the SDEC.

John Connally said the experiences of 1941 had taught him a great deal about close Texas elections and how politics had to be played. Connally had concluded that Johnson's win of several thousand ballots in 1941 had been stolen on the long count. In 1941, the Johnson camp had all of their precincts report early so that the banner headline in all the newspapers would report Johnson as the winner. O'Daniel had conspired with Coke Stevenson and Jim Ferguson to gain enough votes to overcome Johnson's total. Connally said the trick was in holding out some of your strong precincts until most of the vote had already been tabulated. This way the opponents never really knew exactly how many votes that they needed to top your candidate.

Connally said that the Johnson campaign staff knew that the Stevenson camp had instructed county officials in several of his strong precincts to withhold or underreport in the early counting. Then, these legitimate votes could be added to the total to counter gains by the opponent. Connally said, "In 1948 we didn't urge anyone to get their votes in early because we knew the kind of shenanigans that might happen." Connally was once bitten, twice shy. Connally and the rest of the Johnson staff had not forgotten 1941. "We had been bitten once. It would not happen again."³³⁰

Alarm bells rang for the Johnson headquarters when a switchboard operator called to report that in Eastland County there was going to be a revision of the votes. She said, "I shouldn't listen in on conversations, but I just heard two men talking and they're going to take two hundred votes away from you in Eastland County tonight in a revision of the

³³⁰ John B. Connally, *History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1993), 117.

votes.”³³¹ The reason given later by Eastland County officials was that there was an adding mistake in the original total. Lyndon was outraged and asked his staff how you could know two hours before a mistake was found that it was going to occur and further that it would involve about two hundred votes. The actual vote change was a gain of two hundred twenty-five for Stevenson.

Both Stevenson and Johnson participated in the switching of votes in counties where their support was strong or where friendly county judges were in charge of reporting the tallies. Connally said the switching of votes at the close of an election was fairly simple, but creating new votes to add to the total was much more difficult. Johnson’s organization was prepared for the days of lengthy poll watching. In many counties, the Stevenson poll watchers only stayed through Sunday or Monday night. Johnson’s campaign knew every move that the Stevenson camp attempted. When Stevenson called one of his county managers to ask for additional votes, Johnson could counter the move. Sometimes the Johnson worker in the county could thwart the increase for Stevenson, barring that alternative the Johnson aide would call into headquarters to say that the increase would happen for Stevenson. At that point, a precinct where the votes had been intentionally underreported would be called and asked to go ahead and report their votes for Johnson to keep things close to even³³²

Miriam Ferguson’s help proved invaluable. She had contacts in east Texas. Alvin Wirtz convinced “Ma” that she could help Lyndon to win by causing Stevenson to overestimate the number of votes he would tally in the final analysis. She called friendly judges and ask them not to switch any votes for Governor Stevenson. She also told the

³³¹ Walter Jenkins, Oral History, LBJL.

³³² Randall B. Woods, 212-213.

local county judges to agree to switch the votes over the telephone with the Stevenson camp but then not to follow through with the switch. Sam Houston Johnson said that this ploy caused the Stevenson camp to miscalculate the vote tally by about two thousand four hundred votes.³³³

The vote from south Texas caused considerable upheaval. The first question concerned the Duval County vote where political boss, George Parr, delivered the anticipated hugely lopsided vote of four thousand one hundred ninety-five for Johnson to Stevenson's thirty-eighty votes. This type of vote from Duval County was not unexpected. Robert Murphey, Coke Stevenson's driver and nephew, said of the vote from Duval County "everybody noticed when returns came in that it was always lopsided for one candidate down in that area of the state, but you weren't talking about all that many votes nor were you talking about all that influence outside of South Texas."³³⁴

Coke Stevenson had received the George Parr largesse in three previous elections. In 1940, when Stevenson ran for lieutenant governor, he received 3,643 votes to the other aspirants' total of 141. During the 1942 gubernatorial election, Stevenson received a vote of 2,936 to 77 for the five opponents. The vote total was even more lopsided for Coke Stevenson in the 1944 governor's race when he received 3,310 votes to only 17 for several other opponents in Duval County.³³⁵ Stevenson had actually received all but about one-half of one percent of the votes for governor in Duval County during the 1944 campaign. Johnson had received all but about nine-tenths of one percent of the vote in the 1948 runoff.

³³³ Sam Houston Johnson, Oral History, Interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, Interview II, April 14, 1976, LBJL.

³³⁴ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

³³⁵ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 329.

The Parr Machine in south Texas was not ideology based. The candidate who received the huge majority of the vote sometimes rested on the simple principle that George Parr wanted to be on the winning side of an election. At other times, it was because a given candidate had done something that the political boss, the Duke of Duval, did not like. George Parr had become disenchanted with Stevenson because of an appointment for a judgeship. Parr had asked Stevenson to appoint Jimmy Kazen as the Laredo district attorney, but the appointment did not happen.³³⁶ Robert Murphey confirmed that there was a break up between Stevenson and Parr over a political appointment, but he did not recall the exact office or appointment involved.³³⁷

Callan Graham was a Stevenson supporter who said that he was with Coke Stevenson and George Parr in Laredo in 1947. He said that Stevenson asked Parr for his support in the upcoming senate race. Graham said that Parr responded that we have always liked you, but we cannot support you this time. Coke was told that the machine would be “all out against you.” It was nothing personal. Graham said that the Parr Machine had to demonstrate that when they were crossed that nobody would continue to have their support no matter who they were. Graham said that Lyndon Johnson just happened to benefit from the anti-Stevenson vote in south Texas in 1948.³³⁸

On September third, Jim Wells County, a county where George Parr had considerable influence, found two hundred additional votes for LBJ. These votes were the ones that caused the most contention. These voters had all seemed to appear in nearly alphabetical order and all voted within the last fifteen minutes that the polls were open. The color of ink was different than the other names on the poll list. These two hundred

³³⁶ Randall B. Woods, 213.

³³⁷ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

³³⁸ Merle Miller, 125-126.

votes were highly suspected to be fraudulent. After these votes surfaced, Stevenson said that there was a concerted effort to count him out of the race.³³⁹

Robert Murphey said that Jim Wells County was not totally under the control of George Parr. He said that Coke had some support from Jim Wells County. Murphey said he thought the information about the stealing of votes and the matter of the infamous Box 13 came from Stevenson's supporters within the county. Murphey related that in south Texas, "many times they voted a hundred percent when the rest of the state was voting forty or fifty percent." Murphey said it was a good bet that every man eligible to vote in George Parr's domain was recorded as having voted.³⁴⁰

Jim Rowe, a reporter for the Corpus Christi paper, reported that Luis Salas, a Parr protégé, came out and announced the returns from Box 13 in Jim Wells County. Rowe said that this Alice, Texas box was always a bellwether to predict how great the vote totals would be for whichever candidate had garnered Parr's favor. Salas announced to about two hundred onlookers that the tally was seven hundred sixty-five for Johnson to sixty for Stevenson.

On Monday, as Stevenson took the lead once again, George Parr told Luis Salas to hold back the official total for Box 13. Salas told Ronnie Dugger that there were all kinds of switches of votes going on as the late returns were coming in "from Dallas, Fort Worth, and East Texas." Salas said, that's when George Parr instructed him to be late in reporting officially.³⁴¹

It is probable that neither Lyndon Johnson nor John Connally ever set foot in Jim Wells County during the controversy about switching the vote totals. Charles Francis,

³³⁹ George Norris Green, 114.

³⁴⁰ Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

³⁴¹ Ronnie Dugger, 326.

who helped George Brown obtain the contract for the Big and Little Inch Pipelines, stated that he saw Everett Looney get on a Brown and Root plane headed for south Texas at the time all the tallies were seesawing back and forth. Other reports placed Everett Looney and Don Thomas, Johnson's business attorney, both in Alice a few days after the election.³⁴²

The Johnson camp was convinced that several irregularities had added votes to Coke Stevenson's totals. Houston Harte was a newspaper publisher who supported Johnson for the senate in 1948. He owned papers in Greenville, Denison, Commerce, Paris, Marshall, Corpus Christi, Big Spring, Bryan, Huntsville, and Corsicana. He declared that Brown County had numbers of fraudulent votes. It involved a local race for a county judgeship. Harte contented that if the Brown County vote had been challenged in court that there would have been over four hundred fraudulent votes for Coke Stevenson, as well. The local officials who wished to change the election in favor of their candidate for judge needed to try to make the vote look more legitimate so, they also marked the spot on the ballot for Coke Stevenson. These were fictional votes for Stevenson and against Johnson.³⁴³

The Johnson legal team refused to answer any of the charges level against them in the federal district court. Their contention was that Coke Stevenson was appealing to the wrong court. Johnson's attorneys had decided that any remedy concerning the Senatorial Election would have to be obtained in a state court. Any answer to the charges might give legal standing to the Stevenson complaint.

³⁴² Ronnie Dugger, 327.

³⁴³ Houston Harte, Oral History, Interviewed by Paul Bolton, Interview I, LBJL.

This quiet stance in court did not keep the Johnson forces from compiling a list of irregularities they believed would benefit their candidate should they be needed. This list would be used if a court battle became necessary. The first item on the list was six entire boxes that were thrown out for the local judge's race while they were counted for the senate contest. This was in Brown County and Coke Stevenson had a net gain of four hundred sixty-eight votes from these six illegal boxes. This alone more than made up for the two hundred two votes acquired in Jim Wells infamous Box 13.³⁴⁴ This was said by some to be the Johnson ace if a state court fight had ensued.

Johnson's campaign staff found several irregularities they claimed would have allowed Lyndon Johnson to have won the election by a much larger total than the eighty-seven that was finally recorded. In Jack County, the vote totals for Johnson and Stevenson were transposed, which led to Stevenson getting thirty unearned votes. In Dallas County, Governor Stevenson had benefited from very late returns. Two different corrections had been sent to the State Democratic Executive Committee adding ninety-eight votes to Stevenson's score sheet. "The latter correction was made several days after the final date for canvassing returns had elapsed." There were charges that a voting booth in Dallas County had the lever by Mr. Johnson's name locked, and the only way to vote for Johnson was by calling an official over to unlock the lever each time. Many voters may not have taken the time to have an official unlock the lever and simply skipped voting for any senatorial candidate. The problem was present at nine in the morning and at least through noon the day of the election when it was reported by Johnson supporters to headquarters. In Cameron County, two hundred ballots were discarded because they had been mutilated. Johnson poll watchers declared that the

³⁴⁴ Pre-Presidential Confidential File [PPCF] Box 6, Folder [Election Irregularities] [1948], LBJL.

intent of the voter could have been discerned, that the will of the voter was thwarted unlawfully. The ballot box at the King Ranch was held behind locked gates, and no one was allowed to witness the tallying of the votes. With the exception of one vote, all the King Ranch votes went to Coke Stevenson. Gregg County had a conspicuous change of heart from the first primary to the runoff. It had changed from giving Johnson a four percentage point lead to going more than two to one for Stevenson.³⁴⁵ This is a partial list of over three single spaced typed pages that Johnson's attorneys had prepared if they had to answer Stevenson's charges of voter fraud in south Texas.

The ninth day after the election rumors began to fly about investigations of the runoff election. The *Dallas Morning News* wanted the Texas State Senate's Aiken Committee to try to determine if there had been fraudulent votes tallied for either candidate. Johnson preferred that the Federal Bureau of Investigation look into the voting procedures and counting of the votes. LBJ objected to the Aiken Committee on the grounds that many of its members were old friends of Coke Stevenson.³⁴⁶ Stevenson said he did not know how the FBI could be impartial since Johnson lived directly across the street from Director J. Edgar Hoover in the nation's capital, thus Stevenson did not think the proper investigative authority should be the FBI.

Attorney General Tom Clark asked the FBI to look into the Texas senatorial runoff after he received several complaints from the Houston area. The Federal Bureau investigators said they would try to determine if there was sufficient evidence to warrant

³⁴⁵ PPCF, Box 6, Folder [Election Irregularities] [1948], LBJL.

³⁴⁶ June R. Welch, 155.

a grand jury. This grand jury would examine the evidence to see if there had been any conspiracy to violate any state election laws.³⁴⁷

Nine days after the election on Monday night, September sixth, Lyndon Johnson made a statewide radio address where he claimed that he was the winner of the primary runoff. Johnson claimed that the first night of returns that showed Stevenson ahead were to be expected because those votes came from the major cities where the tabulations were done by voting machines. This meant that these totals were reported first. Johnson said the tide began to turn in his favor when the rural vote began to trickle into the election bureau.

Johnson said all the attention about bloc voting was being trained in on the south Texas counties while nothing was being said about other areas where the same type of bloc voting had occurred in Stevenson's favor. Johnson specifically mentioned "the bloc vote in a box behind the gates of King ranch where not a single vote went to me," and "the precinct along millionaires' row, the River Oaks box of Houston where Stevenson got eight out of every ten votes." Johnson emphatically denied having bought anybody's vote. Lyndon finished his speech by telling his audience that this bloc in south Texas had never been challenged when the heavy majorities generated in those border counties went heavily for his opponent on four separate occasions when Stevenson was lieutenant governor and governor.³⁴⁸

Meanwhile by September seventh, Coke Stevenson came to believe that he was being robbed of a victory in the runoff by George Parr's Machine, so he decided to go to Alice, Texas to see Box 13 of Jim Wells County. Stevenson was prompted to visit Jim

³⁴⁷ June R. Welch, 156.

³⁴⁸ Speech by Lyndon B. Johnson, September 6, 1948, PPCF, Box 6, [Election Irregularities] [1948], LBJL.

Wells County because H.L. Poole, Jim Wells' County secretary of the County Executive Committee, said that the members of the committee had been denied access to the poll lists and other election materials. This committee in Jim Wells County questioned the validity of the certified vote from their own county.³⁴⁹

Declaring that the votes originating in the Duval County area were for sale, Stevenson along with T. Kellis Dibrell and Captain Frank Hamer paid a visit to the Alice Bank. Dibrell was a former FBI agent and Captain Hamer was a former Texas Ranger of Bonnie and Clyde fame.³⁵⁰ Some say that Callan Graham also accompanied Stevenson to Alice. The men made sure that they appeared on the street without jackets. This was done so that Parr's hired guns at the bank could see that they were unarmed. The new Democrat Committee Chairman, Harry Lee Adams, convinced the outgoing chairman to allow the men to see the Box 13 poll list. They only had five minutes to look at the list before they were kicked out of the bank vault. They had a chance to jot down eleven names that appeared in the last two hundred two names. These names were all a different colored ink than the other voters on the list. Curiously, these last names were in roughly alphabetical order.³⁵¹ Stevenson told his nephew that the only mistake he made during the runoff contest was leaving that bank vault without the poll list that could have proved the fraud from Jim Wells County.³⁵²

A joke was generated about these names, which appeared to include some people who were actually in the local cemetery. The joke has several versions, but the general jest of the story says that two small Mexican-American boys are talking on the street

³⁴⁹ June R. Welch, 161.

³⁵⁰ George Norris Green, 115.

³⁵¹ Merle Miller, 127.

³⁵² Robert W. Murphey, Oral History, LBJL.

corner. One is crying. “What’s the matter, Pablo? You look sad.” “I am sad, Pedro. My father came to Alice last week and he didn’t come to see me.” “Pablo, your father has been dead for seven years.” “I know, but he came back to Alice last week to vote for Lyndon Johnson, and he didn’t come to see me.”³⁵³ Years later Johnson himself told the joke because as time passed, he seemed to find much about the campaign amusing.

The National Democratic Party split became an important factor when the State Democratic Executive Committee and the State Convention met in September to certify the vote totals for the senatorial election. Most of the States’ Rights group in Texas endorsed Coke Stevenson. This seemed to be an individual and philosophical thing rather than a group decision. Although, Lyndon Johnson had not been involved in the platform split on the national level, it was well known that he was pretty much a party loyalists on most issues besides civil rights. He had supported most of the Fair Deal legislation of the Truman administration. Johnson would support the nomination of the Truman-Barkley ticket.

Chairman Robert Calvert had sent out telegrams to twenty-three of the electors present at the May convention asking them to declare their party loyal. This occurred just a week before the September State Democratic Executive Committee was to meet. Sixteen of the twenty-three members telegraphed answers in the affirmative that they would remain loyal to the Democrat ticket even though it contained an offensive civil rights plank. Governor Beauford Jester also agreed to accept the official party platform of the more liberal National Democrat Party. Thus, the delegates from split counties

³⁵³ Merle Miller, 594.

were not seated at the convention, and the loyalist faction prevailed in nominating Lyndon Johnson as the Democratic Nominee for the November election.³⁵⁴

It was absolutely critical for both candidates to have their supporters present at the State Democratic Executive Committee meeting because the nominee was going to be chosen. The Johnson campaign got busy to insure that the voting delegates who were loyal to Johnson were physically present for the SDEC on September thirteenth. Both Roy Hofheinz and Mrs. Miriam Ferguson played an active role to turn out Johnson delegates. An example of telegrams sent to various influential Texas was the one addressed to Judge Oscar C. Dancy of Brownsville, Texas. It read in part, “You and John Barron keep up that work on getting the delegates up to Fort Worth. We will need their support and will have to have them there to do us any good.”³⁵⁵ The nomination boiled down to who would receive the larger number of delegate votes at the SDEC meeting.

Jake Pickle claimed, “the most dramatic moment I’ve ever participated in or witnessed was at the State Democratic Convention in September, 1948, when the State Democratic Executive Committee met in Fort Worth to canvass the vote.”³⁵⁶ This was the ultimate showdown where the nominee of the Democratic Party for Senate would be decided. The State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC) would recommend a name to the Convention the following day and that person’s name would legally go on the ballot in November. This was tantamount to election in Texas because since Reconstruction the South had been solidly Democratic and a Republican stood little chance of being elected

³⁵⁴ Robert T. Sakowitz, 104-105.

³⁵⁵ PPCF, Box 6, [Fort Worth Convention] [1948], LBJL.

³⁵⁶ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, LBJL.

The presiding officer of the committee, Robert Calvert, said the whole atmosphere was tense. As the vicious debate began, one of Stevenson's attorneys shouted that he was present "to prevent the stuffing of the ballot box." This remark provoked John Cofer, one of Johnson's attorney's to retort, "You are not going to deprive [Johnson] of this election on the affidavits obtained from a few Mexicans."³⁵⁷ With Johnson and Stevenson only a few feet apart on the floor and their supporters only inches away from each other in the packed hall, it was remarkable that a measure of civility remained and no guns were drawn.

The SDEC was nearly evenly split between Johnson supporters and Stevenson supporters. Coke Stevenson had appointed a large number of these state committee persons during his five and one-half years as governor. Once the Johnson staff realized how very close the election results would be, they began to make contact with all the executive committee members.

A thick folder of telegrams and letters attests to the furious effort put forth by the Johnson staff to get delegates and handlers to the Fort Worth SDEC meeting. Roy Hofheinz was mentioned in several of the telegrams as the person to see in regards to what needed to be done at the meeting and convention. The stress in all the telegrams and letters was to be sure that the committee persons showed up in person to vote at the SDEC meeting. Mrs. Ferguson's help was crucial in getting the delegates to the meeting. The telegrams pled with the committee people to please travel whatever distance was necessary to attend the Fort Worth meeting. "Ma" explained in these telegrams, paid for

³⁵⁷ Ronnie Dugger, 332.

by the Johnson for Senate campaign, that every person needed to be present to vote for LBJ. Just one not in attendance could make the difference.³⁵⁸

After several hours of listening to all the arguments for and against each candidate, the roll call vote finally began. Pickle said that he thought the secretary of the convention was Vann Kennedy from Corpus Christi and that he had the job of calling each delegate's name for the vote. The delegates were called to vote in alphabetical order. The first ten or so went smoothly with the vote alternating between Johnson and Stevenson. Next, Stevenson got about ten votes in a row without a single Johnson vote. Things were beginning to look grim for LBJ, but then, several votes were cast for Johnson. "The tension in that room was so sharp that anything could have exploded it. I was leaning up against a pillar in the back listening and trying to make tabulation on my sheet—and keeping tab on my own heart!"

The initial roll call produced a result that favored Johnson by two votes, but then, a woman changed her vote from Lyndon Johnson to Coke Stevenson. This produced a tie vote. Calvert as chairman would have to cast a vote to break the tie. Finally, the secretary was asked to call the names of all the nonvoting delegates one more time. Just as the secretary was about to bring down the gavel, someone pushed Charlie Gibson from Amarillo through the crowd and he voted aye for Johnson. By a vote of twenty nine to twenty eight Johnson had received the endorsement of the SDEC. Vann Kennedy uttered the words, "Mr. Johnson is certified as the nominee."³⁵⁹

Sam Houston Johnson said that he had seen Charlie Gibson heading for the upstairs men's room at the Hotel Commodore Perry where the DSEC met. Charlie was

³⁵⁸ PPCF, Box 6 [Forth Worth Convention] [1948], LBJL.

³⁵⁹ J.J. (Jake) Pickle, Oral History, LBJL.

wobbly from one drink too many. Sam said he found Charlie with his head soaking in a washbasin.³⁶⁰ He grabbed him and escorted him to the committee room where he stood on a chair because he could not get through the throng of people filling the hall. He asked what was the vote concerning, when he was told he voted for Johnson breaking the tie which saved Chairman Robert Calvert from having to cast the deciding vote between Stevenson and Johnson.

One more attempt to alter the vote tallies came after the meeting had declared Johnson the nominee. An east Texas county chairman approached Calvert and stated that he would like to file an amended certificate because Stevenson had actually gotten more votes in his county than was previously reported. The county chairman asked if Calvert would revise the vote. Calvert replied, "I tell you what, if you will revise the certificate, and put it under oath, for whatever consequences might be attendant to that action, I'll take it up with the committee." The man did not change the certificate from his east Texas home county.³⁶¹

The twenty-nine to twenty eight vote of the SDEC meant that Johnson had won the fight within the party. The Democratic Convention which met the next day gave Johnson a healthy majority vote to pave the way for his name to be placed on the November ballot. The minority report that claimed "palpable fraud and irregularities undoubtedly produced" Johnson's eighty-seven vote margin was not even considered at the convention. The convention was more intent on dislodging the states' rights Texas regulars from the convention to give the loyalist faction control to produce a victory for

³⁶⁰ Sam Houston Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon*, 77.

³⁶¹ Ronnie Dugger, 332.

President Truman in November. “Helping elect Truman and opposing the conservative Stevenson became, among the liberals, sufficient justification for siding with Johnson.”³⁶²

There had been a small flurry of court activity before the SDEC had met. Johnson had obtained an injunction to prevent any further certification of the Jim Wells County vote. Stevenson filed an immediate appeal to this temporary injunction. It seemed that everyone in the legal community was looking into what move should be made next. Price Daniel, Texas Attorney General, declined to investigate the runoff. He said the state’s election laws were in bad need of reform. He said that the laws gave him “no authority to investigate or prosecute alleged election irregularities.”³⁶³ Attorneys on both sides found that according to Texas law the only place to appeal the results of the election was in the District Court of Travis County.

The most obvious course of action would have been for Stevenson to contest the outcome in the state courts. A state court filing would have impounded the ballots to prevent their destruction within sixty days of the election. One problem arose from the requirement that all illegal ballots from around the state would have to have been thrown out before any state judge would have issued an injunction to keep Johnson’s name off the November ballot. By the time that a determination about the legality of all the contested ballots could be had, the November election might have been history, and Texas would have had a Republican Senator. A second factor was that as widespread as the fraudulent counts had been on both sides, there was the real possibility that the recount might have confirmed that Lyndon Johnson was the victor after all.³⁶⁴

³⁶² Ronnie Dugger, 332-333.

³⁶³ June R. Welch, 165.

³⁶⁴ George Norris Green, 115-116.

Stevenson had vowed not to quit his fight to win the runoff election. He told a reporter, “Some half million good solid Texans voted for me as their senator, and they have been defrauded and robbed.” He was discouraged by the state convention’s action to endorse Johnson for the senate. The second blow came on the same day when the state court continued the injunction that prevented the re-examination of the vote in Alice’s Precinct 13. Taking into consideration the action of the state court, he decided that his best hope to keep Lyndon Johnson’s name off the November ballot was to sue in the federal courts.³⁶⁵

Stevenson and his advisers chose to file suit in the federal judiciary. The suit concentrated on the “flagrant fast counts in the border counties.”³⁶⁶ Stevenson was able to get a restraining order to keep Johnson’s name off the general election ballot from Federal Judge T. Whitfield Davidson. A frantic search for the judge found him on the Harrison-Upshur County line. T. Kellis Dibrell and Connie Renfrew had driven the considerable distance to find Judge Davidson at his sister’s lakeside cabin. The men explained that his old friend Coke Stevenson badly needed his help.³⁶⁷ He signed the order around six thirty in the morning, and the order was rushed by Stevenson’s attorneys back to Fort Worth where it was filed around one in the afternoon.

One of the remaining unanswered questions about the court fight over the runoff remains why Stevenson chose to rely on the federal courts. His advisors should have been cognizant that there was a good chance that the federal courts would maintain that the election was a state matter. Several of Johnson’s supporters have speculated as to why Stevenson chose to go to the federal judiciary. George Reedy questioned

³⁶⁵ Alfred Steinberg, 267.

³⁶⁶ George Norris Green, 116.

³⁶⁷ Merle Miller, 130.

Stevenson's reason for not appealing to the Texas Supreme Court so that the ballots could have immediately been impounded. Walter Jenkins thought it was peculiar for a man who constantly upheld states' rights to immediately appeal to a conservative federal judge for relief. Alvin Wirtz said, "Stevenson would not resort to the state courts because he knew that there all of the facts regarding illegal votes would be brought to light, and Johnson would win by at least two thousand instead of eighty seven."³⁶⁸

The hearing on the injunction was set for September twenty first. The effect of the injunction was that the State Democratic Convention Chairman was prevented from certifying Johnson to the Texas Secretary of State as the party nominee. This stalled the printing of the November ballot.³⁶⁹ This hearing on the twenty-first was technically four days after the official deadline to certify all nominees for the general election. Time was getting to be a factor if the Democrats were to be represented for the Senate contest on the ballot.

Judge Davidson suggested to both Stevenson and Johnson that one way to settle the dispute was to simply place both their names on the general election ballot. Davidson recalled that when he called the attorneys to the bench he told them, "Gentlemen...you have here two men either of whom would serve with honor, but to let either of them go to Washington under a cloud would be unfortunate."³⁷⁰ Davidson recessed the court so the two candidates and their counsels could discuss the matter. Stevenson was agreeable to the idea, and said he thought the idea was sound. Johnson flatly rejected this suggestion saying that he had already been declared the winner by the SDEC and the state

³⁶⁸ Merle Miller, 131.

³⁶⁹ June R. Welch, 169.

³⁷⁰ Ronnie Dugger, 334.

convention.³⁷¹ Luther Jones, a Johnson attorney, remembered that Johnson was firmly against any agreement to place both names on the November ballot. Johnson maintained that Judge Davidson was exercising unwarranted power by suggesting the problem could be solved by placing his and Stevenson's name on the general election ballot. Johnson said he would not yield to tyranny no matter where it originated.³⁷² He did not want to campaign across the state for many more weeks for a prize he had already won.

Johnson's team of lawyers included Luther Jones, former governor Jimmie Allred, Alvin Wirtz, John Cofer, John Crooker, and Everett Looney. They all advised Johnson to accept Judge Davidson's suggestion to allow both names to be placed on the ballot. They told Lyndon that with the Republican Porter on the ballot with Stevenson that they would split the conservative vote, and he would be the ultimate victor. Most of the time when a client's attorneys are unanimous in recommending a course of action, the client will go along with the advice of his attorneys. Johnson did not agree. He was adamant that he was not going to give up the political advantage that he felt he had from the vote of the SDEC and the state convention.³⁷³

On September twenty-second, Judge Davidson ordered that Johnson's name would be barred from the ballot until a full hearing of Stevenson's charges had been had. Davidson ordered United States' Commissioners to go with haste to Duval, Zapata, and Jim Wells Counties to examine the poll lists and all relevant election documents.³⁷⁴ The commissioners were hampered in their search for poll lists and other materials from the

³⁷¹ June R. Welch, 172.

³⁷² Ronnie Dugger, 335.

³⁷³ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 357.

³⁷⁴ June R. Welch, 172.

election because they were frequently told that the needed election official was on vacation in Mexico.

Johnson's attorneys took Davidson's adverse ruling in stride and immediately appealed his ruling. John Crooker, who was Johnson's lead attorney in Texas, said that he believed that the appellate court would overturn Judge Davidson's ruling. Crooker said that a federal court had no jurisdiction in a state election. Johnson's team including former Governor Jimmie Allred, John Cofer, and John Crooker were confident that the investigation by the Commissioners would be stopped on appeal. Crooker said, "I am as positive as I am that it is daylight that Coke Stevenson's name will not go on the ballot by court order in this case."³⁷⁵

Lyndon Johnson called Abe Fortas to direct his appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Fortas was a prominent Washington D. C. attorney. Fortas was in Dallas taking depositions when Johnson's Texas legal team could not agree on a course of action for pursuing an appeal. Johnson telephoned Stanley Marcus in Dallas and was able to speak to Fortas. Fortas hastily arrived in Fort Worth to meet with Johnson's team.

Fortas listened to the arguments of the Texas attorneys and occasionally asked a few questions. He retired to write an outline of an appellate brief with the help of one of LBJ's secretaries. It was an extraordinary gamble. Fortas proposed bringing the appeal to a single appellate judge of his choosing. He had researched Judge J.C. Hutcheson's opinions and had found that Hutcheson would not render a judgment without the full panel of the Circuit Court.

Fortas reasoned that a weak argument should be made to the Fifth Circuit Judge Hutcheson. He said such an argument would not be particularly convincing and would

³⁷⁵ June R. Welch, 172.

cause an adverse ruling. This adverse ruling would immediately allow Johnson's attorneys to appeal the matter directly to the United States Supreme Court. Fortas realized that it was imperative that the matter be settled quickly. Public opinion was being influenced by adverse newspaper publicity every day. These black marks were staining Johnson's reputation. Also, the time for getting Johnson on the November ballot was becoming a critical factor. The matter needed to be settled before October third which was only about a week away.³⁷⁶

United States Circuit Judge J.C. Hutcheson heard the appeal of the Johnson team on September twenty-fourth. The relief that they sought was a stay of Judge Davidson's injunction and maintenance of the status quo which meant that Lyndon's name could be printed on the general election ballot. Stevenson had an able group of seven attorneys led by former Governor Dan Moody. They argued that Stevenson's civil rights had been violated and that Stevenson needed protection from the federal court. Judge Hutcheson deferred to the full United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals just as Fortas had predicted. He said the matter would have to be resolved when the court met on October fourth in Atlanta.³⁷⁷ It was becoming doubtful that either Stevenson or Johnson could have his name printed on the ballot in time if the case had to wait until October to be decided.

Johnson's attorneys had appealed the ruling to the United States Supreme Court. The lead attorney in Washington was Abe Fortas. Fortas was an old friend of Johnson's, and many said the brightest student to ever graduate from Yale Law School. He took the case to Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, who was the justice assigned to matters

³⁷⁶ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 369-371.

³⁷⁷ June R. Welch, 175.

concerning the Fifth Circuit. This was also fortuitous because Justice Black had been Abe Fortas's boss when both were members of the Roosevelt Administration.

Although only a few witnesses could be found, the masters continued to take testimony well into the twenty-ninth. It was amazing how many of the principal witnesses were out of town. The outgoing secretary of Jim Wells Election Committee, B.F. Donald, was in Mexico. His wife testified that he had telephoned her the night before the hearing from Mexico. Givens Parr, George Parr's brother, testified that Mr. Donald had asked for some time off and had been granted the time. He further testified that he did not know when Mr. Donald was coming back to Texas.³⁷⁸ This same story or some variation of it was heard frequently when a witness was called to testify.

The Masters continued to take testimony from the witnesses they could find well into September twenty ninth. Judge Davidson was informed late in the day on the twenty-ninth that Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black had set aside the federal court order keeping Johnson's name from being entered on the November ballot. At that time, Judge Davidson suspended testimony. Justice Black's injunction would be in effect until the full Supreme Court could decide upon Johnson's motion for a writ of certiorari.

An undated memorandum reported the Texas Commissioners Report of the findings of the unfinished hearing in Judge Davidson's court. Two hundred seventy-five pages of testimony revealed that only one of two boxes used in precinct 13 of Jim Wells County was located. None of the poll lists, election returns, or tally sheets were in the box when it was opened. Testimony revealed that Election Judge Luis Salas told reporters on the night of the election that the vote totals were seven hundred sixty-five for Johnson and sixty for Stevenson. The final returns reflected nine hundred seventy-seven

³⁷⁸ June R. Welch, 176.

for Johnson to sixty for Stevenson. Salas testified that he had not given a report on the night of the election. The testimony further revealed that neither the new county election chairman nor any of the Stevenson campaign officials had been permitted to see the returns. The memo ended by stating the Secretary of the County Executive Committee had left town.³⁷⁹

Finally, on October fifth, the Supreme Court upheld Justice Black's action to place Johnson's name on the ballot. It also sustained Justice Black's interpretation that the federal courts had no jurisdiction in a state election even though it was for a federal office. Thus, Coke Stevenson had lost the first election of his thirty-three year career.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ PPCF, Box 7, [Texas Commissioners Reports] [1948], LBJL.

³⁸⁰ June R. Welch, 177-179.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The close result of the runoff election in August 1948 could not have been predicted at the close of the primary in late July. Lyndon Johnson was seventy-one thousand votes behind Coke Stevenson. The former governor was expected to garner the lion's share of over two hundred thirty thousand conservative Peddy votes. Stevenson looked like a good bet to win the runoff. "Most contemporaries of the period regarded the prospect of an LBJ victory in the August runoff as highly unlikely, if not altogether impossible." Johnson's ability to close this deficit to produce a photo finish was a combination of nearly unlimited spending, Stevenson blunders, and Texas politics as usual.

George and Herman Brown had as much to lose in the election as Johnson did. Their ability to get lucrative government contracts would evaporate, and they would likely face investigations into their financing of LBJ's campaign. The Bureau of Internal Revenue had investigated Brown and Root's financing of Johnson's 1941 campaign, which resulted in the payment of a large fine. The brothers feared indictment for income tax evasion in 1948, especially, if Coke Stevenson replaced friendly Lyndon Johnson. Federal regulatory agencies greatly influenced the Brown brothers' ability to operate. The Interstate Commerce Commission regulated their Joe D. Hughes Trucking Company. The Federal Power Commission regulated the Big and Little Inch Pipelines. Stevenson could redirect all federal contracts away from the Brown brothers. If LBJ lost, they also lost. Even on the state level, there was certainly no guarantee that the Browns would receive road construction contracts that had been customarily assigned to them for several

decades. The ire of conservative politicians in Austin had been raised against Johnson and consequently against George and Herman Brown.³⁸¹

Johnson went after the east Texas piney woods vote where Colonel Peddy had received over two hundred thousand votes during the primary. Johnson praised Peddy and told voters how close his platform had been to that of local hero Peddy's. At the same time, the Brown brothers began to spend money lavishly in the conservative populous portions of Texas near the Louisiana border.

Ed Clark from the Johnson campaign and Ernest Boyett from the Stevenson campaign agreed that money turned the tide in east Texas for LBJ. Boyett was shocked that east Texas county officials refused to support Coke Stevenson. Boyett expressed surprise when several county clerks and commissioners told him "they still believed in Coke, but that they would be throwing their weight to Lyndon." Boyett said one thousand dollar payments had resulted in their sudden conversions.³⁸² Johnson was also using the positive influence of the federal agencies at his disposal. The Rural Electrification Administration reminded east Texans that Lyndon had replaced the sad irons with radios and refrigerators. Money also paid missionaries to directly spread detrimental rumors about Stevenson's criticism of Colonel Peddy.³⁸³

Johnson was able to secure large net gains in both San Augustine and Shelby Counties between the two primaries. United States Senator Ralph Yarborough said that Lyndon was able to turn these east Texas counties to his column because of substantial amounts of money supplied by Brown and Root. Ed Clark was instrumental in turning

³⁸¹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 273.

³⁸² Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 285.

³⁸³ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 284.

the vote toward his friend, Lyndon. There were rumors of promised loans and cash payments to farmers and contracts to businesses in these counties.³⁸⁴

Stevenson spent many days of the finally three weeks of the runoff at his ranch rounding up and dipping cattle, cutting brush, arranging for the annual shearing of the goats, and mending fences. When his county campaign coordinators voluntarily suggested that they might be needed to help with getting out the vote instead of going to Canada on vacation, Stevenson told them to go ahead as they normally did to escape the August summer heat. These activities confounded his staff. A major factor that led to Stevenson's defeat in the runoff was "his negligence in running an effective campaign during the month between the first and second primaries."³⁸⁵

If Coke Stevenson had been successful in getting four-fifths of his supporters from the July primary back to the polls for the August runoff, he would have won the runoff handily. The vote would have been too great for a few hundred votes in the Parr district of south Texas to have a material difference. The other side of the coin was that Johnson was able to get nearly all of his July supporters to come back to the polls to cast a second ballot for him in August. Columnist James Lovell proposed this hypothesis to explain how Johnson could possibly have won shortly after the election.³⁸⁶ His theory was heavily discounted because his paper, the *Dallas Times-Herald* was supporting Johnson's bid for election.

Stevenson's campaign malaise resulted in his supporters simply staying home which greatly lower his total vote tallies. Johnson's constant attacks on Stevenson's

³⁸⁴ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 603.

³⁸⁵ Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 599.

³⁸⁶ James V. Lovell to LBJ, September 9, 1948, PPCF, Box 9, [Undated and unidentified newspaper clippings], LBJL.

character plus Stevenson's staunch refusal to combat what was being said contributed to Stevenson having a less positive image after the months of campaigning. At every turn, Stevenson looked like the folksy states' rights candidate while Johnson successfully portrayed himself as the energetic national candidate who could get things done for Texas. Horace Busby, aide to LBJ, said Stevenson represented "old hat, old ways, old everything."³⁸⁷ Stevenson's lack of precinct by precinct organization to get the vote out on August twenty-eighth was an extremely significant factor in his loss in the runoff.

Politics as usual in Texas elections meant that each candidate held back the total vote from their strong precincts because traditionally additional votes had a way of materializing for the opposing candidate once the exact totals for the other candidate were reported. John Connally and Lyndon Johnson had forgotten to keep back several hundred votes in each of their strong precincts in the 1941 campaign. They had reported all their support, which provided Coke Stevenson and Jim Ferguson with exact totals that they needed to have to place W. Lee O'Daniel in the senate. Both Connally and Johnson had learned an invaluable lesson. "In the next U.S. Senate race Connally decided to pay more direct attention to the ballot boxes."³⁸⁸

When Johnson decided to enter the race for the U.S. Senate in 1948, Connally "was well acquainted with the brawling tradition of Democratic politics in Texas, and good at it."³⁸⁹ Connally vowed that he would not repeat the mistakes of 1941. He would not let Johnson's true vote totals be reported early. Connally denied that any votes were

³⁸⁷ Sid Blumenthal, "The Years of Robert Caro." *The New Republic*, June 4, 1990, 35.

³⁸⁸ Charles Ashman, *Connally: The Adventures of Big Bad John* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1974), 60.

³⁸⁹ James Conaway, 36.

changed, he said they “decided that this time the boss county votes would be kept quiet so the other side would not know how many votes they needed.”³⁹⁰

Texas politics in close elections always was a guessing game. When one side reported some “new” votes from one of its strong districts, it became the turn of the other side to report additional votes to keep pace with the opposing candidate. George Reedy said, “You see, every time the Stevenson forces would come through with some votes, Connally would top it.”³⁹¹

The name “Landslide Lyndon” was attached to Johnson because of the widely reported fraudulent votes from Jim Wells County. This was the infamous area in south Texas that was influenced by Boss George Parr in heavily Mexican-American precincts. While little doubt exists that these extra two hundred two votes for Johnson were created after the polls closed and should have been thrown out, there is much more to the story. Johnson’s allegations of irregularities that gave Stevenson several thousands votes were never reported. The position of Johnson’s Texas attorneys at Judge Davidson’s court was the Stevenson’s charges could not be answered for fear of legitimizing the federal court hearing of the case.

Caro’s charge that Johnson won the 1948 Senatorial Election through undisguised theft which involved “thousands—many thousands” of votes should be reexamined. “Had no revisions been allowed, including those from South Texas, LBJ would have defeated Stevenson by 506 votes.” Thus, the revisions of the vote that trickled in disproportionately helped Coke Stevenson. There is evidence that partisans who wished

³⁹⁰ Ronnie Dugger, 325.

³⁹¹ Merle Miller, 125.

to help Stevenson either counted out votes for Lyndon Johnson or dishonestly added to their candidate's total.³⁹²

Stevenson's thousands of revisions are often overlooked because of the flamboyant Box 13 in Alice, Texas where Johnson added two hundred two manufactured votes for his column. Jim Wells County received all the attention because Judge Davidson's Masters had taken testimony from reluctant witnesses regarding the manufactured vote for Johnson reported from this box. Precincts in Brown County, Longview, Galveston, and Dallas should have received equal attention. Fraud from both the Johnson and Stevenson camps was the likely and expected result in the culture of Texas politics as usual. Several biographies of Johnson have "glossed over" the substantial number of votes stolen by Stevenson.³⁹³ In a pre-computer age it would have been difficult for even a highly skilled campaign staff to keep track of how many votes needed to be manipulated in order to win.

The true winner of the 1948 United States Senatorial Primary in Texas can never be known with any certainty. It was indeed an extremely close runoff election where both candidates wanted the victory. The closeness of the election brought out the shady sides of both campaigns, and many votes were manipulated by Stevenson and Johnson supporters. By following the daring advice of his superior legal team, Lyndon Johnson became the senator from Texas.

³⁹² Dale Baum and James L. Hailey, 610.

³⁹³ Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *LBJ, A Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 139.

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