

Notes 152N, Copy 2

Speaker Sam Rayburn

Bonham, Texas

November 6, 1957

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Interview with Speaker Sam Rayburn at his home and library in Bonham, Texas, November 6, 1957, by Forrest C. Pogue.

(The Speaker and I did most of the talking in the back living room of his roomy, frame house, in Bonham. He has a sort of natural glower but after a rather gruff beginning, he became quite easy to talk to. He was hard to keep on the subject, since he unconsciously ran off onto attacks on the Republicans. Despite a few good words about them now and then, he obviously believes that even the best of Republicans have a little something wrong about them. Our talk was interrupted by two calls from Washington relative to the composition of the Civil Rights Commission and by a call from St. Louis. A constituent came to see him about a job and I heard him talking to him seriously. He did not over-promise. When he came back in he said he looks like he needs a job and I will do something if I can. Later a delegation of "Blue Birds" -- young Camp Fire girls-- came to see him and he greeted them as cordially as if they were all of voting age. He told me with great delight that one had said that she had met his wife and when he said that he wasn't married, since no one would have him, she said "Well I will marry you." The others reflected and "made it unanimous"--as Mr. Rayburn put it. He displayed no great vanity, but it is clear he is thoroughly aware of his power and is pleased to be consulted. I heard him tell his visitors that the White House had called him twice that day.)

Mr. Rayburn began, as his assistant had told me he would, by telling me about his role in helping Gen Marshall put through the appropriation for the atom bombs development. He said that one day Stimson, Marshall, and Dr. Bush (I had never heard of him before) came to see me. They said they had been working on an atomic bomb and had been getting the money out of Army funds, but now they had to have some appropriated and they had to have it kept secret. I had invited in McCormick and Martin and it startled Stimson and Marshall and Bush when they saw them. I thought it was a good idea, but later I thought perhaps I made a mistake. Anyway, I said I would undertake to get the money. It seems to me it was about \$800,000,000 they wanted that time. So I went before the Committee and asked them if they would trust me and give me the money. I just said it was for an important cause and it was something which would help us win this war, but that we couldn't afford to let anything get out about it. They agreed to go along with it. Sometime afterwards I saw one of two men who had been with me (they are both good men, of course) talking with a newspaper man and he looked funny when I saw him. I talked to the newspaper man later and said "you are a good American, aren't you; you love your country?" He said, of course. I said then don't print anything about what he just told you. He didn't and it was all right.

There was a lot of excitement about Oak Ridge. Several people came to me and said see about getting us in. Marshall and the others invited me to go down once, but I said "no". I would just see test tubes and machinery and it wouldn't mean anything to me. He said he was never any hand to go and inspect places he didn't know anything about. Said he had never been no particular interest. Then he talked a little about the background of the atomic bomb development and mentioned the German activities in some place up in Norway and how the Allies had attacked it.

I asked where he first met Marshall. Said he wasn't sure. He thought it was probably in 1939 when he came up as chief of staff to ask for appropriations. However, he had heard Andrew

May and others speak of him earlier. Ewing Thomas spoke of him. Rayburn said, "confidentially, I didn't like his looks at first. His jaw didn't look right. Didn't look like he had good breeding." Soon came to like him. I know think he was the greatest military man since Lee (it is clear that this is Mr. Rayburn's greatest accolade, since he reveres Lee. There are two photographs of Lee in the house up with the photos of relatives).

Marshall always wanted Congress to know what was happening. He was always honest with the members. The Committee on Military Affairs had a pretty easy time with him. He would lay it on the line. Didn't mind telling the bad with the good.

In the matter of some requests, he let the President do the asking, since it was his job, but he would carry the task of explaining it to the committees. They had great confidence in him.

Marshall is the great man of his generation. He exercised Free World leadership.

The discussion of committees and congressional action led Mr. Rayburn off into a disquisition on getting bills through Congress. I think this arose from my question as to how he got some bills through. He said one thing I try not to take things in which I think won't have a chance to pass. I told them that on the court packing thing, but Roosevelt wanted it. The two things which hurt Roosevelt most were the court packing and the purge. That was an awful mistake to take on George in his own state and Cotton Ed Smith and Tydings. He only purged O'Connor. Of course that helped since it got the Rules Committee in friendly hands. We had lots of trouble with O'Connor. I had trouble later with Ed Cox. Howard Smith is not so bad. People fussed about __**, but he was good at getting things out of his committee. Roosevelt on his purge forgot that the Southerner people don't like for outsiders to come in.

We talked of the unification of the services. He said that he had backed it (as had Gen Marshall) on the ground that it would stop bickering, but that they were bickering just as much as before. The President and Secretary of Defense ought to crack some heads together. He said they tried to blame present mess on Congress, but that it had given the Administration more money than it asked for. Part of the trouble lay in the President's advisers who kept him away from people. He quoted some columns of the Alsops and said that among other things they had said that Radford had told Twining not to take the chairmanship of the JCS unless he could see the President alone sometimes; that Sherman Adams or someone was always with the President.

Ike is no reader. He told me he never looked at newspapers, except perhaps the headlines. Said he would just see something which would make him mad. Can you imagine anyone not looking at the newspaper?

He is at the mercy of what he is told by others. (Don't misunderstand I like Eisenhower. He was born up here at Dennison, and we have a joke about him bring my most distinguished constituent). I remember what Leahy said. I was down at that naval review here awhile back and was sitting out in the sun and they told me to come back in--in the shade. I went there and saw Admiral Leahy sitting there all done up in his dress uniform. We got to talking about Eisenhower. He said the trouble is that he won't make up his mind; he never could make up his mind.

Marshall would have made a much better President, but he said a military man shouldn't be President. However, Marshall was no military man in the usual sense of the word. Marshall was a statesman. He could see what we were up against. So few army people know government; it is no part of their reasoning.

I said to him that Eisenhower was a good man. He said yes. But when they talked about him running for President, I said Eisenhower has been in the Army forty years. He has learned all about the Army and he knows what has to be done and how to do it. Next March I will have been in Congress forty years (this was in 1951 or 1952) and I have learned a lot about the business of politics which he hasn't had time to learn.

Grant was a good man, and an able general, but he was hopeless in the Presidency. That should have taught people about military men in the Presidency. Of course, Washington and Jackson weren't true military man.

I asked for his views as to Marshall's great characteristics. He said I would say his modesty, his tremendous personality and his friendliness. He has the presence of a great man. He doesn't dissemble. (I will tell you about dissembling, he added. If a man dissembles before the House of Representatives he is ruined. The Committees have no respect for that kind of man.) Marshall was simple, able, candid. He laid it on the line. He would tell the truth even if it hurt his cause. Congress always respected him. They would give him things they would give no one else,

Here he shifted back to philosophies of government. He talked of the way in which Eisenhower depended on wealthy people. He said did you ever notice the way so many military men had enormous respect for wealth. That is because they aren't paid much and they spend most of their life getting a little money, with the result that they are impressed by people who have it. When they are lieutenants, they are often invited to the homes of well to do people because they look good in their uniforms. As a result they think too much of money. Eisenhower is a lot like that. We are back to the old Hamiltonian theory--the kind of theory which Hoover talked about. The idea is to put the money out at the top and it will trickle down. Jefferson wanted a broad base and let the wealth go up.

Then followed a long diatribe against the people who were saved by Roosevelt who began voting Republican as soon as they got wealthy. He said I have a lot of friends out here who are like that and I get mad about it. We saved them when they were begging for help and now they don't want to help pay. They talk about helping people, but it is the little man who is catching hell now; the little farmer is in a bad shape. Fewer people own farm land than before. He talked of the bad days under Hoover and said that young people didn't know about it. I said that he had reminded them of it in various speeches. Yes, he said, and began with a reminded of the days of six cent cotton and 25 cent corn. He said his sister and others said why keep on going over that, and he said I won't them to remember what it was like. People who lost their shirt then and depended on government help now have lots of money and want to attack the Democrats.

A call came from Washington about the Civil Rights Commission and he shifted the talk to the segregation question. He said Faubus made a mistake and Eisenhower made a bigger one. I

don't care if Faubus gets beaten. He handled that badly. Apparently was trying to get re-elected. Marvin Griffin helped stir things up. But Eisenhower didn't handle it right. He didn't have to send in that dramatic flight of paratroops with bayonets. He could have used the Guard or MPs or something else. Our people don't like the sight of bayonets used against civilians. Do you think the labor people of this country will like to be reminded of the soldiers who used to be sent against them. I said something about the Rangers stopping riots with a few people and he told the old story about one Ranger, one riot. Then he told of a case where a Ranger had been sent to stop a mob and that he walked toward the mob and told them to scatter. One man stood firm, so the Ranger slapped him with his open hand and that ended the trouble.

He said he wasn't impressed by Harry Byrd. He thought Battle was a good man. Said Republicans were mistaken if they thought they had won over the negroes. Spoke of recent elections in New York and New Jersey as evidence.

Said he had nothing against negroes. Liked to see them better themselves and get ahead.

I asked him here about the fight to extend selective service in 1941, saying that Gen Marshall had mentioned Rayburn's work on that. He said that was a hard fight because so many constituents were opposed to it in the first place. He had voted for it in the first place over strong opposition at home. However, he said, I would have been destroyed long ago if I had listened to my excitable friends on everything. I went ahead and did what I thought was right on matters and then went back and explained why I did it. In this fight on the selective service business, fathers and mothers wanted their children to stay home. I pleaded in 1937 and 1938 for defense and we couldn't get people to listen.

When the extension came up, I knew it was rough. I took the floor on it and pled with them now to destroy the Army. Of course, we had said a year and it looked like we were breaking faith. But things had gotten worse in Europe. It would have meant that we were defenseless. Telegrams and propaganda were turned loose against us. Marshall talked before the committees and talked with individual congressmen. I went to individuals and tried to show them you either have to decide to have an Army or not to have one. Can't have it torn up like this. The extension was passed in the House by one vote. I said-- my grandfather used to tell me that usually when something goes by one vote, it usually means that it could have been passed by a few more in a pinch.

Mr. Rayburn said that was true and that he had a few more in reserve, but had told the men he wouldn't use them if he didn't have to have them.

He said the important thing as a congressional leader was to remember not to take things in which you didn't have the votes for. Said it rare to find a tie vote. Since I have been Speaker, I have voted to untie once and to tie twice.

Think what a fix we would have been in on the draft if we hadn't extended--in six or eight weeks afterwards.

I said this was a time when Mr. Taft's views would have gotten us into difficulty. He said yes, he was always isolationist. Mentioned the fact that Taft got into difficulties by accepting the delegates from Texas which were chosen in such a high handed way. (In here somewhere he indicated that Byrd got a reputation as a great finance expert because he opposed all appropriations. Doesn't show any particular knowledge).

Through the period 1937-40, when I was majority leader, I worked for appropriations for defense. I remember Roosevelt saying one day Hitler has the Japanese warlords in Berlin today. He is trying to convince them he has won the war. If he convinces them, they will attack. But many people wouldn't listen.

He noted that Roosevelt was a great man to spring things. Just like that court packing business. I remember he sprang in on several of us. Hatton Summers said this is where I get off. He hated to pull out, but couldn't go along.

He said you shouldn't spring things too suddenly on our congression people. Give them a chance to prepare. I said that Gen Marshall had indicated that he had inadvertently angered Mr. Rayburn once by publishing his report without telling him (this was biannual report of 1943) and that he looked like he was pressuring him. He acted as if he didn't remember this incident, but said that this sort of thing shouldn't be done. It made a man look bad to have something brought up when he wasn't informed ahead of time on it.

Mentioned a case where some Speaker had said there would be no message from the White House and then the reporters had it. He, Rayburn, had made clear to the present White House staff that they had better let him know ahead of time and that they were pretty good about it.

(Somewhere in here I want to record that Mr. Rayburn alluded to a report of a speech he had made two days before about the missiles. He had said he was inclined to agree with Dr. Teller that while we might not have the Sputnik we led in college football).

Along in here we got hopelessly off on politics. He spoke of Eisenhower's predilection for millionaires and big businessmen and spoke of the Cabinet. He should have had the best Cabinet possible. But he got Dulles, who had been some reputation by Marshall and Acheson. Later he was appointed to a seat in the Senate and couldn't hold it. No political strength.

Then he put in Humphrey who still thinks like Mark Hanna. Then Sinclair Weeks and Charley Wilson and a bunch like that. They know how to make money, but they don't know how to run a government. -----* not good.

Said it was funny about Eisenhower and the gas bill. He had said he was for it, but he jumped at the chance to veto it. He blamed it on the Case business, but I knew all the time he wouldn't sign it in an election year. There wasn't enough sentiment for it this time, so I wouldn't bring it up, and I doubt if it will do to bring up next time. Yet it is a good bill and will actually end up by bringing down the price.

His views on the gas bill are in great contrast to some of his others. He began talking about his efforts in Congress in behalf of the utility-holding company bill, the SEC bill and the REA—all of which he sponsored. He said that the Wall Street people screamed over the first two. Said the holding companies made the poor people back them. Had people writing in to him who actually were victims of the companies. On SEC Whitney came down and said you will ruin us. He said Mr. Whitney the American people blame you and people like you for the debacle. This will save the securities set-up. Said Whitney backed down and in a little while he was in prison. We weren't trying to close the exchange. Every governor of the SEC since that was passed has told me he would never have been governor but for me. They put in better people.

The holding companies wrote up stuff and overvalued their holdings. He talked of Insull and the Van Swearingens. Then mentioned Taxes Power and Light.

Talked about possible candidates. Can't stomach Nixon. Says he had the worst face he ever saw. Will take any side. Says he claimed credit for committee work on communists thing when he was seldom there according to a Republican member.

Says Kennedy will make a good vice-presidential candidate. Went ahead to say he was no anti-Catholic. However he is a Primitive Baptist and he understands Southern Protestants and they still won't take a Catholic. Said he backed Kennedy on the second ballot to show that Texas wasn't intolerant. Meyner may have some strength. Said he liked Adlai Stevenson the first time because he sounded like Wilson in his speeches. Second time he got into the hands of a different crowd. Said the things which he thought would help him win. He was always a day's drive too late. __**

On the Catholic thing, I asked if this had played any part in Drum's not getting the Chief of Staff job. He said he didn't know but he was sure that Farley was far a Catholic. You seldom found any of his appointees who weren't.

Here I got him back on Marshall by asking about Pearl Harbor. He said Short and Kimmel didn't get along; didn't speak to each other much, Just interested in social life. People forget that MacArthur let his planes get smashed. Said the Republicans were political in their inquiry on Pearl Harbor. I said weren't the Democratic members. He indicated that they tried to protect themselves.

I asked about the firing of MacArthur. He said he had to be fired. Truman had gone out of his way to go see MacArthur at Wake Island. MacArthur kept talking. He thought he was a man of destiny. Was brought up that way.

It took guts to fire him, but Truman had them. MacArthur told an inferential lie when in his speech in Congress he said it was his understanding that certain actions of his had the backing of the Joint Chiefs at Staff. I remember Bridges standing there and popping his bands.

MacArthur wanted to be a candidate. Martin and others thought they might be able to develop him. They figured it was a good Republican move if the Democrats fired the great hero.

MacArthur tried to get the nomination with his keynote speech, but it was a fizzle. He was too dictatorial. That man Dewey is the same way. He said people said Roosevelt was dictatorial, but that FDR always said he had so much power as President and C in C it scared him.

We talked of McCarthy's attacks on Marshall. Rayburn said he wrote Marshall a handwritten letter saying that M. had the backing of the American people and not to worry.

We talked of China and Formosa and Marshall. He said Marshall went for Truman when the President asked him to go and try to get a government. He worked hard at it. They say he wanted some communists in the government. It would have been better than one with all communists. Knowland the other day was talking about Formosa--you know they call him the Senator from Formosa--and saying we should give more aid to Chiang Kai-shek. I said we gave him 2 billion dollars. As late as 1949 we sent \$350 million. He went off and left the stuff in North China--or the people sold it. Some say our boys were shot with stuff we had let Chiang Kai-shek have. He has run all the way to Formosa.

On the Marshall Plan. It saved western Europe. The countries were wrecked. Here sat a man under his vine and fig tree, with his wife and children, emaciated and cold. They were willing to listen to anyone like the Russians who would have promised them anything. I think they would have been behind the Iron Curtain now but for the Marshall Plan. Marshall went up to Harvard and made his offer. I went right in on it. I thought this was some of the best money we ever spent.

I mentioned Marshall's work with NATO. Rayburn said that it was a fine idea and that he was strong for working with the UN as well.

On Korea--Truman got criticized for going in, but at the time Taft and everybody said that was what we should do. Then Ike came along and said he was going to bring the boys home and the mothers voted for him. We sustained our greatest defeat there. Eisenhower pitched in and said I am going to Korea as soon as I am elected. Adlai said I was intending to say that.

Says he thinks Marshall is at heart a Democrat. I think he feels the Democrats are his kind of people.

Mentioned Lucius Clay. Said he first met him as an engineer captain who worked on a dam in Texas. Very bright man. Saw a lot of him until he went into business and got close to the White House. Said he used to come to see him, but hasn't since Eisenhower elected. Sent word to him once and asked why he didn't come to see him. Caly said he was a little embarrassed because of political set-up. Rayburn made clear this made no difference but has seen nothing of him. Noted that Hood Simson was another young engineer he knew in early days.

Spoke of Bedell Smith as very able man.

Something was said of Louis Johnson and he said I think he was one of the biggest blowhards I know.

Ended by saying that he would have his assistant copy any papers dealing with Gen Marshall and would send them to me.

Drove me to the bus station and said as I left that he felt that Gen Marshall was one of our great men and against repeated his view that he stood next to Lee.

(Mr. Rayburn showed as through his library. He is very proud of its collection of the congressional papers back to the beginning. His museum is not large, but the whole thing is set in a marble case. It is not terribly functional).