
Interview with John Waters

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Sevierville, Tennessee on October 28, 1997

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INTERVIEW: John Waters  
PLACE: Sevierville, Tennessee  
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DW: This is a continuation of the interview with John Waters, and we're once again in delightful Sevierville, Tennessee, and the date is October 28, 1997. Well, it's good to see you again, Mr. Waters.  
JW: It's good to be here. I enjoy visiting with you-all last time.  
DW: Tell me the story of your appointment to the Appalachian Regional Commission as Federal Co-chairman.  
JW: Yeah, what happened was, of course when President Nixon was elected, pretty soon after that, Howard called me on the phone and said, "I'd like for you to consider being a Federal Co-chairman of the Appalachian Commission." Well I knew a little bit about the Commission. I had been involved in a fund-raising thing for the Sevierville Library up here, and we'd had some money that came through the grant program there for the Library, and I knew about some of the grants and some of the things that the Commission did. And I really had never thought about going to Washington. When he was elected, I never thought about being on his staff or being anything like that. And of course, he'd been in the Senate then 2 years, and he was on Public Works, which was the committee that funded the Appalachian Commission. So I did some research on the Commission...didn't talk about it to the family, and the bottom line was I just simply couldn't resist the opportunity to go up there and see how the big boys ran politics and how they did government, and those kind of things. And it was a very interesting job because I had always been interested in economic development, and my grandfather and my father had here at work so hard to get the roads into the mountains, and just general development, especially in education and things like that. So, the Commission had a number of programs that really fascinated me. And so I told Howard "Yes, I think I'd like to do that." So of course he suggested President Nixon appoint me in March of 1968.  
DW: 1969.  
JW: 1969, right. Thank you. Because he was elected in 1968....in November of 1968, wasn't
he....yes. Elected in November of 1968 and it was in March of 1969. And so I went up and Howard was very impressed. Of course, being a lawyer, he had my swearing-in ceremony in one of those ornate rooms in the Capitol, and Justice Potter Stewart of the Supreme Court came over and administered the oath.

DW: How was that arranged?

JW: Howard did all that, and he set all that up....had a little reception there. Howard is such a gracious, gentleman, and knows how to entertain and do those things, so.... such a perfect gentleman. His father was a gentleman, too....I always admired Mr. Baker when I'd go up there, and he always would take you to lunch, or take you to dinner, and I was always impressed that all the doormen and the elevator operators and the waiters and waitresses down in the House Dining Room, then...they always knew who he was. And the same thing with Howard. Howard's a very...he doesn't pass by people like that. He finds out who they are, and they find out who he is, obviously, and Mr. Baker, Sr., I'm dressing a little bit, but had a technique that I've tried to emulate again and failed very often....but a gentleman, and one of the most courteous things that I thought anybody could do on a telephone call. If you call him, or if he called you on the telephone for some reason or other, real early in the conversation he'd say, “Irene and the children are just fine.” You know, you didn't have to ask. And I always thought that was a true mark of a gentleman. And Howard does the same thing. And I thought, “Why can't I remember always to do that, because....especially if you're talking to somebody that you feel that you must inquire.” Anyway, so I got in the Commission, and it's kind of funny.....the first day I was up there, I went to his office, and there were a lot of documents to sign, and meet everybody, and things like that, and we were sitting in his office, and one of his secretaries came in and said, “Senator Baker, Mr. Waters' chauffeur is here. His car is here.” And Howard said, “I think I've got you a better job than I thought.” He didn't know there was a car in it. Car and driver. Sure enough.

DW: Let me ask you a couple of questions about the process. Were you interviewed, and I assume you were, by people in the White House before the appointment?

JW: They have...I forgot what you call the person in, and I've forgotten who he was, as a matter of fact. I remember the TVA appointment, because it was the same thing. But
they had....whoever their personnel people are, they go and you have a kind of a....you must be interviewed, of course, you know, and pass that test, so to speak.

DW: Did they run you through the Oval Office as part of the process?

JW: Not at that time....not going up there. Now I guess if I had been a higher ranking person I'm sure they would have, but no, they didn't do me that time. Now I was in the Oval Office several times after that with Nixon, and would go to the White House. I have a very nice picture of Howard and me, as Nixon's signing the Appalachian Act at his desk in the Oval Office. But not at that time, I was not.

DW: And I assume that you did the usual, and went around and visited with members of the Public Works Committee.

JW: You do your courtesy calls, yes, and that was very interesting, because I remember a couple of them so well. One of the most interesting people I met was Senator John Sherman Cooper from Kentucky, a Republican from Kentucky. Very, very interesting man, and a man who had been a key in the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission. He and Senator Jennings Randolph....Jennings Randolph being a Democrat from West Virginia were very key in forming the Appalachian Commission. So I had to go see Senator Randolph, and I remember Howard telling me....I had an appointment with him about 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. And as I was leaving Howard's office, he said, “By the way, Senator Cooper says he has no idea of time. He refuses to wear a watch.” And so I go up and I wait awhile, and finally I was ushered in and we sat down, and he said, “Oh, by the way,” the secretary had brought me in said, “You had better call those people down in the Dining Room and tell them that I'm not going to make lunch.” It was about 4:00 o'clock, you know, and they had been standing down there since..... he's not going to make lunch. But he was one of those guys....you've met other politicians like that, that seem to be very laid back and very loose, and you wondered if they really knew what was going on. But when the time came to know, for some reason or other, they could push the button, and the adrenalin flowed and he just knew everything. He was really a great person, and I admired him very much. Senator Randolph is still living. I'm sorry to say he's an Alzheimer out in St. Louis, with his son out there. He was the classic United States Senator of the old school, just loved the Appalachian program, you know.
Wouldn't tolerate anybody saying anything against it. An amusing story was... Nixon sent this bill, which every president had since Johnson over to abolish the Commission. And it didn't even get introduced....no Republican introduced it, and no Democrat introduced it. And here I was, a presidential appointee, and going to appear before the Public Works Committee, Senator Randolph presiding. So I called Howard up and I said, “Howard, I'm going over there to testify. I'm supposed to support this bill.” He said, “I've already talked to Senator Randolph. He's handle that for you, John. Don't worry about it.” So, “Mr. Chairman, I know you're here to support the President's bill, we understand, but I've got a couple of questions” ....and so then he just moved right in to talk about things. But as I said, nobody introduced the bill, and oh, several months, maybe, after that, John Erlichman called me. I had met Erlichman just one time in the White House when we were over there. And he said, “John, I think that I'll go and talk to Senator Randolph about the President's bill. And I just wondered, “What do you think about that?” Well, goodness, I didn't get many calls from the White House, and certainly that's the only call I ever got from Erlichman, and you've got to tell them the truth when the White House calls....you've got to be very candid. And I said, “Well, Mr. Erlichman, you've asked me a question, and I”.....he always said, “How will he receive me?” “Well,” I said, “he really is very fond of the Appalachian Commission.” “Oh, I understand, but I just wondered what you thought.” And I said, “Well,” I said, “at first he may cry, because he's very sensitive to know that anybody could ever even think of abolishing the Appalachian Commission. He just would find that so terrible, he may cry. Then he may kick your ass right out of his office.” Well, I heard that, and thought, “Oh, my god. Why did I say that to the White House?” And I thought, “John, really, that was a dumb thing to say.” Well, you know, a week or two later I had been gone somewhere, and I came back in, and Vivian Thompson, my secretary, says, “The White House called and said you would understand that. It's a message from Mr. Erlichman. You were absolutely right.”

DW: You were at the Commission 2½ years.....something like that?

JW: Yes. Two years.

DW: How much did you see of Senator Baker during those 2 years you were there?

JW: Oh, I saw Howard quite a bit. I had to go to the Hill a lot. The main use for that car, let
me tell you, was driving me from Connecticut Avenue to the Hill, because I was just 
am always over there. You know, the Appalachian Commission was always in danger of 
being abolished, so that little Commission, in my opinion, had the best Congressional 
relations of any department in government, because they were fighting for their life all the 
time. And you just went over there and saw those people when they wanted to see you. 
So I'd always drop by and see Howard, and we would have lunch, and dinner every now 
and then. He would always include me in things, and I must say the White House would 
include me in things. Some memorial things that I will never forget. Patsy and I...you 
may or may not recall.... Nixon had these Sunday services....church service, they're like, 
in the White House. I don't know that any other president...certainly since that time, ever 
did that. But instead of trying to go to a church....which I thought was a pretty neat idea, 
really.....he didn't go to a church and have to go through all that stuff....he would invite a 
minister in. And Patsy and I were invited, and I recall sitting next to Senator Dirksen, and 
hear him sing...and we sang the hymns...but it was the day that the astronauts landed on 
the Moon. And I shall never forget. They had a singer there....I don't know who she 
was....but they had taken the Mariners’ hymn and changed the words....what are those 
words....Protect those who are in peril on the sea....and all that stuff...and a very touching 
time. Then that afternoon, they landed. And he had a minister from Whittaker that was 
there that day, and you got to see a lot of people. And I was there one time when Johnny 
Cash....he had Johnny Cash put on entertainment there in the White House one evening, 
and Patsy and I were invited, and I had known June Cash....June Carter....because years 
ago when my family ran the Pines Theater here on Friday night we would have a country 
music show, and she and her family, Mother Maybelle and the Carter family, would 
perform many times. Johnny was not....we never heard of him then, you know. That was 
back in the early 1950s. So I had met her, and she said, “We've come a long way since 
the Pines Theater, Johnny.” And I said, “Yes, we have.” One other interesting little story 
about one time in the White House. They'd have these receptions, and you'd stand around 
with a cup of punch and a cookie, and everybody is kind of jammed in. The only event is 
to go through the line to shake hands with the president and his wife. But I was there and 
the man standing next to me, we introduced ourselves....Senator Stennis....Senator John
Stennis from Mississippi, another great leader in the Appalachian Regional Commission. And he didn't know who I was, and really, I didn't know who he was, either. But we introduced ourselves, and he said, “Well, how are you in Washington, Mr. Waters?” And I said, “Well, I'm here. I'm a Federal Co-chairman of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Senator.” And this is very odd, because I worked with him and got pretty well acquainted later. I said, “I'm here as a friend of Howard Baker's is the reason I got to be here.” “Well,” he said, “I'll tell you something I've never done to any fellow United States senator.” “What's that?” He said, “I have notified the Armed Services,” the committee that he was Chairman of, “they are to take a call from Senator Baker as if it came from my office.” And I thought this was pretty heavy stuff. And I said, “Well” and I didn't know what to say. I was kind of letting him talk. He talked about Howard and the Senate and all. Later on I talked to Howard, and I said, “How did you.... why is he so fond of you?” “Well, he has been”...he had a sickness...I think he had been [mugged] up there by some.....anyway, he had some kind of...I've forgotten what it was....and he was not ...

DW: He was almost killed.

JW: He was not on the floor a lot. And those senior senators had those what you call hideaway offices....I don't know whether you've ever seen them or not.

DW: Yes.

JW: You know they're about 6' x 8', you know, but they're a room where they can kind of lie down and take telephone calls, if they're real senior, and they are right pretty close. He would stay in there a lot, because he was not well, and roll call would come, and he would have to come on the floor. And Howard said one time he came on the floor, and Howard saw these Democrats go to him and talk to him. And even though he couldn't hear exactly, he thought they were telling him to vote wrong on the issue. And he went and he said, “Senator, I'm voting this way. I think from some of the things you have said, or I've heard you said, you may feel the other way. I just wanted to make sure.” And he said, “I would have made a mistake.” Howard told me that he had told him that he would have made a mistake if Howard hadn't....you know....clued him in on that issue.

DW: That's fascinating.
JW: That's the kind of man Howard Baker was. He didn't dare mislead the old man.

DW: Yes. Right.

JW: But it paid off.

DW: That is an amazing compliment rendered by Senator Stennis. Did you have an occasion to see Nixon and Baker together earlier and during that period to get a feel for the chemistry between the two?

JW: Yes. Howard had known Nixon before he was ever elected to the Senate. Through his father and through Dirksen and he had happened to meet him socially before Nixon was elected president, I'm trying to say. And before Howard was in the Senate. So he had gotten acquainted with him. I don't they were real close friends or anything, but they had a pretty good relationship. I was interested to read some of the press that has come out recently about what he had talked to him on the Vietnam War. And Howard was in and out of, I think, the White House quite a bit at that time. And another interesting story that I have always enjoyed very much. You'll recall those times the unrest, especially on the campuses, was very bad. They were burning up places, and it was just terrible. And Nixon wanted to make a speech on some campus. He was trying to figure out which one was safe to go to. And Howard said, “You know it's got to be The University of Tennessee at Knoxville. You'll be treated well there, and Knoxville and that surrounding area has all voted for you,” and all that stuff. So that was kind of in the mill when Billy Graham was scheduled.....this is either, I guess, 1969 or 1970, I've forgotten when.....but I was in the ARC....still in the ARC. Billy Graham was having a crusade at Knoxville, and was speaking in Neyland Stadium, and I don't know whether Howard arranged this or what...I've forgotten...but at any rate, Graham invited Nixon to come to Knoxville and be with him on the platform at that event, and of course it filled the Stadium. Were either of you-all around?

DW: I was not.

HS: I read about it.

JW: Well, of course, the security was just tops, because it was a bad situation....just a bad time, really. A lot of hustle...so much unrest, really. Especially in a lot of young people and college people. So they brought in I guess every policeman and state trooper they
could find, and we had a state trooper here in Sevierville, then, that I knew very well...named Fred Hill. He had been a Tennessee Highway Patrol, State Trooper, and he was assigned an area back in the stands there on the east side. And it so happened that right where he was was where there was a handful of demonstrators that got in there. And they had their signs...their placards hidden some way or another, and they, at whatever time they wanted to do, they'd commit their disruptive hollering and shouting and waving their signs, and there was a small number of them...of course the television cameras and everything rushed in to get them...and there was not much to it. And I found out later that Fred was up there....right in that area. And I said, “Fred, how was that? Was that pretty rough? Did you...was there any danger that you all couldn't handle those demonstrators?” “Oh, no, John, we didn't have any trouble handling those demonstrators. If those Christians had got turned loose, there wouldn't have been a thing in the world we could do.” Well, I told the story to Nixon not too long after that. I was in the White House, and I told Nixon that story. And Howard said that was one of Nixon's favorite stories. He told it many, many times. And that was a true story. I'm sure Fred Hill was right. He could handle those handful of demonstrators, but if those Christians had decided to _____, there wouldn't have been a thing in the world we could do.

DW: Around the time you were in Washington, Senator Baker made those two attempts at becoming the Republican Leader of the Senate in 1969 and 1971, did he ever reflect on those efforts with you?

JW: I'm sure we talked about it. In one of them he just lost by one vote, didn't he?

DW: That's correct.

JW: I was there standing right outside the door....the Caucus Room, and I'm sure we talked about it. I can't remember....Howard was such a....you know, he made the effort, and it was over, and he puts that behind him, and as I say, and he decides whether or not he'll think about that again and when he'll do it, you know. So I don't remember any particular comments on it, really.

DW: Well, you had plenty of opportunity to see him in action on the Public Works Committee.

JW: Oh yes.

DW: How would you describe Baker on the Committee...the role he seemed to play... the kind
of influence he exerted...his relations with his colleagues?

JW: Well, he just had such a great relationship....he had a way to handle...he'd been brought up in politics, and he knew how to handle these big egos that these United States senators, most of them have. And he would defer to them, and he could do it all in a very quiet way....it was never....and really, he could get just about any-thing done he wanted. He was just, even then, was a very junior member. I remember one time we were having a meeting at the ARC, and we were having a luncheon out at the offices out there on Connecticut Avenue.....what's that park right next to where they had all that trouble in....DuPont Circle. That was the birthplace of the hippie movement, I understand.

DW: And it lives on.

JW: It lives on. And see, the Commission office is just right half a block from there.... 1666 Connecticut and R, that's where the Commission office was. Not in a federal building. And we had a meeting there in the DuPont Hotel...the DuPont Plaza....crummy little hotel, really, I guess.

HS: Still.

JW: Still is, I guess. Anyway, he had all these governors up there...those that would come....and of course you always invited the senators, and one thing and another, and very seldom they would come, but every now and then..... So we were having this meeting luncheon in the DuPont Plaza, and in walks James Randolph and Baker. Well, of course, you know, we weren't expecting it, so we cleared the tables and all, and I said, “You know, Howard, how to handle all this,” and he said, “You introduce me, and I'll enter with Randolph.” So I got up and I said, “We're real proud to have two United States senators with us that have been great warriors for the ARC, and we are so honored having them, and I'd like to introduce Senator Baker, and Senator ______ gets up and said, “Well I had no idea I was coming out here. It was not on my plan. I had other plans for lunch, and I'm sitting in my office, and the Chairman,” Randolph, “said, 'Come, Howard, we must go.'” And, he said, “I dared not ask him where we were going, but this is where we came.” And of course Randolph swells up. But yes, he just had that knack to make those people feel good, and they loved him. So did Senator Randolph. Senator Randolph....another story. A friend of mine worked for me on the Commission named
Bill Phillips....was from West Virginia, and was a very close friend of the Randolph family. And after Randolph first went to St. Louis, after he had retired, and he must be getting very, very old....must be. Bill Phillips told me that he kept in touch with the family, and he said, “You know, one of the things that he looks forward to is on his birthday, Senator Baker calls him on the telephone and says he insists that he's dressed, puts on his tie, and he's waiting for Senator Baker's call.” And Howard said, “By god, I'm glad you told me that. I must not forget to call.” But he had been calling. And that's a typical Howard Baker. That he would call Senator Randolph, even though he's gone....he's not there anymore....he's over the hill and gone. But Randolph is of the old school. Did you ever know him?

DW: I have never met him personally, no, but I'm very familiar with his career.

JW: A little bit like Dirksen. You know, they were of the old school and the old speakers and all. After I left the Commission, my son graduated from The University of Tennessee, and decided he wanted to go to law school, and he was a good student, and I told him, “You can go anywhere you want to go, as far as I'm concerned.” And he elected to go to Georgetown. Of course it's a very fine law school. So we flew up to get Johnny B. admitted in law school, and we had some time before we caught our plane back. The Georgetown Law School's right there next to the Capitol almost. Or New Jersey, I think. So Johnny B. had to do his thing, so I told Patsy, “Let's go by and see some of the people.” So we went to see Senator Randolph's office. And a gal said, “Senator Randolph's in a meeting.” And I said, “Well, just tell him that I came by...had absolutely no business with him, and I don't need to see him at all....just came by to say Hello,” and she said, “Now Mr. Waters, would you mind just staying here a minute. I believe I'd better tell the Senator you're here.” So here he comes out.... “John, Patsy, why are you in Washington?” I said, “Well, Senator, we're here to enroll our son in Georgetown Law School.” Well, he gathers the staff. You could see they've all done this several times before. They line up. “Staff,” he says, “Mr. Waters and Mrs. Waters' son is enrolling in Georgetown Law School. The full facilities of this office will be made available to him.” They all nod their heads and leave. [I'll bet that goes on here several times]. That's Senator Randolph. Just a great guy....really a great guy. I love him dearly.
DW: How would you rank attracting Ron MacMahan to Washington? That was one of your accomplishments on the ARC.

JW: Well, that's an interesting story, because when I got there, the Commission had always taken the attitude that they were to be very low-key...that they weren't to do a lot of public relations. And I thought this was a bad mistake. We're trying to survive. And they had never had a press-type secretary.... they'd had some people that did that kind of part-time, you know. And so pretty soon, I told the staff, “I want to get somebody in here that knows how to deal with the press. We've got to improve our press.” We weren't getting anything bad. We just weren't getting anything. And I felt like “we really need to do something better.” Well, I met with some resistance there. Incidentally, I really enjoyed your book on the ARC.

DW: The Chapter on _____? You actually read it?

JW: Oh, let me tell you....John X, as I call him.....John Wisman. We called him John X because he used a little x in between his initials. And he thought, “Oh, we've never done this.” And I said, “Well, you know, I'm going to put somebody on my staff, or we're going to have somebody up here to handle press relations.” And about that time, and I honestly can’t remember....I'd heard that Ron....and I knew who Ron was....that he'd kind of like to come to Washington. And I'd met him in the campaign. He was a reporter for the Chattanooga Times, then. So I called him and he came up, and we hired him. And of course, he just did a fantastic job. One other thing that I had him do a lot at the Commission, I said, “I'm going to have an inspection tour of the ARC. I want to get these people that work here on this staff down in the region talking to the people. What we're going to do is we're going to charter a bus, and we're going to set a tour through the ARC, and we're going to take the press with us, and we're going to talk about problems and issues they have. When we stop at a town we'll pick up the leaders....mayors and county leaders and state leaders....for the next town, and we'll haul them with us, and when we get there, we'll know what we're going to do then. And Ron MacMahan is in charge.” Well, of course, Ron likes to tell a story which....I guess most of it's true....but it doesn't make any difference. Appalachia is mostly dry. So he had these boxes of liquor, and we'd stop in these little ole' rinky-dink hotels, and there wasn't much.....and Ron would
tell the people....you know, 4 or 5 press people..... “I'm going to read you a story before I open the box.” You can ask Ron about it. Anyway, it worked pretty good. But anyway, it was a very successful tour.

DW: Did he stay at ARC until you left, or did he –

JW: No. What happened was....I don't know how long he was there, to be honest with you. We'd have to look and see what the record shows. But anyway, Howard called me up on the phone and says, “I need Ron MacMahan.” And I says, “Well, you've got him if you need him.” And so then we hired Guy Smith IV. Did you ever know who he was?

DW: Yes.

JW: He was the grandson of...his grandfather was the editor of The Knoxville Journal. And was the guy I had all those problems with years ago. And he became the press secretary. And Pat Butler. Did you know Pat?

DW: I know Pat, yes.

JW: A funny, funny story about Pat. Pat was a little old cub reporter, I believe in Chattanooga. Yes. Just, you know, a kid. And Ron comes in and says, “I want to hire this guy. We need some more people, and he's really a great writer, and he's just a kid, but he's worked there for The Times a little bit, and I want to hire him.” And I said, “OK. Hire him.” So Pat comes to Washington. Here's a guy who later became a speech writer for Ford and Nixon and Baker and I don't know how many others. And...is he out in California now?

DW: The last I heard he is a vice president for something or other with the Washington Post Corporation.

JW: Maybe that's right. At any rate, he comes to Washington, and he had such an old, worn-out car that he parked it in a No Parking area, and when he came back to get it, they had not only picked it up, they had taken it to a compactor and it was as big as that _____.

And I called a lawyer and said, “I want you to look after this. Go sue them. This man's car is perfectly running and this is what they've done about it.” Well, Pat and the lawyer, neither one....they came back and said, “We really don't want to do that.” I would love to have done it. I said, “If I was a lawyer, I'd sue everybody, right now. Here's a young man comes to work in Washington, and he brings his car up here and it's a perfectly running
car. It doesn't look too good, and they not only pick it up but they think it's a junker, and just mash it up. And I think he ought to be compensated for it.” But we never did anything more about it. But I always regretted that we didn't, because I think we should have.

DW: So you, in a sense [motioned] as a talent scout for Senator Baker in regard to two people who became very key staff people for him.

JW: That's right. Yes, that's right. Yes, he needed Ron, and of course Ron was an aggressive kind of a guy, and still is. And he did a good job for the Commission. He kind of opened up that door, which they just took in and they hadn't done it. They'd never really hardly had any bad press, but they were always afraid of being linked in with the poverty program, which they liked to say they weren't. And of course, as you point out in your book, and I was glad you gave John Sweeney and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. credit, because I'd always heard that....but I've never read that much....that you may be one of the first to write that in there. I'm trying to write some stuff on the Commission myself right now. And I'm trying to....I became a devotee of regionalism.....because I think it was...so many functions of government could have been done so much better. If we had some way to change this crazy county line with 3,000 counties in the United States, and of course state lines which were drawn for political and reasons that were good at the time, but they have really very little reason now. And then, of course, I understood regionalism a little bit more at TVA, and I've always thought that the watershed was a good way to do regionalism. And then, I think that we came....I guess close is not the word....maybe we didn't come close....but we got Nixon's attention on doing [some] regionalism approach. When we met at Louisville with him....back up a little bit. It's been a long time. My memory is a little bit awkward on some of this, and you probably can correct me. Nixon had formed these 10 administrative regions in the country, and for example, there was a HUD and HEW and the departments would have a regional administrator in Atlanta. And there was 10 of those regions. Well, I picked up on this, because I thought that if you could do all of the economic development work through those regions, like the Appalachian Regional Commission was, it would be a much more efficient way to do it. You make the state present the plan, and then it comes into the region, and it's got to be
approved, and then the federal funds come in, and I think Nixon was impressed with the idea. He left Louisville, and you know, I can't find those memos today...I looked for them...that I wrote that was sent to the White House on this idea. Nixon left Louisville, and as I recall, flew to the West coast...I believe to go to a football or a basketball game. A ball game. And while he was out there...he might have been in Seattle or California, I'm not sure where...I was told that he had a meeting with some of those western governors....informal meeting...just he was there, and they had a chance to meet......and he proposed this. He threw it out on the table...he didn't propose it...he threw the idea out to them. Of course, unfortunately, those governors knew hardly anything about ARC...they hardly knew anything about the concept...and they weren't enthusiastic about it. And he said later to...I was having dinner....what was that guy that had been his political advisor when he was in Congress, and in the Senate, and...he's dead.

DW: I know who you're talking about, but the name is not coming to me.

JW: He was the politician.

HS: John, _____.

JW: No. This guy never...

DW: He never had office....he never had office.

JW: He was on the staff there in the White House.

DW: Yes.

JW: And he'd been Nixon's...he'd worked on Nixon's campaign when he was in Congress, and in the Senate, and the Vice Presidency and all. Marty....Morrie.... something or other. Anyway, I was having dinner with him in the White House down in the staff...mess, yes. And he told me, he said that Richard Nixon thought about that two or three times. Said he mentioned a time or two that there was a lot of merit in that idea.

DW: Well, it was a decentralizing kind of notion, that I can see would appeal to him.

JW: Yes. But obviously he never....I don't mean to say that he had pushed it, but it still is a good idea.

DW: Did ARC have any serious difficulties with the Senate Public Works Committee when you were there? Given the preferences of Senator Randolph and Senator Baker?

JW: Senator Randolph and Senator Baker and John Sherman Cooper and Senator Byrd. Of
course, he was not on the Committee, but I never will forget the first time we had a
meeting....little old staff-type meeting, where you're meeting for something, and you go in
to...can't remember the senator's name....he was on the Appropriations....was it Proxmire?
No, no. Couldn't have been him. Little old guy with a mustache and sunburn.

DW: Was it Pastore?

JW: Pastore. That's who it was, I believe. We go in his office to talk about some ARC
appropriation matters and one thing and another, and back at the end of the table was this
guy setting there that I assumed was a staff person. He looked very young. And I find
out later it was Senator Byrd. And I was a little embarrassed that I didn't....and so this is a
follow-up on the story being at the White House when we landed on the moon on that
Sunday, and I met Mrs. Byrd. And I said, “Hello, Mrs. Byrd.” I said, “I was
embarrassed. I was with Senator Byrd,” and I told her about going in this meeting and he
was back there, and I said, “He looked so young that I didn't recognize the Senator.” She
said, “You've already made more points, Mr. Waters, than if you had recognized him.”

DW: Were you still at ARC during the 1972 election season?

JW: Yes.

DW: So you were not involved in Baker's re-election campaign.

JW: Oh, Baker's re-election. No, no, I was thinking about the Nixon re-election. Was that the
same year?

DW: Same year, right.

JW: Yeah, same year. Right. Yes, I had to kind of low-key that one, of course. Talking about
that election...I'll tell you a funny story on that election. One of the great leaders for the
ARC....fantastic leader....was Congressman Bob Jones, from Alabama. He was Chairman
of the House Public Works. And he was very much an advocate of the ARC....and TVA
Jones. He was just a great.....but when I was at TVA, I had a tug boat named after him
down there. We had about 10 of them, and they named it something like Mary Ann, and I
said, “No, it's the Robert E. Jones.” They said, “Who's that?” “Well, [You need to
know].” He'd retired, then, and was living down in....well, near Muscle Shoals there,
where those seven blacks were made famous there.
DW: Scottsboro.

JW: Scottsboro. He was living there. But at any rate, the Democrats had had their Convention, and nominated Senator McGovern as president. And just a day or two after the Convention, I walked in Bob Jones' office, and he said, “Come in, John. I just got off the phone with a very leading Democrat from Alabama...an old friend...a dear old friend that's been a friend of mine forever. He called me up on the phone and he said, “Bob, are you still a Democrat?” And I said, “Yes. I'm a very still Democrat.” I always thought that was a great story. The governor didn't _____ him too much.

DW: So when you left the ARC, you moved back to Sevierville and resumed your practice of law? And then, were you involved in Baker's campaign in 1978?

JW: Well, I was involved in all of them, but in a much more.....you know, by then the professionals had taken over.

DW: Right.

JW: The volunteers had less important roles, and I always did anything he'd ever asked me....you know, a special assignment kind of thing. Sometimes he would ask me to go to some place maybe he could go, and I was maybe a kind of surrogate....

DW: Make a talk.

JW: Yes. You know, to stand up here for him or something. And I was always glad to do that.

DW: Was he instrumental in your involvement in Tennessee Tombigbee matters, or did that come from a different direction?

JW: Really, from a _____. Of course, Lamar named me to that board, and after Lamar was elected governor, somebody from down there called me up and said, “Anything you're interested in?” And I said, “No. No, I don't want a job, or any-thing like that.” And he said, “Well, are you interested in any of the boards?” And I said, “Wait a minute. What are the boards?” So I got on the boards, and of course my love for the river....and I don't know if we've talked about that, but I really have always had a love for the river. It has always fascinated me, and that's one of the main reasons I wanted to go to TVA. So I said, “Boy, this is really something. I'd like to be on the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway Authority.” And he said, “What's that?” But anyway, we were all learning, you know.
So I got on that and enjoyed that, and renewed my friendship with Jamey Whitten and Tom Bevill, and Sandra Stennis, as a matter of fact.

DW: Did you have to go to Washington from time to time and do business with the Senate Public Works Committee then?

JW: Oh sure, sure did. About every year.

DW: On Appropriations and....

JW: Yes. Went up about every year....worked on that. That was a....

DW: Talk a little bit about Senator Baker's role in regard to the Waterway.

JW: You know, he was just always supportive. He realized that this could be very important to Tennessee, when we'd talk about it. I'd say, “Howard, you know when you can cut off 600 miles in how Tennessee gets to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, it has to be a pretty important thing.” And he always recognized that, and he was always supportive. It was the kind of thing that I don’t’ ever recall him being in any more of a leadership role than that, but I expect he certainly was.

DW: Did you have any encounters with Jim Range in that sort of thing?

JW: Oh yes. Yes, the Ranger? Oh yeah.

DW: Well, I remember him telling me a story about some piece of legislation involving Tennessee Tombigbee, and I don't know when this was....whether it was in the 1970s or the 1980s, but they were having some trouble in getting whatever it was through. And because of opposition from the environmentalists. And he said...I've forgotten whether he said he did it with Baker's approval, or Baker told him, “Well, just put in something about the environment every other sentence.” And Jim Range said, “By god, we made that legislation into an environmental protection.”

JW: Well, of course, Howard has a unique ability on that, you know. He really does. He knows how to craft those kinds of things. One story that always amused me. After he was Majority Leader, I went up one time, and you may recall, once again....my dates are getting fuzzy....but you will remember when the big issue was whether or not federal employees were going to be on Social Security. I have no idea what year that was, but it was a long time ago. Anyway, that was a huge issue. And it was on the floor of the
Senate. I didn't know that. I went up there because...I can't remember now why I even went up there, but that certainly was not the reason. So I go up and I go in Laura Nell's there, and she said, “Oh well, that boy's so tough. He has sent word in here that you might want to just go up there and sit in the Gallery and watch this. He can't [leave].” And I said, “Yes, I always enjoy it.” So they gave me the pass, and I was sitting up there in the Gallery. And it was not real jammed or anything, but mostly federal bureaucrats in there, trying to see....watch what was happening. Whether they were going to get on Social Security or not. And he was down on the floor and all, and all this maneuvering was going on, and speech-making, and whether or not this was....... And all of a sudden, Howard comes into the Gallery....comes upstairs and sits down beside me. And we're setting there. And I realize all of a sudden that all these people are looking. And we sat there and talked a while. And he said, “Well, this is going to be over pretty soon, now.” So he goes back down and pretty soon this lady came up to me and said, “Do you mind telling me who you are?” And I said, “No. I'm John Waters.” Well, that didn't mean anything to her. And she said, “Well, we're....was Senator Baker...was he consulting with you on the Bill?” And I said, “Oh, we talked about the Bill.” And here these people were wondering “Who is this he's talking to? Why did he go in the Gallery?”

HS: How many senators [are] ever in there?
JW: Yes. That's right.
HS: [Much] less talking.
JW: Yes. And much less on somebody that they had no earthly idea who I was. But I got a kick out of that.
DW: Were you at the Republican Convention in Kansas City in 1976?
JW: No. Was at the one in Miami, but not the......
DW: What about the 1980 presidential campaign of Senator Baker?
JW: Oh, I went to New Hampshire and campaigned for him, and it was just....it just never got off the ground. And I don't know why. I remember him being up there in New Hampshire, and the only thing I remember about that was I remember telling Patsy, “You know this guy George Bush is getting talk up here,” because we were running the telephones....called all these names on the list. And we'd say, “Who are you for?” And
they'd mention Reagan and mention maybe two or three people, but they always
talked about Bush. And kind of on the end. And I said, “You know, he's got some kind of
support up here that's kind of grass level.” And he did, of course. But of course he wasn't
nominated that time.

DW: So you went to New Hampshire as a foot soldier?

JW: Yes., of yes.

DW: I remember when in East Tennessee when they went up, and I was talking to Tom Jensen
about it a long time ago. I don't know whether you were part of the same __.

JW: No. I wasn't _____.

DW: But from the perspective of a foot soldier in terms of organization and management, what
did Baker's campaign look like, in New Hampshire?

JW: Terrible. I mean, really, it was just....it just wasn't a tight organization. He came into
New Hampshire while we were there. We went out to the other town, wherever that was,
to the meeting. And it was not a good organization. There were people for him, and like
there always is, it just was not a good organization. I'm not blaming anybody. I don't
even know why all that didn't happen. But it just didn't. Just didn't happen.

DW: What's the story of your becoming a member of the TVA Board of Directors?

JW: Well, I had always had an interest in TVA. And TVA at that time....the Freemans had
been on the Board, and S. David Freeman had been Chairman, and then they removed
him as Chairman and put Dean in. And I had always had an interest in it. And I had kind
of kept up with what was going on, and I had been told that since Chili was on the Board,
that there would be somebody appointed from some other state. And I understood that.

DW: Excuse me. Who did you replace on the Board?

JW: S. David Freeman. His term expired and I went on. And that was the vacancy that was
occurring, and I understood that. That they had to meet a balance and things like that. So
they couldn't seem to ever get to an agreement. Somebody would be mentioned, and that
didn't fly, and I do remember that Jesse Helms was knocking somebody from North
Carolina, and it just didn't seem to be coming to any agreement. And I told Howard one
time, I said, “You know, I might like to be on the TVA Board.” He didn't believe it. He
said, “You don't want to be on the TVA Board. Let me let you do something else.”
DW: Why did he think you would not like it?

JW: I don't know. But it was in terrible shape then. I mean the [nukes] were all flat then, and the press was terrible. I mean it was just....rates had been raised... doubled in just a few years. Just a terrible, terrible situation. He said, “You don't want to be on that.” I said, “Yeah, I really would like to do the TVA Board.” Well, he mentioned two or three other things...even including a federal judgeship. He offered me a federal judgeship, not offered me, I don't want him to say that. But we talked about it.

DW: It had been a possibility.

JW: It had been a possibility. And I didn't want to be a federal judge. So one day...it went on and on....Tommy Griscom called me on the phone, and he said, “Johnny, are you interested in the TVA Board?” And I said, “Well, yeah. I think I am.” He said, “Wait a minute. Before you answer that question, I want you to think about it. Because if you're interested, you may be appointed tomorrow. The Senator is pissed off. He has suggested a number of people....and the politics....and he was unhappy with it....and if you're interested in it, I think this is going....he told me to call you and find out.” And I said, “Well, you know, yeah, I really am. I think I'd like to do that.” So just in a day or two, he called me and said, “You need to come up here.” I was President of the Tennessee Bar Association, then, and traveling around a lot over the state and country, and so the word got out that.....you can see a little cartoon...my favorite cartoon I'll have to show you....it's in there when we go out....by Daniels about Baker appointing his buddy...his friend...to the TVA Board. Like the press thought he was going to appoint somebody who wasn't his friend.

DW: What role did Senator Baker play in Chili Dean's appointment as Chairman?

JW: Well, he appointed Chili. He thought that it needed a power....somebody who knew something about power and TVA. Chili had been Chairman of KUB...and so that's how Chili came into it. Chili used to laugh and say, “_____ call me back after they talked about appointment, and asked me if I was a Republican,” which he said he was. I said, “By god, he didn't have to call me.”

DW: You went on the TVA Board just about the time Baker was concluding his career in the
JW: Well, he was Majority Leader.

DW: He won in 1984.

JW: Yes, that's right. That's right.

DW: I assume you had no confirmation problems.

JW: I'll tell you what. It was funny. Of course I went out to make my courtesy calls, to everybody, and at the White House, and this guy comes in and says, “Mr. Waters, I want to tell you right up front what I was ordered to tell you. The President told me to tell you that whoever Senator Baker wants is going to be on the TVA Board.” There had been a little bit of a press, they call it, because Maureen, is that her name...his daughter....

DW: Reagan.

JW: Reagan, yes. Had been a little bit of a press, and she thought it would be a good thing for a woman. And it would have been a good thing.....nothing wrong with that....there never has been one appointed...but he wanted to make sure that Baker was going to do the appointment. But I was in one of the Senate Office Buildings making my little courtesy calls, and of course _____, and I had been around, and I understood the _____ pretty good, and I was standing there at the elevator and Senator Mathias walks up. Well, I've always been such a student of politics, I recognize these people by their picture...even though I didn't.....and I said, “Senator Mathias,” and he says, “Yes.” And I said, “Senator, I'm John Waters. I'm here going to be on the floor of the Senate for confirmation for the TVA Board. I'd appreciate your support.” And he says, “John, who's your friend?” And I said, “Howard Baker.” And he said, “John, the only thing a United States senator even thinks about doing now is whatever Howard wants.” And after Howard left the Senate and several years after that, I guess, I was in the Mayflower Hotel one morning, and I walked down to eat breakfast in the Dining Room, and there sat Senator Baker and Senator Mathias, eating breakfast in the Mayflower. And of course I went over and spoke to Howard, and I said, “Senator, you will not recall, but I would like to tell Senator Baker about when I met you.” And of course he's such a handsome looking man....so I told that story. And he said, “That was exactly right.” And I said, “Yeah, I think it was.”

DW: Did Senator Baker have any expectations that he expressed to you in regard to how TVA
business should be handled in the future?

JW: He just....Senator Baker never gave me any orders or anything like that. He said, “John, you've got to do something in a business-like way. It's going to have to be, you're going to have to do better in the press. You've got some real problems. And nuclear power is in bad shape.” It was just a terrible time...a bad time. And I'm happy to say we turned that around a lot. We really did. And I regret now that I think TVA's in such sad shape. I'm afraid we're going to lose it.

DW: Well, _____ go back to those decisions made almost 30 years ago or more. And it is indeed unfortunate. Do you have any observations on Senator Baker's performance as Republican leader in the Senate, in the minority, and especially in the majority?

JW: Well, you know, I remember one time reading in The Press that somebody had polled the Democrat members of the Senate, and the story was that he could have been elected Majority Leader by the Democrats. And I don't know if that's a true story or not. I did read that in The Press. But that really didn't surprise me. Because he does have such a unique ability and working with people like that. And he's willing to kind of take the back step...appear in the back, and let them get out in the front. And believe you me, that's such an unusual trait in the United State Senate....it will buy you an awful lot of good things. But he worked that, I think, very well, and he understood...he knew each one of them, and he knew what their [interest] was...what was on their agenda...and he tried to accommodate them. And Howard knows that those kinds of things are a lot of compromise. And I think that that's the thing that, to me, bothers the House and Senate today.... that you've got these extreme liberals and extreme conservatives, and I think both of them don't realize that governing lots of times is compromise. And you have to go on, and you see the liberals criticizing...just jumping all over Clinton every time he's for any kind of a conservative move. And then you've got this right wing, and I think Baker was a man of as deep a conviction as anybody that ever served there. But he understood the compromise in government....and how things are done, and how you've got to get things done, and how you've got to move on. I think it's a sad story.....it bothers me a little bit. I see my conservative friends who think that all government is bad and what the best thing to do is take everything away from them and let the private sector do everything it can.
And then my liberal friends who think that the private sector is all bad, and all crooks, and the only way to survive is for the government to look over the shoulder and regulate...and my god, how wrong they both can be.

DW: Yes. That's right.

JW: What we need is an efficiently run government.

DW: When Senator Baker was Reagan's Chief of Staff, did he have any official dealings with TVA on TVA matters?

JW: Well, he couldn't do much. He'd get us in to see the President, you know...and I got my picture made. And I would go up and visit with him when he was Chief of Staff, and during that time the Iran Contra problem was big, and all this time, but I don't recall a single issue....oh yeah! Back up a minute. He told me, “We've got to find a person who has got experience in big corporate management...to come in to the TVA Board.” And he had a guy down in Texas he was looking at....he was very active in the selection of Marvin Runyon for the TVA Board. He was it. No question about it. And he brought Marvin in there. And I recommended that to him. We talked about me being Chairman, and I said, “The thing to do is bring in that kind of person and let me support him, because you've got to have two.” And it worked very well. And Marvin Runyon was a fantastic, big corporate manager .....he understood crisis management. Look what he's done. Anybody that can put the Postal Service in the black. And we worked well together.

DW: You've known Senator Baker for....pardon me for putting a number on it....almost 50 years.

JW: Gee, that's sounds a lot.

DW: To what extent, if any, or how has he changed as a person over the years? And how, over the course of his political career, particularly, did he develop as a public figure and a man involved in public affairs?

JW: Well, that's an excellent question. And I do remember one time when we were somewhere together in some public group, and somebody asked Howard, and I think they didn't intend it as a kind question, but they said, “Howard, have you changed since you've been in the Senate?” And he says, “My goodness, I hope so.”
END OF TAPE