

# LBJ Getting His Affairs in Order

By Jack Anderson

Those who have talked to Lyndon Johnson lately say he is calmly getting his affairs in order for an early demise.

When he's depressed, he sometimes muses aloud about the low life expectancy of the Johnson menfolk. He recalls that his father died of a heart attack in his early sixties. A similar fate, suggests LBJ, now 64, probably awaits him.

As evidence that he believes his own dire speculation, he is quietly setting his estate in order. He sold the family TV interests, subject to government approval, for about \$9 million. He is also withdrawing from business interests that require his active supervision and looking for investments that won't create problems for his heirs.

"He looks five moves down the chessboard," an intimate told us. "He doesn't want his wife and children to be left with any hard decisions."

The former President has withdrawn almost completely from the spotlight since he left the White House. He won't talk to the press, won't respond to attacks, won't permit even his friends to draw him into a discussion of national affairs.

This is so uncharacteristic of the Lyndon Johnson who dominated Washington for five years, that he has become, in retirement, a mystery man. For an insight into this

strange, new Johnson, we spoke to half a dozen of his closest friends who have kept in touch with him. We agreed to withhold their identities in return for their frank answers.

## LBJ's Pains

They generally agree that Johnson went through severe withdrawal pains as the presidential power slowly slipped from his fingers four years ago. He departed Washington feeling he was a maligned and misunderstood man.

The angry antiwar protesters didn't seem to understand, in his view, that he really cared. They were never told how he stayed awake nights to check on American casualties. When soldiers in Vietnam wrote him, he personally answered their letters. "He would spend as much time on them as he did on a document to the Secretary of State," recalls a former aide.

Nor had any previous President sponsored so much social legislation. Dwight Eisenhower left 45 social programs on the books, costing just under \$10 billion a year. When Mr. Johnson departed, there were 435 programs with a yearly price tag of more than \$25 billion.

He pushed through John Kennedy's voting rights law, which enfranchised millions of blacks in the South. Mr. Johnson began the war on poverty, aimed at ending hunger and

ignorance. There was a model cities program to cure urban ills, medicare for the elderly and medicaid for the needy.

He felt his critics overlooked these giant achievements and emphasized instead his Texas mannerisms and his wheeler-dealer politics. He was disappointed when the poor and the downtrodden didn't hail him as their savior. After he left the White House, recall friends, he alternately brooded and plunged into work on the LBJ library.

The criticism of his war policies, meanwhile, reached new crescendos. Not only did he start reflecting on the low Johnson life expectancy, but he began chain-smoking the cigarettes he had given up after his 1955 heart attack. He also ate his way up to 235 pounds.

## Calories, Cigarillos

Inevitably, he was struck earlier this year with another seizure. Now he must keep an inhaler handy for occasional quick breaths of oxygen. A house servant with an eye on the clock also brings him a pill and a glass of water at regular intervals.

He negotiated with his doctor and finally agreed to give up cigarettes for less frequent cigarillos. And he has brought his weight down to 209 pounds.

His attitude, meanwhile, has become almost serene. He no longer betrays the least con-

cern over criticism nor bitterness over the nation's seeming ingratitude.

One friend describes LBJ's attitude toward his critics as "turning the other cheek."

"He's not mad at anybody," shrugs another.

Agrees still another, Mr. Johnson "feels that his record is there, that his deeds will remain after the criticism has faded, that history will vindicate him."

All the intimates who talked to us about Mr. Johnson remarked on his amazing new magnanimity. But one suggested that "all the hate-Johnson stories must hurt the Old Man inside."

Those who visit him down on the Pedernales say, except for his occasional morbid moods, he seems to be enjoying retirement. He stays on the ranch, takes off when he pleases to look at the deer or inspect the grass. "This is the first time in 40 years I am making my own schedule," he says happily.

Friends have been unable to get much out of him on the presidential election, except that he had a good visit with George McGovern and that McGovern treated him "with affection and respect."

His own term in the White House, he has said, was a "sobering experience." He seems quite satisfied, meanwhile, to let history be his judge.