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Significant African American Public Figures of Texas

Interviewee: **Glenn O. Lewis**
State Representative

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GLENN O. LEWIS

Dana Ortega: Good Morning Representative Glenn Lewis. We would like to thank you on behalf of UT Arlington and Political Science African Americans [class]. We appreciate you coming out and we just have a couple of questions to ask you if you don't mind. Have you always lived in Fort Worth?

Glenn Lewis: Yes.

Dana: Yes, you have.

Glenn Lewis: Born in Fort Worth.

Dana: And what about your parents? Were they born here?

Glenn Lewis: No. Both of my parents grew up in Falls County Texas, Marlin, Texas. My mother grew up in Marlin, my father actually grew up in sort of a farming community right outside of Marlin. They knew each other as children, were life long friends their families were friends.

Dana: Could you give us for the record their names?

Glenn Lewis: My father's name was T.D Lewis. He died about 12 years ago. My mother's maiden name was Vivian Gay. Then she became a Lewis. She is currently a Wells. She is married to the Rev. K.K. Wells, who is my stepfather.

Dana: Where your parents at all or ever in the political system?

Glenn Lewis: Not in a formal way. My parents were divorced when I was two-years-old. So I did not grow up with my father in the household with me. I did however, my mother's been married three times.

She was married to my stepfather when I was a teenager. He died and then Rev. Wells she married after I became grown. I was out of the house by the time she married him. She was, back in the time that I was growing up there was only one African American lawyer in Tarrant County. His name was L. Clifford Davis. He is now a retired judge. My mother was his secretary. And so a lot of political activity in the community centered around his office and so I sort of grew up around that. Then my stepfather, Emmitt Session, who my mother married when I was a teenager or adolescent. He was very politically involved. He was a board member of the local NAACP and he was always involved in campaigning for one candidate or another. And he used to have me out handing out leaflets when I was just a boy and didn't really know what I was doing.

Dana: And what about your grandparents? Are they from Texas and have they ever been in the political arena?

Glenn Lewis: Both of my grandparents were born in Texas. My grandmother, well, all my grandparents are dead looking at both sides. My paternal grandfather was sort of an informal leader of his community in Falls County Texas. He was sort of a spokesperson for the people around the community and in his church. He was a deacon in the church. He often acted as a spokesperson, which actually resulted in his being lynched long before I was born.

Dana: How did that impact your life?

Glenn Lewis: Well, of course I never new him but my maternal

grandfather, who was his friend and I knew all my life, he just died in 1998 at the age of 102. And so both of my grandfathers were friends. I think it impacted my life some because my maternal grandfather, who I was around all of my life, often mentioned my paternal grandfather, who was his friend. And made sure we knew who he was and what kind of person he was, how he died and why he died.

Dana: Entering into the university years, had you always wanted to be in politics?

Glenn Lewis: I think, yeah, I did. And to be real honest about it, I went into... Why else would I major in political science, you know, if I didn't have some interest in politics? And I recall once when I was a freshman at Prairie View A&M University I was in a class for political science majors and the professor Hulen Davis, who is retired now but still hangs around the university down there by the way. There were about a dozen of us in there, the first day of class, he took this survey and he wanted to know why are ya'll majoring in political science? What are your career aspirations and goals? We were only freshman. When he got to me I don't know why I said it but probably because I thought I was being clever I said I want to be governor of the state of Texas. Everybody in the room laughed which is probably what I was trying to do trying to make everybody laugh or say something clever but I remember his saying, "Well don't laugh because you never know." And he said, "I think it's

significant that at this point in our history he feels that he has the right to even aspire to be governor of this state.” I don’t know if I really knew then or again if I was just trying to be clever. Who knows.

Dana: And what faith do you practice?

Glenn Lewis: I am a Baptist. A missionary Baptist.

Dana: Do you feel your faith has been a deciding factor in you being a democrat?

Glenn Lewis: That’s a hard question because as you know in the African American community historically the church has played a more active role with the politics of the African American community probably more so than other communities. And you know I grew up in a Missionary Baptist church and there was always a lot of political activity centered around the church. You know Martin Luther King was a missionary Baptist minister. And the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and church have always gone hand and hand. Most of the people I knew and grew up around were Democrats. So I don’t know if it’s a matter of faith dictating that or if that is something that just happened. I don’t think most African Americans are Democrats because of the church Black history says we are democrats because of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Prior to that most African American’s were Republican’s because Abraham Lincoln was a Republican. The re-alignment vote took place with Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt. And Eleanor Roosevelt, mostly, being the first person in that highly position

actually took an active part in the struggle for Civil Rights. She was the first woman who had done that since Abraham Lincoln. And so that's when African American's started to move into the Democratic Party.

Dana: What influenced you to enter into politics?

Glenn Lewis: First of all, my mother. She was always very involved in the politics of our community. And I can remember she and other people in the community back in the days when we had poll taxes and a lot... You know, you couldn't vote unless you paid a poll tax. And a lot of people couldn't afford to pay the poll tax. They used to have bake sales and sell baked goods to raise money to pay people's poll taxes for them so they could vote. And another big influence on me was Senator Craig Washington. I used to watch Craig when I was in law school and I worked for a state agency, the Texas Employment Commission. And at that time Craig was not in the state Senate he was a member of the House of Representatives. Anybody who knows Craig Washington knows how eloquent he is. And when you sit in the gallery and you watch him and you hear him as he debates the great issues of the day with his eloquence and his presence, you know it really made an impression on me. And that's one of the reason's I followed him into the law practice cause I watched him try lot's and try cases. And he had that same sort of...He blushes now when I tell him that. We're very good friends now. And when I tell him that it almost brings him to tears but it's

true. He was a big influence and, of course, all of your great political thinkers. Malcolm X had a tremendous effect on me. My brother Terry who later became my law partner... He left here when I was a freshman in high school to go to the University of Chicago as a National Merit Scholar. And I was still here still in high school and he sent me or maybe he brought home when he came home a copy of the autobiography of Malcolm X. A book that I had never heard of at the time. And I read it while I was still in high school and it affected me profoundly.

Dana: What type of law do you practice?

Glenn Lewis: We do ad valorem tax collection. We represent taxing entities, cities, counties, school districts. Those types of entities, we assist them in collecting their delinquent property taxes.

Dana: And prior to that?

Glenn Lewis: Prior to that my brother and I did a practice in Fort Worth. It encompassed everything. We did criminal defense. We did divorces. We did civil right litigation. We did... You name it. We incorporated small businesses. We did probate. We were the quintessential neighborhood lawyers. We were two guys who had grown up in the neighborhood had become lawyers and we set up our practice in the neighborhood we grew up in. And we attempted to serve the legal needs of anybody who came in the door. Either we did it or if we didn't feel competent to do it we would help them find a lawyer who was competent to do it.

Dana: Do you feel that your law degree helped you in becoming state representative?

Glenn Lewis: I think it did. Out of, right now, out of 150 members of the House of Representatives in Texas I believe there are 47 lawyers. And lawyers by far outnumber any other profession in political and legislative bodies. Some people thinks that's a good thing some people think it's not a good thing. I personally believe that the reason there are more lawyers than there are any other profession is first the training that we receive, and the work that we do requires us to work directly with laws and legislation. And it generates a higher interest in what those laws and what the legislation should be. Second of all, the nature of the work we do allows us the flexibility with our time. It's not like I own a retail shop or I have to be in my place of business everyday to make a living. Anybody who is going to serve in the Texas Legislature since we are barely compensated, it's almost a voluntary position. You have to have some other way of making a living. But that job you have has to allow you the flexibility to move to Austin for five and a half months every other year; to come and sit and talk with students when your time... And there are lots of demands on your time that require that you have some flexibility. If you work from 9 to 5 where you have to punch a clock or if you own the business that was a sort of retail type operation where you have to physically be there in order for it to operate it would be very difficult for you to serve in the

legislature. And I think those two reasons you have more lawyers than you have and strangely enough the second most represented profession is insurance agents and that's because they have that same sort of time flexibility that allows them to do things like that.

Dana: How did you organize your campaign?

Glenn Lewis: You know I ran two unsuccessful campaigns before I was elected. And so we had sort of put our organization together in those first two campaigns. One of the benefits I had was running the campaign in the neighborhood or in the community where I had lived all of my life. And so I had sort of a built in network of family and friends and classmates and people who knew me personally, we were able, church, we were able to organize a network of volunteers that worked very well. We used phone banks. We used mailings. We used radio advertisings. We walked the streets and knocked on doors, but we had no particular organization chain. We didn't have an organizational chart where you've got like a manager here that is in this position, you know, formalized things like that. We all just pitched in and we did whatever we could do and it worked.

Dana: How did you raise money for your campaigns?

Glenn Lewis: Strangely enough the first two campaigns I ran were financed almost exclusively by myself and another attorney friend of mine named Leon Haley, who by the way is a UTA alum, you all. Leon and I had practiced law quite a bit together that was before

my brother came home from Chicago. And Leon and I worked together a lot and we became very close friends. And we decided we were going to do this. We were running against an incumbent representative. And one of the things you'll find is that when you run against an incumbent it's very difficult to raise money. Because most people that contribute money contributed not necessarily because they want to... Well they are careful to make sure they contribute to the winner because all of that has to be reported and it's public record. And nobody wants to be seen as a big contributor to someone who didn't win because the guy that won may hold it against you. So they contribute to the person they think that's going to win. And the incumbent wins most of the time in most political races. The incumbents win unless they have done something that gives people a reason to throw them out of office. And so it's hard to raise money when you run against an incumbent. Leon and I financed those first two campaigns ourselves out of our pockets with money we probably should have been doing other things with. We were paying for a campaign. What that did though was establish us even though we didn't win those races we came very close in the second one. It established us as a political force within the community. So when the incumbent we challenged decided to step down and it was an open seat although there were six candidates in the race most people predicted from the beginning that I would be the winner. And so

they all just.... People started donating money because again everybody wants to be with the winner.

Dana: How much does it cost to file to run and how much does it cost to run a campaign that wins?

Glenn Lewis: It costs six hundred dollars to file and that has not changed since I first filed, that is set by law. What it costs to run a campaign varies. We ran our winning campaign in 1994. We spent about thirty-five thousand dollars to win that race. Fortunately for me, I have not been opposed since then so I have not had to run a contested campaign since 1994. Some of my colleagues though who have run races in different areas some of them tell me they spent eighty, ninety, a hundred thousand dollars to get elected to a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. That's almost inconceivable to me based on my own experience but that's what they tell me they are spending now.

Dana: What is your salary as a state representative?

Glenn Lewis: Six hundred dollars a month.

Dana: I'm going to take it over to Kelly now.

Kelly Willis: Representative Lewis, what do you think of, what gave you the upper hand in reference to being honored as the outstanding freshman in the 74th session of the Texas Legislature?

Glenn Lewis: Well, I think that one of the things that helped me is that I came in from the beginning determined to assert myself as an independent thinker. While I am a Democrat I did not feel compelled to always vote with the rest of the liberal Democrats. In fact I

really don't consider myself Liberal. People ask me if I'm Liberal or Conservative and I say there is no one word in the entire language that can define how I feel about everything. It depends on what you are talking about. I'm Liberal about some things and I'm Conservative about other things. And I came in with that philosophy and did not align myself with one group or another. I try to assert myself as someone who will take things issue by issue. We may agree on this issue and we may not agree on the next issue. But I try to take things issue by issue and try to avoid being labeled. And quite frankly I think that is a surprise to some people because I am African American and I am a Democrat. And I represent a mostly inner city district. People want to label you. And you walk in and they say, "Oh, ok. He is going to always be with the Liberal Democrats on every issue." And when you don't do that it sort of surprises them and usually pleasantly surprises them. And they say, "Oh, ok This is somebody who we can go and talk to. And he is going to take these things issue by issue. He's not going to allow himself to be labeled and pigeon hold like so many others who ..." Because once you do that people won't take to you. Once you label somebody then that label tells you every thing you need to know about that person. And so you feel like you don't need to go talk to them because you've already labeled them. And you know what they think and who they are and every thing. And I think that's really bad. And I tried very hard... In

fact there were some issues, some positions that I took that I didn't have real strong feelings about in one way or the other. But I took the unexpected position just to make that point, that I don't want to be labeled. I want you to have to come and talk to me when you want to know where I am on certain issues.

Kelly Willis: I also hear that you have pledged to Republican [Tom] Craddick, Republican for Speaker of the House [Texas]. Is that correct?

Glenn Lewis: Yes that is correct.

Kelly: I'll just go ahead and move on and ask you about who do you stand with on school vouchers on that issue.

Glenn Lewis: I believe that that is an issue that is not going to go away because we stonewall it. I believe that's an issue that we are going to have to test. And we're gonna have to test it to see if it works. And you know, one of the things that I find very strange and unusual, those of us who live... The poor, minority, inner city dwellers, we are the ones who have gotten the least out of the public education system. If there's anybody who's been abused by the public education system it's been us. I have personally been involve in litigation that has lasted forty years where we were trying to focus the public education system to address the educational needs of African Americans and Hispanics children in the city of Fort Worth. And they fought us on every term. And now that their funding is being threatened by people who want to offer an alternative way to educate

these children we're suppose to be the ones that protect them? We're suppose to be their victorious? I don't think that they have done enough to earn that kind of trust and I think that we have to look at alternative ways of educating our children, particularly in light of the situation that currently exist. So I don't think we ought to close the door on anything. I voted in 1995 for a pilot plan, pilot program to test school choice on very limited basis in this state to see if in fact it was workable solution. Aand I suspect that if that same pilot program comes up again I'll vote for it again. Because I don't....Now that the Supreme Court has settled the legal issue, which I thought was sort of a tenuous legal argument at best anyway, to put public money into a religious affiliated school violates separation of church and state. Well that means that if somebody takes a Pell grant or a GRV award or BBOG and goes to TCU, which is a Christian school, we're violating separation of church and state. And I just never thought that that was a very meritorious argument. And I also don't think the argument that putting money into public schools, putting money into private schools by allowing people to make that choice is going to destroy the public school system. Quite the contrary, I think it will make it better. Very possibly make it better. The fact that people can take public money and go to TCU hasn't destroyed UTA has it? UTA has flourished right here in the middle of TCU and SMU. And UTA is a public

college university but people can take public money and go to UTA or TCU if they wanted to. And it hasn't destroyed UTA. What it has done is place UTA in competitive environment so that UTA has to be competitive in the services they provide in order to attract students. And UTA has grown in the last year. I was just reading this in ya'll newspaper [*The Shorthorn*]. UTA's enrollment has grown more than either TCU or SMU over the last year. And the fact that people can take public money and go to those schools hasn't hurt UTA. I don't think it will hurt at all. But we have to test it to find out.

Dana: Speaking of the minorities, do you feel that test scores or the ability to enroll in the college upper level school is a factor? What is your opinion on that?

Glenn Lewis: Well, I think that first of all, you know ethnic minorities are going to college right now at a much higher rate than we've ever had before. And I don't know that continues to climb. I think that universities, some of the universities in Texas, mainly the University of Texas and Texas A&M have not done all they can to recruit qualified minorities to diversify their student population. But I have a different idea about how we can do that. The Hopwood case, as you know, created the controversy surrounding that. I think it's our job as legislators, as the ones who hold the purse strings for our public colleges and universities, to make sure that the public colleges and universities that we

fund in the state of Texas offer an opportunity of an education to all of the students who want to come to Texas and get their education. And if a college or university is not doing that then we should take steps. I mean why do you need large share of the states money if you're not gonna educate the large share of the state's students? I think this idea though that somehow the University of Texas and Texas A&M have a monopoly on higher education in the state of Texas is a myth that needs to be debunked. And we simply need to say to them either you meet the standards we want you to meet in terms of providing an education to all of the students in this state or we will send the money to other universities that do. There are plenty of them. We are sitting in one. And you know, I don't think if the University of Texas and Texas A&M are not willing to make that commitment then they should stop getting the large share of our higher education dollars.

Dana: Could you speak about the school of finance at this time?

Glenn Lewis: The school of finance.

Dana: As in...your pro voucher is that correct?

Glenn Lewis: Again, I am pro pilot voucher. I'm not quite there for a universal voucher plan yet. You see I don't think we ought to make decisions without first, if we have an opportunity to test them, we should test them first. And I think that's something that ought to be tested.

Dana: Could you answer how does public education get

funded?

Glenn Lewis: How does public education get funded? You know that's a real good question. Part of it, most of it gets funded by local property tax dollars. But then there's a large share of it that gets funded from the state in the state legislature. And the reason I said that's a real good question is because I have been one of the critics of the way we currently fund the state's portion. Because I think the formula, if you've ever looked at it, the formula is far, far too complicated. Most people don't understand it, including me I confess. And my belief is why does it have to be so complicated. Why does it have to be so complicated that there are only people in Austin who spend all of their time working with it really understand it. I think that was done intentionally as a measure of control. How can you criticize something that you really don't understand how it works. And the only way anybody can understand how we fund public education in Texas is that they have to be in a position that they spend all of their time studying that and nothing else. If you asked the Superintendent of the Arlington ISD, Mac Bird, if he understands how we fund public education he will not. He will refer you to Steve Brown, who is the district's chief financial officer, who spends all of his time doing that so he understands it. But the superintendent doesn't fully understand it. And I don't think it has to be that complicated.

Kelly: Representative Lewis, you know there's been debate about insurance cost and availability

between [Tony] Sanchez and [Rick] Perry. Where do you stand on that issue?

Glenn Lewis: Well I stand where I think all Texans stand. The cost of insurance is too high. The cost of insurance, the cost of it affects the availability. But you know, I represent a district where we've had availability problem for a long time. And we have been telling the previous government and this government and the previous insurance commissioner and this insurance commissioner that we have an availability problem in older, inner city neighborhoods. We've had it for as long as I've been in the Legislature and we've proposed solutions to it. And it has not been until their availability problem now affects some of the areas, the more affluent areas of the state, that now suddenly everybody thinks, oh we've got an availability problem in the state of Texas. Well, that's news. You know, we've been saying that for eight years. And have been asking, in fact my colleague, Lon Burnham, who represents the 90th district in Tarrant County, which is the district right next to mine. Lon is considered far left wing liberals in the Texas House of Representative. Right now you've got Rick Perry, Tony Sanchez, John Sharp, even David Dewhurst, all saying that we need to regulated insurance rates in this state. Ron [Wilson] filed a billed to do that four years ago and couldn't get it on the insurance committee. So maybe everybody else has now reached the realization of something we already knew and that was is that the cost of insurance was sky rocketing

to the point was that it was making it unavailable to many people but it's just that when the price starts to rise, you know it becomes unavailable to the poor people first and when it's unavailable to the poor people then it doesn't get quite as much attention until the cost gets so high that now it's unavailable to high wage earners. Now it's a problem.

Kelly: Moving on, we understand that you're in three committees. Can you please explain to us your role in those committees.

Glenn Lewis: The County Affairs committee, of which I am the Vice Chairman and I have been for the last three sessions. County government in Texas is kind of a strange animal. County government is set up as an arm of state government. They were set up to administer the state's business and their part of the state. That's constitutional. As such, the County government does not have home rule authority, unlike cities. Cities have home rule authority. They can pass any ordinance they want to pass as long as it does not conflict with state or federal law. County government have no authority to do anything that they were not specifically authorized to do by the state legislature. And all of those bills that come in that ask for changes in County government or giving them permission to do certain things, all those bills are reviewed by the County Affairs committee, which I am the Vice Chairman of. The same thing with the insurance committee. All legislation that has to do with insurance regulations and changes in insurance. And let me

explain the committee process. Committees are where, when you file legislation it goes to a committee. Most committees consist of nine members. Some of the more important committees, like the appropriations committee that looks at the budget, they have twenty-seven members. But the committees look at legislation first and studies it and get opinions from experts, they get public testimony in the committees. And the committee first has to pass the legislation out before it goes to the calendar and is set for debate on the floor. And the advantage that committees have is that we get to look at all this stuff. Once a bill get on the floor, for all the members to consider, there's no public testimony, there's no expert testimony, there's just debates between the members of the House as to whether or not we pass this bill. And I would say that eighty-five percent, at least eighty, maybe eighty, between eighty and eighty-five percent of the bills that are passed by committee are also passed on the floor by the entire body because the committees are the ones that have had the benefit of studying this bill, listening to all the public testimony and it is very seldom that the body would overturn a recommendation of the committee. And so that's why the committees are so important. Also I serve on the Constitutional Revision committee. Almost everybody in the state of Texas thinks that it's time to add a new constitution. There are things in our constitution that are supervioulous, that have absolutely no connection

to today's wealth at all. And so everybody that we've amended our constitution, 327 times I believe, we're working under the same constitution we've had since 1876 and we've amended it all those times. It probably needs to be updated and modernized. The Speaker created an ad hoc committee to study that. We've been studying it and studying it. We have not rewritten the constitution. One of the problems that we have is that while most people believe we need a new constitution and most people believe, agree on about eighty-five of ninety percent of what should go in the new constitution. It's that ten percent that people disagree on and if that's enough cause the constitution, to change it you have to have two-thirds of the legislature to vote for it just to put it on the ballot. And then once it gets on the ballot then the citizens and referendum vote have to approve it. And to come up with a constitution that can first be agreed upon by two-thirds of the legislature and then by majority of the citizens, it's very difficult because it's so all incomborsom that everybody can find something in there that they don't like, when you try to rewrite the constitution. And if that's something you don't like is enough to keep you from voting for it then it doesn't pass.

Kelly: We understand that you served as Vice Chairman of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus. Could you tell us about that please?

Glenn Lewis: Yes. In 1973, when some of the voting rights litigation mandated single-member districts for

certain legislative positions, suddenly we saw a proliferation of African Americans and Hispanics legislatives that had not been there before in those numbers. Mind you, when I say numbers, I mean fourteen of us out of one hundred and fifty. Before, there had only one or two in the fifties and sixties. So once we got to a point where there were actually enough members there to have a Black Caucus then they formed the Texas Legislative Black Caucus. We currently have fourteen African Americans in the House out of 150 and two in the Senate out of thirty-one. We make up the Texas Legislative Black Caucus. We are a group that comes together and tries to address ourselves to the issues that are a particular concern for African American people in this state. I'll also point out that we have a number of Caucuses that do the same thing. We have a Black Caucus, we have a Hispanic Caucus, we have a Women's Caucus, we have a Rural Caucus, we have Sportsmen Caucus, we have a Conservative Caucus and these are people who have certain things in common and they come together. And many people belong to more than one caucus. And they come together and try to address themselves to issues that are of concern that they have in common of that particular group. And so yes and I was very honored to be elected as the Vice Chairman of the Black Caucus.

Kelly:

So, being the Chairman, have you made, I'm sure you've made an impact, could you tell us about that?

Glenn Lewis: I've not been the Chairman; I've been the Vice Chairman. My job as Vice Chairman is to serve the Chairman. And I think in that case I have had an impact. To preside over the meetings when the Chairman cannot be there, to be sort of the Chairman's right hand person, to try to help determine, implement their agenda. And I've been privileged to serve in that capacity under two different Chairmen and in that respect I think I've had an impact on the Caucus. And what the Caucus does often times has an impact on the whole state.

Dana: Why do you think that Austin has not adhered to the single-member district?

Glenn Lewis: Well Austin, first of all, the city of Austin is a little bit different than any other city in Texas. Because of the University influence, the University of Texas, the state's largest university has been in Austin so long. It has been such a pervasive influence over the whole town and as you know, not so much today as in the past, but people who were more educated tended to be more liberal. And Austin is the most liberal town in the state of Texas. And it has that reputation so rather than when it came to the issue of having minority representation on their city council and their legislative body Austin is one that didn't have to be sued like Fort Worth was, under the Voting Rights Act, and forced to go to some single-member district scheme that ensured that there would be minority representation. Austin sort of did sort of a fact though they've always had minority since of the seventies, they've had at least

one minority on their City Council and it is because they as a city just decided that ok, that's a seat that's going to be a minority seat. And we'll let the minority community elect their representative and as a matter of custom and practice the rest of the majority or mainstream community will not run for that seat. We will make that a minority seat and we won't have to. The Supreme Court doesn't have to do it for us. And that's always held up and it's been sort of tradition. There's that one seat on that City Council that an African American files for and there's no other one they file for. And it strange that happens and there's another Hispanic seat. The same way. And they've always managed to maintain their representation in that way without doing that in a formal sense. We couldn't do that in Fort Worth so don't ask me how they did it.

Dana: How long have you've been married to Arveda Bailey Lewis? How many children do you have?

Glenn Lewis: December the 23rd will be twenty-five years I've been married to her. And we have two children.

Dana: What are there names?

Glenn Lewis: Jelani Bailey Lewis is the oldest. He is our son. He's thirteen years old.

Dana: Could your spell his name for me?

Glenn Lewis: J-E-L-A-N-I and Tiffany Gaye Lewis is our daughter. She's eleven years old.

Dana: Why have you pledged your support to Tom Craddick?

Glenn Lewis: Well, for a number of reasons. First of all, in the eight years I've been in the house Tom Craddick

and I have enjoyed a very, very good relationship. We have worked on legislation together that has benefited Tarrant County and Fort Worth. While we don't always agree on everything we have a very good working relationship, as oppose to the Speaker who is running against him, Pete Laney. When I came into the House Pete Laney was already Speaker and he sort of already had his cadre of lieutenants or confidants around him that was already in play when I got there. And I have not been able to establish a real relationship with Pete Laney. He and I have hardly had any conversations since I've been member of the House. I mean we have conversations that are light conversations, the weather and that sort of thing, but in term of discussing policy he has never asked my opinion about anything. We've never discussed policy and we've never worked on anything together. So I don't have the same relationship with Pete Laney that I have Tom Craddick. Up to now Pete Laney has been the only candidate. I've never had a choice in Speakers since I've been there. Now I do and so I am exercising that choice. Second of all, I don't want to see the bi-partisanship of the Texas House of Representative destroyed. And I think that we've enjoyed bi-partisan body and we've bragged about it and talked about that's how we get things done. And that's always been with a Democratic majority though and everybody understood that there's going to be a Democratic Speaker. So let's not talk about parties let's just talk

about which one you want to be Speaker. Well this time there's going to be a change for the first time in one hundred and twenty-five years. There will be a Republican majority in all likelihood and if the Democrats don't handle that correctly we're going to destroy all bi-partisanship in the Texas House. And we're going to end up like they are in Washington [D.C.] where all the Democrats sit on one side and all the Republicans sit on the other side and they all point fingers at each other and nobody exercises any independent thought. And I don't want to see that happen.

Kelly: What if the Speaker, what if Speaker Laney is re-elected and become Speaker, what happens in terms of his key appointments?

Glenn Lewis: In terms of his what?

Kelly: Key appointments.

Glenn Lewis: I suspect that I would not get one but I've not gotten one in eight years. So I'm no worse off than I am already.

Kelly: I'll like to move on to the question leadership. What is leadership to you?

Glenn Lewis: Leadership means being able to sort of ascertain what is in the best interest of whatever group or country or family or church that you're trying to lead and build consensus around that. Leadership doesn't always mean taking a poll and see what the majority is and go follow them. Sometimes leadership means taking chances and some of those chances means, you know, being about to ascertain and see what is in the long term best interest in

taking those position. You know if we voted simply majority and we did simply what the majority said to do then Brown vs. Board of Education and a lot of momentous decisions that have affected this society will probably have never been done because if you had taken a poll, the majority of the people in this country, at that time, they would have told you that they didn't want to do that. This University will probably still be not admitting minorities if you had taken a poll at that time. And most of the people in this state probably would've been against doing it. But there was leadership in this state that decided that irrespective of what popular opinion is, this is the right thing to do we know this is the right thing to do and we're going to do it. And of course we will be judged by history. And being willing to take those kinds of positions and step out and take those kinds of chances on occasion is also a part of being a leader.

Kelly: Well after you've shown us what a leader is, I would like you to point out what's the most effective African American politician today?

Glenn Lewis: And by politician you mean someone who's engaged in electoral politics.

Kelly: More like politics in general.

Glenn Lewis: Politics in general? There are a number who have been very effective. I'm not as familiar with those who are outside the state of Texas as I am with some who are inside the state of Texas. So those in Texas I'm more familiar with.

Kelly: If you'd like to comment about the local level.

Glenn Lewis: Okay. I think Ron Kirk has been particularly effective. That is colored by the fact that he and I are very good friends I suspect. And it results where he is up for a very big election one week from today that might make my view less objective but I think Ron has been very effective. Ron has done a very good job of walking a chalk line that all minority politicians have to walk. Because let's face it, ethnicity still remains an issue in many things in this country. And that may not be the way it should be but that's the way it is. And failure to recognize that is a mistake. And for somebody like Ron, who understands that if he carries too much favor or is favored too much by the North Dallas business establishment then the minority community in South Dallas begins not to trust him. And if he's favored too much by other minority communities in South Dallas then the more conservative business community in North Dallas, which provides a lot of his funding for his campaigns, they don't trust him. And so he has to walk that line. And one of the sayings people said when he became mayor of Dallas is that Ron got his money from North Dallas and his votes from South Dallas. Well, being able to have both of those groups trust you enough to invest their votes and/or their money in you is a very sticky position and it's a very precarious position to do. And Ron has done that very effectively as suppose to, I understand ya'll also had my friend John Wiley Price here, as oppose to John, which universally highly regarded

and trusted in South Dallas but couldn't get a penny from North Dallas because they don't trust him at all. And being able to have enough favor with both groups, particularly in city as racially polarized as Dallas is, takes a real talent to be able to and Ron Kirk's been able to do that very well. I don't know how long he's going to do it but he has been able to do that very well.

Kelly: On a national level, who's the most effective African American politician today?

Glenn Lewis: There's not many on the national level are there?

Kelly: Well, why do you think that is?

Glenn Lewis: Because the very thing I just mentioned. That's very hard. Can you think of someone who could get out there and be a national leader as an African American and have the vast majority of African Americans to trust them and be willing to follow their leadership and still have enough votes to be elected to a national position. I mean what kind of person will it take to be able to do that. You know, when Jesse Jackson ran for President, Jesse Jackson was almost universally supported by the African American vote and the Hispanic vote. But because of the positions he took that caused him to be so universally supported by that group, mainstream America would not accept him. And Colin Powell, on the other hand, is universally accepted by the conservative mainstream group but I think he would have some difficulty gaining that same sort of acceptance in the African American and Hispanic community. That's a dilemma that we as minorities

and elected officials have to deal with and most of the time it relegates us to having to represent districts, which are majority minority. Occasionally there are some differences to it. You have a mayor here in Arlington, Elzie Odom, who was elected in a city who has a relatively small minority population. But how many times have you've heard Elzie Odom speak out and take strong positions on issues that concern minority community? I suspect that if he did he probably wouldn't be the mayor of Arlington anymore, you know.

Kelly: Which is the most effective African American local organization today?

Glenn Lewis: Political organization?

Kelly: Yes.

Glenn Lewis: The NAACP is of course still very effective. I have to give them their props, you know they've been around a long time. And they are still not as effective as they were back when they were fighting the overt sort of segregation in Jim Crow that they were first came into being to fight. For the most part that type of overt racism has been eliminated and it is more culprit now. And not as easy to see and the NAACP has not been quite as effective when it comes to combating that kind of racism but I think as a result of what they were able to accomplish over the previous years still garner them a great deal of respect from people around the country. Also, let me plug my own organization, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. I belong to an organization of state legislators from

all over the United States who are African Americans. There are about 600 of us. We have an organization and we come together periodically during every year and we work on issues and because so many issues have now been devolved down to the states, you know that was part of the whole Reagan/Bush revolution that, you know, federal government doesn't need to take on all responsibility, we need to give some of that responsibility back to the states. Because the states now take on so much responsibility we have state legislators have been able to be very effective.

Dana: Are you a member of the NAACP?

Glenn Lewis: A life member and my first membership was a youth membership when I was about twelve years old. I'm also on board the Fort Worth Tarrant County branch and I also have served as the general council to the Fort Worth Tarrant County branch of the NAACP.

Kelly: What is the most pressing issue facing African Americans today?

Glenn Lewis: You know, between education and economic development, both of those things; they sort of go hand in hand. Because economic development seems to follow educational opportunity so I would think that educational opportunity is probably the most pressing issue. Even though we are getting access to education in more numbers than we have been before, those numbers are still lag far behind Anglo's percentage. And Hispanics even lag behind African Americans. And without providing

educational opportunities and educating people then we'll never going to be able to solve any of the other sort of social and economic problems that we have.

Kelly: What are the underpinnings of tension between African Americans and Hispanics today do you think?

Glenn Lewis: Well, I believe that many African Americans, whether correctly or incorrectly, that when were doing with Jim Crow and much of the sort of overt racism, and it was even dangerous, people were losing their lives, that Hispanics in large numbers, who we saw standing beside us on those lines when those battles were being fought. And there is a perception that now that being those battles have been won and there are actually some gains that come from it then many Hispanics are sort of joined in. After the furniture was moved they come in and enjoy it. I don't personally hold that view but I think that that's part of it. And I think that because Hispanic numbers are growing so large that many African Americans feel threatened by that. They feel that there numbers are so large and we cross over our own to get where we want to get and there gonna sort of come in and surpass us and people feel threatened by it and I think many Hispanics feel that because they have larger number, particularly in Texas, that African Americans in many instances have more gains and more positions than they do even though their larger numbers. And many people feel that's unfair. And so that's some of the

friction that exists. For example, in Fort Worth, we have an African American on every single elected body in Fort Worth and one Legislative delegation. We have no Hispanics on any except the school board and Hispanics outnumber African Americans. Well, really Hispanics think that's not fair.

Dana: Patricia Jones, in our class, has a question, "When the lottery was passed it was said that a lot of money from lottery sales would go toward education. What's happened to that"?

Glenn Lewis: It has in fact gone toward education. I think there was a missed moment. When governor Ann Richards was pushing the lottery program she said this might will help and will go towards our education. I think many people believed that that meant that the money would be dedicated solely to education. The money initially went into the general fund but education is a business taken out of by the general fund. So when you put money in the general fund pot it does in fact benefit education but I think many people felt misled because they thought it wouldn't go into the general fund it would be sort of segregated out and committed to education only.

Dana: Bruke also has a question, "If you were U.S. State Representative, of course, how would you have voted on the bill okaying war on Iraq"?

Glenn Lewis: I don't know because I did not take part in the debate. I was not there. The only information I have that's available to me was the information that has been sort of filtered through the press. And I

learned a long time ago that you cannot take at face value everything that you hear in the U.S. news media. And I'm sure that those people who had to vote who are members of Congress had access to much more information than any of us in this room have. And not having had that information I don't really know how I would have voted.

Dana: Karla Graham has a question, "As you mentioned earlier, the desire to be governor of Texas. Do you see that as an unchallenged aspect or are you working towards that now?"

Glenn Lewis: I would not say that I'm working toward being governor because I'm very happy doing what I do right now and so much of politics is dictated by opportunity. And I have not perceived a real opportunity for me to become governor of Texas as of yet. Should I be someday confronted with that opportunity than I might prevail myself with it, I don't know. That's not something I'm spending everyday working towards right now.

Dana: If we have any other questions from the audience.

Latasha McCrary: John Wiley Price said that he believes that we live in a desegregated society and not an integrated society. Do you agree with that?

Glenn Lewis: I agree with that whole-heartedly. And I know what John means by that, and yes I do agree that we live in a desegregated society and not an integrated society. You can be segregated by color coordinating the numbers and making sure there's so many blacks, so many browns, so many Anglos in every classroom, so many... you know. But truly

integrating this society is going to take something that we have not gotten to yet.

Dana: Pam has a question.

Pam Bass: Where do you sit in the House chamber and who determines who sits where?

Glenn Lewis: I sit on the front row and on the right side of the Speaker's desk. That's just a seat I chose. And the way we determine that is by seniority. Each member is called in after the elections certified and we know who's going to serve then you are scheduled an appointment to choose your seat on the floor, your office and your parking space in the garage. And their staggered so that they take the one with seniority first. So when you come in you have to choose from what's left because everybody with more seniority than you have already chosen. So they do that according to seniority.

Dana: Mitch has a question.

Mitch: You mentioned the insurance and the board of health. Black mold has had a big affect on the insurance premiums. Do you think that's been the biggest reason why premiums have skyrocketed?

Glenn Lewis: I think that it has been an excuse, yes. Whether or not it is a valid reason I am not sure. I think some of the insurance companies panicked, sort of panicked on that issue. To my knowledge I don't know of but one large judgment that was rendered in a black mold case and that was a couple of years ago in Travis County. And there was this large 32 million dollar judgment and all of the sudden the insurance companies started saying, "Oh my God

we can't litigate anymore black mold cases because juries are handing out these big awards." So they started giving big settlements for black mold without really exploring the merits of the cases and they said, "Fine, we can give the big settlements because we can always just raise the premiums to cover those." I think that it is still an unsettled question as to whether or not black mold actually causes the kind of damage that some people say it does. I think that needs to be tested.

Jose Gutierrez: Any other questions?

Dana: Brad.

Brad: What role do you think the fact the state representative, representative of policy insurance as all the other insurance industry?

Glenn Lewis: I think it gives them a lot of power and a lot of influence in the Legislature. Not quite as much as lawyers.

Dana: Well, on behalf of UTA for African American Politics we thank you and appreciate your time.

Glenn Lewis: Thank you for inviting me.

Jose Gutierrez: One quick question. This was sent, I guess, by your office, it says here 1955.

Glenn Lewis: Well, actually that's a misprint, it's 1995. I'll have to correct that, I'll have to get more corrected, it's 1995. I was elected in '94 and I began serving in 1995.

Dana: Well, thank you.