

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 30, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD M. KENNEDY

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Majority Whip Office, Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: Senator, very briefly, set the scene for us; when you came to the Senate, what you did previously. In other words, get us from the time that you were born up until 1964 or so.

K: Let me just say I was elected in 1962. My first real direct contact with President Johnson was in an indirect kind of way; it dated back to 1956. It was at the time of the Democratic Convention. I was with my father in the southern part of France. There was some speculation for the two weeks prior to the nomination that President Kennedy might be interested in running for the vice presidential nomination. And there were conversations during the two or three days before the nomination itself with my father. My father was under a strong belief that President Kennedy should not make the effort to secure the vice presidential nomination--

F: Because it was too soon, or because he thought it was a burying ground, or what? Or the wrong year?

K: He had a variety of different reasons. But the one exception to the rule in his conversations that I remember quite clearly was he felt that the only one that President Kennedy should serve as the vice president would be then-Senator Johnson. My father had a good deal of respect for Senator Johnson.

F: Did your father know Senator Johnson fairly well?

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K: I believe he had, from many years past, developed a relationship with him. I'm not really prepared to say how extensive that was, but I remember this standing out at that time even though it was fairly well understood that the nominee was going to be Mr. [Adlai] Stevenson.

Now I suppose bringing it on up to 1960, there was perhaps very little that I can add in terms of the convention itself. I can remember there was a good deal of distress on the part of President Kennedy prior to the nomination on the putting out of certain materials about my father being pro-Nazi. It was at least understood at that time that it was put out by some of the supporters of President Johnson. It was one of those events that move very quickly and only lasted probably eighteen to twenty-four hours.

F: Another one of those short crises.

K: I don't know exactly the origins of it or where, but I remember that incident that took place.

F: It was pretty well known that then-Senator Kennedy would be a front-running candidate for the nomination in 1960. There was considerable question whether Senate Majority Leader Johnson would allow his name to be offered. Was this ever discussed as a possibility, that Johnson would or would not be a rival, in any specific instances that you recall?

K: I think the President believed that he would be a rival and that he would be a candidate, and conducted his effort with that in mind.

F: He planned on it, in other words, as a possibility.

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K: That's right. And I think that was fairly well understood.

F: When did he first begin to think of Senator Johnson as a possible vice presidential running mate?

K: I remember his name being discussed by the President and my father the day, or the evening, or two evenings, before the actual balloting, the nomination. Once again, my father was very sympathetic to that possibility. There were other names that were being considered: Senator [Henry] Jackson, Senator [Stuart] Symington, Senator [Hubert] Humphrey, and also Orville Freeman. And then there was some consideration for one or two of the midwestern governors. I've always believed the personal preference for it had been my father's.

F: You arrived in Los Angeles fairly confident that you would get the nomination?

K: Yes.

F: So that you could look beyond that. Now then, it's fairly well documented that Robert Kennedy had an aversion to Johnson on the ticket. Did this have any great influence on President Kennedy?

K: I don't believe that Robert Kennedy had an aversion to President Johnson being on the ticket. I understand during the course of the conversations in that period of consideration that there was an indication that the labor groups would make a floor fight if Johnson was going to be on the ticket, and they expressed this view strongly to Robert Kennedy. In their conversations--between Robert and President Kennedy--this was a factor to be considered, and to be weighed and balanced. They indicated that several other candidates would be acceptable to them. When this issue finally developed, as I understand it, the

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Vice President and later President Johnson indicated that he was prepared to see a floor fight, and he decided to go. As I understand it, it was to Robert Kennedy that the labor leaders spoke. I was also conscious of the fact that Mr. Graham had spoken to President Kennedy--

F: Philip Graham?

K: Philip Graham--in support of President Johnson in that period.

F: Now you have the convention settled, and you coordinated the western part of the campaign.

K: That's correct.

F: Senator Johnson was sort of a transitional person between South and West and, I presume, was supposed to have some western attractiveness as a running mate.

K: That's right.

F: Now how did you and he coordinate, or did you tend to go your separate ways? In other words, how did you mesh your schedules?

K: What I'd like to do is perhaps go back to prior to the convention itself. The two states in which President Johnson had the strongest support were New Mexico and Arizona.

There was a very strenuous struggle for both of those delegations, which is a very interesting development. I hope you get from former Secretary [Stewart] Udall--

F: Yes, I have his account already.

K: --his account on Arizona.

F: I haven't seen Ernest McFarland to find out how he got away from him.

K: Yes. In New Mexico, the Johnson forces were very strong and President Kennedy only

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ended up with, I think, about six and a half or seven of the votes of seventeen or eighteen delegates. Those were probably the two areas that came across to the Johnson forces prior to the convention.

Now after the convention I went out--I stayed in the western part of the country--went to California and coordinated the campaign there and in the western states. I didn't have the scheduling responsibility, nor during the period of the campaign did I campaign with the--

F: So there wasn't any necessity for the two of you to work too closely together during this? Can you give any estimate on how effective he was as a campaigner in the West?

K: I remember a story that President Kennedy told me about President Johnson when he campaigned down in Texas in the middle fifties or early 1950s. Perhaps it was as late as 1956. He spent a couple of days campaigning with President Johnson, and they were at this big rally and President Johnson gave this really thumping speech--campaign speech--and about half way through the speech the fellow jumped up and said, "Give 'em hell, Lyndon." And President Johnson said, "I won't give them hell. I'm going to tell the truth and the truth *is* hell!" And the whole crowd enjoyed this.

My brother just remarked on how responsive President Johnson had been and quick to pick this up. He said they got to the next rally and at the same place in the speech this fellow jumped up again. And later on that evening he had a drink with all of them, and President Kennedy said that he thought he knew a few tricks up in Massachusetts politics, but he learned something new that day.

But he thought he was a very effective campaigner. I remember him expressing a

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good deal of satisfaction from that experience with the President.

I would say also, in terms of 1960, how much my mother appreciated the kindnesses of Mrs. Johnson and how kind Mrs. Johnson was to my sisters during that campaign. My mother was always deeply impressed by the thoughtfulness and consideration of President Johnson on a number of different times--and of course later on--and how thoughtful and considerate Mrs. Johnson was of my sisters when they campaigned in Texas.

F: I have a fairly good record of that, incidentally, from various people who were along on that Texas part of it with the ladies.

You lost Oklahoma, or the President did. And I heard your brother, the Attorney General, say one time in my presence that, "Well, we didn't know whether to stay on in California or go to Oklahoma, and the result was we blew both of them." Would President Johnson have been any factor at all in those two losing causes? Of course, as it turned out it didn't matter, but--

K: Yes, I don't think I remember any specific kinds of responsibility assigned him, certainly in the California case or situation. I was never really that familiar with Oklahoma. But California I think was lost because of the work on the absentee ballots, which was really never done. The ticket carried the state by 70,000 votes. There were 300,000 absentee ballots, of which 70 per cent of them went to Nixon and correspondingly we lost the state by about 60,000 votes.

F: Did the Vice President coordinate his part of the campaign pretty closely with President Kennedy? Or was he given a certain area to carve out and was left alone within it and

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operated sort of semi-independently?

K: You probably can get better information on that from others. [In] the Southwest and the South President Kennedy was hopeful the Vice President would be most influential, although he had a great reception when he came up to Boston that time, too.

F: Moving ahead, when you ran for the Senate for the first time in 1962, did the Vice President assist you in any way?

K: No. I can remember one time, though, in 1962 when President Kennedy called me up one Sunday morning and asked me if I'd read page 78 of the *New York Times*. I said, "No." It was down three flights of stairs from me. And he said, "Well, you go downstairs and get the newspaper, the *New York Times*." And I went down and got it and came upstairs. And he said, "Now you look in page 78."

There was a story about a classmate of mine, a roommate of mine, Claude Hooten, who was running in Texas for Congress against Bob Casey. This whole story was that the Kennedys were moving in on the Vice President in order to build a power base underneath Johnson in Texas. President Kennedy remarked that he'd heard about this already that morning from Vice President Johnson: What was this all about? And it certainly appeared to the Vice President, evidently, that since Hooten was such a good friend and close associate of mine that he wouldn't have possibly gotten in unless I knew about it, and President Kennedy. I gave every assurance to my brother that it was unknown to me. Actually at the end, Claude Hooten never did get out of the race. But on a later occasion when I was elected to the Senate, Vice President Johnson was, again, courteous in receiving Claude Hooten and myself in his office for lunch one day. We

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reviewed this and had a good laugh about it.

F: I think from some of Casey's later votes that President Johnson would have been better served by Claude Hooten because Casey was not an administration man by any means.

In the campaign of 1964, did you work with President Johnson, either before the Democratic convention in Atlantic City or in the campaign that followed? Or were you too busy with your own--?

K: No, I had a plane accident that spring, so I was in the hospital all summer. At the time of the plane accident, as a matter of fact, one of the earliest calls that I received was from President Johnson. And he was very kind to assure us that we would have the best in terms of the military doctors. They'd be made available to look out after me after my plane crash, which was again an indication of his thoughtfulness, and very much appreciated. Then he came to visit me when I was in the hospital up in Boston, when he was making his swing through New England.

F: Were you able, at that time, to keep a fairly good grasp of what was going on politically? All second-hand, of course.

K: I was, but I was out of touch because I'd been in the hospital recuperating.

F: Did President Johnson assist Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, with his campaign for the Senate in any way?

K: Yes, he did. He traveled and campaigned up in New York state and spoke in his behalf in 1964.

F: Were you active in any way? I realize your physical problem in this case, but were you active in any way in trying to work out Democratic national finances during this

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campaign?

K: No. I really wasn't.

F: This is really a lost summer for you.

K: That's right.

F: In 1966, did you assist with mid-term congressional elections?

K: Let me say, in terms of the convention in 1964, there's always the question about the vice presidential nomination and Robert Kennedy's interest in it.

F: I was going to come back to that, but I'll take it now. Let's go on now.

K: And you probably, I'm sure, have the story about the exchanges between President Johnson and Senator Robert Kennedy about whether he was going to take himself out or whether there was going to be a statement issued by the administration--

F: Now mainly on this I have only pro-Johnson accounts, so I would like to hear the Kennedy side of the story.

K: I haven't got the access at this point to Robert Kennedy's notes. I think he has some notes, but I haven't got them at this time.

But sometime in the spring there was a conversation that took place between the President and Senator Robert Kennedy. After that conversation they were talking about, I believe, other matters--I haven't gotten the material, but I do know the conversation took place. After that there was a phone call from Mac [McGeorge] Bundy to the effect that the President wanted Robert Kennedy to take his name out of consideration for the vice presidency, and Robert Kennedy indicated that he would not. And then President Johnson issued the statement taking the whole cabinet out at that time.

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F: The Attorney General felt that this was definitely a move to block him?

K: Yes. Yes, he did.

F: This is supposition on your part, but a fairly educated supposition: Did he think that it would be a sufficiently open convention if he stayed in the race that he might get the nomination? Or did he really think that Johnson might just be pressured into accepting him as a running mate?

K: He never really had made up his mind whether he was really interested in the nomination or not. He didn't want to foreclose or preclude any kind of opportunity. He realized that obviously heavy weight would be given to the President in the selection of a vice presidential candidate. But he was also--and he wasn't really sure that even if he was able to get on the ticket that he really wanted to be a vice president. But he didn't want to have that possibility foreclosed at that time. In any event, looking over the period of the recent history, the conventions themselves--particularly in recent time--had taken a position in making the decision who the vice president was going to be. And so at least he thought it was a possibility or an option that he wanted left open.

F: He'd keep the initiative.

K: That's right. He'd keep the option--the opportunity--open and perhaps something may or may not [happen]. He wasn't prepared to take himself out.

One of the sources of friction during this period of time that occurred was the apparent floating of the balloon for Sargent Shriver. It appeared that Sargent Shriver was receiving, in terms of White House attention--the balloon was sort of being blown up and lofted at various times. It at least appeared, I think, to other members of the family that

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this was a way of sort of heading off, obviously, Robert Kennedy's--you know, this possibility.

F: This has always been intriguing. Was Sargent Shriver actively courted by the--I don't want to oversimplify this and divide it into Kennedy and Johnson camps, and yet you do have two groups here. Was Sargent sort of nibbled at and picked off to a certain extent?

K: I think Sarge was flattered by the attention. I think it was viewed by members of the family that this was sort of an effort to sort of short-circuit Robert Kennedy, any potential interest that he might have. I think Sarge just went about his business, as he does very effectively, in terms of the job that he had and never really gave it any kind of serious attention, although there was modest speculation that he might be the figure.

F: The friction between the Attorney General and the President was rather largely due to just two strong personalities, wasn't it? It had nothing to do with the relationship between the office of attorney general and the presidency?

K: I think you're right. I think in those two personalities, they would have gotten along either terribly, terribly well or not at all, because they were very similar in many different ways. The personalities were either going to mix and move along well together or there was going to be a difficulty.

F: Were there times when they grew close together? Or did they tend pretty well to stay on guard at all times?

K: I think the times of greatest importance were in the immediate post-1963 period. I think these were periods of difficulty. Robert Kennedy appreciated the support President Johnson gave him in the 1964 campaign, and there were times--Robert Kennedy's

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introduction of President Johnson in New York at the Democratic State Dinner--where I think he was sincere in his statements and comments. I think there were warmer periods but I think a fair characterization was to say it was a pretty cool period of time.

F: One last question, then I know you need to go.

Did the Attorney General, so far as you know, consider seriously getting out of the cabinet immediately after Johnson became president? Or did he feel that there was this necessity for continuity of personnel?

K: I'd like to come back to that. Let's use that as a starter the next time.

F: All right. Thank you, Senator.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

Paul G. Kirk, Jr.

January 24, 2013

Ms. Nicole H. Hadad
Archives Specialist
LBJ Library
2313 Red River St.
Austin, Tx 78705-5702

Re: Edward M. Kennedy Oral History

Dear Ms. Hadad:

I am writing as Executor of the Estate of Edward M. Kennedy to authorize the Lyndon Baines Johnson to open to all researchers the three oral histories that were conducted with Senator Edward Kennedy in October of 1969, November of 1969 and January of 1970.

I am certain Senator Kennedy's views and observations will be a valuable resource for scholars and historians in the years to come.

With appreciation for your courtesies and for those of the LBJ Library staff through the years.

Sincerely,


Paul G. Kirk, Jr.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Edward Kennedy

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Edward M. Kennedy, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument available for research in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. At the same time, it is his wish to guard against the possibility of its contents being used to embarrass, damage, injure, or harass anyone. Therefore, in pursuance of this objective, and in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 507 (f) (3) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) this material shall not be available for examination by anyone for a period of five years, without the express written authorization of the donor. At the completion of said five year period, it shall be available after the Library has given the donor a 60-day notice in writing of the date of expiration and has received written acknowledgment from the donor of his receipt of notification, or, in the event of prior death of donor, from his executors or next of kin; unless, upon such notification, the donor, or in the event of the prior death of donor, his executors or next of kin, requests the Library to extend the period of non-availability.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed Edward Kennedy
Date 24 March 1971
Accepted Harry J. Waddleton - for
Archivist of the United States
Date March 11, 1975