

INTERVIEW II

DATE: November 13, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD KENNEDY

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

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

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: Senator, last time we closed with a question of mine on whether the Attorney General seriously considered getting out of Mr. Johnson's cabinet following the assassination.

K: Well, he did. Of course, his mood during that whole period through the latter part of 1963 and the early part of 1964--he wasn't really sort of thinking so much in terms of his own future or what plans he might have other than really spending a great deal of time with Mrs. Kennedy and with the children, and really drawing within himself.

I remember--I think it was in the middle part of the winter of 1964--he mentioned to President Johnson his willingness to go to Saigon as an American ambassador over there. I know that he had thought about this and made that offer, which President Johnson turned down. I heard afterwards it was primarily because he was concerned about the security of Robert Kennedy. So in his mind, he was thinking about--I'd say by early spring--alternatives. I couldn't give additional detail.

F: You can't put yourself in the other person's place altogether.

K: Right.

F: Getting back to you. Of course you were badly injured; did you play any role at all in trying to help with finances with the Democratic Party in 1964?

K: No. I had my plane accident in June--

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- F: So we just have to leave you out of the campaign?
- K: That's right. The President did come to visit me while I was in the hospital.
- F: Yes. We talked about that last time. In 1966, did you assist with the mid-term congressional elections?
- K: I campaigned in a number of different states in 1966.
- F: Did you find the administration of President Johnson a handicap, an asset or any sort of factor? Or were you concerned mainly with local issues?
- K: I found most of the speaking I did was in terms of local candidates, members of the Congress, some members of the Senate. I think there was great interest in the programs which had been passed by the President. I think anyone would realize the historical achievement of the administration through 1964 and 1965--through 1966 as well--in terms of passage of legislation.
- F: The end of the honeymoon hadn't quite come by then.
- K: No, it hadn't.
- F: When support began to build up for Senator Robert Kennedy to run for the presidency in 1968 instead of what was popularly supposed--waiting until 1972--did Johnson make any attempt to try to block Robert Kennedy's burgeoning popularity, that you could tell? Any effective effort?
- K: No. I know they had different meetings--
- F: At this time, of course, it was still presumed Lyndon Johnson would be a candidate in 1968.
- K: That's right. They had a series of conversations, I believe--at different intervals, during

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that period of time. I believe that in one of those the President had indicated to Robert Kennedy that he felt that Robert Kennedy's position on the war would mean the end of his political opportunity for success. There were a number of other discussions which took place, but I don't have any knowledge of them.

F: Obliquely or otherwise, did President Johnson ever hint that he might accept either you or your brother as a vice presidential running mate in 1968?

K: No, not to my knowledge.

F: Nothing even came to you that he might dump [Hubert] Humphrey?

K: No.

F: Did President Johnson ever try to play you off against Robert Kennedy?

K: No, I never felt that. I'd been able to, from the beginning--from the time I started serving down here, I had an easy relationship with him. I never felt that he was trying to play me off Robert Kennedy. I felt in 1964, as we went over last time, there was this kind of situation with Sargent Shriver. But I found that as far as my relationships with him, they'd always been good and favorable.

F: In a way now, in 1968, the selection of the Massachusetts delegation was cut and dried and yet it wasn't, and of course it came very early. What was your role in the selection of delegates from Massachusetts to the Democratic National Convention? That gets into what was John McCormack's role and whether Johnson tried to use him as a stalking horse.

K: In effect, the delegation was made up between the state political leaders and Speaker McCormack and myself. And I think [it] was a fairly representative group--

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F: Was this to head off any disruptions?

K: No, as you know, in Massachusetts we had a primary there, so anybody who was going to run therefore would get the committed delegation in any event. The only question was, Senator [Eugene] McCarthy had indicated he was going to run in the early part of the year. As Robert Kennedy was thinking about getting on into the race, there was a question whether I would run up there in the primary and try, at least, to secure the Massachusetts delegation in terms of Senator McCarthy. But those plans didn't really take shape, so Senator McCarthy ran and won.

F: What would be your assessment of the Massachusetts primary? That it was premature for the way things were going to evolve? It came too soon for a clear-cut picture?

K: Well, yes. The filing dates on that were sufficiently earlier and still this posed a question about running in 1968.

F: Did you ever get the feeling that the President was trying to get John McCormack to offer himself as a favorite son so as to hold off any Kennedy and McCarthy thrust?

K: There was some talk on this. The chairman, Lester Hyman, would probably best be able to talk with you on it. I know there was an effort to run the Speaker, and the Speaker would have none of it. But I know there had been a discussion about having the Speaker run--a consideration of it--but how serious that ever was I'm not sure.

F: Now the significant primary, in a way, was the one in New Hampshire.

K: That's right.

F: Did you work in that?

K: No, I wasn't involved in that, actually.

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F: Were you in touch with President Johnson at this time regarding politics at all, or were you just tending to senatorial business?

K: There were matters which I was interested in which brought me in touch with the President. So we were seeing each other not frequently, but not infrequently either. But at this time now, just prior to the New Hampshire, I can't think of any time I saw him.

F: Well, we'll move on to Wisconsin. Did you play any role in that? Things are changing all the time.

K: No, absolutely none.

F: In what ways did the removal of President Johnson as a candidate alter your strategy?

K: Well, I saw the President's speech when I was in Indiana during our first series of organizational meetings out there. And, of course, I was surprised to say the least, as I think all of us were. In terms of the change in strategy on it, I thought that to a great extent it removed one of the prime issues and questions, which was being raised by Robert Kennedy and Senator McCarthy, and that was the war issue. It really, to a great extent, defanged that issue for a period of time, turned it into a more traditional kind of campaign.

F: Should we get into Robert Kennedy's decision to run, or do you want to save that for someone working on--

K: I don't think I'd probably get to that--

F: Did you hear the President speak the night he removed himself?

K: That's in March--

F: March 31.

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K: In Indiana?

F: But were you listening?

K: Yes.

F: Did you have any advance leak that it might be going this way?

K: No, absolutely not.

F: What was your reaction?

K: Well, as I mentioned here, I was enormously surprised.

F: Were you with your brother?

K: No, I wasn't.

F: Did you call him? Did he call you?

K: No, I called him. He was flying from the West to New York. He heard about it in New York. I talked with him later that evening.

F: After he got in?

K: That's right.

F: Was there a sense of elation or relief or just a sense of "let's figure where we go from here"?

K: No, I think it was just real surprise. I think the impact of that hadn't really sort of settled in during the course of that evening. We weren't together. It was just a conversation about what the impact of this would be in the totality of the campaign. But it was difficult to sort of see at that time.

F: Moving on, when you offered yourself for the post of majority whip, did you ever discuss the possibility with President Johnson?

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- K: I called President Johnson to indicate that I was considering it. He was down at the Ranch. I called him about two days before my announcement. I believe it was on a Monday.
- F: This was so he's not caught by surprise as a titular leader?
- K: That's right. Then he returned my call probably a day and a half after that. As a matter of fact, I think it was a few hours after I had actually announced. I wanted to call him and indicate to him. I didn't have a chance to speak with him. He was away from the Ranch, and I didn't have a chance to talk with him.
- F: Did he indicate anything one way or another?
- K: No. No, he didn't.
- F: Did you ever think you perceived his hand, either on your side or on Russell Long's side during this?
- K: I don't feel he became active in it at all.
- F: So that he's no factor there. Did he ever discuss either your prospects or your brother's prospects for 1972, for the presidential nomination?
- K: Never talked with me about my prospects. I don't know of personal conversations with Robert Kennedy. I doubt very much whether he did.
- F: Did you get a feeling this was a reluctance on his part to anticipate anything beyond him, or just a kind of tenderness on the subject?
- K: Well, I think both. I think it was such a long way down the road even after that that I don't think it really became a bitter matter. I think it was only in terms of the issue of the war that the President really felt that Robert Kennedy had damaged himself.

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- F: Can you sort of reconstruct your thoughts, your assessments, of the Johnson Administration as he left office this past January 20?
- K: I think it's an amazing achievement in terms of the domestic programs. I think that the range and volume and quantity and quality of these programs that were passed during that whole period was an extraordinary achievement. I think the country is really the better for it. I think the whole problem of Southeast Asia, of course, adds a problem that is too early to really assess in terms of how history will evaluate it. Obviously, I stated my position but I think historians will be able to better tell in the long range.
- F: In the long range you don't know whether this is an interlude or whether it's major or what.
- K: That really has to remain.
- F: On a more personal basis, what contact did you have with President Johnson immediately following the assassination of your brother? Where were you?
- K: Well, I was presiding over the Senate. I went in the late afternoon-- that afternoon I went up to my parents with one of my sisters and while I was there he called my mother, and my father as well. He came to visit my father, I think, that Christmas time down in Florida as well.
- F: He and your father had a certain respect for each other.
- K: That's right. I think he was extremely thoughtful to both my parents, as Mrs. Johnson was in terms of writing to my mother, I believe. This was beyond what one would have even thought would have been routine kinds of consideration; routine kindnesses. I think it made a very important impression on my mother and my father and all the members of

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my family.

F: When you came back to Washington in the beginning of 1965 you made a call to the White House to discuss your back injury with the President, among other things. Did you discuss politics that time, do you recall? (Interruption)

K: When I talked to him in January, I went down to thank him for the courtesies to me when I'd been in the hospital because after the accident he called me and made available the military doctors. They came up immediately in the first few hours of my accident. I wanted to express my appreciation to him personally, which I did. Then I talked to him about the New England Regional Commission and could New England be included in the first group of regional commissions that were to be announced. That was the principal topical question.

F: Did he seem receptive to the idea?

K: Yes, he was, very. Subsequently New England was one of the early ones announced.

F: Did the President take any notice of the fact that you and Robert Kennedy were sworn in together, the first time that two brothers had ever been sworn into the Senate? This is at least a footnote to history.

K: Sure. I don't remember any specific communications that we had with him on that particular matter. There was a continuing, as I say, easy exchange of visits from time to time, but I don't remember anything on that particular experience.

F: You've been credited with a finely honed political sense and, once upon a time, Johnson was supposed to have that. During Johnson's days the Democratic National Committee went down hill--the machinery, the party machinery. Did he ever discuss this problem

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with you?

K: No, never did.

F: When Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated, what relationship did you have with President Johnson? I know he sent the plane, of course, to California, but in particular with you, what--

K: I talked with him on the phone on that. He was very considerate and came to the funeral up in New York. Then I left--

F: But it was just sort of routine. In 1968 President Johnson named you the trustee for the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Was this more than just a presidential commission which he made the appointments and let go, or was there some kind of close coordination between the Center and the President? Did he take an active interest, in other words?

K: What is the date on that again?

F: This was in 1968.

K: Well, I think Robert Kennedy had been on it. I think when that vacancy came up I indicated an interest in it. He was very kind and responded affirmatively.

F: He himself took no active part in the coordinating at all with the committee?

K: Not that I remember.

(Interruption)

F: Was the rumor-dropping of the Vice President in 1964 a really serious movement?

K: I've read about it in the press but--

F: Allowing for the fact that people discuss all possibilities.

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- K: --I never heard President John Kennedy talk about that.
- F: There wasn't, to your knowledge, any palace intrigue going on here?
- K: No, absolutely not.
- F: After Johnson became president was there really a Kennedy clique within the Johnson Administration? I've seen evidence that there wasn't and know well of people like Joe Califano, for instance, who crossed lines if there were lines. I wondered if this is just a case of people seeing more than is there.
- K: I think there were a number of people in the White House that continued to be very accessible--Joe Califano, Harry McPherson, who was there. And of course Larry O'Brien remained on right up through 1968. There still continued to be an easy relationship between, for example; Secretary [Robert] McNamara and our family and General [Maxwell] Taylor, Secretary [Stewart] Udall, a number of others that had been very much identified with President John Kennedy. I think if there'd been a feeling and reaction it was more in the political operatives, both the President Johnson, I suppose President John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. And that's probably somewhat understandable although I don't think it really was of much significance.
- F: After Mr. Johnson was elected in 1964 and had a term of his own definitely, then you and your brother tended in the next year or year and a half to move somewhat to the left of his position. Was this a conscious effort to disassociate yourself from the Johnson Administration, or did this simply evolve?
- K: In terms of support, of course, of the President's program; in terms of votes, I don't think you'll probably find more than three or four Senators that had better voting records in

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terms of administration programs than Senator Robert Kennedy and myself. I think our voting for administration programs is in excess of 95 per cent during that period of time. So it was very strong in support of those programs. There were areas where we felt we could be expanding some kinds of programs. It became more evident as the Vietnam War continued, of the reallocation of our resources. And there was the separation in terms of the war issue.

But I think, with regard to the domestic programs, I don't think you'll find any more senators who supported any more strongly or spoke for those issues more emphatically than Senator Robert Kennedy.

F: The only question was whether they went far enough.

K: That's right.

F: Did you get a feeling sometimes that Johnson as president was almost intrigued with statistics and just loved to get programs underway without maybe always having thought them through? That maybe he did raise anticipations beyond an ability to deliver?

K: I never felt that was President Johnson's problem. I think it was more the congressional problem in not appropriating funds for these programs. You take now the authorization of a billion dollars or so for the Water Pollution Control Act and only an appropriation of \$214,000,000. It's been changed now by the Congress. You built up great expectations and you could say, "Well, a president shouldn't ask for those kinds of authorizations." A lot of it was the Congress' fault on it. I thought, as I said before, the legislative program was an exceptionally fine one.

F: In the matter of space accomplishments, and of course we're in the midst of another now

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and we just had Apollo 11, did the Kennedys feel that President Johnson had deferred sufficiently to President Kennedy in proclaiming United States accomplishments in space? Along with that, would you compare his record in this latter respect to that of President Nixon? That may be a little loaded.

K: Yes. President Johnson had been very active from the beginning on the whole space program, space effort, and had a particular responsibility for it. It was getting started on it. It's difficult; who's giving how much credit to whom on this.

F: You can't always disentangle on this.

K: It's pretty difficult. I don't know.

F: I don't want to put you on the spot. This may be a personal interest of mine, but I had a feeling that Mr. Nixon kind of entered the game in the fifty-ninth minute and accepted the victory.

K: That's right.

F: You think that's a fair estimate?

K: Well, I think President Nixon did invite President Johnson to the launching. Now I don't believe any member of the Kennedy family was included--my mother or certainly myself and the others. That's a small indication, but perhaps there is something to that.

When they had the dinner out in Los Angeles, I think we got what was considered a sort of routine invitation that went to all members of the Senate inviting them on out there. And perhaps one might have expected, maybe not for me, but perhaps either my mother or someone in the family might have been invited to that. So there is at least some indication of in terms of--I don't remember really the references. I couldn't really

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respond on that.

(Interruption)

F: Have you seen President Johnson since January 1969 or had any contact with him at all?

K: No, I haven't.

F: Let's talk a little bit about congressional issues, shift to that. Your first major speech in the Senate was on the topic of civil rights, was made about the ninth of April, 1965. Did you attempt to coordinate your thoughts with the administration, or did you receive any endorsement from President Johnson on this?

K: No. This was a particularly important issue during that period of time. We had the Civil Rights Act, I believe, in 1965. So I thought it was timely and appropriate--

F: It's also right about the hundredth anniversary of the end of the Civil War.

K: Right.

F: Could you describe your relationship, or your brother's relationship, with President Johnson in the passage of these major civil rights bills in 1964, 1965, 1968? Open housing, voting rights and so on?

K: Well, they were enormously important and significant legislation. I don't know of any special kinds of--

F: There was no coordination with the Kennedys?

K: No, there wasn't.

F: Of course, you've got a disadvantage in effect when you support an administration that was against somebody like [Everett] Dirksen, where Johnson always had to bring him around on issues.

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K: That's right. I'd say that we worked very closely with Attorneys General Katzenbach and Clark, both of whom were appointed by the President, and we were deeply interested in having a strong working relationship with them, and in terms you might say of working with the administration. But there was no exchange--

F: Did you work with President Johnson on the control of firearms?

K: Only really again with the Justice Department, the Attorney General.

F: Ramsey Clark?

K: Ramsey Clark. The Immigration Bill as well.

F: Same thing with housing discrimination?

K: That's right.

F: What about anti-poverty programs after 1967? There's a great deal of criticism of the fact Johnson just put in legislation and never made any attempt to implement it.

K: You ought to get that story from Sargent Shriver.

F: Yes, I will.

K: I think there was some disappointment really in the President's real interest in the poverty bill in that year and the kind of support that was being given. It appeared that it really went completely on the shoulders of Mr. Shriver. We'd see him at times on weekends and, although he was still very loyal to the President, it was very clear the frustration that he was experiencing, but I'd rather have him tell the story. I gathered, and I know Senator Robert [Kennedy] did, the very clear impression that there was not the complete kind of commitment in terms of the funding of that program, that we might have seen in other times and other programs.

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F: The President made the only presidential address ever devoted entirely to the Indian problem, and you have been active in the problems of the Indian minority. Did the two of you ever cross lines on this?

K: No, we never really did.

F: Just a confluence of interest.

K: That's right.

F: What about the rash of riots that broke out in the spring and summer of 1967 and 1968, particularly the one here following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King? Did you have any relationship with the White House on this?

K: No, not really.

F: Let's shift to foreign affairs. You made a trip to the Far East in late 1965. Did you discuss your finding with President Johnson?

K: I'd have to check.

(Interruption)

F: Thank you, Senator Kennedy.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II

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.

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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. Widdleton - for
Archivist of the United States
Date March 11, 1975