

### INTERVIEW III

DATE: January 21, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD M. KENNEDY

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

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

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

F: My first question then is going to be, any further elaboration on the relationship between Senator Robert F. Kennedy and President Johnson between January of 1968, when the campaigning--or at least the preliminaries--began, and the Senator's death in June of 1968? In that period when you had the Tet Offensive, you had Johnson's problems with Vietnam; and, of course, you had Gene McCarthy coming forward and then your brother and then Johnson's withdrawal and so on, and then the campaign. I didn't know whether there were other things that we ought to take up or not on that.

K: I think the most revealing would probably be the discussions, conversations, that took place between Robert Kennedy and the President during that period of time. I'm not sure within that given framework whether this included the time that Senator Robert Kennedy was abroad in Europe and Asia--the trip in which he stopped off in Paris and had some discussions there with some French authorities.

F: Is this the one that the press played up so?

K: That's right.

F: It's earlier, but it's worth having.

K: And the subsequent return of Robert Kennedy and the conversation with the President. I think that was a subject of some misunderstanding, I suppose, between President Johnson

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and Robert Kennedy.

F: From your knowledge of it, was it as vitriolic as the press played it up, or did--

K: Well, I think there were some heated words on that. As I understood, there was some leak from over in Paris which was unknown to Robert Kennedy and eventually the leaks got out through--the newspapers came out as I understand it, and I haven't got my notes right here--came on out through some State Department officials. I believe that the President felt that Robert Kennedy had triggered or stimulated the leak.

F: Trying to bring some pressures before he got to see him.

K: There was some exchange during that conversation about--Robert Kennedy talked about the leak coming through *your* State Department to President Johnson. President Johnson said, "It's not my State Department. It's *your* State Department." Words to this effect, but it was the basis of some misunderstanding and some reaction and counter-reaction between the two men and I think added to some of the difficulty. I think it was an area of real mutual misunderstanding really between both of them. I don't think Robert Kennedy--I know he wasn't involved in any leaks and I could understand why the President might feel that it *had* come. But I think this was one of the problems.

F: Allowing for the fact that men who generally have the drive and ambition and attention to get to leadership positions are therefore strong minded and are likely to collide once in a while, is it a true estimate that you and your brother John came nearer [to] being able to sit and talk quietly with Lyndon Johnson than your brother, Robert?

K: I believe, though I wasn't really very active on the scene in terms of the 1961 and 1962 period--I was up in Massachusetts during that period of time. And, of course, it's really

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difficult although I always was under the understanding that the relationship between President Kennedy and Johnson was an easy and cordial, and no relationship....

I know there was some discussion about whether President Johnson would travel to Europe. I guess it was 1962. The date again would have to be looked at. I know President Johnson was reluctant to go on that trip. There was some conversation, exchanges, but during that whole period, it's my understanding the relationship was easy and was based upon a good deal of mutual respect and understanding.

The series of kinds of incidents, in terms of Robert Kennedy and President Johnson, which have been reported--what was always I think an unfair characterization is Robert Kennedy's desire to keep President Johnson off the ticket in 1960, which was completely false and fallacious but was always looked upon as being one of the areas of mutual kinds of disagreement. There had been some sparks that flew at the convention itself in terms of allegations and charges about Father and other kinds of questions--who put these out, and who was responsible for it. But these general kinds of questions, I think, for those who were involved in the thick of political campaigns and know what happens, are easily understood and appreciated--

F: It's part of the lust of battle, in a sense.

K: That's right. And I always felt an easy relationship with the President. I think there were a series of some, as I say, misunderstandings, although there were also, on the other hand, a number of incidents which showed a good deal of accommodation and mutual respect between President Johnson and Robert Kennedy as well. When you minimize and maximize those--I haven't had a chance in terms of the detailed review of Robert

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Kennedy's papers and notes on these things to at least get even a fuller appreciation of his feelings.

F: Was it much of a matter of concern to the Kennedys as to whether Sargent Shriver should remain in the Peace Corps and whether he should go as ambassador to France?

K: The question was really in remaining in the poverty program. I think that, as I remember, Sarge had indicated that he wanted to go out of the poverty programs about a year or so prior to the time he did leave. The President asked him to remain and stay, which he did do, and then the opportunity for service in France came up. Robert Kennedy was interested in Sarge helping in the course of the campaign. I think Sarge Shriver had made a commitment to the President about going ahead to France.

F: This was, of course, at this particular point one of the more sensitive posts. It's always major--

K: That's right. It was. It was at a time when the Franco-American relationships were at a low ebb and it was an important position. But Sargent felt that he had given the commitment, made the plans, and therefore wanted to go ahead.

F: Was there any feeling that Mr. Johnson was trying to persuade Mr. Shriver to, in a sense, absent himself from the Robert Kennedy campaign?

K: No. I don't think there was any--because at the time that Sargent took the job it was before Robert had gotten into it, although it hadn't been confirmed by the Senate.

F: Let's go back and talk a little bit about Mr. Johnson's program *vis-a-vis* your brother, President John F. Kennedy.

As you know, President Kennedy had a program partially underway and things in

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various stages of completion, or stalling, or whatever, but things certainly before Congress and a couple of years of, you might say, education of Congress, and then Mr. Johnson was thrust into the position of president. I'd be very interested in your assessment of President Johnson's extension of the programs of President John F. Kennedy--whether you think he overused the emotional thrust of the President's assassination or whether you think he was effective?

K: First of all, the achievements of President Johnson, in the domestic field, were truly historic and outstanding. I'd like to believe and I feel it's true that these programs, to a great extent, had been outlined and presented during the early 1960s, but President Johnson added an enormous amount of resourcefulness, energy and knowledge of the ways of Congress and the Senate in bringing them about and executing them. I think this is particularly true in that 1964 and 1965 period. I think really the record that was achieved during that period of time will go down in history as one of the most productive in history.

F: You would say then that he lived up to the question of continuity of the New Frontier ideals?

K: I felt so, very strongly in the domestic programs--commitment to these areas which had been a subject of the campaign of 1960, had been developed into messages and legislative programs, but had not been considered in the past.

F: In some cases study of the forces--

K: That's right--but I think through his energies and work [he] was able to bring many of them to fruition.

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- F: You never felt that he overused the emotional thrust of your brother's assassination?
- K: No, I don't believe so.
- F: Do you consider that President Johnson pushed through an indigestible amount of social legislation during his administration, as some of his critics charged? Or would you say that many of the social programs did not go as far as they could have?
- K: So much of it varies in different areas and fields. I think what we saw--the programs themselves--particularly in that 1964-65 period were really historic monuments. After that period we began to see the changes in the scope of the war itself, drawing away more and more resources for it.
- F: The war sort of stalled the social programs.
- K: Stalled--in a number of instances retarded--the directions that these programs were moving in. And in spite of the fact there were significant authorizations in many fields, the appropriations fell way underneath. We had some corresponding reaction of frustration about promises made and not lived up to. But I don't think it belies the very significant achievement of the President, particularly during that period of time.
- F: Did you have any liaison with the White House in your own attempts to alleviate the neglect of the American Indians?
- K: No, this was something that Robert Kennedy had been really terribly interested in, had been working on, and I really, though I'd been interested in it, really took up the cause after his loss.
- F: After you made your trip to the Far East in late 1965, did you discuss your findings with President Johnson?

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K: I did after 1968. I believe in 1965 as well. I'm not as clear on that.

F: Was this an analytical session after 1968, or did you just sort of report in and he said, "Thank you"?

K: Really, he was kind enough to see me and interested enough in some of the views. I tried to outline into some degree some of the observations which I later incorporated into a speech. I didn't feel it was appropriate for me to be speaking until I at least had a chance to check this with him. He was kind enough to give me that opportunity.

F: In a session like that, did he tend to be argumentative or defensive, or was he mainly interested in sort of drawing out various facets of what you had to say? In other words, what is his style in that kind of a meeting?

K: Well, I think he was tolerant of the view. I think he felt very strongly about his own approach on the question and strongly about the direction he was moving in.

We had a period in the summer of 1965, as I believe. He asked a number of congressmen down one evening in the summer--those who had been to Vietnam--to ask about their views and it was about a four- or five-hour session. I had a chance to express myself, so I think people appreciate at least that opportunity, particularly as members of the party and prior to the time that they were going to make any kind of public statement.

F: Did most of the senators at that meeting express themselves fairly freely?

K: Yes.

F: I don't have to tell you many of the senators, of course, have parted with Mr. Johnson on Vietnam policy. Was there ever any feeling of reprisal because of the difference of opinion?

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K: Well, it would be more difficult, certainly not with me. There never was. I would be able to really--

F: How much pressure can the White House put on? You read this, of course; this is a favorite columnist--particularly if the party they don't favor is in power and they say that the White House pressure is intolerable? Is it intolerable? Can it be made intolerable?

K: I think it can for certain individuals, certain members of the Congress and the Senate. I think--

F: Do these tend to be people without any particular so-called power base?

K: I think they are more susceptible to the influence. I mean, let's face it, if a study or a review by the Navy Department indicates that they are going to close down either Boston or New York and they reach the conclusion--as to terms of naval yards--and they reach the conclusion that in terms of cost and expense and evaluation it's about even--Stephen, I suppose it's pretty easy--and [if] there's one senator in there that's been sympathetic and understanding and is up for an election, and the other one is not, I suppose that has an impact. You can say well, does a few thousand jobs make a difference? I suppose that--

F: Yes, it does.

K: --makes a difference and it adds to the general kind of climate and community that a congressman or senator has the ear of the President. So it can be a force.

F: Did you ever discuss the Middle East situation with the President that you can remember?

K: No, I don't believe I did.

(Interruption)

F: Did you ever get any direct reaction from him as a result of some of your speeches on

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Vietnam?

K: No.

F: Did he ever discuss with you his attempts to cool the antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union?

K: Only in the sort of the general kind of problems that he was facing in Southeast Asia, relationships with the Soviet Union. He'd talk in an expansive manner about these problems but I don't think I could give you specific examples.

F: You never saw any possibilities of openings or coolings in this so-called Cold War?

K: No.

F: What about the possibility of reopening relations with China?

K: I can't at this point really remember.

(Interruption)

F: Did he ever talk about Latin America with you?

K: As I say, I just haven't had the chance to review those notes.

F: In general, would you say that President Johnson was effective, or not effective? Did the relationship with Latin America sort of deteriorate after he became president? I'd be interested in what you think he did in continuing the programs of President Kennedy, with regard to the Peace Corps, the AID [Agency for International Development] and the Alliance for Progress--

K: Well, the Alliance was cut back to some extent but not as much as some of the other programs. It was continued as the Alliance for a time.

There was a removal of a number of the people in the State Department that had

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been associated closely with the Alliance at that time, bringing about some other personnel in there that--so it was generally considered a hardening up of attitudes towards some of the Latin American countries. I would like to think at the beginning of the Alliance that the direction of it was the reduction of military kinds of aid and assistance to a number of the Latin American countries and an expansion of help and assistance to those countries that really were interested in helping and assisting themselves in economic terms. I think we found a reduction of aid under the Alliance, although, as I said, it was not reduced as dramatically as some of the other aid programs. But there was a continuation of the military kinds of help and assistance and, to some extent, even an expansion of some of those in terms of military aid.

I thought that just generally, in terms of economic aid, one of the very apparent problems was the fact that the foreign aid program is built on being opposition to communism, rather than as nation building. I think as it looked like we're getting into greater accommodations, or at least into a more livable situation with the Soviet Union, support for foreign aid declined. And I think there was very little done during that period of time to try and give it an uplifting, or at least placing some support behind the concept of nation building.

F: Do you get the feeling that the Congress and maybe the administration, too, to a certain extent, almost needs the thrust of scare tactics to keep foreign aid--

K: This is the history of it, you know. Arthur Vandenburg when he came down and talked to--Harry Truman said the only way you're going to get foreign aid is by scaring the hell out of the American people. And they did get it and when that scare began to disappear

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then there was a corresponding loss of support for it. We haven't had a president in recent times that really tried to build a new support for this concept. And I think it was attempting to be built in the early 1960s. I think President Johnson was really interested in doing the kinds of things domestically which he did so brilliantly, but this was an area of some loss, I think.

(Interruption)

F: Senator, to continue, do you consider Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach was removed from the position of attorney general to the position of undersecretary of state because he was an original appointee of President Kennedy?

K: I have no information that would indicate that, certainly at the present time.

F: You never had any feeling that having been named by President Kennedy made President Johnson doubt loyalty?

K: No. Because he was replaced by Ramsey Clark, who had served in the Justice Department under Robert Kennedy and had achieved a position of considerable significance and importance at that time, too. I hadn't attached any special significance--I think [Attorney] General Katzenbach was interested in moving on and this certainly did open up new opportunities for him.

F: Because of your brother's service as attorney general, of course, you had more than usual interest in the Justice Department. Did you see any change in the focus of Justice after Ramsey Clark became attorney general?

K: No, I thought he was a very courageous attorney general. I thought President Johnson was to be commended for appointing him. I remember at the time of his swearing in,

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Robert Kennedy and myself attended the ceremony. I had a great deal of respect for Ramsey Clark. I think he was really one of the outstanding attorney generals.

F: The position of attorney general, in a sense, is very badly exposed, isn't it. It is one of those that's just almost bound to become controversial.

K: That's true. I think particularly because the issues which the Attorney General was very much involved with, the civil rights issues, were basically very emotional kinds of issues.

F: Of course, crime and--

K: Crime and many of the other questions. But I thought both Nicholas Katzenbach and Ramsey Clark were first-rate men and I thought they performed admirably well. I think they reflected credit not only on their own selves, but also on President Johnson for their appointment.

F: A great deal has been said about some of the John F. Kennedy people who continued into the Johnson Administration and gave good, unswerving, loyal service. On the other hand, I rather gather that some of the strictly Johnson appointees became fairly close friends of some of the Kennedy people. I hate to put things in two camps, but there is a certain amount of that in the public view--like Joe Califano, Ramsey Clark, and perhaps Bill Moyers. Would you confirm that?

K: I would say in terms of [Attorney] General Clark, for example, because of the work on the Judiciary Committee, obviously because he had worked with Robert Kennedy, enjoyed mutual interest in legislation and in many other kinds of activities of the Justice Department, and had a very easy relationship there. In the White House, I think some of those you've mentioned--Mr. Califano, Harry McPherson--there were a few others--Bill

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Moyers--who I think always had their first loyalty to the President, but were interested in maintaining liaison and association with--

F: There weren't then two hard and fast camps?

K: No, not certainly--with these men you've outlined. I think there were perhaps, as in any kind of situation, of those--I think those men you've mentioned were men of considerable ability and commitment to the President, as I say, and to the nation. I think, perhaps, there were some of the political operatives of the administration who might have been somewhat harsher in their judgments or motives. But I remember one of the statements that was made by President Johnson that he never wanted to hear, in early 1964, any derogatory remarks made about either the Kennedy appointments or the family. There was never a time that I think that he wasn't himself--or he wanted any of his staff to be trying to make life any more difficult than it was.

F: You came to the Senate, of course, long after Senator Johnson had departed as Senate Majority Leader, but you overlapped with a lot of people who were in there with him. Did you have any opportunity to observe the deteriorating relations between President Johnson and Senator Strom Thurmond?

K: No, I never--

F: Did you get the feeling that Senator Thurmond, in effect, was conducting a vendetta against the appointment of Abe Fortas as chief justice?

K: Well, I think vendetta is such a difficult, strong word to use. I think he can be harsh in his judgments of people and personalities.

F: Are you talking about Thurmond?

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K: Senator Thurmond. I think he was, in the example of the Fortas case.

F: As chairman of the Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees, did you have any contact with President Johnson?

K: Very little.

F: In what other ways did you--did your membership on the Judiciary Committee bring you into contact with the Johnson Administration? Or did it--?

K: Well, mostly on the questions of civil rights, which as I mentioned was through Ramsey Clark and Mr. Katzenbach.

F: Did you have any contact with the White House through your service on the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare?

K: Well, to some extent, but perhaps the best example was the time of the railroad--or was it the airline?--strike. The President asked the members of the House Labor Committee and the Senate Labor Committee to come down and he had the meeting which Secretary McNamara and Secretary Rusk attended, and Willard Wirtz. They wanted to get some immediate legislation and the House committee actually caucused and embraced the proposal that was then outlined by Wayne Morse. The Senate Labor Committee met in the Cabinet Room--the President excused himself--but failed to, at that time, agree on the legislation. Eventually they had some hearings and eventually the legislation was actually defeated. I remember that incident myself as being one which the President attempted to meet what was, appeared to be, a considerable crisis.

F: On that committee, of course, you worked very closely with Senator Ralph Yarborough.

K: That's correct.

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F: Have you had any opportunities to observe, or has the Senator talked with you about how deep the antagonism between him and President Johnson had become, or occasionally becomes?

K: Not really.

F: It's an elastic thing in a way.

K: That's right. There was some incident involved [?] 1964--in the election itself--which I'm not particularly aware of now the circumstances of it. But there was--in which I heard Senator Yarborough think [?] that there were being some efforts made to discredit him. Outside that time I don't--Senator Yarborough's so active in so many different fields, he's usually talking about those.

F: Does he run a fairly taut committee meeting?

K: He's an effective chairman and he's now just assumed the chairmanship. He's been up in a situation where he's been running for election so he's been very active and busy this year. But he has a broad range of issues and I think he's been extremely fair to all the interests involved.

F: As chairman of the Subcommittee on Federal-State Community Services, did you have any relationship with the Johnson Administration?

K: No, very little, mostly on the aging. We, of course, had some exchanges in terms of committee hearings and process but nothing really outside of that.

F: Did you work at all in the fields of health, housing, consumer interest, the elderly?

K: Yes, but most of that was with personnel within the department, there wasn't really anything in the executive.

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F: Nothing that would have put you in contact directly?

K: No.

F: Okay, as a wind-up then, journalists and other varieties of political pundits have a tendency to describe the Democratic Party during these years as consisting of a Johnson group and a Kennedy group. We've talked about that to some extent. But do you think it is true as an analysis? Is it an oversimplification? Or does it place an undue emphasis on the personalities of the two presidents? Or were there some sort of fundamental or superficial antagonisms?

K: I think that there were some obvious, strong personality differences between President Johnson and Senator Robert Kennedy. I think there was a very strong belief, certainly on my part, that President Johnson had carried through the legacy of President Kennedy in terms of domestic policy. There was broad disagreement in terms of Southeast Asia, which led to increasing kinds of personal antagonism between Senator Robert and the President. I think there was a good deal of mutual respect for each other in terms of ability and concern and commitment and I think that--

F: You don't think it ever got in the way of getting on with the main business of governing the country?

K: No, I never felt that way.

F: I'd be interested in one final question, and that is since Harry Truman, with the aberration of Dwight Eisenhower, we have picked all our presidents from the Senate. At least they've had senatorial experience, if they didn't come in directly. Why do you think this has come about? Do you think it's just a coincidence of history?

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K: I think it's a combination of factors. One, I think, is an increasing appreciation by American people of the importance of having at least some kind of an experience or involvement in foreign affairs, with which under the Constitution the Senate is charged. And which, obviously, a governor does not have, and perhaps the principal rival to the Senate would be governorship. And I think the complexities of the problems of local and state government in terms of meeting the extraordinary expanding demands in terms of services in those states, increasing the taxes of the people in those communities, have given a premium to those governors who have been able to govern effectively and develop a national kind of image and respect.

F: Once upon a time--we can personalize this--Senator Robert Taft was supposed never to be able to get the Republican nomination because he was too exposed as a senator, whereas other Republicans who did not have the national exposure made it, at least not the national political exposure. You don't think this is any longer viable?

K: Well, I think besides Taft--I think it's even true today, he was a very exact, outspoken personality on every issue. I think our people want frankness and candor and openness. I think the system for those that are outspoken and are involved in the controversial and complex issues--[they] are going to have difficulties. I think one of the things that we learn in politics is that, to a great extent, it's the enemies that defeat you rather than the friends which elect you. And when you're constantly saying aye or nay on matters which involve great emotion day after day and year after year, it's difficult to keep those that work enthusiastically for you and their concern and commitment. Now you have public figures, and there are in the Senate today those who have been able to do it, and it's no

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less respect that Taft had the difficulty. Of course, he was running against a man of extraordinary acceptance.

F: His timing was bad.

K: That's right.

F: Well, thank you very much.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III

## 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