

John H. Sharon Oral History Interview—JFK #2, 1/16/1968
Administrative Information

Creator: John H. Sharon
Interviewer: John F. Stewart
Date of Interview: January 16, 1968
Location: Washington D.C.
Length: 35 pages

Biographical Note

John H. Sharon (1927 - 1980) worked as a legislative assistant to Representative George Howell of Illinois. He also served as a Democratic Party campaign organizer in 1956 and 1960, and later as a Presidential adviser to John F. Kennedy (JFK) on foreign affairs. This interview focuses on Sharon's role in the Kennedy administration, his impressions of the White House staff, and various controversies that occurred during JFK's presidency, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed March 9, 1970, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any

concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Sharon, John H., recorded interview by John F. Stewart, on January 16, 1968, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By John H. Sharon

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy 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, John H. Sharon, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, the tape(s) and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy 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 terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

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 John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed

John H. Sharon

Date

March 5, 1970

Accepted

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

March 9, 1970

John H. Sharon—JFK #2
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Sharon's relationship with John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s staff
1	On assembling various task forces during Kennedy administration
3	Stevenson Report
5	On foreign economic policy
9	JFK's appointment of Adlai Stevenson as Ambassador to UN
12	Stevenson's involvement in Bay of Pigs
20	Sharon's involvement in Kennedy's appointments to Supreme Court
23	JFK's alleged first marriage
24	Edward "Ted" Kennedy's decision to run for Senate and controversy
27	November 1961 Firing of Chester Bowles and shake-up in State Department
31	JFK's opinion of Cabinet members
32	Criticisms of White House staff under Kennedy administration

Oral History Interview

with

JOHN H. SHARON

July 16, 1968
Washington, D.C.

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Could you just describe your relationships with the Kennedy staff as far as the setting up and operation of these task forces were concerned?

SHARON: Yes, the President-elect did dictate a letter to me and suggested a form of operation with respect to setting up the task forces, and it was a letter that he never sent. I received a telephone call from Chester Bowles because, by mistake, a copy of the letter had gone to him, and it was suggested in the letter that I meet quickly with Chester Bowles and others. In telephone conversations that I had with the President-elect, he had asked us — when I say us, I mean George Ball and myself, principally — to go forward and get a task force going immediately on Latin America, the USIA [United States Information Agency] program, foreign economic policy, Africa, and there were one or two others. This was in addition to the separate memoranda on specific subjects that he'd requested when I'd been down to see him on the 14th of November, the weekend after his election. In carrying out the mandate on the Latin American task force, we assembled some names of experts whom we knew to have special competence in this area, and the first two people we called said they were confused because they had just received a telephone call from Ted Sorensen and that Ted had told them that he was

[-1-]

setting up a task force on Latin America for the President-elect and wanted them to serve.

At that point, and in view of the confusion over the letter, I talked to George Ball at some length and felt that we should suspend our operations entirely because to continue with such obviously unclear authority was a duplication of effort, and we didn't want to do anything to embarrass the President-elect. So we did suspend.

I telephoned him shortly thereafter, told him about the letter, and told him about the conversations that we had had with potential Latin American members of that task force. He asked me if I had seen the letter. I said yes, that Chester Bowles had sent me a copy, and he said, well, he didn't send the letter because after he had dictated it, he felt that that was not the most efficient and economical and intelligent way to proceed. He said to me, I remember very clearly, he said, "I told Ted [Sorensen] to turn over all those task forces to you because Ted has too much to do." Then he rattled off to me the responsibilities he had assigned to Ted, not the least of which was the Inaugural Address and the State of the Union and a few other messages that had to have immediate attention. He suggested that I get in touch with Ted right away, and I said I'd be glad to do that but I thought that it was imperative for the President-elect to call Ted and reinforce the President-elect's intention of what he wanted who to do. And so on the Latin American task force and all other task forces that were either in the domestic or international field, it was his hope at the end of that phone conversation that Ted would extricate himself from whatever he was doing and concentrate on the other assignments that he had been given.

The next morning I had a telephone call from Ted Sorensen and Ted apologized for the confusion that had arisen and suggested that we get together right away. We did; George Ball and Ted and I did meet. He had already, in fact, established several task forces; most of them in the domestic economic field. The only one that he had gotten off the ground in the international field was the one on Latin America. And because most of the people in the domestic area had been contacted, we decided to divide them. Ted took the domestic and we took the international ones, except for the one on Latin America.

[-2-]

I also drew up an outline of the form that we thought the task force reports should take. The President-elect had been very precise in saying that he wanted specific recommendations with respect to actions that he could take administratively, or by executive order, that could put some of these programs into immediate operation if necessary: what would be required by way of legislation and why. And he asked us to a limited extent to sort of cost out some of the recommendations to the extent that we could, though he was not as much interested in that as he was with substantive proposals.

The meeting with Ted was quite amicable; the division of authority and responsibility was clear; there was no attempt to embarrass anybody. We told him that we had suspended because we had thought we would be embarrassing the President-elect if we continued. It was quite clear to me that the President-elect had, in fact, telephoned Ted after my conversation with him, and that's what prompted Sorensen's call to me.

Subsequent to that meeting, George Ball and I met with the President-elect at his Georgetown home. For that meeting we prepared a memorandum of all the task forces that were in operation, who had jurisdiction over them, and I showed him the outline form that George Ball and I had drawn up which reflected the President-elect's intention in terms of being concise, with precise recommendations, be they administrative or legislative. We went over that with him, and he said, "Have you and Ted met?" I said, "We have." And he asked, "Is everything amicable and

agreeable?" I said, "Yes." And he said he wanted all this stuff before his Inauguration, though he wasn't quite sure whether any of it would be incorporated into the Inaugural speech. So he gave us a pretty firm deadline. He went over the proposed outline of the reports, said he liked that; it was concise and what he wanted.

And then we chatted at some length about foreign economic policy. Before we got into that subject, he said that he wanted to compliment George Ball and the rest of us on the Stevenson Report, which he said he had read from cover to cover two or three times and found to be of enormous benefit to him, and that Adlai Stevenson had indicated to him orally that it had been drafted and written principally by Mr. Ball. He thought it was a first-rate job, very helpful to him, and

[-3-]

answered many questions which he had in the area of foreign policy which suddenly came to his mind the day after he won the election.

STEWART: May I ask you something about these task force reports? Did most people who were working on them to any great extent have the feeling that this was an opportunity to set some basic approaches that the new Administration was going to use? Were they looked at in this sort of critical or crucial way as far as setting down something that the Administration was going to adopt and maintain for a while? [Interruption]

SHARON: What was the question again?

STEWART: The question was whether people generally who were heavily involved in the task force reports looked on them as something that would be of great importance as far as the general direction the administration was going to take in all these areas. Were they looked at as very critical, or was there a certain amount of doubt as to precisely how they were going to be used?

SHARON: No, I think they were looked upon as something very, very important. And they were viewed that way simply because the mandate for their existence came directly from the President-elect, it didn't come from the President-elect's staff. He wanted, as he indicated to me, some fresh, new, positive, productive thinking in some of these critical areas, and he didn't feel that merely resurrecting campaign ideas which had found themselves in the speeches — some of them did not, but those that did — he just felt that that could not be the springboard from which he was going to formulate administration policy. So he turned to people who weren't connected with the campaign and were not identified with him — they were professors, economists, trustees of foundations, people of all walks of life, businessmen, etc., who traveled around and had great experience — to get some new thinking down on paper. [Interruption]

[-4-]

STEWART: There was no specific mention of other Cabinet people, either then or at any other time?

SHARON: Not that I can recall. He was greatly impressed with [Robert S.] McNamara and Ball, [C. Douglas] Dillon. He expressed a frustration that the rest of them weren't as tough and as precise and didn't have the carry-through that these fellows have. And, of course, I was very pleased to hear him talk about George this way because I could tell by the way he shot from the hip on this one that he meant it.

STEWART: This business with the White House staff and the interference or non-interference with assistant secretaries and undersecretaries that you mentioned a while ago, were there any changes throughout the three years or during the three years in the way the White House staff operated or the general atmosphere there as far as interfering too much in affairs that properly belonged within the departments?

SHARON: Well, it's awfully hard to answer that question, not having been there. But there is no question that... [Interruption] ...in changing the direction of our foreign and domestic policies. And think that perhaps the most critical one at that time, the one that the President-elect was bothered by the most, was the whole question of the balance of payments. And that was one that was rather uniquely in the competence of George Ball, and we made him the chairman of that task force report. Once we had a meeting on it at Kennedy's house, and George gave him a briefing on this whole problem of foreign economic policy: What the problem areas were; what were some of the things you can do; what were some of the things you do not do. I remember after he was elected president, I think on two or three occasions — [Myer] Mike Feldman, Ted Sorensen, George Ball had many,

[-5-]

many meetings on this question.

Now, this task force report formed sort of a basic document from which they worked. I would think, in going over the substance of all the task force reports, that the one that had the greatest impact on policy, the one which was adopted by the President-elect, subsequently when he was President, almost word for word was the one on foreign economic policy. That, again, was one that was George's particular competence. He was then designated by the President as Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs. And I'm quite confident that George Ball never would have been named to that post had the President-elect not been exposed to his thinking, both in the area of the balance of payments question as well as foreign economic policy problem. He got a first-hand exposure to Ball's articulate, imaginative, and rather constructive approach to things, and he was greatly impressed.

STEWART: Did you get any impressions from discussing this whole matter of the balance of payments and other foreign economic problems as to Kennedy's understanding or comprehension of all of the issues involved?

SHARON: I think the fairest thing to say is that he recognized his own limitations and inexperience in some of these foreign fields. As he listened, for instance,

to some of the briefings that he was given, he sounded more like a student. He was always probing with very precise and incisive questions. He had a very economical mind, and he could grasp a problem, and if the problem didn't lend itself to an intuitive solution to him, he would fire back a question. If you didn't have the answer, you obviously had to supply it later on because he wanted the quick answers.

But there was no doubt in my mind that he was so tired, physically and mentally tired, as a result of the campaign that he had to turn somewhere for some fresh briefing after he got physically rested, some briefing that he could rely on, that wasn't biased, that dealt with the facts, the problems, and alternative solutions to those problems. I think that they probably served their greatest purpose in educating him to what the problems were and the various courses

[-6-]

of action he could take as President. Now some of them, of course, required legislative proposals, which he did send up to the Congress, but others did involve administrative orders. But I think they served a real contribution.

I think another ancillary contribution that they served was that we had with us the mechanism (we had the personnel; we had the secretaries; we had the office space; we had the files) that could turn out for him quickly — and when I say quickly, I mean within twenty-four hours — a memorandum on about any subject that he had in mind.

I remember very vividly when a meeting with President Eisenhower was scheduled and I got a call from Clark Clifford. He had just had a call from President Kennedy. I guess the sequence went: a call from General [Wilton B.] Persons at the White House to Clifford saying what Eisenhower wanted to discuss (there were nine items on the agenda); and this had been passed on to us, and we volunteered to drop everything we were doing and get up a briefing paper on each subject for the President-elect. And we did that; we did it over the weekend. What we did was we wrote a page of facts on each subject, a page of questions that he might want to ask.

STEWART: Copies of that are in the files you gave us.

SHARON: Yes. But I do remember that Clifford and [Allen W.] Dulles and Paul Nitze, I believe, had dinner with Kennedy the evening before his meeting with Eisenhower, and they said that he went over it page for page, and with his very photographic type of memory, he committed most of it to his mind, and he made a great impression on President Eisenhower the next day.

STEWART: Well, you had seen him then, according to my notes and again from your files, on the second of December and the meeting was on the sixth.

SHARON: Sixth, that's correct.

[-7-]

STEWART: Do you recall him talking about the meeting coming up with Eisenhower? Does anything outstanding come to mind as far as...

SHARON: Yes. We sort of cautioned him, I remember, about not getting himself committed to sending off a personal observer to Paris. There was an international meeting in Paris that Eisenhower's people were attending, and we felt certain that the President would probably suggest to Kennedy that he send along an observer. We thought that that was probably unwise, told him so, and told him why, and he did admit that he had had some conflicting advice on that already but that his instinct was not to send anybody. He had no agenda, yet, as to his meeting with Eisenhower and didn't give us any specific instructions or assignments with respect to that meeting until the agenda came to his attention. At that point, he wanted to be briefed. That's when we suspended the task force operation, shifted to a briefing paper operation, and the following Monday and Tuesday we went back to the other tasks.

STEWART: Okay. We move on to some appointments that you may have been involved in. Well, first of all I think you mentioned that when you delivered the initial report, the Stevenson campaign report that was prepared during the campaign, he asked you about a number of people who had worked on that report, namely David Bruce and probably Robert Lovett.

SHARON: And Bill Fulbright.

STEWART: Fulbright. Were there any other Cabinet positions that you either made recommendations for or were asked your opinion of by the President or anyone on his staff?

SHARON: Nothing that specific. As I think I may have mentioned before, he did say that one of the frustrating problems he was immediately faced with was staffing the federal government. And in that connection, he was concerned about the appointment of ambassadors abroad, particularly their living allowances and their

[-8-]

ability to speak the language, two subjects which seemed to concern him. And he was anxious to have a list of Democrats and a list of Republicans who had competence in the area of foreign policy. He rattled off two or three Republican names, and he said, "Beyond that, I don't know who there are." And so we did prepare for him, in a special memorandum, a list of all the Democrats that we knew that we thought had particular competence in the area of foreign policy and all the Republicans. I must say, you can go over the list — which I'm sure is in the files somewhere — and you'll see an awful lot of those names were appointed to something in some post in his administration including, I was very happy to see, Dean Rusk. I was worried, after Rusk got appointed, that we'd overlooked him, but when I looked it up on the file, he was there.

I think that, on the part of the Kennedy staff, they looked upon our involvement as sort of a desperate holding operation for Stevenson, desperate in the sense that we were still hoping that he'd be named Secretary of State. I think the political realities were so clear: Kennedy did not have that in mind, and it wasn't in our mind at all. I think it may have been a question in Stevenson's mind as to whether he was going to be so picked, but it was quite clear in talking to

the President-elect that he didn't have it in mind. What he wanted was ideas; he wanted recommendations on substance; and he wanted names that he could filter and go over.

STEWART: How about the appointment of Governor Stevenson as Ambassador to the U.N.? Were you at all involved in it and in what way?

SHARON: Well, I was involved in it principally from the Stevenson side of it. President Kennedy, as you may recall, summoned Stevenson to his house at Georgetown and told him he wanted him to be the U.N. ambassador.

But that was before the Secretary of State was selected, and Stevenson didn't know who it was going to be, nor did the President-elect. There was no doubt in Stevenson's mind that he could work with Fulbright. He was an old friend of his. He could work with Dean Rusk, but that wasn't a name that was being bandied about at that point. And he said that he couldn't unconditionally say yes, he'll take the job,

[-9-]

until he knew who his boss was going to be. And he knew that the realities were that the Secretary of State does, in fact, have the Ambassador to the U.N. report to him, as it should be. Stevenson was very firm on that. I think that probably irritated President Kennedy because I'm sure he wanted to announce right away that Stevenson had accepted his offer to be U.N. Ambassador.

Stevenson agonized about whether he had done the right thing, but I don't think that there was any doubt in his mind that for his own self-respect he wanted to know who his boss was going to be. He didn't honestly want to go back into government. He would much have preferred to have stayed in Illinois and practice law and spend more time with his grandchildren, but he did feel that he could help the President-elect, that he had a contribution to make, whether it was at the U.N. or any other place. Kennedy had said that he wanted him to sit in on Cabinet meetings and consult with him directly on policy, and all of that, I think, intrigued Stevenson, and so he took the job. He didn't want it. I think in fairness people that were closer to him than I was would say that he did want the job of Secretary of State, but he's a realistic politician and knew that that was a very, very remote possibility, very remote. I saw a lot of Stevenson after he was Ambassador to the U.N., and he wasn't the happiest U.N. ambassador, but under the circumstances, I think he was a lot happier up there than he would have been down here as Secretary of State.

STEWART: Really?

SHARON: He was involved in the kind of diplomacy that he was expert in. He wasn't subject, up there, to as great a frustration as a lot of the Cabinet members down here were, many of whom felt were being short circuited by the White House staff. The Irish Mafia got the reputation, rightly or wrongly, of being suspicious of everybody who walked in the door to see the President, either alone or with somebody else. They never knew how solidly their advice was accepted; even though the President himself might agree with it, he wasn't sure whether he would communicate his agreement to his staff. So there was that frustration that most of the Cabinet had here.

[-10-]

I'm sure Stevenson would have been most unhappy — particularly Stevenson. I don't think he would have ever been able to fulfill the role of Secretary of State the way President Kennedy envisioned it. I think he envisioned that role as one where he, the President, would make the policy and the Secretary of State would carry it out. He wasn't looking to the Secretary, as Eisenhower turned to [John Foster] Dulles, for initiating policy. Stevenson would have been a policy initiator. He would have been full of ideas and suggestions, as he frequently did make them. But Kennedy wanted and needed a man more of Rusk's temperament and background and experience. And I think for Kennedy he was the ideal Secretary of State.

STEWART: Did you say you were relatively close to Governor Stevenson throughout that whole period?

SHARON: Yes. It was a rather frustrating period for him, I think. He wanted to be helpful, but he wasn't ambitious. He was tired. He wasn't young. He didn't have the vigor for government service. He had a great deal of admiration for President Kennedy. I think he had more admiration for President Kennedy than President Kennedy had for him. Whether that was still an outgrowth over the 1960 primary situation and the presidential election year, I don't know.

STEWART: Did he feel this himself? Did he recognize that possibly...

SHARON: Oh, sure. Sure, but he at all times maintained his self-respect. Had he made a deal to become Secretary of State in return for having come out for Kennedy at some early point in the primaries, well, Stevenson wouldn't do it in the first place, but if he ever did it, he would have found it very difficult to live with himself. That was one of his great "weaknesses" as a governor: He wouldn't make deals with people. Very unpopular.

[-11-]

STEWART: Maybe there's no need of really going in, although it's tempting, to what Governor Stevenson's feelings and reactions were to various things because, well, for one thing, I think there is a group at the University of Chicago who are probably doing some interviewing of people who knew Governor Stevenson. You'll probably be asked to go over all this again at some point in more detail. So maybe there's no point in going...

SHARON: Well, that's a subject that Clayton Fritchey would have to be interviewed on because Clayton was quite close to the President and he was also working for Stevenson at the U.N. There were many times that Clayton would fly down here for the weekend, spend the night at the White House, and if there were any problems that existed between the President and the Ambassador to the U.N., why, Clayton Fritchey tried to smooth them out. He was a lot closer to that situation than anybody else.

Of course, the whole question of the Bay of Pigs is one which was a great frustration to

Stevenson. I hope that the history books will somehow correct the record on his involvement in that because there were some people not directly, in my judgement, associated with President Kennedy but who were in his administration who tried to put the whole blame for that fiasco on Stevenson. And he was not consulted about it. Despite certain newspaper stories that were leaked out of the government that he had flown down here in the middle of the night and tried to persuade President Kennedy to call off all the air cover and all that, that was pure fiction, not a word of truth in it, because I remember when these reports first came out, I called Governor Stevenson and asked him.

As I say, Clayton Fritchey is.... If that story is ever developed by the Kennedy Library, I think Clayton would be a much more objective and knowledgeable source than anybody else; to another extent, George Ball, because George, being in the administration and as close as he was to Stevenson personally, was very, very much aware of the relationship between the two men and any tension, friction, or disagreement that might have existed.

[-12-]

STEWART: Well, let's move on, then. You mentioned the Bay of Pigs. You were involved in the investigation that took place after the whole thing. Could you describe, generally, how originally you did get involved in this?

SHARON: Yes. I've never mentioned this before, but there were several people in CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] who came to [Thomas D., Jr.] Tom Finney and myself. Tom Finney, being one of my law partners and having been a former CIA official, was absolutely dismayed at how this was botched up. And they told us their side of the story, and we had to evaluate it. Tom and I prepared a memorandum for the President on what we thought was the problem (basically, bad information) and how it could have been avoided and how it could be avoided in the future in other areas of the world. We then discussed it with Mr. Clifford. Mr. Clifford had an interest in this simply because he had helped draft the original statute in the Truman administration which created the Central Intelligence Agency.

One of our recommendations was that we thought it was imperative that the President-elect get an independent evaluation of the intelligence that he was getting from CIA or any other source. And there was the vehicle to do this in the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board which President Eisenhower had once created but never did much with. So that was one of our recommendations that he immediately reinstate this board; get outside, trusted, top people in charge of it; and let the President use it to whatever extent he wanted to use it.

So armed with this memorandum, which was unsigned, Clifford went over to talk to the President one day and said that he'd been giving a lot of thought to this whole problem of the Bay of Pigs: How the problems arose, how it could have been avoided, what should be done in the future to stop it, analyzing its impact.

[-13-]

So the President read the memorandum, called Clifford a few days hence, did institute the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. He asked Clifford to serve on it. I think he named James Killian as chairman of it. They were on their own from then on. At that point, Tom Finney and I

felt that we'd accomplished our mission, and we had our law business to do, so we let Mr. Clifford slip out of here half the time, certainly half of the time in those days. And he worked on that board which did a lot of work for the President.

I remember seeing the President that spring. I had brought the Woodrow Wilson Fellows from Princeton in to meet the President. We chatted about a lot of things. The President took me over to the window, and he wanted to know how Clark was. He had just named Clark to the board. We talked about the intelligence problem, and I could see that he was troubled by it and wanted to ride herd on it and seemed to be relieved that Clifford was at least willing to accept this particular assignment for him, because Clifford had turned down several others he'd been asked to do. But that was the extent of our involvement in it.

STEWART: Did these fellows from the CIA come to you because they knew you might have access to the President or could get...

SHARON: Yes, I think so. It was based on (a) friendship and (b) the fact that this was a disastrous situation and if the President didn't take some corrective steps immediately, it could be a worse disastrous situation in other parts of the world. I will also say that they gave us other examples that were pretty horrendous, which we relayed and which were subsequently investigated and found out to be horrendous. And corrective action was taken. At least to the extent of my knowledge of it, corrective action was taken. And they were, fortunately, never publicized.

STEWART: But that was the extent of it?

[-14-]

SHARON: From time to time during Mr. Clifford's tenure on that board — and he still is, you know, now he's president of it — we'd get similar types of feeds. We can't evaluate it; it's not our job to. But since we trust the sources, and they come from numerous sources in the covert and the overt field in that Agency, why, we always pass them on and let Mr. Clifford decide whether or not he wants the board to investigate it.

STEWART: Jumping back a little, you mentioned as a topic in your original conversation with [Joseph E.] O'Connor the whole matter of the meetings that Ambassador Stevenson had with [Mikhail Alexeyevitch] Menshikov during the transition period. Do you recall this?

SHARON: Oh, yes. I would have to go back and refresh my recollection, but I do recall, yes. Menshikov was going around seeing several people.

STEWART: That's right. He had seen Averell Harriman.

SHARON: Seen Harriman, he saw Stevenson. Who else he saw, I've forgotten. But I do remember that Stevenson was very sensitive about not saying anything to Menshikov which in any way committed the President to any particular

line. It was Stevenson's view — and it was also Kennedy's — that this was sort of a concerted softening up process that Menshikov was involved in. I remember Ball and I asked the President-elect what he wanted Stevenson to do because Stevenson was obligated to get back to Menshikov. At that point, the President-elect said that Harriman had reported to him his visit with him and that his advice was for Stevenson to carry on these conversations, but probe for any new areas of possible accommodation. If it was just a rehash of old crap, as the President would say, it was probably a waste of his time and Stevenson's. But was he anxious to keep these lines of communication open and to see, really,

[-15-]

what new was developing, if anything. As it turned out, there wasn't much new there.

STEWART: This would have been when? In early December probably?

SHARON: Yes, yes. It was in December, before he was inaugurated. And Menshikov didn't want to see — he thought it was presumptuous to call, apparently, on the President-elect, so he went and saw people he thought were more approachable than the President-elect whom he had known. So he talked to Harriman and Stevenson. I think there were one or two others. I've forgotten who they were. But all these people reported back to Kennedy, obviously, right away.

STEWART: But nothing of any import ever...

SHARON: No, I was very impressed with Kennedy's reaction to it. It was not the enthusiastic, boyish type of thing, "Oh, gee whiz, what's this all about?" It was a very cold, calculated probing as to, "What's new about all this?" There was no false enthusiasm. It was all very straightforward: If he has something new to say, let's find out what it is. It's not unlike their trying to probe the Hanoi people today for what's new. I was very impressed with Kennedy's coolness and calmness all during this. He had an enormous amount of self confidence, but it wasn't arrogance. When he knew that he was on an area or a subject where he was not well-informed, you could quickly comprehend that because he'd just fire questions away like a machine gun. They were sharp, penetrating questions.

STEWART: He had absolutely no fear of possibly embarrassing himself by asking questions.

SHARON: Not at all, because the questions were so intelligent and so all-inclusive and so very much to the point that far from being embarrassing... The only people that were embarrassed were the men who were being asked the questions because they didn't have all the answers.

[-16-]

STEWART: You mentioned, I think, in a memo that's in your files some problems you had with Governor [G. Mennen] Williams soon after he was appointed

Assistant Secretary of State, he wanting to move fairly fast and, for example, to appoint some Negro and Arab deputies to meet visitors. Is there anything more about that, offhand, that you can think of that probably wouldn't be included in....

SHARON: Well, he did, I remember, Governor Williams called one day and said that he was about to announce a national committee to advise him on African affairs. I urged him very strongly not to do that.

STEWART: Excuse me, why was he calling you?

SHARON: Well, he knew that we were writing a task force report on Africa. You'll remember Governor Williams was the first appointee in the State Department. We had been given our assignment on Africa, and the moment that appointment was announced, President Kennedy asked me, the President-elect asked me to call Williams and tell him what we were doing and that the next time he was in Washington to come in and we'd give him a briefing as to the general areas and subject matters we were covering. We didn't want him on the task force for very obvious reasons; we wanted this to be independently evaluated. We didn't want him committed to something that he felt he'd have to sell. We wanted it evaluated by the President, the Secretary of State, for whatever use they could put it to.

So he called one day and told me about the committee, and I urged him not to do it. I told him I thought he ought to check with the President-elect first. I realized I had no such authority to be telling him, Assistant Secretary of State to be, what to be doing, so I called Clifford and I told him what Governor Williams said and how I'd reacted. He was pleased. He said, "You'll find that when governors come to Washington, they try to conduct their affairs as if they were still governors of a state. And they've got to realize that this is a totally team effort and they're working for somebody else. They're now an employee."

[-17-]

The subsequent meeting I had with President Kennedy, he did mention that, made some reference to Soapy Williams, which was not derogatory. It was just that, you know, "Keep him toned down if you see him. Keep him briefed but toned down." I remember seeing him at the White House once and he said that.... Well, at that point, Soapy Williams had been abroad to Africa and had made that "Africa is for the Africans" remark. I remember President Kennedy said, "Who else is Africa for but the Africans?" He said he couldn't get disturbed over the remark, and he asked me if I were disturbed over it. I said, "No, not at all." And in that conversation I had with him on Africa, we talked mostly about aid to African education, which we felt was the most critical part of the whole African task force. I regret that not more was done in that whole area.

STEWART: Did you, through your involvement in these task forces, get called on or get involved in other related areas like this...

SHARON: We got asked a lot of questions about personnel. I mean, he asked me one day — I guess that that was the same day I was over there — that he had

to have an ambassador to Gabon right away. [BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE II] And he asked me, "Where the hell is Gabon?" And I made a wild guess: "The west coast of Africa." He wanted to know who were the top people on our task force, who were the real able, bright guys that he ought to consider appointing. And I gave him several names, some of whom he did appoint to various jobs. But in terms of getting more involved in substance, no, we didn't.

On the USIA report, I did talk to him about some of the recommendations in that, and I went over and had a long talk with [Edward R.] Murrow about the report. Ed had been on the task force. He was one of the few people who was actually a task force member who got, like George Ball, appointed to be in charge of the area in which he was most competent. But beyond that, there wasn't....

[-18-]

STEWART: You mentioned this meeting you had in February with the President. There was some discussion then, or did he ask you if you were going to join the administration yourself?

SHARON: Well, I had crossed that bridge when I was down in Florida. I was pretty tired after all this work. I decided that I wouldn't stay in town for the Inauguration, that I'd go down to Florida and rest. My colleague, who was also working on it, Tom Finney, decided that he'd fly down right after the Inauguration. We were down staying at George Ball's place in Cocoa Beach. Tom got a phone call from Ralph Dungan, and Ralph said, "Can you please tell me where John Sharon is? The President's mentioned his name three times today as to what we're going to do with him here in the White House." So at that point I realized I had to decide pretty soon whether I wanted to stay on the outside or be prepared to say yes to whatever he offered.

And I was very impressed with the graciousness with which President Kennedy went about it. What he did was to call George Ball the day I went over to see him, after I got back, and asked George what I preferred to do: Did I want to come into the government, and if so, what did I want to do; but if I didn't, he didn't want to put me into a position of forcing me, you know. George told him that he didn't think I wanted to go in because it was an opportunity for me to start building my law practice, particularly since George had left the firm that I was with. So when I went over there, he asked me, "Tell me what you want to do." He didn't tell me that he'd talked to George Ball; he just said, "What do you want to do?" That was the easiest way to answer; I didn't have to say no to the President. That's awfully difficult to do.

[-19-]

But I would have not gone to the White House staff, simply because I don't think the White House staff would have liked it. They were a pretty tight-knit group of fellows. They were very loyal and more closely identified with the President than I was. While I was very loyal to the President, I felt that he ought to have around him men who not only trusted him and whom he trusted, but who trusted each other. I know Fred Dutton had his problems over there not being one of the Irish Mafia. He was one of the few there that was not, and he found it pretty uncomfortable, too. I think anybody on the outside who had any sensitivity about that was wise to say away.

STEWART: Just one more and then...

SHARON: Well, I can keep on going because I don't think I — that I know of.

STEWART: All right. You mentioned that you were involved in the two Supreme Court appointments that President Kennedy did make, namely Byron White in April 1962 and Arthur Goldberg in August of '62. First, Byron White: Do you recall how you got involved in that whole situation filling that vacancy?

SHARON: Well, that's a bit of an overstatement. If I said that, I probably misled the record, and I should correct it. What happened was that President Kennedy called my partner, Clark Clifford. I came over to be Mr. Clifford's partner in '62, January '62. I was with him one morning when he got a call from President Kennedy, and President Kennedy said, "What's your thought about appointing a Negro to the Supreme Court?" And Clifford said, "Well, I think that's something that we ought to talk about and not make a hasty decision on." He said, "Well, I've got to make my mind up pretty quickly. How about coming over tomorrow at 5:30," or 5:45 or whatever it was. So Clifford said he would.

[-20-]

In the meantime, I drew up a memorandum which analyzed the ages of all the members of the Supreme Court. The gist of it was that if President Kennedy was in the White House for at least four years, and probably eight years, he would have at least two, probably, four appointments to the Court; that his first appointment would probably be the most important because it would set the tone for the rest; and that if it were a Negro, it would obviously be thought of as strictly a political move. [Interruption]

STEWART: You wrote a memo saying that the first appointment, if it was a Negro, would make him look bad.

SHARON: Well, the memorandum was pretty much restricted to the analysis of the present Court. It didn't have too much of the politics involved. That was more or less orally expressed by Mr. Clifford to the President.

When Mr. Clifford went over there to discuss this with the President, the Attorney General was there. The President turned to the Attorney General, being his brother, and asked him for his view. And the Attorney General, as it was reported to me, simply said, "We have one hundred ninety million Americans in this country, and 10 percent of them are Negroes; therefore, we should have a Negro on the Court." Clifford, being more of a lawyer, greater experience in the bar, felt that this was not the time; that President Kennedy would be better served if he appointed somebody of legal competence not based upon race or creed or anything else. Mr. Clifford, I know, was a little bit surprised to find the Attorney General right there on one side of the President's desk and himself on the other. We had also drawn up a list of six or seven other people who we thought would lend greater dignity to such an appointment. As I recall, the name of White was not one the list.

STEWART: He was a surprise, I guess.

SHARON: Yes, I think he was. It was a very excellent choice.

STEWART: How about the appointment of Arthur Goldberg?

[-21-]

SHARON: He succeeded [Felix] Frankfurter, didn't he?

STEWART: Right.

SHARON: Well, it was more or less the same thing. It was Bobby against the pack. It was a Negro against a Jew in that situation. We had suggested Henry Friendly as a man of great stature in the bar. He was Republican, and perhaps he was more conservative in his views than the President might have wanted to have on the Court. But in terms of competence and in terms of his acceptance in most the judicial and legal profession, he would have been second to none. I gather that the President — I know the President did consider him very seriously because he told several of his staff, and some even called here and checked out Henry Friendly, "Find out all you can about him." But he preferred to have a Democrat, more liberal leanings, and certainly Goldberg filled that particular bill.

STEWART: Were you involved in any other judicial appointments? Or were you asked on many occasions for your opinions of various people?

SHARON: I wouldn't say I personally was. There were times when we would get a call from the White House staff. It was usually Ralph Dungan. He was working in the personnel area, and he would call Tom Finney or myself or both of us. Sometimes he'd call Clifford directly, and the President frequently called Clifford directly. Very frequently, when Clifford would get a call and didn't have what he thought was the quick ready answer, he'd ask Tom and myself to come in and we'd all discuss it. And to that extent we'd try to be as helpful as we possibly could. We were involved in a lot of evaluations of people who were in the business community who were known to us either through our clients or who were clients of ours, and we were able to give, I think, what was a reasonably objective assessment of a man's competence to hold a particular job. There were very frequently times when we said, "No, that's no guy for the job; he's not strong enough." Our advice wasn't always followed, but we gave it.

[-22-]

STEWART: Another item you mentioned was the whole business of President Kennedy's, quote, first marriage. Again, how did this...

SHARON: Well, this came up, again, through the Kennedy family to Mr. Clifford, and they'd asked for Mr. Clifford's advice as the family lawyer, so to speak, as to how this should be handled and what should be done. I remember going to the Library of Congress as an individual and getting out the so-called *Blauvelt Genealogy*,

looking it up, and, sure enough, right there in black and white it said that John F. Kennedy was married to so-and-so Blauvelt.

STEWART: [Durie Malcolm] Desloge.

SHARON: What's her name?

STEWART: Desloge.

SHARON: Desloge, yes, but she was a Blauvelt by birth or something like that. Her married name....

STEWART: That's a family name, Blauvelt.

SHARON: The family name was Blauvelt, that's right. And there were all kinds of rumors that were being fed into the White House. Finally, I remember — well, I remember two or three things about it. One is that I told Clifford I thought he ought to go and talk to the President directly and get the facts, which he did. And the facts were very simple: he'd never married her; he'd known her in Palm Beach; he'd dated her frequently before he was married, but he'd hardly ever seen her since. In fact, I don't think he had seen her since. But the fact that this genealogy existed, that it was in black and white, that it was printed — people believed it.

The *New York Daily News* was going to publish it. President Kennedy got word of this, and he called Clifford as his lawyer and said to Clifford, "You call the *New York Daily News*

[-23-]

and tell them that they publish that at their peril." I think Clifford was about to carry out his instructions, and I intercepted him because that would have been a perfectly publishable, non-actionable story for them to have printed, that "presidential advisor Clark Clifford called us to say that we'd publish the story at our peril." Now they could publish that; that's perfectly true. There's no defense to that; whereas, if they did publish it without anybody interfering, they were certainly actionable. So Clifford did not call them and carry out the instructions of the President. I've forgotten precisely how the word got to the *New York Daily News* that they'd better not publish it because it was false. I think that maybe the *New York Daily News* was smart enough to consult one of their own attorneys, who probably just told that it would have destroyed their newspaper, they could never have survived a libel suit of that proportion.

It was subsequently discussed how to get rid of the issue, and the only way you could get rid of it — and I remember it came up again when we were talking about whether or not [Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy ought to run for the Senate, and if he did, how we ought to handle his cheating incident at Harvard. We felt that if it had to be published, it should be published in some way that was the most beneficial to the President. So it was published as a news item in one of the news magazines — I don't know whether it was *Time* or *Newsweek*; wasn't it *Newsweek*? They published it under "Press," how the press was handling this story and how it was false, which was, I think, a very acceptable way to get over it. It died; I think it died pretty quickly. I

remember some people were suggesting that we find this woman and fly down and get her to execute an affidavit. She was interviewed by a lot of people, newspapermen.

STEWART: I think she lived in Newport, Rhode Island, or...

SHARON: I do know that one of the times there was a suggestion made to interview her, why she was down in Florida....

STEWART: [Durie Malcolm Desloge] Shevlin, you mean.

[-24-]

SHARON: Yes, that's right. She'd been married three or four times.

STEWART: But you didn't get into it any further; for example, trying to find — there were two or three other people who had assisted the fellow who wrote the genealogy, who passed away.

SHARON: No, I did not get involved. I just ascertained what was printed and what should and shouldn't be done about it, and it was really in the role of advising Clifford how to advise the President more than it was advising the President directly.

STEWART: You mentioned the matter of Senator Edward Kennedy and his reply to the question about cheating at Harvard. Were you involved in any other way in his campaign other than this?

SHARON: Well, I was involved in the original family problem that they had as to whether or not Ted should even run, and, again, it was as a result of Clifford having gotten a call, this time from the father. Ambassador Kennedy called Mr. Clifford at his home over the weekend once and said that there was a problem that had come up with respect to the Massachusetts campaign and he wanted Clifford to talk to the President and to the Attorney General about it, which Clifford did. It was interesting to me to see the sort of inter-family competition, because Bobby wanted to talk to Clifford about it before Clifford came to any conclusions or recommendations to the father or to the President. Bobby was opposed to his brother running, naturally. Then there was the question of Teddy's record at Harvard; it wasn't too clear and would Clifford look into that.

I think Clifford used me more as a sounding board for his own ideas on this than anything else, but he had concluded in his own mind, Clifford had, that Teddy should not run, he was too young for the job. The other aspect of it was secondary; they had the facts, they ascertained the facts as to whether or not they were fatal if he should run. But Clifford had come to the definite opinion he shouldn't run anyway. I argued very strongly on the other side because I

[-25-]

told him I didn't think that he had been asked by the family to ascertain whether Ted's age disqualified him or not. I felt that the factual situation, as I saw it, in Massachusetts was that this was the year; if Ted was going to make a race, he ought to do it. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose, and I thought, in my judgement, that if he handled this Harvard problem correctly, it could help elect him and not hurt him.

I think, in fairness to Clifford, he in a couple of days swung around to the other side, and he was persuaded that this was something for Ted to work out on his own and he probably should run. In the meantime, Clifford had all the facts on the problem and went over and talked to the President and to Bobby. And as I recall the facts, Bobby was opposed still; the President was sympathetic; Teddy wanted to run, but he obviously saw that the family had pulled in this outside advisor to advise it.

I remember getting off the plane with Clifford out here. We had gone off to visit some client somewhere, and we were flying back here, and Teddy met us at the airport. So I gracefully got a cab and came home, and they closeted themselves out there for some time.

When it was decided he was to run, then we got into the question of how to handle it, and I did get involved in that. I drafted up a statement as to what I thought (a) the President should say if asked at a press conference and (b) how it should be handled by Teddy in Boston if he were asked. It seemed to me that the most important thing was to get this out into the open very quickly, to plant the question and have a good answer ready, and to have the President's answer, if he were asked, coordinated completely with Teddy's. It's so easy to have these things fall between the chairs. It worked out very successfully. I think Teddy handled himself at this press conference very well, and it never came up, as I recall, in the President's press conference.

STEWART: No, I don't think so.

SHARON: It made headlines briefly in Boston, but the whispering campaign stopped instantly, and he went on to win.

[-26-]

STEWART: The [*Boston*] *Globe* hit the story originally, and they had, I assume, had it for some time, just waiting until they wanted to use it.

SHARON: Well, I recall it finally broke by Teddy planting a question at one of his own press conferences. That was all calculated.

STEWART: In other words, there was either no hope nor plan to kill it?

SHARON: No, not at all, just the opposite. There was the thought: How do you kill it? That was discussed. We took a very hard line that that's not the way to treat it at all; that, hell, most of those Back Bay Boston Irish voters' sons could never get through Harvard unless they cheated their way through — they would probably be sympathetic toward him.

STEWART: The whole matter of Chester Bowles and the shifts in the State Department in November of 1961, this again was a topic which you mentioned.

Briefly, what was your relationship with Chester Bowles, or were you involved in it from that end or in some other way?

SHARON: Well, I was home one day, one Saturday afternoon, and I got a call from [Thomas L.] Tom Hughes, who was Chester Bowles' top aide, whom I've known for many years, and I've always had a very high opinion of him. He said that the rumors that were floating around town were not rumors, they happened to be facts; that he was convinced, from the way he had read the comments from the White House staff to him, that come Monday morning at the scheduled luncheon that the President was going to have it out with Chester Bowles, and Chester Bowles was going to get fired.

STEWART: Excuse me, when was this?

[-27-]

SHARON: I've forgotten the date, but it's easy to reconstruct the date because the President had a press conference, I think, the following Tuesday or Wednesday in which this was the subject. And I said, "Well, I don't know what I could do, how I could be of any help." He said, "The only thing that you could do would be to get in touch with George Ball or Adlai Stevenson and have them ask the President to hold up any action on that until they have a chance to talk to him." Ball was in Geneva and Stevenson was en route between Geneva and Italy, as I recall. So I put a call in to Ball, talked to him in Geneva, and I said, "This is what's been reported to me. I don't know whether it's true or not, but I have a lot of respect for Tom's judgement on it." I said, "It seems to me the only thing that we could do in response to a friend, if it's true, is to have Adlai send a cable to the President," which Stevenson did at Ball's suggestion.

I think on the following Monday I reported that to Hughes, and somehow during the conversation, why, he said to he thought it would be useful for Mr. Bowles to talk to me. I was not very close to Mr. Bowles. I had met him two or three times through Bill Attwood and Tom Hughes.

So I did talk to him, and I asked him if Secretary [Dean] Rusk was giving him the kind of support and backup that he felt he deserved. He was very candid; he said, no, he was not. I said, "Well, who is talking to the President on your behalf?" He said, "No one." And he told the story of his relationship with Bobby on the Bay of Pigs and how upsetting that was to him; he said, in fact, his getting fired would be misinterpreted around the world, particularly following the Cuban Bay of Pigs problem. And he said, "I can't. I'm shut off from the White House staff; I can't seem to get to the President to tell my side of the story." Now, I probably made a mistake in talking to him and listening to him and particularly in being disturbed at the fact that Rusk was not making a courageous case for his own undersecretary. I said, "Well, I'll be glad to call the President if you want me to." He said, "Well, I think if you would, he knows you and respects you, and it couldn't hurt," he said.

[-28-]

So, I put a call in to him, and he returned it in fifteen minutes. I've forgotten the precise language of the conversation, but I told him I was just curious about the Bowles thing, about whether or

not it would be misinterpreted by our friends abroad, particularly the people who are in Geneva representing the government right now who have been identified with Chester Bowles over the years, and whether his being “canned” out of government right now was representing a shift in policy.

At that point, Kennedy got kind of irritated, to say the least; in fact, he got mad as hell. He thought I was part of a great conspiracy that was campaigning for Chester Bowles’ retention, and he made it clear to me in no uncertain terms that he didn’t appreciate at all the fact that there was this great campaign to keep Chester Bowles in the administration. He cited the *New York Times* editorial, the *Washington Post* editorial, the telephone calls he’d had from people. He said, “Chet’s got quite a campaign going for him.”

Well, after he got all this off his chest, he did say, “Look, I’ll tell you quite confidentially, John,” he said, “what I should have done was made Chet Secretary,” which I didn’t believe. I’d heard from reasonably good sources that when he went down to see Nixon in Florida, the day I was there, Nixon made it very clear to him that he could appoint any Secretary of State he wanted and he’d have his tacit approval, but if he appointed Chester Bowles, he’d have to speak out against him and do everything he could to block it, and that Kennedy gave him the assurance that he had no intention of appointing Bowles as Secretary of State. So I was a little bit curious at this reaction.

I said to him, “You’re going to be asked at your press conference about this.” And I said, “It seems to me you’d better be very careful that you don’t get yourself caught in a trap of, by implication, pointing the finger at Chester Bowles for the Bay of Pigs.” He said, “Well, if you’d like to dictate to Evelyn Lincoln a statement that you think I can use, I’ll be glad to consider it.” That was really his way of getting me off the telephone. So I sat down and wrote one and checked it out with Tom Finney, and I called Evelyn and dictated it to her.

[-29-]

So I called Chet back, and I told him it wasn’t a very satisfactory conversation, that I did what I could but it wasn’t very much. I repeated to him the conversation. He said, “Yes, that’s curious; he told me, he has told me on several occasions that he made a mistake in appointing Rusk” and that he should have appointed himself.

STEWART: Really? That never occurred to me.

SHARON: Puzzled me, really puzzled me, because I think the information I got about his conversation with Nixon was reasonably accurate. Now maybe this was his way of just trying to make Chet feel “at home,” I don’t know, “happy.” Chester Bowles can confirm for you his side of it. I was just startled to hear President Kennedy tell me that he should have appointed him Secretary of State.

I want to make it clear: Kennedy said nothing derogatory to me about Rusk. But he did say that he thought he would have to reserve the right to ascertain where each member of the administration could make a contribution. He used some pretty strong language, I might add, in that conversation, and I could see how deeply he felt about it. He was getting damn annoyed at being harassed by people who were calling him on Chet’s behalf. I was a little embarrassed about it when I hung up the telephone because I was not a Chester Bowles man. I was never so identified.

I remember I was over at Bill Blair's wedding in Copenhagen, and I was coming back in a car with Bill Benton, and I was telling Phil Stern or somebody who was also an usher in Bill's wedding this story because it hadn't happened very long ago. I was embarrassed that I had gotten myself out on a limb. Gosh, like two days later — I had a job offer from Bill Benton at some fantastic salary. I guess he thought that it meant something to be able to talk to the President as frankly as I had. All I was doing was trying to help a friend.

STEWART: Did you have any or many other conversations with the President?

[-30-]

SHARON: No. No, I felt our role was largely — the role that Tom Finney and I played — was largely to help Clifford, not only to sort out but respond meaningfully and productively to the many requests he had from the President or the President's brother or family. Our role was pretty much confined to advising the staff, and we always made ourselves available. An awful lot of frustrations existed. We'd get telephone calls from undersecretaries in various departments who felt that the White House was torpedoing what they were trying to do. But our conversations with the President were pretty much limited to the ones I've described. Maybe we'd see him socially at some event or something, banquet or something, but nothing very important.

STEWART: You wrote a memo about the members of the Cabinet at one time. Do you recall that?

SHARON: You'd better refresh my recollection.

STEWART: I'm a little vague about it myself. The only notes I have — and this wasn't included in the papers you gave us — but it was a memo presumably reflecting Kennedy's opinion of the various members of the Cabinet.

SHARON: Oh, yes. Well, this was in a telephone conversation with him. Oh, I know what that was. This was on the Chester Bowles thing. On the Chester Bowles conversation, I guess he and I were on the telephone for what seemed like thirty minutes — maybe it was only twenty, but it was for quite a long period of time. And he told me what was wrong with Chester Bowles in his judgement. He wasn't tough enough. He said to me, "What I need over here to make this government run is ten or twelve sons of bitches." And he said, "One of the reasons that McNamara and Ball and Doug Dillon are so effective is that they are tough bastards. They know how to get things done; they don't get bogged down in all the quicksand of government red tape. They're not looking for excuses as to why not to do something; they're always getting things done." On those three he was exceedingly complimentary. He said, "Too many of the rest of them are just soft. They've got soft bellies. They

[-31-]

don't know how to get things done." The implication was quite clear that he considered Chester Bowles to be in that category, which obviously was inconsistent with the other thing he said, that Chester Bowles ought to have been Secretary of State. I didn't point that out to him because I think that he was at the moment speaking more from emotion and anger (getting another call on this "damn subject") than he was rationally thinking through what his problem was.

I would have passed over the comment about Chester Bowles being Secretary as just a means of getting rid of this phone call, except for the fact that he had told Chet that himself several times and he apparently had told others that. Maybe at the moment there was some dissatisfaction with Rusk that none of us knew about. [Interruption]

Well, I think at the beginning of the Kennedy administration there was an apparent arrogance on the part of some White House staffers. I remember sitting in the office of a very key staff member when the Secretary of Treasury telephoned; he was concerned about something that was going into the budget. He wanted this matter brought to the President's attention, he wanted his concern about it known, so he called this particular staff man, whose name I shouldn't mention. When he hung up that staff member turned to another staff member and said, "Mr. Dillon has suggested that we add forty or sixty million dollars on this key item and he wanted the President to know about it." They looked at each and said, "Well, the President has just been informed about it," and shrugged their shoulders. I thought it was a pretty arrogant attitude. If I had been in their posture, I certainly would have either dictated a memo and let the President know what his staff's reaction was; but they had no intention of so doing.

And that was the only firsthand experience I had on it, but it seemed to me if that attitude had any prevalence beyond these two fellows — and they were very key men — the frustrations that subsequently arose on the part of various people were quite justified. You don't always want to be bothering the President if you're a member of the Cabinet if you have access to his staff he turns to for advice. You would assume that ex officio any request you make of a staff, a White House staffer, would get it passed on to the President in one form or another, and this was not the case. And

[-32-]

I would assume that this was probably characteristic, or at least it happened on more than one occasion. So I think until the Bay of Pigs occurred there was an excessive amount of self-assurance, over-identification with the power of the presidency, which some of these fellows exerted. I think that the Bay of Pigs so shook them that the whole administration became more of a team effort after that, which is a terrible way to have a more democratic government. I think anyone who was on the outside the way we were saw the sort of shock treatment that it had.

Many times many people in this town will tell you that you could always get through to the President yourself if you called him; it might take a week or three months for the President's staff to call you. I don't think they served the President that well when they put themselves in that posture of making judgements as to whether or not to return phone calls. I never bothered the President at all. Tom Finney and I sort of felt that the role we would play would be to help Clifford in his relationships with the President. But I think as competent and as able as that Irish Mafia was, the so-called Irish Mafia — and they were competent; there's no question about that — they could have served the country more in those initial stages, and I think the whole spirit of the government — being on a team that was out to make a team effort — there would have been less frustration, less suspicion and less distrust.

STEWART: You think this was, at least in part, because of the lack of understanding of really how these big organizations operated from going beyond the Secretary's level.

SHARON: There's a lot to that, I think, and most of the facts — keep in mind that these fellows hadn't had much experience themselves, with a few exceptions. They'd been up on the Hill; they'd been in politics in Massachusetts; but they didn't have a lot of government experience, they didn't know how to deal with government personnel, the machinery of the government was something new to them. I think that their inexperience sort of led them to make snap decisions without staffing out something in depth. I think the President himself instinctively, at least in my limited experience and mine was very limited with him, but I think instinctively he wanted everything staffed out, and I

[-33-]

think he assumed that people on his staff would be doing the same thing. They didn't, although there were obvious exceptions to that.

You got the very definite impression that they were all out to be sure that the image of John Kennedy as a bright star on the horizon; that was the story that had to be sold; well, they were sort of marketing him. He didn't want that, but they did, and they used the President's name a great deal. People always complained about that to us, that they'd get a call from one of these staff members and they would say, "The President wants you to do this," or "The President wants you to do that," or "We just talked to the President." And there were frequent times when these people would talk to the President about it, and the President never heard about it, and that would be upsetting, naturally.

So I think until they really had this horrible shock of the Bay of Pigs and saw the impact it had on the President as well as themselves and the impact it had on the nation as well, that — they were sweating pretty hard. I don't mean this as a criticism because I think they were exceedingly able people. He was obviously dependent on them, and they served him very well in many very competent ways. But I do feel that President Johnson brought to the White House eventually a staff that was more dedicated to serving all of the government and all of the country than the initial staff was under Kennedy. These Johnson men staffed things out better; they checked things out better; they coordinated things with the Cabinet people and the Cabinet liaison people better; they worked much better with Capitol Hill. There was a certain arrogance, I think, on the part of the White House staff under Kennedy, in the early days, of just trying to see where to give and take. President Kennedy knew where to give and take, but these fellows hadn't had much legislative experience except for Ted [Sorensen]. Ted couldn't shoulder the whole burden himself. As competent, as able, and as bright as he was, he just couldn't do the whole job. [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien gradually became a master at it, but it took time.

STEWART: To think that he had absolutely no experience, except for that two or three years, and then he was with [Foster] Furcolo. Well, okay, is there anything else you can think of?

[-34-]

SHARON: I can't. I'm really speaking mostly, shooting from the hip most of the time.

STEWART: You weren't at all involved in any political plans for '64 or any of that business, were you?

SHARON: No. Well, how do you mean? You mean...

STEWART: Plans that Kennedy had in the fall of 1963 for the 1964 campaign.

SHARON: No. No.

STEWART: Or anything relating to relations between the President and the Vice President?

SHARON: Well, the staff was always criticizing the Vice President in sort of a needling way. They picked up President Kennedy's description of Vice President Johnson as a cry baby "always crying over something." And you got the playbacks about how strained the relationship was, and the only evidence you had was the fact that the Vice President was never consulted about anything. He was sent on missions. In fact, it was probably somewhat the same kind of frustrations Hubert Humphrey had.

There isn't any doubt in anyone's mind, though, if anyone talked to President Kennedy or to his staff, that Lyndon Johnson was intentionally selected with the very thought in mind that John Kennedy might not live through his term, and he personally felt that Lyndon Johnson was by far the most competent of all the men to succeed him, if someone had to succeed him by — by accident. And this was basically, perhaps, at the moment a political decision, but it was also colored very strongly with the view that he was, by experience and every other measure, the most competent man to succeed JFK.

STEWART: It's hard to see, though, the true reasons for this particular — as you say, the political one must have had priority at the time, anyway.

SHARON: Well, that's just about all I can think of.

[END OF INTERVIEW]