

Mike N. Manatos Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 10/30/1970
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Biographical Note

Mike N. Manatos (1914-1983) was the Administrative Assistant to the President from 1961 to 1963. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, particularly in Wyoming, and congressional relations during the Kennedy administration, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Mike N. Manatos

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Oral History Interview

with

MIKE N. MANATOS

October 30, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Ann M. Campbell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMPBELL: Mr. Manatos, I thought maybe we could start out this morning by asking about your beginnings in politics and then coming up to the time your path crossed John Kennedy's.

MANATOS: Gosh, that goes back quite a ways. I was driving a truck for a living out in Wyoming when I was offered the opportunity to come back to Washington with Senator Harry Schwartz [Henry H. Schwartz]-Harry Schwartz of Wyoming who turned out to be a one-term member of the Senate. And it was at that point that Senator O'Mahoney [Joseph C. O'Mahoney] asked me to go to work for him. I worked for Senator O'Mahoney until he was defeated in 1952. And strangely enough, I have about six crises of my own. Senator Lester Hunt, who was then the senior senator from Wyoming, then called me and asked me to go to work for him as his administrative assistant which was the first time I'd reached that stage in the hierarchy of the Senate staff. Senator Hunt, you recall, killed himself in office, and I found him that morning. It was at that time that Senator O'Mahoney decided that he'd get back into the political arena and I went out into the state and campaigned with him and took the assignment as his administrative assistant. When he decided not to run in 1960, I was with Senator [John J.] Joe Hickey of Wyoming--all of these senators were Wyoming senators--for about a month before I went down to the White

House with President Kennedy.

I had known President Kennedy off and on for, gosh, several years when he was in the Senate. I wasn't an intimate of the senator's, but he was always very friendly, and we had occasions on which we found ourselves in one another's company. I probably was a lot more familiar to his staff--Ted Sorensen [Theodore Sorensen], Mike Feldman [Myers Feldman], and others of his staff, Evelyn Lincoln--than I was with the senator. As a matter of fact, I used to see Mrs. [Jacqueline B.] Kennedy when she was interviewing before they were married and even after they were married when she used to visit the Senate Office Building. Our office with Senator Lester Hunt was just around the corner. We were on the third floor and Senator Kennedy was just around the corner from us.

I think, though, that my connection with the senator after he was president-elect came about through Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]. Several friends of mine asked me what I would do if I were to go down with, were to be asked to take a post in government. And I said, "Well, I'd really like to go down to the White House and see if I couldn't lend whatever talent I had on the Senate side as the liaison officer." And much to my surprise, I was offered an opportunity to go into the administration in the Post Office Department. And I called Larry O'Brien and I told him of this offer, and he said, "Well, now, don't you do anything until you hear from me."

CAMPBELL: Would this have been in January?

MANATOS: This was in January, yes. This was before the inauguration. Because I may have some other ideas for you," he said. "Then if this doesn't work out, then you're free to go to the Post Office Department." I didn't particularly want to do that anyhow. He wanted me to be an assistant postmaster general for personnel. Well, what I know about personnel you could fit in an ear, you know. But anyhow, it wasn't a day later when Larry called and said, "We would like to have you come down to the White House with us and handle the Senate for us," which was precisely what I wanted. So I called back the Post Office Department or the individual scheduled to rate on the Post Office Department and told him that I would not take his gracious offer.

I suppose that I ought to go back a little bit to the convention of 1960.

CAMPBELL: We shouldn't be bound by chronology, but you did mention that your senator's office was close to then Senator Kennedy's office, and I wondered, as a veteran at that time of the Hill, what your

impressions was of the Kennedy office?

MANATOS: Oh, I couldn't quite understand why anyone would work so late. Golly, they were always busy. It seemed to be a most informal office but it was just a beehive of activity any time of day or night. If I happened to be late--late by Wyoming standards was 6 or 7 or 8 o'clock at night--they would still be there working. And, of course, the senator was such an attractive individual that you couldn't help but notice him, and very friendly. Sometimes he'd be wrapped up in thought and he's looking at the floor as he walked by, but if you said hello to him, why, he'd speak.

CAMPBELL: How effective was John Kennedy in those years in the Senate?

MANATOS: Well, there used to be a quip that made the rounds of the cloakrooms at the time that his Profiles in Courage received all of its prominence, and that was that they wished he'd show a little more courage and less profile. Well, I think the senators whom I used to overhear talking thought that maybe he was trying to move too fast. They all liked him. You know, and this is sometimes strange for other men who have the same ambitions to like one another. They did like Senator Kennedy. He didn't seem to spend an awful lot of time on the Senate floor, but when he was there, he was noticed. He was always the individual who was singled out in the gallery, that any time he walked on the floor, why, you would just see people pointing down at him and practically ignoring all the rest of the Senate, including the majority leader. He was very well liked.

CAMPBELL: Were you involved, at all. . . . One of the more controversial votes, I suppose, the senator made was the vote on your senator's amendment to the civil rights bill in 1957, the jury trial amendment.

MANATOS: Jury trial amendment, yeah.

CAMPBELL: Were you involved in the back-and-forth on that at all?

MANATOS: No, not very much because Senator O'Mahoney was the kind of a person who did all of this by himself. I knew what was going on. I knew how important it was not only to Senator O'Mahoney but to the southerners in getting them to go along on the first civil rights bill. And this was mostly negotiations between Senator O'Mahoney and Jim Eastland [James O. Eastland] and Dick

Russell [Richard B. Russell] and Lyndon Johnson. John Kennedy was involved in it. I think that what little I remember about that was that Senator O'Mahoney spent much time persuading Senator Kennedy that this was the only way realistically, you were going to get a bill and that he ought to go along. I don't recall now, I think he did vote for the jury trial amendment.

CAMPBELL: He did and it was an object of some controversy, at the time, I think.

MANATOS: Yes, but he was realistic as he always was, yeah. He was about as realistic as anyone ever.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. What was your attitude now, before the convention, about John Kennedy--your personal attitude--as a possible presidential candidate in 1960?

MANATOS: As a matter of fact, I ought to tell a little story about that. I have a very good friend out in California by the name of George Goggin who was then--he's pretty much retired now but he was then one of the vice presidents of, well, I guess the senior vice-president of the Douglas Oil Company. I got acquainted with George in some California matters that we had involving oil. Since Senator O'Mahoney was on the Interior Committee, he took the tour of our office. I think he was having trouble getting any of his own senators from California interest in his problem. [^] iced

CAMPBELL: Independent, right?

MANATOS: Yes, he was an independent, right. When the election came around, a couple of years before the election came around, why, George was just absolutely enamored of John Kennedy. He had seen him at a couple of speeches, a couple of meetings out in California. He was a Republican, but he was just saying to me, "Golly, my friend, I'm going to turn Democrat and vote for Senator Kennedy." He said, "I'm going to work for him." He said, "What do you think of that?" He was telling me this because he knew that Senator O'Mahoney and Lyndon Johnson were very close.

And I said, "Well, I know that if I go to the convention as a delegate from Wyoming, it's only going to be as a substitute for Senator O'Mahoney," who wasn't too well, "and I know what Senator O'Mahoney's views are going to be in this area. He's going to at least want one vote for Lyndon Johnson. But, I said, "My view is that Kennedy's not only going to get the

nomination but he's going to be the next president. And you ought not let anything stand in your way of supporting him." Which he did.

As a matter of fact, I called, I think it was Ted Sorensen--it might have been Mike Feldman--and made an appointment for George to go up and see him. They tell you get into the background, but here's a man who could be very helpful in California. And as it turned out, he really was.

CAMPBELL: At what point, or did you, before the convention, get involved in the sort of pre-convention maneuvering--the Johnson maneuvering, the Kennedy maneuvering--when you were with . . .

MANATOS: I was involved in, at least I attended a meeting that was called by Bobby Baker [Robert G. Baker] and Oscar Chapman for Lyndon Johnson for his candidacy. And I recall that at that meeting the only thing I said during the meeting--I was called there to represent Senator O'Mahoney--and the only thing I recall saying is that, "If you have a candidate, you'd better get him out of the stables and on to the racetrack, because no one's going to get excited about him until he declares." And then, of course, they all said, well, you know, he couldn't declare, he was majority leader--the usual story. And that was it.

As it turned out I did go out as a delegate for Wyoming. Teno Roncalio was handling the Kennedy campaign, and I'd grown up with Teno. I've known him as long as I've known anyone. The minute I got out there he called me. And we were sitting at dinner around the pool there under one of those umbrellas, and he said, "Mike, how are you going to vote?" As he said, "You know, we have to vote on you as a substitute for Senator O'Mahoney. You know that he wants you to be his substitute, but how do you feel about this election?"

I said, "Well, Teno, you know how I feel. I feel that Kennedy's going to win it in a walk and he's going to be the next president. But I also want you to know that if the group approves my, or rather gives me the approval as O'Mahoney's substitute, that I will have to. But he's asked me only one thing and that is that I vote, at least the first time around, for Lyndon Johnson." He felt he owed him that. He told me very frankly that he didn't think that Johnson would win, that Kennedy would win and that he had a good chance of becoming president. Well, Teno's immediate response to that was, "Well, that's not good enough. Then I'm going to fight you." Which he did. And my side won; I was seated.

The strange thing about all this is that when the voting began, you may recall that New Jersey passed. They were

playing some sort of game. And as it got down to Wyoming's time--the call--why, it became obvious that Kennedy was going to win on the first ballot.

Oh, I'm getting ahead of myself. In this meeting Teno said to our group of Democrats, "Well, now I hope that we won't do as Keith Thomson"--who was then congressman--" did in the first Eisenhower convention when Wyoming had the chance to put Eisenhower over on the first ballot, but went for Taft [Robert A. Taft] because they were committed to Taft and thereby lost the great opportunity." And he said, "Now, if we're down to the point where our delegation could put over Kennedy's nomination, would you agree to vote for Kennedy?" And one of the group said, "Well, now let me just put it the other way a few minutes. Supposing that, when we got down to the end of the line, we could put over Lyndon Johnson. Would you vote for Johnson?" He said, "Oh, hell, no. That's another ballgame. I won't do that." So then we concluded that we would just use our better judgment when that time came.

Then--getting back to New Jersey--I recall their emissaries coming over to us saying, "Would you give us your turn?" Well, we weren't that silly. But Tracy McCracken, who was chairman--who was then our national committeeman and chairman of the convention--and Joe Hickey [Joseph J. Hickey], who was governor, Richardson [David G. Richardson], who was one of the delegates from Rock Springs, and myself were sitting right there. And Tracy McCracken turned to me and he said, "Mike, what are we going to do? It looks like we are in a position to put over Kennedy." I said, "Well, Tracy, we're only going to do one thing. We're going to vote for John Kennedy." I said, "Because the District of Columbia is sitting right behind us, and they can do it. If we don't, they're going to do it. And, you know, we'd just be damned fools not to do it. Besides, it's all over with." And then he turned to Governor Hickey and to Gale McGee and said, "What'll we do?" And they said, "Well, let's go." So we did.

CAMPBELL: You did. And there was no feedback from dissident members of the delegation?

MANATOS: Oh, no. They were all realistic. And as a matter of fact, when I got back and was telling Senator O'Mahoney about it, he said, "Well, you did the only thing you could have done."

CAMPBELL: Do you have any comment on the charges that were leveled at the time, that you hear sometimes, that Paul Butler perhaps was rigging the convention in some way for John Kennedy to win?

MANATOS: I heard it all around, but I thought if there

was any rigging to be done, it was the Stevenson [Adlai Stevenson] affair from the galleries, in which they put on this tremendously orchestrated demonstration and the parades around the convention floor saw only a handful of delegates. It was obviously staged. And, oh, I think Paul was doing what he thought best to do. I had no argument with that.

CAMPBELL: Did you have personal contacts in Los Angeles with the Kennedy people much?

MANATOS: No, I did not. As a matter of fact, I think I'm probably the only delegate who went to that convention and paid his way. They just waited all the way through. I didn't get anything from the Johnson group or Kennedy group, and I didn't ask them for any. But I've heard many stories that both groups were taking care of delegates.

CAMPBELL: What are your recollections about the selection of Lyndon Johnson as the vice-presidential candidate?

MANATOS: Gosh, the only recollection I have of that is that Joe--oh, gosh, what's his name, the Democratic leader here in the District of Columbia--Joe Rauh [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] apparently did not want Lyndon Johnson. And he, in the most vicious, vile, foul-mouthed way insisted that we ought to stop Lyndon Johnson. And finally I turned to Joe and I said, "For Christ's sake, Joe, what the hell's wrong? The president of the United States, or the president-elect of the United States has the absolute right to select his running-mate. Now, why don't you and your group"--in the District of Columbia committee, or the convention delegates--"settle down and let's have this thing over with?" And whether that had any effect on him, I don't know, or whether the weight of events just struck him wrong. Oh, I thought it was a tremendously important decision. I was surprised that Lyndon Johnson would take it.

CAMPBELL: Did you play a role in the campaigning, then, in 1960?

MANATOS: I did not. I was asked to, but I didn't because I then went out to Wyoming and tried to elect a Democratic senator. I spent the fall in Wyoming.

CAMPBELL: How did the Kennedy campaign tie in with the local races in Wyoming? Was it the same organization involved in both of these?

MANATOS: Oh, yes. We worked pretty well hand-in-hand. Yes. The only problem we had with the Kennedy timetable was that about every time he wanted to land at Cheyenne, he was snowed out or something, so he had to fly back from Denver.

CAMPBELL: What did you anticipate would be candidate Kennedy's big problems in your state?

MANATOS: Religion mostly.

CAMPBELL: Religion?

MANATOS: Uh-huh. Coming from a very conservative Republican state I thought maybe religion would weigh him down, and it did. Because if Kennedy had the opportunity to go into every community in the country, he could've just walked away with this election, he was that magnetic.

CAMPBELL: Did the Kennedy organization send anybody in from. . . Well, why, I suppose Edward Kennedy stopped through.

MANATOS: Ted, yes, was assigned to that whole Rocky Mountain area. He was in all them a good deal of the time. He spent most of his time with Teno though, and Teno's little group. But they worked with us.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. How effective was he? He was a novice at politics then.

MANATOS: Well, he was such a bright, refreshing young fellow that everybody liked him. And I think he was very effective.

CAMPBELL: Were you involved at all in that Senate race in '60, the Whitaker [Raymond B. Whitaker]-Thomson race?

MANATOS: I sure was. I was Ray Whitaker's campaign manager, and the only thing I regretted was that I couldn't get him to do anything. I think we might have won that race. Keith Thomson had taken credit for about forty bills, none of which were his. And I'd try to persuade Ray to make a statement on it, and he's say, "Well, no. You make it." I said, "Look, I'm not running for the Senate." "Well then, get Teno," who was our state chairman earlier. I said, "Neither is Teno running for the Senate. Unless you make the statement, they could charge and

refute this." It's just not going to count." Well, Ray wouldn't do anything. I've always felt that he kind of lost that race by default. And he did. He was of no help to the head of the ticket.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Did you have the feeling, conversely, that the president, or then Senator Kennedy, on the ticket was probably no help to Whitaker either?

MANATOS: Yes. Well, Ray was such a dull person that Kennedy had to be of some help to him. And he really, really was. He just was not a candidate. It was just that our state is so conservative and I think at that time had this feeling about religion that never gave either of us the vote.

CAMPBELL: Do you have any memories. . . . I have a note here that he was in Cheyenne at Frontier Parks September 23, 1960. Do you have any memories of that trip?

MANATOS: Well, I do know I sort of stayed in the background; I wasn't up front. It was a great appearance, though. He was just a magnetic person. I have better memories of him up at the University of Wyoming when he was president, but anyhow. . . .

CAMPBELL: Well, then the Democratic ticket did lose. Looking back, were there mistakes the Kennedy organizers made? Could it have been better?

MANATOS: No. No, no. I think the Kennedy people did all they could. It was more a problem of Democratic candidates at state level, that is, local senators--the people we had running for the Senate and the House on the state ticket--who dragged him down. It wasn't the best group.

CAMPBELL: Then you've already talked a little bit about the interim period and how your job came about. Larry O'Brien contacted you in January . . .

MANATOS: Yes.

CAMPBELL: . . . about the job. I think it would be interesting--I just have a list here of your associates in legislative liaisons--if you could sort of describe the considerations which led to their being asked to participate on the teams sort of. Larry O'Brien hadn't had much experience in Washington.

MANATOS: No, he hadn't. He was on the House side for a few years, but he was relatively new. And one of the things he told me when I came aboard, you know, he said, "Mike, the Senate is yours and totally because you know them and I don't. If there's any way I can help, I'll be glad to, but it's your ballgame." I wasn't involved in the selection of the rest of the staff because I think I was about the last one aboard. I didn't come aboard until about February 7th, something like that.

CAMPBELL: And then Henry Hall Wilson as well, who handled part of the House, I think had no Washington experience.

MANATOS: He had none at all. Yes, so he had to start from scratch.

CAMPBELL: Did you see this as a problem, the sort of inexperience of the other people?

MANATOS: Oh, I think so. Except that I think, for the first time, the Kennedy-O'Brien approach to congressional relations was novel. It was put on the basis that, look, if we're going to work with these people, we have to get to know them. And it's the situation where for the first time members of Congress really had entree with the White House, and had an ear of anybody down there that wanted to talk to them including the president. And I think it set the pattern--I'm not so sure that this administration is doing it as well--but it set the pattern which led to success.

CAMPBELL: Well, and that was a major change. As somebody that had a great deal of experience with other legislative liaison operations, what changes did you think had to be made? Was this the major one, just greater personal contact?

MANATOS: Right, because in all the years I was on the Hill with various Wyoming senators, I don't think I ever saw a White House liaison man. It was something new. I recall, at the first reception that President Kennedy had at the White House, talking to Senator Cotton [Norris Cotton] of New Hampshire. And he was just absolutely delighted, he and his wife. When we were talking to him, he said, "Mike, you know I was a senator during the Eisenhower administration and I just want to tell you something. This is the first time I've ever been invited to the White House."

Well, gosh, it was such a departure from the long receiving line where you went through the the line and shook hands--

waited two hours to shake hands with the president, and then push off and then you go home. And here was this new concept of let's open up the White House and let them move around, and the president would come down and just mingle with them. You may or may not have a chance to shake hands with him, but there he was and there was Mrs. Kennedy. Here was a chance, if you wanted to dance with the president--well, just go up and ask him. The same thing with Mrs. Kennedy. And the members of Congress were just enthralled with this whole concept.

CAMPBELL: Did you have the opportunity--probably not--to discuss the previous operations at all with Bryce Harlow or General Persons [Major General Wilton B. Persons] or. . .

MANATOS: Larry did, but I didn't. I guess I knew about as many people up there on the Senate side as Bryce did, so I didn't have any need for it. But Larry had talked with him. I guess that Larry took some of the suggestions that Bryce made and expanded on them considerably, because I don't think that Eisenhower was as accessible as was Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: I had heard that Harlow suggested to your shop and perhaps to Larry O'Brien that you not get involved in patronage and personnel things.

MANATOS: Oh, I think he did make that point. We figured that if you're going to play a ballgame, you just have to play it.

CAMPBELL: That was part of the ballgame.

MANATOS: Oh, sure. And there's nothing in the world that a senator appreciates more than an opportunity to be heard on an appointment, whether it's a judgeship or a district director who happens to be located in his state. And if he comes up with a candidate who's qualified and you can accommodate him then you're much better off.

CAMPBELL: How well did John Kennedy understand Congress in early 1961?

MANATOS: Oh, I think he understood them very well. Yes. And he was available to. . . . I never had any problem getting any senator in to see either President Kennedy or President Johnson for that matter. I think this easy access made for very fine relationships.

CAMPBELL: Was there sort of an overall strategy when you

came aboard in early February, a sort of major list of priorities or something for legislation? How was that approached?

MANATOS: Well, we had meetings down there, staff meetings, in which we would feed our views as to what ought to be a major concept, a major approach, and what legislation we ought to send up and what legislation we ought to hope we can enact. I think we, at least as I see it, pretty much played this by ear as we went along. We had extremely good luck in the Senate. I think without exception we passed about all of the Kennedy legislation in all of the years. We did have a problem with some of it in the House, which wasn't quite as friendly to Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: What moves did you make personally early in February? I've become aware that you contacted the staff directors of the Senate committees.

MANATOS: I did that. I made it my business to call on every senator personally to say that we're down there, we hope that we can be of any help, that we can, we'd like to do so. And you'd be surprised at the good will that's built up by just that gesture, whether they ever call on you or not.

CAMPBELL: How about your legislative liaison people in the agencies? What sort of team were they to work with generally?

MANATOS: I found that mostly they were very, very good and very cooperative. I think the modd was set at the White House, the whole tenor and the tone of this administration was set at the White House level. Larry O'Brien in the meetings we had with these different groups--they used to hold regular meetings--would just say, "Now, we just have to get this legislation passed because the president's record is based on what we can get through Congress. And we want you to cooperate with any member of Congress who has a legitimate demand." And they worked very well. We used to expect our agency liaison people to do much of the spadework. And then when it got to the point of counting the heads and determining whether or not we could win a vote, why, that's when I would start to worry if it weren't for the leaders up there, Senator Mansfield [Michael J. Mansfield] and the others.

CAMPBELL: Johnson. Oh, let's talk about the Senate leadership a little bit, Senator Mansfield and Lyndon Johnson. At the outset of the administration, what did Lyndon Johnson see as his role in the

Senate?

MANATOS: Gosh, I don't know. I would imagine, like any other vice-president, he probably felt tht he sort of had to hold back and play the role of the vice president.

CAMPBELL: It's been suggested that he expected to play a more significant role.

MANATOS: He may have. I don't know if that was the situation. I found that any time I went in and talked to him about anything, he was very helpful. He was accessible and was willing to cooperate in any way possible. I think there was a little problem with the vice president, who was the majority leader in the caucuses--the party caucuses. And you recall that it was only on threat of Mansfield resigning that they allowed him to sit, without having a voice. I would imagine that would have been a little hard to take for anybody, but that's the way they wanted it and that's the way it was played.

CAMPBELL: Did he continue to attend the caucuses?

MANATOS: I understand he did.

CAMPBELL: You didn't?

MANATOS: No, no. I did not.

CAMPBELL: Do you have anything to add or subtract from Ken O'Donnell's [Kenneth O'Donnell's] recent Life magazine article, which suggests that Lyndon Johnson was selected as vice-presidential candidate to kind of get him out of the Senate to then be able to work with Mike Mansfield or something?

MANATOS: I don't know about that. I really wasn't involved. I would have thought that the reason that he was selected was not so much to get him out of the Senate as perhaps to carry Texas and win the election which is about the way it worked out. 13

CAMPBELL: Before the inauguration--and again this may be something that you didn't get involved in--the Kennedy people didn't get involved in an early Senate caucus and plans to try to change Senate rules, you know, old Rule 22 and things. Do you think it was subconscious strategy here of some kind? I think some liberal senators felt sor tof let down on that. 10#

MANATOS: Oh, I'm sure they did, but gosh, the old saw

that politics is the art of the impossible. I was not involved in any meetings, but I was asked at the state level what I thought about Rule 22. My view was that you would just be spinning your wheels; you're never going to get it repealed or modified, and certainly not at that time. I'm not so sure we could do it even now. But my suggestion was that we forget that. I know there was a lot of pressure from, well, probably Ted Sorensen, Mike Feldman that we ought to make a push whether we win or lose. But I don't see any point in pushing in a fight that you can't win.

CAMPBELL: According to one count I think President Kennedy, in campaigning, made over 220 specific policy pledges. How many of them could you realistically ask this particular eighty-seventh Congress to pass?

MANATOS: Gosh, I don't know. I really would have to go back to some of the records that I have and some of the memos that I hope are still around. I don't know. I haven't looked at any papers for so long. But as I recall it roughly--and I wouldn't try to use numbers--the Senate passed all of the Kennedy recommendations the first two years, the first three years. I remember particularly that we managed to get through the Senate--and historians writing the Kennedy records seem to completely overlook this--a five-year backdoor spending authorization on foreign aid. You know, you talk about a five-year authorization right now with appropriations and you couldn't get it. We got that through the Senate. It fell and I think we lost it in the House and finally had to settle for something. I remember talking to Senator Aiken [George D. Aiken] about it and he told me, he said, "Well, Mike, you probably could win this vote even with backdoor spending on foreign aid. But you'd be a lot wiser to go for the five years with an appropriation, authorization appropriation by the Appropriations Committees." He thought maybe we could see that. Well, we counted the thing pretty closely and we knew that we could carry it--the program as the president wanted it--as we did.

CAMPBELL: You mentioned Senator Aiken, and I wondered if there was a conscious attempt on your part to win over Republican votes?

MANATOS: Oh, there sure was.

CAMPBELL: Work with the liberal Republicans?

MANATOS: Oh, gosh, absolutely. I spent a lot of time with Republicans. Fortunately we had a person like George Aiken with whom you could talk

about foreign affairs, and with Everett Dirksen, he was a key to everything there. And in many, many instances some of our closest votes on the most important legislation that President Kennedy sent up--foreign aid was one of them--we could win by five or six votes. And those five or six votes were Republican votes.

CAMPBELL: Any difficulty in getting them into the White House to see the president?

MANATOS: Never.

CAMPBELL: Including them in this.

MANATOS: Oh, yes. Gosh, we used to get people in to see the president who'd never voted with us. Now, I guess the president figured that they had a right to see their president.

CAMPBELL: Who did you work with on that, Kenny O'Donnell--for appointments--or. . . .

MANATOS: Yes. Well, Larry and Ken. It all depended on what was needed. I had complete authority to go either to the president direct or to talk to Larry or Kenny. It was a very family-type staff, and it just worked out beautifully.

CAMPBELL: You've mentioned your nose-counting several times. How was Bobby Baker at that? Was he the absolute master?

MANATOS: Bobby Baker counted heads about as well as any one. He had one habit--and I knew Bobby from working with him over the years when I was on the Hill--and that was he used to pad his count once in a while; at the very end he'd say, "Well, I picked up four or five senators and that's why we won it." Of course, we knew differently. One of the things that stays with me the most is Larry O'Brien's constant admonition not only that both of us work directly with him but the agency people. He didn't want a head count. . . . He didn't want you to say that Senator Aiken, for instance, was going to be with us on this particular vote unless you talked to Senator Aiken. He didn't want it from the staff or some third party. If you said that a senator was with us on an issue, you'd best be ready to tell him that you'd talked to the senator and knew it to be a fact.

CAMPBELL: Did you get involved at all in the very early House rules fight?

MANATOS: No. As a matter of fact, I'm glad to say that

I kept out of it.

CAMPBELL: You say that with great pleasure.

MANATOS: Yes, yes. Very honestly, I was there when it was going on and I listened to much of it, but I was not at all involved.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Did you have a recommendation about it at all?

MANATOS: No, as a matter of fact, I thought I had my hands full with the Senate. I was an observer.

CAMPBELL: I have a list that I want to hand you. I promised today not to bother you with specific issues, but I think that it could be very interesting if in a future session we talked at length about several Kennedy administration issues, and I thought you might like to glance at that. You may have some already in mind, but it gives you some good test cases there to understand your operation there.

MANATOS: Oh, gosh. There are several here, civil rights bill, trade expansion, minimum wage. Yeah, they're all very good. I hope that we do this at some later date because I'd like to . . .

CAMPBELL: We will.

MANATOS: . . . refresh my memory on some of them. Very good.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. Let me ask you--you just mentioned civil rights and, again, it's been suggested in published works that there was really a conscious decision that that wasn't the wise thing to bring up in the first session the first year.

MANATOS: It was certainly my recommendation that it not be brought up. I thought that it was a bad way for the president to set off a new administration. I knew how those southerners felt, the conservatives up there. And we were in a position to make or break the legislative program. And I recommended that the civil rights bill not be sent. Well, you might send it up if you wanted to, but nothing'd be done with it. But my view was I thought that it ought not even be sent up.

CAMPBELL: How would discussions like this amongst the staff come about? Was it often that you were involved in back-and-forth with Theodore

Sorensen and other people on something like this?

MANATOS: Generally, it would be a meeting in Larry O'Brien's office, and we'd just sit around and go over these things. Many times Larry would be the only one sitting with Ted and Mike and the rest of them in a group and the president to decide where we go. Then of course, as you know, the president used to call some of the staff down to Florida and go over the legislative proposals for the next year. I was not in those sessions, although my input was made to Larry at meetings that we had before those meeting.

CAMPBELL: You had, I believe, Monday morning meetings or Monday meetings before the Tuesday morning legislative breakfast. Did you?

MANATOS: Yes, yes. Well, sometimes they were morning, sometimes there were afternoon.

CAMPBELL: What was sort of the general format for them? Discuss any specific things which. . . .

MANATOS: Oh, yes. Well, Larry would ask us if we had any thought on what might be discussed at the leadership meetings. We would funnel in our views, and out of this Larry would make up an agenda which he would present to the president. This same process carried over into the Johnson administration.

CAMPBELL: How much of a problem was it for you--was it a problem that Senator Smathers [George A. Smathers] was an awfully good personal friend of the president's a member of the leadership and yet not the best supporter you had on the legislation?

MANATOS: Well, it was a problem in the sense that senators would needle me about it. I don't think it had much effect on votes, because he was liable to get a senator who was a consistent supporter and say, "Well, now, Mike, why don't you get George Smathers to stand up for you on this one?" Well, you know you can't get him, and I knew that the chances are we couldn't. But I don't think it made any real difference.

CAMPBELL: How would you evaluate Senator Mansfield's leadership?

MANATOS: I think Senator Mansfield is probably as good a leader as the Democrats ever had. And I say that because he was able to get along with not only the Democrats but he had this liaison, this agreement

with Ev Dirksen that was just invaluable. And gosh, he was so well liked by everybody up there that without him, gosh, we couldn't have done anywhere near what we did.

CAMPBELL: Was it often that you asked the vice president for specific assistance?

MANATOS: I did not because I really didn't need it. I would only bother the vice president if I had something that I was really concerned with that needed somebody of his stature. But fortunately for me, I guess, I don't think I ever had to bother him with anything. (transpose)

CAMPBELL: From the other directions, was there much input into your office and things to Larry O'Brien from the vice president?

MANATOS: He may have had some input with Larry, did not with me.

CAMPBELL: If you would at a later time, it would probably be interesting to talk about the Bobby Baker thing a little bit, the ramifications to your operation. But that's another one that you might want to . . .

MANATOS: Well, I'll tell a very funny story, at least I think it's funny, about Bobby and this thing about his involvement, all the money he's making inside the grapevine. And I was needling him one day and I said, "You know, Bobby, I just can't believe that anyone who's a good friend of another person's could make three and a half million dollars in twenty-two months and not cut me in on it." He said, "Well, now don't pay any attention to that." Then I always followed by saying that, well, that didn't bother me so much, but when I found out I hadn't been invited to his parties, that did. [Laughter] (7)

CAMPBELL: Well, I've come to the end of my sort of early questions and getting you settled in the White House, but maybe . . . (t)

MANATOS: Well, maybe some things will come up later on.

CAMPBELL: . . . sometime shortly we can talk about some specific legislation.

MANATOS: Very good.