

Bob Myers Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 7/11/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Bob Myers

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Biographical Note

Bob Myers was the co-chairman of John F. Kennedy for President in Cabell County, West Virginia. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign in West Virginia, in particular the religious issue and West Virginians' reactions to his political platform, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

with

BOB MYERS

July 11, 1964
Huntington, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Mr. Myers, how did you first get interested in the Kennedy primary campaign, what were your first contacts?

MYERS: Bill, my contact goes back to a friendship all my life with Matthew Reese. Matt Reese's wife and my wife were very good friends and have been for years. We all went to school together, the same public schools in Huntington. Matt was engaged in the insurance business in Huntington prior to the primary and very early in the total Kennedy effort became one of the Kennedy's staff people in West Virginia through (Robert A.) Bob McDonough. But Matt Reese recruited (Andrew J.) Andy Houvouras, and Andy Houvouras and Matt together recruited Dave Fox, Jr.

And then it must have been in January or so of 1960 that Andy Houvouras and Dave Fox and myself and our wives were attending a Rotary conference at the Greenbriar Hotel in White Sulphur Springs. I recall vividly walking down the hallway, the three of us with our wives in front, doing some window shopping in the arcade there, that they asked me if I would serve as a co-chairman with them for Cabel County in the Kennedy effort. Of course, at this time there had been considerable publicity toward the West Virginia campaign and the newsmen attempting to predict what significance it would have with regard to West Virginia and the bigotry issue and such. Well, I had never taken a real active part in politics nor had Dave or Andy at this point, and I told them that I might be interested and that I'd like to think it over a little bit, which I did.

My primary concern was not at this point whether Kennedy was elected or not elected; my concern was based primarily

upon the news coverage that we read, whether the state was going to come out as a bigoted state reputation or whether it wasn't. So, not having any great interest in politics, I wasn't prompted to serve from a standpoint of Senator Kennedy's interest as such, but was more prompted to serve from the standpoint of what the public image might be of our state. Therefore, I agreed to serve, and the three of us undertook the total project for this area. So as far as Cabel County was concerned, we wound up with a tri-chairmanship arrangement.

One of the oddities that developed, an outgrowth of it-- perhaps it was planned; in fact, I think it was planned; if I'm not mistaken, we discussed it prior to any public announcement--that was with Dave Fox representing our Jewish citizenry, Andy Houvouras representing the Catholic citizenry, and myself representing the Protestant group, we covered the religious scope of Huntington and Cabel County pretty well with regard to Kennedy's interest in this area.

YOUNG: Were all three of you rather active in the respective churches and synagogue?

MYERS: Yes, all of us were relatively active. Dave Fox, oddly, is not. . . . Dave actually goes to the Presbyterian church, although he is Jewish by birth and is certainly sympathetic and is well accepted by the Jewish community here. We, of course, have almost no orthodox Judaism here; it's all Conservative or Liberal Judaism. But Dave is certainly recognized by the community as being Jewish, even though he attends the Presbyterian church. His wife, incidentally, is a Presbyterian and his children have been reared as Presbyterians, but still we felt we had all three of the major religious groups represented in our Kennedy effort.

YOUNG: Is your own role one of being relatively active in your own church?

MYERS: Yes, I'm relatively active in church. Dave and I attend the same church, and he, too, is quite active in the church.

YOUNG: Well, there's been a great deal of talk, of course, about religion as an issue. Could you distinguish the rather subtle gradations in Cabel County in terms of the religious bigotry, or is this possible?

MYERS: Well, Bill, yes, I think it's perhaps possible, at least as far as my impressions are concerned. How accurate they are is for someone else to evaluate.

But I see Cabell County as a moderate county where social status enters into almost every aspect of political life. Here we have a I call it a status quo county. Our economic condition is never too bad and never too terribly good here. We don't follow the normal economic trends of the state of West Virginia. As a result, we've got a situation where our people in the county never get real emotional over any issue. I would sum up the religious issue here as one that was certainly a factor, and I'm confident that Senator Kennedy would have won this county--which he didn't, incidentally--I'm confident he would have won the county and would have won it substantially if it hadn't been for his religion. I thought there was an undercurrent of concern towards Catholicism in this area, primarily not necessarily because of Catholicism but because it was a change from the accepted procedure in the election of presidents--although I'm certain that Catholicism entered into it.

We had our extremists and our lunatic fringe of Protestantism. More specifically, it distributed a certain amount of hate literature that continually tried to stir up the Protestant population against the senator just because he was a Catholic. But I never thought they were terribly successful. Of course, the Catholics that were working with us in the effort, quite naturally responded against this type of thing and were very resentful of it--literature similar to the Knights of Columbus oath where supposedly, according to the lunatic fringe, the Catholics were taught to disembowel Protestants and poison them and go to any extreme to do away with Protestantism.

YOUNG: As a representative of the Protestant faction, did you act as a missionary to Protestant groups and attempt in any way to counter the propaganda yourself?

MYERS: Well, I didn't do it specifically myself; we did it as a group. Again, of course, the three of us had a rapport with the leadership of the community as such, and we did it as a group. Letters were sent to the ministers from our Kennedy headquarters. The Houston, Texas speech, which we considered to be very, very effective in this area, was replayed, the Dallas, Texas--I believe it was--speech where Kennedy appeared before Protestant ministers and gave his stand on religion. This, of course, was photographed in movies and distributed through the area and was replayed on television. If I'm not mistaken, we replayed it twice on local television. Kennedy gave a very forthright answer to Protestant ministers concerning his stand on religion with regard to the office of the presidency. This was effective. The money was raised for this locally to put it on the air.

And incidentally, most of the money was raised from Catholics. There is no question about it, our Catholic population here contributed substantially to the total Kennedy effort. In fact, without the Catholic assistance and volunteers and financial arrangements, we probably wouldn't have had much of a Kennedy campaign in Cabel County. I suspect that this is perhaps true in the state of West Virginia. But I'd say 80 to 90 percent of our active volunteer effort was provided by members of the Catholic faith.

YOUNG: What duties did you assign to them in particular, what were they most likely to be doing?

MYERS: Well, our effort was broken down, of course, into one with relationship, and this is a pretty skilled political requirement. One was liaison between the Kennedy volunteer organization and the normal Democratic organization that existed in the county. This was strained many, many times because, of course, the normal Democrats were scared to death of having a Catholic president leading their ticket possibly in November. But this was a skilled arrangement, the relationship between Kennedy volunteers and the normal Democratic organization. With respect to volunteers, their duties involved manning the headquarters, preparing literature for distribution, sealing envelopes--menial tasks such as that; normal office tasks: telephone answering, telephone calling committee; distribution of the Kennedy paper which was, in effect, a Sunday supplement type thing that discussed the senator and his family and his thinking, gave a background situation. We distributed some twenty thousand of these in the county.

YOUNG: These were not distributed, however, with the regular paper; they were distributed . . .

MYERS: No, they were distributed independently. The Kennedy effort required total effort, required every family getting one of these Sunday supplements, every Democratic family being contacted by telephone at least once in an effort to encourage them to vote for the senator and to encourage them to vote specifically, but definitely for the senator, if possible. There was a Businessmen for Kennedy organization formed which was headed by (Thomas W., Jr.) Tom Harvey, who is now general counsel for the ARA (Area Redevelopment Administration). High schools girls, again mainly from St. Joseph High School here, provided a lot of hoopla and wore the Kennedy hats and sold the Kennedy buttons and the Kennedy little PT boats and dressed in cute uniforms, were downtown trying to stimulate any interest they could, at any time, in the senator during his visits here.

YOUNG: There have been reports from some of the people who have been interviewed in West Virginia that members of their family because they were associated with the Catholic candidate, felt social pressure. Not exactly not being invited to the right garden party, but things of that sort. Were you or members of your family ever aware of anything of this nature?

MYERS: No, I never. . . . I sometimes think when you get involved in an emotional issue of this type that. . . . Again, maybe I'm being too broadminded, but we never experienced anything of this nature at all, not in the slightest. Quite often, I think, individuals might use something of this nature as an excuse for why they weren't invited somewhere, or something. But no, I never. . . . Perhaps, I'm sure, up in the mountains of West Virginia, in some counties, this might be true, but here this was never an issue.

YOUNG: Well then, along with that, professional pressure in terms of your own business: You were not aware of any?

MYERS: None whatsoever. I feel that participation in politics if it is done properly on a level where your conscience doesn't bother you too much, why, it does absolutely no harm to your business. And I, of course, am in a business that has the public as its customers. I could see absolutely no problem in that respect in this county. Now, this may not be true in other counties.

YOUNG: You are in the storage and transfer business?

MYERS: Yes.

YOUNG: What were your first personal contacts with Senator Kennedy himself?

MYERS: Coming over I was trying to think of that. But before I get into that I might tell you about an incident that occurred in probably March prior to the primary.

YOUNG: This would be March 1960?

MYERS: March 1960, right. A call was made into the area by (Robert P.) Bob McDonough requesting Cabel County representatives to go to Washington. Of course, it gives us a little insight into the way the Kennedys did things, handled their organization, which was very impressive to those

of us down here. We were advised that a chartered plane would pick us up and take us into Parkersburg where the Kennedy Convair would come and pick up all the county representatives that they could get together, from West Virginia. So I agreed to go. The call was made at 10:00 in the morning and the chartered plane was to pick us up at 11:00 in the morning. We were to go to Charleston and pick up the Charleston and Beckley representatives, then to Parkersburg and await the Convair. Chartered planes were also coming from Wheeling, Fairmont, and three or four other areas in the state, and, of course, we would pick up the Parkersburg representatives at Parkersburg. Well, the end result was that we got into Parkersburg and there were approximately fifteen or eighteen of us representing various sections of West Virginia that were put aboard the Convair along with (Robert P.) Bob McDonough and Matt Reese. We flew into Washington, the Washington National Airport, and were picked up at the airport and taken to (Robert F.) Bobby Kennedy's residence in McLean, Virginia. There we were met by Bobby Kennedy, (Theodore C.) Ted Sorensen, (Lawrence F.) Larry O'Brien and (Kenneth P.) Kenny O'Donnell and two or three other aides of the Kennedy organization. The purpose of the meeting, we were told, was to evaluate West Virginia so that the Kennedy staff could make a determination whether to come into West Virginia strong and make a concerted effort to win the primary, or whether they should perhaps bypass West Virginia and avoid the real test of the religious issue. We settled down almost immediately into a meeting in Bobby Kennedy's den where they had put up a map of West Virginia, a county map. We took the state section by section and each of us were to give our evaluation of what we as West Virginians felt might be effective in the way of a campaign; and the way of issues and how our areas, our specific areas, might differ from the other areas in the state, West Virginia being a pretty sectionalized state.

YOUNG: Did you do the evaluation for this section?

MYERS: Yes, I did the evaluation for this section.

YOUNG: What was your evaluation of this section at that time?

MYERS: Well, my evaluation was this, that I didn't think for Cabell County specifically that the religious issue would be a tremendous factor, although it certainly would be a factor. Perhaps the major contribution I made, if any, was a strong recommendation that they use the name Roosevelt as often and as vigorously as they could.

YOUNG: In this particular section or in the state in general?

MYERS: Well, in this particular section and definitely in the coal fields. Whether this prompted them getting Roosevelt to come in actively or not, I don't know. Perhaps they already had it in mind but the name Roosevelt has been magic in this area for many years and probably always will be.

YOUNG: Well, this, then, you would consider your unique contribution to the West Virginia campaign?

MYERS: Yes, if there was any. But at least it was interesting to me, the concern by some of the West Virginians that they not use the airplane, they not make the money image the image. I'm sure the Kennedys had to decide whether to try to hide the money image if they could, or whether to just accept it and accept its liabilities and take advantage of its assets. This argument centered around the use of the Convair for transportation for the senator. And, of course, at the same time that he was making appearances in West Virginia, he would also have some Wisconsin appearances to make. He was also running in primaries in Indiana and Oregon, so Larry O'Brien insisted that the airplane had to be used just as a simple matter of logistics, that they couldn't get him from place to place, he couldn't possibly meet the schedule that was already set without the Convair. Bobby Kennedy stated flatly and bluntly that the Convair would not be used and that other arrangements would have to be made. Of course, the end result was that the Convair was used. A little bit of an argument among the staff in front of us on this one, which resulted in the Convair being used without tremendous criticism, if any criticism, I believe. In fact, West Virginians considered it pretty novel; that was their first exposure to this type campaigning on a fast and furious basis.

YOUNG: I think we might add as an historical footnote that the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Cecil Underwood, had used a helicopter in the election four years earlier. So, West Virginians may have been softened a little bit.

MYERS: That's true, right, a little bit for this approach. But, back to the president. My first meeting with the president was at a courthouse appearance in Huntington, probably his first appearance here. Of course, he was in a tremendous rush-rush situation beautifully organized by his staff, with local assistance everywhere. So that

the candidate being used literally as a piece of merchandise was displayed in his best light at every possible appearance, adapting himself--and I'm sure they had thorough briefing meetings--to conditions of his audience, thinking of his audience--a quick change from the business man meeting, the breakfast which we had here, to a poverty situation thirty miles away with an elderly couple living on thirty or forty dollars a month. So he was a wonderful candidate as far as I could see from observation, in this respect. Whether he set the policies of where he was going and how he was going or not, I don't know. I doubt it, because I don't think a candidate is able to do this. The whole thing was planned beautifully and they moved like clockwork, always being a little bit late--which is good, I believe, because it builds up anticipation.

YOUNG: As far as you know, would you be able to make a calculated guess as to who the chief advisors were with respect to just West Virginia and the conduct of the campaign here?

MYERS: Well, I think without question Bob McDonough was the chief local advisor, chief state-wide advisor. Larry O'Brien was on the scene; (R. Sargent, Jr.) Sarge Shriver was in this particular area, although Sarge spent most of his time here during the general campaign. But I'd say Ted Sorensen and Kenny O'Donnell were the two chief advisors along with Bobby Kennedy.

YOUNG: I want to go back just a minute to this meeting you mentioned in Robert Kennedy's den. Your advice, then, at that was for the senator to enter the campaign.

MYERS: Oh, yes, very definitely, without question.

YOUNG: How do you feel your own predictions held up with respect to religion as an issue?

MYERS: Well--and again maybe I'm playing it down--I know that religion was a tremendous factor. I do feel that most of the Protestants, if I had to guess, felt certainly that a Catholic had a right to be president, but likewise they were concerned, they were a little bit afraid for a Catholic to be president. We lost this county. Kennedy was defeated and Humphrey won. I think Kennedy would have won without question had he not been a Catholic. But I think my prediction was reasonably valid because we put the religious issue to bed in West Virginia in 1960 with regard to presidential campaigns, I believe.

YOUNG: You don't think it's likely to be an issue again, then, ever?

MYERS: I can't conceive that it would unless we get into perhaps some of the real radical situations, for example, running an atheist for president. I believe that religion would definitely come into play then.

YOUNG: Well, I wanted to get back to another point. We've kind of jumped around here from the meeting in Washington where the decision was made perhaps to enter the primary, to talking about the president himself. We are much aware, of course, of the president's charm and of his wit. Did you personally observe any examples of his charm at work, or any examples of his wit, in the West Virginia campaign with which you were connected?

MYERS: Well, his wit not specifically, but his charm was just utterly terrific with the women. He had our Cabell County women and those closely associated with the campaign just in a state of trance, almost, due to the way he did things. His appearance, his approach, his personality was quite magnetic. My wife's main claim to fame now is that she sewed a button on his coat when a button came off after someone had been tugging on his coat. So, yes, I'd say without question he was a real charmer.

YOUNG: What was the reaction of the West Virginians that you were with to the Harvard accent and the Eastern airs? Did you find any resentment of this in West Virginia or was he accepted as simply being a little bit different but nevertheless a good guy?

MYERS: Well, I think without question the Harvard accent was an asset.

YOUNG: This, too, brought memories of Franklin Roosevelt?

MYERS: Yes. And well, maybe this again is a personal opinion, but I always feel that the outstanding public speaker is a man with. . . . His voice can be differentiated; his voice can be distinctive on the radio, for example, as opposed to someone else's. I think the Harvard accent was not resented to any extent at all and, in fact, it became a tremendous asset to him.

YOUNG: Well, do you have any other stories that might be relevant, then, to just the personality as such, rather than policies?

MYERS: Unfortunately, much of the senator's time when he

was here was a rush-rush situation, so I didn't spend a tremendous amount of time with him other than when we were in large groups--except on a few occasions.

YOUNG: What was your particular role in the general election then?

MYERS: Well here, of course, you get into the interplay again of politics. We were faced with the decision of should Kennedy as the nominee for president, his effort, be blended with the gubernatorial effort. And we have to again recall that in the primary the Kennedy effort was opposed to the normal Democratic organization. So when we came to the general, we found that a Kennedy organization existed throughout the state of West Virginia, that was separate and distinct from the normal Democratic organization. This was especially true in Cabel County. The decision had to be made how to blend the two organizations, one that had been successful in Kennedy being nominated and the other representing the normal politicians and people that existed in the corrupt politics of West Virginia. I say that without question, not meaning that all the people that are involved in it are corrupt, of course, but the total system. But someone somewhere--and I assume that Bob McDonough and the nominee, Senator Kennedy, both participated in the decision--the decision was made that the Kennedy organization would stand separate and distinct during the general, from the state organization, the Democratic headquarters, that would exist. As a concession to the state organization however, they tied the hands of the Kennedy organization--this is probably proper--by insisting that the Kennedy chairmen had to work through the county chairmen of the Democratic party, and the Kennedy forces would not be allowed to solicit money for their effort.

YOUNG: Was this in all fifty-five counties?

MYERS: I would assume so, yes. Because this seemed to be a decision that was made, that the Kennedy headquarters must be adjacent to, or the operation in the headquarters of the county organization. In our particular case, we witnessed any number of incidences of where the Democratic organization was just literally scared to death to have their candidates attached to the Catholic presidential nominee. One incident is the Kennedy volunteers. Incidentally, the state Democratic organization in Cabel county didn't believe, or for one reason or another did not use volunteers in their concept of politics. So that we wound up in Cabel County with the state Democratic organization being run by a few people and the Kennedy organization having all the volunteers.

YOUNG: In other words, the state organization was campaigning professionally and you were campaigning on an amateur basis, more or less?

MYERS: On an amateur basis, yes. In fact we were all amateurs. There was no question about it, complete amateurs, and we probably still are. But one incident was where the Kennedy group in Cabell County was given the job of stuffing some fifty thousand envelopes with (William Wallace) Barron literature for the governor. The envelopes were in Huntington and were to be taken to Charleston to be mailed, where stamps were to be affixed by the state Democratic organization. We agreed to do this provided we could put in a Kennedy stuffer: Because in no case, in absolutely no case in 1960 did any of the state candidates' literature have the Kennedy name or the Kennedy picture attached to it, which is most unusual in normal presidential elections. Usually the governor will attach himself along with the president. But in this case, it was not done.

YOUNG: Well, were you allowed to do this?

MYERS: We did it. We stuffed the envelopes with the Barron literature and the Kennedy leaflet and sent them to Charleston. In Charleston somebody made the decision to remove the Kennedy literature from the Barron mailing, and the Kennedy literature was returned to us. Needless to say, those of us in our enthusiasm for Senator Kennedy, didn't appreciate this in the least.

YOUNG: Well, there are two questions here that I'd like to ask and I'll ask them both right now; perhaps we can go along with them at the same time. I was going to ask you if you felt that religion as an issue subsided just a little bit between the time of the primary and the general election. In other words, was the religious issue less forceful in the general election? Did the victory in the primary indicate that it would be diminished? Secondly, this would indicate that the state Democratic machine might have had some doubts about the meaning of the primary in terms of the fact that a Catholic did win?

MYERS: Well, yes. Let me answer the first part first. I believe without question the West Virginians generally, the vast majority, accepted Senator Kennedy as the nominee.

YOUNG: And there was a diminution of the anti-Catholic feeling?

MYERS: A definite diminution of anti-Catholic feeling. In

fact, I'm confident that the people of West Virginia took a great amount of pride in the fact that they were, number one, being able to participate forcibly in a national election; and number two, the fact that they had killed this issue of bigotry, they had proven to the nation that West Virginia was not a state of bigots. So I think they took a great amount of pride in it. I agree with you that the state Democratic organization did not perhaps accept Senator Kennedy as an asset in the general election.

YOUNG: Well, would the two United States senators be in on this decision to not associate the state ticket with the national ticket?

MYERS: Well, I couldn't say, only I would have to assume that at some point they were in on the decision. Whether they agreed with the decision or not, I do not know.

YOUNG: You don't know whether they were more attuned to the state campaign or to the national campaign?

MYERS: That's right; I don't know this. I do know--and this again is strictly a personal opinion--that the Democratic party in West Virginia is not responsive to the people of West Virginia. We are blessed with a tremendous majority, which is continually diminishing, actually. In fact, the statistics, the outcome of the election, would prove beyond a question of doubt that the state Democratic organization would have been much, much smarter to have attached themselves to Kennedy, the nominee, rather than to . . .

YOUNG: This might have been reflected in a few more Democrats, then, in the House of Delegates and the Senate if they had been attached to the Kennedy ticket?

MYERS: Definitely could have been, yes. Well, another example, the Barron organization purchased some two hundred billboards.

YOUNG: This is Governor Barron, the candidate in 1960?

MYERS: That's right. And the state organization purchased some two hundred billboards for advertising throughout the state. In no case, did these two hundred billboards have the name Kennedy mentioned, or a photograph of him. Finally, with pressure from McDonough, perhaps from some of the senators, I don't know, just perhaps to go through

the motion, they purchased late in the campaign an additional twenty-eight for Kennedy alone--again, not attaching Barron and Kennedy together.

YOUNG: This was pressure from Robert McDonough, the state chairman for Kennedy?

MYERS: Yes.

YOUNG: Were these billboards evenly distributed geographically, or is that . . .

MYERS: Well, I assume they would be, yes, to some degree.

YOUNG: Busy highways?

MYERS: Right, to good locations. Of course, late in the campaign the twenty-eight locations purchased for Kennedy couldn't have been as desirable because the choice spots were taken. But this rubbed those of us who were active in the Kennedy organization the wrong way, of course.

YOUNG: In various interviews and various publications, the statement has been made that Senator Kennedy decided to enter the campaign because various polls showed that he would win, that he had about a 60-40 chance of winning; that shortly after he announced his candidacy, his popularity, according to the polls, had slipped. But if you take the final primary election results, he did win on just about a 60-40 basis.

MYERS: That's right.

YOUNG: Now, assuming that organization and money had been equal between the two candidates, do you think Senator Kennedy would still have won? If both sides had had a Sargent Shriver, and both sides had used the same techniques, would the result have been the same?

MYERS: Well, of course, this makes a number of assumptions. Number one, Senator Humphrey certainly had the organization of the state, I think without question. He had the professional politicians almost in toto.

YOUNG: Would you call this the "courthouse gang?"

MYERS: Well, I wouldn't. Now this is supposition on my part, but I would assume that it would be developed out of the Senate club where . . .

YOUNG: The West Virginia Senate or the United States Senate?

MYERS: The United States Senate, where Senator (Lyndon B.) Johnson, who evidently had some aspirations toward the presidential nomination at the time, undoubtedly has a tremendous rapport with Senator (Robert C.) Byrd and Senator (Jennings) Randolph of West Virginia which gives him a direct connection with--and, of course Senator (Hubert H.) Humphrey--a direct connection with the state house organization.

YOUNG: Do you think that Senator Humphrey was quite willing, while he has something of a liberal reputation, to align himself with the more Southern members, Senator Byrd and Senator Johnson?

MYERS: Well, in this case, of course, I don't think there was necessarily a question of alignment from the standpoint of philosophy--practical politics.

YOUNG: He appears to be a patsy in one sense, doesn't he?

MYERS: Well, he does, in a sense, yes. Whether he was doing it to make a sincere effort toward the presidential nomination or perhaps the vice-presidential nomination, or perhaps moving--and this is pure supposition--perhaps moving Senator Johnson into the presidency, which would have left the leadership of the Senate open to Senator Humphrey.

YOUNG: Well, I'm sorry to have interrupted; do you want to go back? We started on the supposition that other things being equal in terms of the final primary results . . .

MYERS: Well, yes, if all things had been equal. . . . And I certainly don't want to detract from Senator Humphrey's qualifications as a politician, because he does make a tremendous effort. But I think the novelty of the volunteer approach that the Kennedys made, and certainly the money factor, were tremendous factors in his election here. Of course, disregarding the candidates themselves, it would have been impossible to add the ingredient of the volunteers with their enthusiasm, their bungling, and their ineptness towards politics. But they still had the one thing, enthusiasm, which overshadows the others. It would have been impossible to add the volunteer effort with the professional effort that Senator Humphrey had.

YOUNG: In other words, one just about balances the other?

MYERS: Yes, and the two are incompatible. There were two efforts available to the politician: one was the volunteer which the Kennedys organized and stimulated; the other was the professional. Senator Humphrey picked up and got all the professional help, and Senator Kennedy organized his volunteers and did a beautiful job of it. This was the way he campaigned, the way he has always campaigned.

YOUNG: Well, if you exclude the Catholic factor in the volunteer factor, volunteers in general, you are saying, are not likely to volunteer to work for professional politicians?

MYERS: This has been traditionally true in West Virginia. Now, this is not necessarily traditionally true in all states. Senator Kennedy used the volunteers to tremendous advantage in Massachusetts, if what I understand is true.

YOUNG: You mean the marriage there of the professional and the volunteer?

MYERS: Yes, fortunately there they had the blending, because they had the policy set at the top.

YOUNG: You mentioned the fact that the professional politician balances, you think, the volunteer. Did organized labor for Humphrey in any sense also help balance the volunteer proposition on the political seesaw?

MYERS: Well, now you say organized labor for Humphrey. Of course, we had in this area organized labor for Kennedy.

YOUNG: It is true, however, that in some areas of the state organized labor did support Humphrey, is this correct?

MYERS: Yes, I am sure this is true. Here we had Henry Glazier representing the garment workers and Summers Dean representing the AFL/CIO (American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations) organization, both of them committed to Senator Kennedy. They wavered at times, but Washington pressure was applied and they came back into the fold.

YOUNG: Well, if we take just Cabel County, define, if you would for me, please, the term "professional politician." Are these people that have local jobs?

Obviously, they couldn't all be under a United States Senator's patronage. How are they kept alive or what is the nature of the professional organization as opposed to the Kennedy organization?

MYERS: Well, the professional organization here consists of perhaps, well, the local attorneys, for the courthouse and such provides much of their livelihood. They respond to the political climate more rapidly than anyone else out of financial necessity. The state house organization that consists of the state road commission, the Huntington State Hospital and all their employees, and then the courthouse organization.

YOUNG: Huntington State Hospital is what kind of a hospital?

MYERS: It's a mental hospital. In addition, the state road, of course, is a very, very active group. So you have here the Democratic executive committee, the county chairman, the courthouse, the county court people, the prosecuting attorney, and the elected officials of the county, balanced with the state house organization, their employees. These people generally provide the election officials in the general and primary elections, run the organization, collect the money, handle the state money that is sent into Cabel County, and actually form the political basis of our area. Aside from this, we had the Volunteers for Kennedy and the Catholic people here. And, of course, a tremendous candidate, which we don't want to forget.

YOUNG: Would you say that attorneys were notably absent from your volunteer group?

MYERS: Oh, yes, yes. I can count them on one hand.

YOUNG: And what particular reasons did the ones that joined you have to join, would you say?

MYERS: Well, in one case, Bob Erison is a graduate of Harvard, which gave him a rapport. But Bob is a liberal and knows Kenny O'Donnell, went to school with Kenny O'Donnell. Bob is very active in the Kennedy organization and believed in the Kennedy philosophy. Tom Harvey was a member of the political group or the political family of Cabel County, the state house organization, but had two years previous to this been defeated for the U.S. House of Representatives, and as a result was on the outside of the political group. So Tom entered into the picture.

YOUNG: He would have been a candidate against Kenneth Heckler?

MYERS: Yes, he was a candidate in the primary. So, he was on the outside of the structure, but this is about the only--well, we had another attorney, Joe Patton, who was anti-state house. We got our nucleus of people from the anti-state house politicians that were--the few people that we had that were politically aware at all were anti-state house, and they'll work for anybody against the state house.

YOUNG: Would you say that in the primary the battle between the two United States senators in West Virginia, Kennedy and Humphrey, in 1960, that there was any real difference in terms of platform, promises, or ideology, or, on the other hand, did the campaign develop itself around personalities?

MYERS: Well, I think there was almost no difference in ideology between the two, because I don't think that that even became an issue in West Virginia. The economic condition in West Virginia was perhaps the prime issue. Kennedy's campaigning technique where he hit every hollow, every creekbed, every area of the state, and then continually reminded the people that he had been there, by producing our odd names like "Hurricane," and so on and so forth, on TV and such, showed a real closeness to the people. The Kennedy organization, the steamroller technique where it was Kennedy everywhere, everywhere--I recall one week in Cabel County alone we had eighteen hundred dollars in petty cash bills in our headquarters, which is pretty fabulous for sound trucks and busses and such. So that it was a theatrical production in a sense, tuned to the serious side of people's welfare from the standpoint of politics. I don't think that ideology even entered into it. I don't believe, unfortunately, that people were concerned with ideology. Again, perhaps I'm cynical but people quite often are merely concerned with "What's this politician going to do for me?" And Kennedy told them and, of course, he did do it after he was elected.

YOUNG: Well, that leads into the next question that I wanted to ask. In general, as you observed it, what was the reaction to the domestic policies of the New Frontier, the various Kennedy proposals? Specifically, did West Virginians feel that Kennedy had done rather well by them, or did they feel let down?

MYERS: Oh, well, here again in 1964, if Kennedy had been able to re-run, I don't think there would have been any question but that he would have carried West Virginia overwhelmingly. Even our strongest Republican opponent would admit that they had to be flattered by the attention, the direct attention of a president toward a state. It

was generally felt that he met his obligation toward West Virginia, he acknowledged the obligation, even to the extent of putting the flag of West Virginia in his office in the White House, displaying it. He acknowledged it, he met his obligation, and even though many of the Republicans didn't agree with his philosophy or the liberal aspects of the Democratic organization or the way he did it, they had to be flattered as West Virginians over the fact that here was a president that took an interest in our state. And the businessmen were, of course, very much flattered from the standpoint of--not flattered but economically helped. I believe that when Senator Kennedy became president, West Virginia was about forty-fourth or forty-fifth with regard to placement of federal contracts, Defense Department, and so on. And by the time he was assassinated, West Virginia's rank was probably in the mid-twenties of the fifty states. So there is no question that he promised to help West Virginia, acknowledged his obligation to West Virginia, and certainly met it.

YOUNG: How would you judge local reaction to such broader items as the Peace Corps and the Kennedy medical proposals?

MYERS: Well, the Peace Corps was accepted without hesitation by everyone. Sarge Shriver was probably almost as popular as the president here in Cabell County because he spent so much time here. But the Peace Corps was accepted without question. The Medicare situation perhaps was much more controversial. Certainly here the Republicans of our area and, of course, led by our doctors, were in violent opposition to it. Some of the hospital administrators, or one specifically, was very much for it. Supposedly, the story goes that one of our Kennedy supporters lost their job over the Medicare program at one of the local TV stations. Whether this is true or not, I don't know.

YOUNG: A newscaster?

MYERS: No, a program writer. But Medicare was controversial, very controversial. But again in politics, I think, if it doesn't become too emotional, people look at the total picture rather than one specific issue, and West Virginia without question would have voted for Kennedy heavily in '64. I am confident they would have had no other choice.

YOUNG: Well, if you exclude the people who would normally be critical of the president--die-hard political opponents--did any of Kennedy's supporters feel let down on any individual item or any single item? In other

words, what possible criticism of the New Frontier among those that ostensibly were with the president?

MYERS: Probably the only--and I'll say this is the only-- issue that caused any concern at all in this state, or in this area of the state, was the civil rights issue. Pushing hard on the civil rights issue generated some concern toward Kennedy. Most of this was directed toward Bobby Kennedy. And, of course, there was some question at the time that Bobby Kennedy was appointed attorney general. There was a question in the mind of a lot of people whether this was a proper move or not. Yet again, we all respected Kennedy for the fact that he made the appointment in face of criticism. I say civil rights was the only issue that caused any real concern among the public.

YOUNG: Well, locally, that would be in Huntington and Cabel County. Did you notice any correlation between the religious issue and the civil rights question? In other words, could you correlate those who opposed Kennedy because he was a Catholic with those who opposed the civil rights issue, or do these things cross each other?

MYERS: No, I don't believe there was any cross at all. I believe they were separate and distinct. The religious issue couldn't have been dead here after the primary or after the general, specifically. The civil rights issue and, of course, Cabel County is very--we've had almost no racial incidents.

YOUNG: Do you know approximately what the Negro population is in the county?

MYERS: Approximately 5 percent. Our schools have all been integrated. There are no problems at all. The only concern that people seemed to have was whether we were pushing too fast and Kennedy was pushing too hard, and, as a result, taking the problem out of perspective. Of course, we have to realize that here in Cabel County we had almost no problem. Therefore, this might have been the reason we felt the problem was being pushed out of perspective.

YOUNG: Well, could you, for purposes of the record then, make any final summary or evaluation of President Kennedy, the primary, the general election, the years of the presidency?

MYERS: Well, Bill, of course, that's a big order. But those of us that participated in the Kennedy movement in this area felt a great amount of pride in being able,

number one, from a state standpoint, to participate in a national election and to have that degree of participation, degree of importance of our participation in a national election. West Virginia has always been--we have eight electoral votes--we've always been a nothing with regard to politics in the nation. I think this is perhaps one thing that impressed me immensely. The candidate--the president and his family, Mrs. Kennedy--just charmed us right out of our shoes in this area; we were all very much infatuated with them. We all did not necessarily--even those of us that were for him--didn't necessarily agree with everything he said at all times, but we were all completely satisfied with his presidency. The political appointment that I got out of it--if this is of any interest at all; and it wasn't necessarily a political appointment, although from a practical standpoint, it was--was appointment to national advisory committee of the Small Business Administration, where I met with the president a couple of times after he was in office, with the advisory board. He continually acknowledged his concern over West Virginia and certainly had an insight into West Virginia that no national politician has ever had before, primarily because of his active campaign.

YOUNG: Primarily because he had been here, I expect.

MYERS: That's right. He spent hours and days and days going into every nook and cranny of West Virginia, saw our problem, was tremendously impressed by the gentleness of our people. Those of us that know New Yorkers and New Englanders sometimes regard them as harsh, so I think he was impressed by this gentleness and politeness that West Virginia had shown to him. He remarked on that a number of times. But all in all, those of us that started early were immediately captured by his personal magnetism, the magnetism of his family as a total unit, and the total Kennedy package. And through him this image was projected throughout the state. I think Kennedy was our president.

YOUNG: Did you have any personal impressions of him as president, other than just these general meetings of the advisory board of the Small Business Administration?

MYERS: Well, this is the only contact I had with him. And this was actually the only direct contact we had with him after he was president.

YOUNG: In concluding this interview, then, are there any areas which I have missed or which you have missed, which you might like to add?

MYERS: I don't think so, Bill. Undoubtedly when I leave here I'll think of a hundred things that we could have discussed, but at this time I feel that I have exhausted my contacts and my association with the president.

YOUNG: Thank you very much.

MYERS: Thank you.

YOUNG: This has been an interview with Mr. Robert Myers.

MYERS: Bill, just for the record . . .

YOUNG: Mr. Myers wishes to say something else.

MYERS: The only thing I wanted to add--just for the record, since we're interested in accuracy--is that my name is not Robert, it's Bob. This is a common error, but I thought since it was going on the record, the name is Bob Myers, an oddity in that respect.

YOUNG: Well, we'll immortalize you then as Bob. Mr. Myers has an additional comment which he wishes to make, so this is not the end of the tape. You were talking about the effect of the Kennedy visit on Marshall University and the attitude of colleges in general towards politics. Would you like to continue that?

MYERS: Well, Bill, I think the reputation of politics in West Virginia is to be rather sordid, but I recall when the president visited the campus of Marshall. He was required to stay off the campus, and a truckbed was used as a speaking platform in the middle of the street adjacent to the campus and the students were allowed to congregate around the truck and Kennedy spoke to them. The rule was that he was not allowed on campus, of course, being a controversial figure of politics.

YOUNG: This is Marshall University in Huntington?

MYERS: Yes, that's right. Since that time, of course, this has changed abruptly. (John Davison, IV) Rockefeller has visited the campus here during his campaign and we have had all three gubernatorial candidates in the past primary, Democratic primary, and, of course, Republican. Cecil Underwood has visited the campus, has spoken to political science classes, as well as to the Young Democratic club. So we have seen an abrupt change. I think all this came about as a result of Kennedy injecting, of necessity, volunteers into the political structure of West Virginia. Kennedy made

partisan politics a little bit more respectable in West Virginia and showed to many, many people who had never been involved in politics that politics as such was an absolute necessity and that we all should be more concerned about our public officials. I think that without question this has disturbed some of our state politicians who would like to run closed-corporation type politics. They don't want people, people generally, citizens generally and members of their party, nosing around into the political structure because it hampers their activities and control of the power structure. I recall here in Cabell County where many people, feeling that it was patriotic to volunteer for political service, had called the state Democratic headquarters in the general election in 1960. The secretary had a list of the names, and the Kennedy headquarters being adjacent, we watched these volunteers come in, volunteer registration build up. And nothing was done with them, absolutely nothing. Fifty or seventy-five people had volunteered. We literally stole the list from the state Democratic headquarters and called the people and put them to work for Kennedy. So there seems to be an awareness. This could eventually bring about an upgrading of West Virginia politics which I personally feel is so desperately needed before the state of West Virginia will ever take its place among the fifty states of the Union.

YOUNG: Part of the Kennedy contribution, then, was to leave a legacy here, at least, of political respectability and, in one instance at least, open up a state university campus to politicians of all parties?

MYERS: That's right, that's right. This could conceivably be the greatest contribution that he has made to West Virginia in the long term, that he brought about a political awareness of our state. Many of us know that the motivation of politics in West Virginia leaves a lot to be desired, and the only way it can be corrected is for people of good motivation to become interested in politics.

YOUNG: Thank you very much for this additional comment.