

**Edward A. McDermott Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 06/04/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Edward A. McDermott

**Interviewer:** Charles Daly

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**Biographical Note**

Edward A. McDermott (1920-1999) was the Director of the Office of Emergency Planning from 1962 to 1965 and a member of the National Security Council from 1962 to 1965. This interview focuses on emergency preparedness planning during the Cuban Missile Crisis, McDermott's personal recollections of John F. Kennedy [JFK], and JFK's assassination.

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me that he had had a call from Governor Phil Hoff of Vermont and that Gov. Hoff was requesting Federal assistance in connection with a drought disaster that was affecting his state. The dairy industry of his state was suffering very badly because of the fact that the ponds from which the dairy herds draw their water had all gone dry as a consequence of this unusually extended drought and there was something that had to be done. The President said and I recall his words, that "Phil Hoff had called and they have some kind of a serious disaster problem up there. I would like you to go up there tomorrow, meet with the Governor, and investigate the situation and see what we can do and I will talk with you about it when I come back." With that, he walked out of the doors of the Presidential office onto the porch and toward the helicopter and departed Washington. I know of no other official Presidential action that might have been taken between then and the time of lift-off. On November 22, early in the morning, I took a small jet in the Presidential fleet and went up to Vermont and met with Governor Hoff and I was actually enroute back from that Presidential mission when I received word of his assassination in Texas.

June 4, 1964

This is Charles Daly, continuing our conversation with Ed McDermott, Director of OEP, here in his office. Ed, we were last talking about November 22. Let's continue this Vermont thing -- what your duties were -- your actions -- on the 22nd.

EAM: As I was commenting in our last discussion, when I arrived back from the trip to Vermont at the President's request on the morning of the 22nd, upon landing at Andrews AFB I saw my driver, as the plane taxied to a stop, driving the car rather rapidly toward the place where the plane was coming to a stop. This was a sort of unusual action, and we opened the door of the plane and my driver got out of the car and told me that the President had been shot and that was the first information -- that was about 1:25 or 1:30 p. m., Washington time, that I had of the occurrence in Dallas because no information had reached us on the plane. In fact, it had just occurred, because the driver heard it on the radio as he was approaching Andrews. There was this feeling of disbelief that everyone shared when they heard the news; -- no feeling at that time that it was as serious as it proved to

be but my first reaction was that some sort of incident had occurred in which the President may have been injured. I got into the car and the driver started driving rapidly toward the White House and reports continued to come over the car radio.

As we drove toward the White House -- West Executive Avenue to enter the White House grounds I received the news that the President had been assassinated and that he was dead. I went immediately to the Situation Room in the basement of the White House, which is a main source of information for us on national security matters, and there learned that they had the same information that I had heard. I went immediately upstairs. I remembered that Pierre Salinger was over the Atlantic with the Cabinet Officers enroute to Japan. I had talked to Andy Hatcher the preceding day and he told me he was going to Baltimore on Friday so I knew that there was probably no one in the Press Office. I went to that office and found that the remnants of the White House Press Corps that were not in Dallas with the President were, of course, jammed into Pierre Salinger's office. At that particular moment, there were some other members of the White House staff congregating there. I recall Lee White, and I recall you, Chuck, coming into that office. Paul Southwick came in and also Under Secretary Jim Carr of Department of Interior. I have vivid recollections of what happened then. The television set was on in that office. We were getting most of our information from that source. Newsmen were asking questions of Lee White, yourself and myself and others and of course none of us had any information except what we were getting from television or radio sources. Phones were ringing and there was no information we could give to callers. When I concluded that not much was being accomplished there and, being totally confused by the shock of the situation, I stepped out into the corridor between Pierre's office and the President's Oval Office. It was quiet. I remember walking over to the President's doorway which opened out into this corridor and I looked in that office and I don't think I shall ever forget what I saw there at that moment. You will recall, because you were there, the President's office had been substantially denuded of furniture -- there was some redecorating being done -- arranged as a surprise by Mrs. Kennedy. New draperies had been hung, the desk still remained in the office but many of the other pieces of furniture had been moved into Evelyn Lincoln's office. The memorabilia of which the President was so fond, which were such a common sight on his desk had been moved and the only activity in

that office at that moment -- probably within an hour of the President's death -- was the quiet tapping of a carpet-layer's hammer as he was laying a new crimson carpet in the President's Oval Office. At that moment, the events in Dallas were transpiring. Coming through the corridor while I was standing there were the President's brother, Ted, and others -- some members of the family who were coming to see the President's children who were still in the White House. A little bit later, Ted Kennedy and his sister took off by helicopter from the White House lawn to go to Hyannis to be with the President's parents.

I went back to my own office which was just across West Executive Avenue from the White House. I assembled my top staff people, all of whom had of course heard the news. All were in about the same state of shock, disbelief, tears -- many of them -- that was without reference to political affiliation, I might add. We had a discussion in my Conference Room on the events that had just transpired and suggested to the staff that while there were certain things we should be prepared for because of our emergency-type responsibilities, the key elements of the staff should remain and others could be excused early in that afternoon and suggested that they remember the President in their prayers.

We had some concerns at the moment because we have responsibilities in the field of continuity of government and in other areas. I went back over to the White House and at that time there were a number of rumors floating around. One story heard, I believe, before I actually left the White House the first time was that Vice President Johnson had been shot and there was some question as to whether he was injured and the severity of that injury -- whether he was surviving and well. We quickly confirmed that he was and of course thereafter he was actually taking the oath of his office aboard Air Force One. But there was that interval -- that short interval -- where there was the rumor of the President and the Vice President's death and the question of who was President of the United States. The official consolation that came from the fact of the Vice President's safety and his taking the oath was a very real emotion. Then, I recall that there was a period of apparent temporary inactivity at the White House -- very little conversation with those old friends and associates of the President



whom you met -- many wet eyes -- not much being said. But sort of spontaneously and quite quickly everyone came to the sudden realization that there was a lot of work to be done, arrangements to be made. I think it's interesting that with the great record of efficiency that President Kennedy and his Administration had and with all of the plans that had been made for most contingencies that could occur, one of the contingencies for which there were fewest plans was the possibility of the death of President Kennedy in office. I think that's maybe because all of us associated with him sort of felt that he had that indestructible quality because of his youth and that this sort of thing would never occur. There were plans to be made. I recall that we suddenly heard that Air Force One was enroute back -- actually in the air -- out of Dallas, heading back to Andrews AFB with the President. The late President's body was aboard, Mrs. Kennedy, Kenny, Larry, and others. Also that arrangements had to be made for the meeting of that Plane when it arrived.

Sarge Shriver came to the White House and began very active direction of the many, many plans that had to be made for the funeral. I worked at the White House and in our office in our agency that night until about 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock. I went home; came in again early Saturday morning and tried to be of assistance to Sarge Shriver and the others who were working on arrangements at the White House, made phone calls to people around the country at the family's request, for various purposes.

About 11:30 a. m. Mrs. McDermott came down town and met me and we were included in the group that passed silently through the East Room of the White House to view the President's body in repose. That was an emotional experience, as so many of them were, because this was Saturday noon and on Wednesday night of that very week, Mrs. McDermott and I attended a reception held by the President and Mrs. Kennedy at the White House and had visited with him and Mrs. Kennedy in that same very room -- the East Room of the White House -- where just 2-1/2 days later his body lay in repose. That party on November 20th was, I believe, the last official social occasion in the White House in which the President participated. He talked that night about his upcoming trip to Texas the next day -- he was interested in it and that seemed to be the principal subject of his conversation that evening.

Then, of course, the events of the week end occurred and those events, because of the tremendous coverage that was accorded to the President's funeral and ceremonies associated with it by the television and radio networks, are well known to all Americans and to the world. I was present at the funeral Mass at St. Matthews Cathedral on Monday and the interment of his body at Arlington Cemetery later that day.

Daly: Ed, you want to go back now and discuss your activities in the Cuban crisis?

EAM: Well, many aspects of the Cuban crisis and the President's decisions growing out of that great threat to our national security and interest will be covered by others. I recall that on the week end prior to October 22, the President was on a tour that took him to the Midwest and was intended to take him to the West Coast. A situation was developing in Cuba that came to the attention of certain officials in Government the few days prior to Saturday, October 20. The decision was made by the President that morning in Chicago on Saturday to return to Washington rather than to continue his trip. I received a call at my home about noon from the Secretary of the National Security Council advising that a meeting was being scheduled with the President in the living quarters of the White House as soon as he touched down from the Midwest. We were given instructions for access to the White House; each member of the National Security Council and the others who were to participate in that discussion were to enter by different routes so as not to create undue concern or suspicions.

Daly: Did you know the subject of that meeting?

EAM: I knew that it was relating generally to Cuba but I did not know the specifics of it because at that time I had not personally been present at any of the intelligence briefings where developing information was made known to the President.

Daly: How did you know it was Cuba?

EAM: There had been some discussions in the intelligence agencies of government on the preceding day or possibly on Thursday that alerted

us to the problem in Cuba and I knew the information concerning it was being made available to the President. Because of general familiarity with potential trouble spots around the world it was sort of assumed that this would be Cuba.

Very shortly after the President arrived back in Washington, this meeting did convene in the living room of the President's family quarters on the second floor of the White House and at that time a rather detailed current briefing on the product of the aerial surveillance of Cuba was made available to the President. The discussions continued rather than began -- I say continued because there had been discussions earlier in the week -- discussions continued as to the various types of response and action that might be taken and of course, as others will report in more detail, those discussions and considerations ranged across the whole spectrum of alternative responses to this problem. I think here for the first time, to me, was demonstrated the real burdens of the Presidency in the seriousness with which the President approached this problem. I recall him leaving the discussion on a couple of occasions and stepping alone out onto the porch on the second floor of the White House looking across the South Lawn of the White House. On occasion he would stand out there alone for a few minutes and on another occasion, possibly on both occasions that I'm referring to he would be joined by Bobby, his brother. They would have a discussion -- the President would come back and join the group and would indicate a particular decision or judgment that he made. The reaction of the group in his absence was rather interesting because there was very little conversation when he was not present and in the moments or minutes, they seemed like hours, but in those minutes he would be alone out on the porch of the White House, any conversation that took place in the group that remained in the living room was in very low, hushed tones and not much was said in his absence.

Those discussions went on until Saturday night; -- we returned again to the White House for resumption of those discussions on Sunday and they continued until mid-afternoon on Sunday at which time the President's decision about the action to be taken, which he subsequently announced, became firm. Then the problem was the question of the necessary notification to our allies and to others and an expedited chronology of activities was developed. Everybody was given a specific assignment to discharge and various departments, State and Defense had their responsibilities and they went about the discharge of those responsibilities. Included in these arrangements, of course, were the

leaders of the Congress and your office, Chuck, your associates were very active in that area.

Daly: What specifically, other than participating in the NSC meeting, what specifically were you doing in your operations?

EAM: The problem here was that the President had a desire to endeavor to isolate this problem into its military and diplomatic aspects and to make sure that there was a maximum degree of readiness throughout the Governmental structure to deal with the consequences of his decision and any actions that might have been taken by Castro or the Soviets. On the other hand, he did not want a series of external actions taken by the Federal Government that would contribute to the concern of or panic the American people. So my task, consistent with our responsibilities in the Office of Emergency Planning, was to make sure that there was a degree of readiness in the nonmilitary area within the Federal structure to respond to any type of emergency that might develop. As I am sure others will agree, these were very tense hours and days. As we view it now, in retrospect, some might have difficulty recognizing that there was a feeling and a fear that nearly anything could happen as a result of the actions and threats that had been made and actions taken in Cuba and the President's determined response to it.

My responsibility was in the non-military area and I did proceed with the discharge of those responsibilities consistent with the President's instruction; shortly after the President made his statement to the American people on the evening of Monday, October 22, I called a meeting of the Cabinet members who had important nonmilitary responsibilities and discussed preparedness actions with them. They received a briefing on the background of the problem and I discussed with them organizational and other planning arrangements that had been made in Government to deal with the nonmilitary problems of a war emergency. We had actually a series of those meetings with Cabinet Officers. Those meetings were held in the Conference Room at the White House -- were not publicized -- because the actions that were being taken within this group were to develop a level of internal readiness that was adequate to meet any contingency but still make sure there were no external actions taken that would cause great public concern. At the same time, I called meetings of the heads of some 18 or 20 independent agencies that had had important nonmilitary emergency responsibilities and we made sure that the level of readiness to discharge those responsibilities was adequate.

Daly: You were operating under a broad mandate to get ready for whatever might develop?

EAM: Correct. The President directed on Sunday afternoon, as other directions were being given to those departments, that these general actions be taken. I reported on these various actions to the President through Ted Sorensen. I reported to him on meetings that had been held and worked closely with Ted Reardon, who was at that time Assistant to the President and specifically, was Secretary to the Cabinet and the activities of the Cabinet, so Ted Reardon was instrumental in assisting and setting up some of these meetings and participated in them.

An interesting event was taking place coincidentally on October 22nd. There is in Government an element called the National Defense Executive Reserve. The NDER is provided for by the Defense Production Act of 1950 and in this program the Federal Government has recruited from the private sector business, financial, labor, agricultural and other leaders who are people who would be called upon by the Federal Government to serve the Federal Government in one capacity or another in event of a war emergency in the discharge of some of these necessary Federal nonmilitary programs. There are some 3,000 leaders throughout the country that are members of this Executive Reserve. It had been planned--the President was interested in this program--for several months that there should be a national conference of the members of the NDER. About three months prior to October we began developing plans for this conference and actually called this conference and set the date for Monday, October 22. So there were about 1800 private sector leaders who were members of the NDER who were in Washington on that day.

Now, having charge of that program, I was very interested that this be an impressive program for the Executive Reservists. As we completed our plans for it, I made arrangements that the Executive Reservists be addressed at the Departmental Auditorium on Monday morning, October 22, by Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara and by General Maxwell Taylor. The agendas had been prepared, the programs had been printed, and I must say the participation of these distinguished leaders contributed to the attendance that we had at the meeting. The events of Saturday and Sunday, of course, made somewhat of a shambles of my "cast of characters" who were going to participate in this program.

When the Executive Reservists convened on that Monday morning, I had to leave other responsibilities in which I was engaged, and convene this meeting of Executive Reservists. They, I think, sensed the tenseness that existed here in Washington that week but of course nobody had any specifics of what was involved. I had to announce to them that due to circumstances beyond our control Secretary Rusk was not going to appear, Mr. McNamara was not going to appear, and General Taylor was not going to appear. We had arranged on short notice for very adequate substitutes.

. . . . .

As I was saying at the conclusion of the last tape, there was this dramatic experience of having to tell this assembled group that all scheduled speakers were going to be unavailable. While the group did not know the reason, and I could not tell them the reason, they had been exposed to the spirit and feeling of tension that had prevailed in Washington on that day and knew that something important was happening. To conclude that reference, that day's meeting went ahead as scheduled for this National Defense Executive Reserve group and it concluded with a dinner that was held at the Statler Hotel that night. That evening of Monday, October 22, the President went on national radio and television and announced to not only the people of the United States but to the people of the world, the nature of the problem and the nature of our responsive action. So the attendees at this conference actually heard the President's address to the American people just before we assembled in the Ballroom at the Statler for the concluding dinner.

Daly: Another thing here, regarding the crisis: Do you happen to know when the Cabinet, other than the obviously concerned members like McNamara and Rusk, when the Cabinet as a whole was advised of the nature of the crisis?

EAM: With the exception of the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Treasury, I believe that the balance of the Cabinet for security reasons was not advised of the nature of the threat or the decisions made by the President until about mid-afternoon on Monday, October 22, at which time the decisions having been made and certain implementing actions having been taken, a meeting of the Cabinet was called, at which time

the information was presented to them. I recall that while I was in the Departmental Auditorium earlier the morning of October 22nd, preparing to tell the assembled Executive Reservists that our program was substantially altered, I was talking with one member of the Cabinet who sensed the attitude of tenseness that prevailed but had no knowledge or information or indication of any kind as to what the problem was or what was really the provoking cause of this attitude.

Daly: Who was that member?

EAM: That was Secretary Hodges, Secretary of Commerce.

Now, in further response to these meetings of the Cabinet and meetings of the Independent Agency heads, a coordinating mechanism was established for the Federal family within the Office of Emergency Planning to make sure that no Department or Agency that had an independent responsibility and authority to take some preparedness action would take that action prematurely. We made arrangements that before any Department or Agency would take any preparedness action in response to this crisis that had an external effect, the proposed action would be reported to me as Director of the Office of Emergency Planning. On the basis of guidance available to me practically hourly from the National Security Council and from Ted Sorensen, and from other sources, I made a preliminary determination as to whether that proposed action was appropriate under the circumstances and consistent with the President's objective. I did not exercise a veto power because these actions, if any, were being proposed by Cabinet officers who had access to the President. If there was any disagreement as to an action to be taken the appeal was, of course, directed to the President. We did establish this coordinating mechanism and strangely enough, and to the satisfaction and surprise of many of us, it did work.

Daly: Was there any specific disagreement?

EAM: There were no specific disagreements but there were some proposed actions that were slowed down or deferred through this coordinating procedure that, had they not been deferred, conceivably could have contributed to public concern and we don't know then what the public response to the situation would have been. There were discussions, for example, about the necessity of closing the stock and

commodity exchanges to deal with the developing problem of gold flow and it was determined that was premature action at that time. The consequences of such a Federal action upon the American people and the attitude of the American people were fully considered and the action was not taken, and subsequently was determined not to be necessary. The Office of Emergency Planning was placed on a 24-hour duty at that time. Beginning on Sunday, the 21st, we operated on a 24-hour basis here in the Office of Emergency Planning for about a two-week period until the tensions fully subsided.

Another action that was taken involved part of our Continuity of Government program. We have arrangements for the prelocation, in the developing of an emergency, of certain essential Governmental personnel who would be able to carry on essential Governmental functions in an emergency situation. We were faced with the problem of how we were going to handle that. It was necessary that there be some relocation of personnel because the relocation facilities of the Federal Government had to be made ready and activated. On the other hand, any sort of mass exodus from Washington by Federal personnel would have possibly been a provocative act and certainly would have contributed to the concerns of the American people. I think that there was a very close tab being kept on where Federal officials were. I know that many Cabinet Officers and many agency heads, including my own home, received calls during those early days of the week of October 22nd to determine whether the dependents of the Government official were still in the city. These were calls from the Press. I think there was some anticipation that there might be a movement of dependents of key Government personnel---anticipatory to Government movement of key Government personnel themselves. The system worked well during that period. It provided many helpful lessons to us that I hope we can build upon, improve upon, and while I hope they will never have to be called upon again, I think it was a productive experience for the nonmilitary preparedness of Government.

Daly: Did you have at that time or previously, or subsequent to those events, did you have any discussion with President Kennedy regarding this relocation operation of White House, etc. ?

EAM: Yes, many discussions.

Daly: What was his reaction to that type of operation?



EAM: Throughout Government this was really the first opportunity in this Administration to face the realities of this type of problem. You know, one of the frustrating things about these responsibilities which are part of this agency is that most people don't want to think about it, talk about it, or hear about it. And interest only develops contemporaneously with the crisis but...

Daly: Was President Kennedy in that category?

EAM: The President, I think, was one of those that would have to plead guilty to that indictment to some degree also. That isn't true of all of the programs of this agency, such as some we discussed in earlier discussions, but when we got talking about these kinds of things his interest was lukewarm until the advent of the Cuban crisis and then, of course, in the post-Cuban situation, having been through it together, he was very interested in it. As a matter of fact, I reported to him--when things quieted down--I reported to him personally on the manner in which our responsibilities had been discharged in those tense days in the week of October 22nd, reported to him on the Cabinet and Independent Agency heads meeting. He was very interested not only in how it was done--his interest was to the point where on November 3rd, which was actually just about ten days after his action, he sent a memorandum to me in which he complimented the actions that had been taken. He said in that memorandum that it was important that we further improve the capability of the independent agencies to maintain or support the vital functions of the Federal Government and he asked that I continue to work closely with the Departments and Agencies concerned with these responsibilities, and that he would appreciate being kept advised as to further progress. That memorandum is one of the series of Presidential memoranda that will be going to the Library but he followed through on that memorandum of November 3rd and from time to time he did discuss with me the feasibility of our plans, the extent of our plans, including plans for relocation.

We have as one of our problems - Chuck - not only how we are going to identify the essential functions of Government that must be continued in any kind of an emergency, as well as the key people of Government who can discharge those responsibilities, but what are we going to do with the dependents of these people. We faced that issue for the first time in the Cuban crisis. There were extensive paper plans that contemplated the prelocation of or relocation of identified individuals in Government to other sites and physical locations. That was a paper plan. When we came so close to the

implementation of that plan, started tapping on the shoulder and indicating that in connection with your responsibility you are to go here or there, we found that these people were then faced with a choice of responsibility to their Government and responsibility to their families--as head of a family. In practically every instance, and I'm not so sure we can be critical of this--in practically every instance, the individual felt that his first responsibility was to his family and he had to make some kind of adequate arrangement for them before he was prepared or willing to leave his family in furtherance of his Governmental responsibility. I discussed that with the President and the consequence of that.

Since Cuba we have made arrangements that are a substantial improvement over what existed in October of 1962 to deal with the dependent problem. The Federal Government is not taking care of the dependents of these prelocated or relocated Government personnel, no money is being spent on this program, but actions have been taken that will, I think, give the Government employee who is subject to relocation or prelocation a certain peace of mind in knowing that his family is being taken care of.

Daly: Did you discuss that specific point with the President? What were his comments about the fellow who would not want to leave his family?

EAM: That was the first time that that subject had ever been discussed with him but he was not surprised by that reaction. I don't think that any of us had actually addressed ourselves to the question of what the response of the individual would be, but the President's comment was to the effect that that was completely understandable to him and obviously the plan had to be improved to the point where there was some sort of understanding as to what was going to happen to the dependents. He was very concerned with this aspect of the problem. Perhaps as much as with any other aspect of the problem. I believe he was more concerned as to how we were going to handle the personal end of it than he was with some of the other problems that we have in this program and that is the location of physical facilities, the funding--the development of these facilities and other things.

Daly: Did he say anything in regard to his own family?

EAM: No, I don't believe his own family came into it, except that his own sense of responsibility as a husband and father were obviously reflected in his attitude toward the reaction of other individuals in Government. Of course, he was familiar--I had briefed him previously, as had his military aide and naval aide on alternative arrangements that were available for the President and his family--and he was quite familiar with those.

Daly: Did he ever rehearse. . . .

EAM: To a limited degree. The only concern I had there was that we had these arrangements and facilities and they were quite satisfactory, but they all contemplated, to be successful, that the President would leave his desk at a particular time and would take such actions as would be necessary by him to get to one of these facilities. . . that were designed for his protection and safety. As I observed the President, not only during the Cuban crisis, but in other situations, I became quite convinced that the problem was going to be to get him to leave, and if an emergency like or greater than the Cuban crisis proved ultimately to be---were to develop---that a lot of planning that had been done perhaps would be ineffective, because I think it would have been a difficult thing to get President Kennedy away from his desk and away from his responsibilities as he was discharging them in the physical office of the President. . . in time to take advantage of some of these other plans.

Daly: Did you discuss that problem with him?

EAM: Some, but to a greater degree with Tazewell Shepard who was his Naval Aide, who was working directly during this period on the questions of Presidential security, as well as others. Captain Shepard shared my concern in that area and agreed with my feeling that the first problem was going to be to get the President to actually leave or move because of the deep sense of responsibility that he had and his desire to be personally involved up to the very last moment. This experience in this area was a new experience for many, including the President. I recall when we first had the meeting of the nonmilitary element of the Cabinet, that I referred to a few minutes ago, here were

Cabinet Officers whose Departments and who as heads of Departments had very important nonmilitary responsibilities--many of whom were quite unfamiliar with the nature of those responsibilities because they came into Government, they worked very hard in the discharge of their day-to-day peacetime operating responsibilities and, while this package of emergency responsibilities was recognized as being lodged somewhere in the Department, they did not have any sense of immediacy to it. I sensed that many of the Cabinet Officers had not gotten very deeply into this area of their responsibilities. There were some very grave concerns evidenced by officials and Cabinet members in those initial meetings and the lights that burned all night that week of October 22nd were illuminating discussions being held in the nonmilitary agencies and Cabinet Departments of Government where the top Executive level of Government was becoming familiar with some of these nonmilitary responsibilities.

The biggest "shot in the arm" these preparedness programs received in our whole experience, if not in the last decade, was the drama of the Cuban crisis. Take for example, Chuck, succession. I think this illustrates the problem. About 4 months prior to October 1962, we had made a review of the provisions that had been made within the Federal Departments of Government for legal succession to the top responsibilities in those Departments. We found that there was no uniformity in the arrangements that existed--that in some Departments there was legal provision for succession maybe only to a depth of three--all three of those individuals generally being together and in Washington, and beyond that, if those three people did not survive, any kind of an attack or an emergency that developed, there was just no legal provision for anybody to exercise the great responsibilities of some of these major Departments. So, consistent with our responsibilities, we developed some general guidance and distributed it to the Departments and agencies, asking that they take certain prescribed steps to insure two things: one, that there be adequate legal provision for succession to the Executive responsibility in every Department and agency of Government to a depth of about ten and that in providing for succession the problems of geography be recognized and, where possible, that regional personnel be included at some point in this succession list. This guidance went out about 3 months--at least 90 days--before Cuba and by October 22 we had enjoyed about a 20% response to that guidance. About 20% of the Departments and agencies had actually taken the actions. It was one of the agenda items at the first meeting of the nonmilitary members of the Cabinet, as

well as my first meeting with Independent Agency heads on October 23rd. I called their attention to this fact and need for it, and within 24 hours of that announcement on October 23rd, there was 100% compliance within Government, with the development of these succession procedures. That illustrates as well as anything the nature of the response to that problem.

Another thing that took place during that same week was of interest. There were great concerns developing on the part of Governors throughout the Nation and there is within the Governors' Conference, a committee -- the Governors' Conference Committee on Civil Defense and Post Attack Recovery -- and there were great concerns in the civil defense area. On Saturday, October 27, as things began to subside slightly, this Governors' Conference Committee met--convening here in Washington--first of all over at the Pentagon, where the Governors were briefed by John McCone of Central Intelligence Agency, on the nature of the problem. Stuart Pittman, who was at that time Assistant Secretary of Defense (Civil Defense), addressed the Governors on the Federal Civil Defense program and proposed actions. Then we came over from the Pentagon to the White House and I met with the President and the members of this Governors' Conference Committee, and they discussed with the President the nature of their concerns and action they thought might be necessary for them to take, particularly in the civil defense field in their respective States. Then we adjourned from the White House to my office across the street where we had a meeting until mid-afternoon on Saturday, October 27, reviewing for the Governors--on a broad basis--all actions of a nonmilitary character that had been taken in the Federal Government to deal with the problem of this threatened emergency. At the meeting of the President with the Governors, the Governors' Committee was chaired by Nelson Rockefeller. The President discussed with them in some detail the background of the actions he had announced a few days earlier on October 22nd and the reasons for it. He received their full support for the actions he had taken. He showed that day the strain that he had been under for the preceding ten days, but yet he was courteous; he gave a lot of his time to this Committee; he answered all the questions; he completely satisfied them that not only had he made the right decision but that the actions taken by the Federal Government in response to his decision were appropriately designed to meet the problems.

Daly: How did he show signs of strain?

EAM: He looked tired. I think he showed the physical evidence of the pressures that he had been under and the gravity of the decisions that he had made and the tensions that attended those decisions that followed Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of that week. He was beginning -- we were all beginning at that time -- to feel that some of the things we thought might happen were not going to happen. I think on that particular day -- on Saturday of that week -- he was showing the full strain of the week that he had been through.

Daly: You made some comments -- you mentioned that one of the problems you had with him was a reluctance to think about personal safety in a nuclear disaster. What were some of your other tough problems?

EAM: Well, the nature of my responsibilities, Chuck, which we have discussed broadly in earlier discussions, were such that the things that I had occasion to deal with him about with some frequency were things to which he was generally very responsive. For example, during the period of a number of months, when we were deeply involved in stockpile policy, stockpile decisions, that was an item that was carried rather high on his agenda of domestic matters and he was perfectly accessible, he was -- he understood the problem and background of it -- he was always anxious to discuss it. I suppose the most difficult things I took to him less frequently because it was not necessary except in the actual Cuban crisis -- to talk to him about those things. I had very little in the way of problems because the things I was talking to him about were not particularly controversial, once a basic policy decision was made, and they were things that he was interested in hearing about.

We had some difficult times in connection with some petroleum studies which he initiated and in which we participated, and in which there were substantial disagreements within the Federal family. We had a series of meetings with reference to such questions as the continuation of the import controls on residual fuel oil, etc. He would, on occasion, evidence some irritation or displeasure as we got into those areas of discussion because they were sticky areas, politically and otherwise, and they weren't very pleasant things to have to discuss. They weren't -- in the great, grand scheme of things, they weren't the most serious problems, the most pressing problems, coming before him.

the Chair for the Vice President and that puts me approximately directly across the table from the President. I am looking at him during the course of the discussions and I felt that as issues were being discussed I could actually see the decision developing--watching the expression on his face. He would listen attentively to points being made--individuals participating in the discussion--he would ask incisive questions, he would doodle on pad and paper in front of him, and, as he was approaching a point of where he had heard enough and was able to make up his mind, you could see an expression developing on his face that was -- that he had reached that point. He would announce his decision and then he demonstrated considerable impatience with any further discussion on the subject of the issue after his mind was made up. There were instances--I do not recall the individuals--but I can recall instances where an issue was discussed, and the Presidential decision made--it was announced by him--somebody in the room didn't read the message accurately or wasn't paying attention and with continued discussion he would be quite curt in pointing out to them that any further discussion was unnecessary because he had made up his mind and this was the way it was going to be.

Daly: Can you recall any instances where it was changed by further discussion?

EAM: There were -- no major decisions -- there were instances about a minor element--persistence about a minor element within the framework of the basic decision -- he would -- if the person expressing the view were persistent enough to be talking about it -- there were instances where he would allow a change. In many instances, in the reading of a document -- major Presidential statements on some of the matters considered in National Security Council were carefully reviewed in the Council and drafts of the proposed document would be available to go over word by word, and you would go down through the document sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, making changes as you went along on the basis of discussion. There would be an instance where maybe you'd be at paragraph 4, having passed paragraph 2, and then a word or clause in paragraph 2 that had been passed over would be the subject of further discussion, and in many instances the President was very willing to go back to that second paragraph and reconsider that point and in a number of instances change it.

but they were problems of the type that whatever action you took was not going to satisfy all, and it was hard to determine -- for all the rest of us to determine -- which actions would be right.

It was interesting to see the evolution of the President's decisions. On the general routine domestic matters, the decision came forward as a result of discussions that usually took place orally and in his office. He followed the procedure in many instances of wanting the issue presented in a memorandum. I used to follow the practice of preparing a short memorandum, trying to keep it to one page if I could, identifying the problem and suggesting alternative responses to it, and then making a recommendation as to which one of those particular actions I would propose, and then I would attach to it a draft of a memorandum which would be a suggested document that would come back to me from him as evidence of Presidential decision. We used to follow the practice, and I think all agencies outside the President's personal White House staff do this -- of not preparing these draft return memoranda on official White House letterhead, but we used a plain piece of bond paper and the secretaries would type THE WHITE HOUSE up at the top and then "Suggested Draft Memorandum" and then we would give the substance of the memorandum. After the President had considered the question, he read this document very quickly in every instance -- you would discuss it back and forth -- and if his decision -- he made it quickly -- and if his decision was to approve the recommendation which you had made, then this draft memorandum that was the second sheet attached would be responsive to that decision and there were several instances when he would make up his mind -- his desire to dispose of the matter quickly would result in him flipping over the page and signing this draft memorandum with his fairly illegible Presidential signature. This presented some difficulties because that was not the document that he should sign, but I would leave his office through the office of his dear friend and mine, his secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, and I would explain to Evelyn that her boss and mine had signed a "draft document" and leave it with her and she would very kindly retype it on the formal White House letterhead, put it in appropriate form for posterity purposes, and have it resigned by the President.

In other instances the evolution of the Presidential decision developed a bit differently -- and particularly in the National Security Council deliberations and discussions. It was very interesting to see that decision develop. My seat at the NSC happens to be at the left of



He certainly demonstrated throughout all those discussions a willingness and a desire to hear the expressions of all of those who had a logical and appropriate input to the particular issue. He did, however, rather consistently demonstrate impatience with needless discussion after a decision had been made.

I think as we near the end of this -- there's so much to talk about that this can go on indefinitely -- there are some personal experiences that I think reflect the great qualities of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The quality that I think most of us -- most of the world associates with the President -- is the quality of courage that he demonstrated so often. Certainly that was evident during those discussions that I talked about a little while ago - October 20th and 21st, 22nd, leading up to his decisions and actions regarding Cuba. He consistently demonstrated his understanding and sincerity; he talked with me on a number of occasions about my family, my wife and my children, whom he had met, and these were not just inquiries to be nice -- these were sincere inquiries -- he was interested in my boys -- we have a daughter who is a student at Stone Ridge Country Day School, which is taught by the Madams of the Sacred Heart, an Order to which his own sisters had been exposed during their elementary and perhaps secondary education -- where Caroline, by the way, has been enrolled within the last week or ten days and where she is going to resume her academic studies in September. He displayed this interest in children, not only in the children of his associates, but also his own. I can recall instances when, in the late afternoon particularly -- when I was in his office and John Jr., who was then at the walking stage, would enter the office -- the President would pick him up and talk and play with him for a short period of time. He did the same thing with Caroline, and then usher them out into Mrs. Lincoln's care and the nurse who was waiting in Mrs. Lincoln's room.

Daly: Mrs. Lincoln always seemed to have some candy.

EAM: Yes -- not only for John Jr. and Caroline, but I think that you and I and many others dipped into that candy dish on occasion.

One day I was discussing a problem with the President in his office, and it was a kind of a serious problem; he was sitting in his rocker and I was sitting on the arm of the davenport -- he was in the rocker because he had been meeting with people preceding my visit -- and all of a sudden we heard a noise -- clack, clack, clack, and looked up and John Jr. was coming into the office pulling behind him

a little wooden duck that makes that sound. The President observed at that time that not too many major Presidential decisions had been made with that musical background.

In nearly every contact he evidenced a depth of knowledge and sense of humor that were so characteristic of him. On one of my first visits to a NATO meeting in Paris I came upon a very fine haberdashery shop in Paris just off the Champs Elysees called "O'Kennedy's." It had a very attractive sign on it -- the merchandise had a very attractive label. I bought a few shirts and neckties principally because I was interested in the label; -- I brought them back and on one occasion after that when I was in the President's office one morning he co-incidentally happened to comment about the tie that I was wearing. I told him that I was very happy that he asked that and showed him the label on the tie -- the O'Kennedy label. Well, he made some comment that I was not a particularly good advertisement for his Buy-American program as a Presidential appointee, sacheting around with French neckwear. I had worked my way through college in the men's clothing business and I thought I detected a certain quality in the President's own necktie; I asked him where he obtained the tie he was wearing and he turned it over and on the back it said "Christian Dior." He said, "touchè" and immediately launched into a story about the O'Kennedy's and said "You know, I'm not familiar with that store but that's an interesting story." He started talking about the emigration of Irish from Ireland to Spain, then to France and the assumption of their position in the economic life of France, and that very probably this "O'Kennedy" operation had that origin. He talked on this subject of Irish history for maybe 4 minutes or so and he recited dates and names I cannot recall. It suggested that perhaps the preceding night he had done some rather extensive reading to prepare to make a dissertation on the subject but actually he was, of course, just drawing on that great knowledge of history that he had.

His thoughtfulness was demonstrated so many times. I was talking earlier in this discussion about the organization of Iowans for Kennedy and the fact that I had enlisted the services in that campaign, in the pre-Los Angeles days, of a friend of mine who was a lawyer in Iowa by the name of Lumond F. Wilcox. The President, I think, met Lu Wilcox at the most - twice and then only briefly during the course

of the campaign and up through the election and Inauguration and did not see him at all after he became President - after he assumed office. One day in January, 1963, now two years having gone by in office, I was talking with the President and as we finished our discussion he started asking, as he frequently did, "what's new on the political scene in Iowa" and so on. He said, "Ed, what have we ever done for that fellow that worked with you, Mr. Wilson?" I thought a moment and I said "Do you mean Mr. Wilcox, Mr. President?" and he said "Yes, Mr. Wilcox. He worked with you in that Iowa campaign and he was very helpful wasn't he?" and I said "Yes, he was." He said "Well have we done anything for him?" I said "No, we haven't particularly, Mr. President, partly because he doesn't want anything, he didn't want any position in Government -- he didn't ask for any appointment. He has been here in Washington several times since you have assumed the Presidency, he has visited me, I have brought him over here to the White House and I have shown him your office in your absence and he has had lunch with me in the White House staff mess; he's been exposed to courtesies of that type for which he has been very grateful - that's all he wants." He said "Well, he's been very helpful and we should do something for him." He said "I would like you to see that he is included in the official Presidential party that goes to the next installation of a foreign head of state." Well, I had very little contact with that area of White House activity and the only thing that I was sure of was that I didn't have anything to say about who was in the official Presidential party. He did comment that I should talk to Ralph Dungan about it. I assured the President that Mr. Wilcox would be very grateful for the recognition and I knew it would be a thrill of a lifetime for him, as it is for most who receive that honor. I left the President's office and I stopped by Ralph Dungan's office and passed on to him the Presidential instruction that Lu Wilcox and his wife should be included in the official Presidential party. Shortly thereafter, the next foreign head of state installation that arose was in the Dominican Republic and Mr. and Mrs. Lumond F. Wilcox from Jefferson, Iowa, because of the thoughtfulness and the great powers of recollection of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy were included in that official party. They came down here to Washington, they received the customary briefing and they went to the Dominican Republic in that party which was headed at that time by Vice President and Mrs. Johnson. It was, of course, one of the most memorable

experiences in their lifetime. I have never done it, maybe you have never done it, Chuck, but they tell me that it was a great experience, and it arose in just the manner that I have described. He thought of that name, a name I am sure we had not discussed in maybe three years, but he wanted to make sure that something was done to evidence his personal appreciation for what Mr. Wilcox had done.

Daly: I wonder if you can recall instances where he had discussed the political significance of your office, and I'm thinking of, for example, the support that you can give to Congressmen and Governors when they have disasters in their districts.

EAM: Yes. Well, he was very interested in maximizing the political values that flow, or could flow, from the conduct of our responsibilities, but he was quick to point out that in the particular business in which we were engaged, which was developing and maintaining a level of nonmilitary preparedness in the Federal, State and local governmental structure that it was necessary that I work closely with the 50 Governors and with many, many Mayors who were of both parties and, just like our military preparedness, our nonmilitary preparedness was not a political exercise and it was not a partisan endeavor. Therefore, I would not customarily or traditionally engage in depth in partisan political activity, to the extent of going around making partisan campaign speeches for the Democratic candidates, etc., but he did, as he evidenced in the Wilcox case, he did want to make sure that those who were kind or thoughtful to him were remembered in anything that he had to do with. So, he was anxious that there be an alert and immediate response to Democratic Governors and Democratic Congressmen but at the same time that was not to the exclusion of a response to members of the other party. I must say that all of what was done in the conduct of the programs of this agency was at his request done on about as objective and non-partisan basis as possible. The only thing that would perhaps be not quite in line with that statement is on certain instances, for example, in the Natural Disaster program, when the President, in response to a Governor's request and upon my recommendation declared a major disaster, we were faced with the need for notifying the Governor and notifying the members of the interested Congressional

delegation promptly. Now, of course, you have to make a choice as you can't notify everybody at once; you have to make choices as to the order in which those notifications are made and it was with the approval of the President that the choice usually worked out that the Democratic members of the Congressional delegation received the notification before some of the others.

Daly: And in Eisenhower's day, it would have been the reverse?

EAM: I'm sure that's the pattern.

One other area that I might just mention relates to the scope of the President's interests. We have talked a lot about government and a lot about politics, but those of us who worked with him or knew him either during the Presidency or before know that his interests were many and varied, extended beyond government, and history and politics, to boating and sports and music and so many other fields.

One evening, Mrs. McDermott and I were at a party at the White House that was entertained by some distinguished entertainer and in the course of that evening, I was talking with Mrs. Kennedy and indicated to her that my contacts and associations in the theatrical world were not as great as her's but that I did have a friendship with a man whose work I admired greatly. That was Frederick Loewe, or Fritz Loewe, of Lerner and Loewe - My Fair Lady, Camelot, and others. I told Mrs. Kennedy also that Fritz had never been to Washington although he had spent much of his life in New York, and he had indicated in a recent meeting that I had with him that he intended to come to Washington to visit Mrs. McDermott and me, and to see some of Washington that he had missed for so many years. Well, she was very interested in this and she said that Lerner and Loewe's music was, perhaps, the President's favorite music and she asked that I let her know when Mr. Loewe was going to be in Washington, and that she would like very much to be able to get together with him and for the President to get together with him when he was here. A few weeks went by and Fritz Loewe called me from Palm Springs, California where he now, and then, resided and indicated that he was going to be in Washington in about 10 days. That must have been about mid-May, 1962. In line with Mrs. Kennedy's earlier suggestion, I called her and reminded her of the earlier conversation and told her that Mr. Loewe

was going to be in Washington to visit us and that was all that was said at that time. She was pleased to have the information. The next day, Mrs. Kennedy called to ask if Mrs. McDermott and Mr. Loewe and I could be the guests of the President and herself for dinner at the White House on, I believe it was the 15th of May -- a date during Mr. Loewe's visit. I assured her that any other arrangements we might have for that evening could be easily revised, and I called Fritz in California and told him that he was being invited to the White House during the course of his stay. He came to Washington, and, coincidentally with his visit, "My Fair Lady" -- the road company of "My Fair Lady" was at the National Theater. He came to town and this particular evening we were invited to dinner at the White House.

It was a small group -- there were the Chuck Spaldings, the Ben Bradlees, Ann Gargan (Ambassador Kennedy's niece), Bill Walton, Fritz Loewe, and Mrs. McDermott and myself. We had a very pleasant, informal social evening -- cocktails before dinner and after dinner we adjourned to that area in the private quarters of the White House where there is a piano. I had alerted Fritz to the fact that he might very well be called upon to perform. He is an outstanding pianist; on that team, Fritz writes the music and Lerner writes the words. Most artists you know do not like to perform under those circumstances, but he did not express that attitude on this occasion, and as we were sitting around and visiting after dinner, I led the discussion to the field of music and the suggestion was made that perhaps Fritz would like to play some of his work. He didn't express the reluctance that many people do when they're asked to perform on such an occasion. There was a big bouquet of roses in a vase on the piano; Fritz got up out of his seat -- walked over to the piano -- moved the roses so they did not obstruct his view of the President and Mrs. Kennedy. He sat down at the piano, probably at about 9:15, and began to play. As he played various selections as requested by members of the party, including President and Mrs. Kennedy, he played much of the score of "My Fair Lady" and much of the score of "Camelot." This was interspersed with conversation all the time -- the President asked him, for example, "How do you go about writing a piece of music? Do you write the music first and then does somebody put the words to it?" Fritz explained that practically every

number he had written for a purpose -- it was part of the theme of a show or play and he demonstrated at the piano part of the complex process in writing a piece of music. The President was very interested -- Fritz discussed the fact that he was working on a new musical. He had separated from his relationship with Lerner at that time but he was working on a new piece of music -- a new play actually -- a new musical that was to have an Irish theme, and he discussed the rather unfortunate success that Irish-theme musicals had had on Broadway. They are not distinguished for their success. He played a number of selections that he had written for this work. The President was very interested in it -- there were some discussions whether he and the President shouldn't collaborate on the lyrics -- the fact that his lyricist was no longer associated with him -- and the President told him that evening he had a tape recorder in his bedroom and he went to sleep most nights listening to tapes of Fritz Loewe's music. So there was a very warm feeling between the two and I think it was a very enjoyable, relaxing evening for the President. He indicated to me on several occasions afterward how much he enjoyed the evening. It was maybe because he was exposed informally to the type of music he really liked -- perhaps liked better than some of what was formally presented at the White House on some other occasions.

Then, finally, I think one of the most pleasant experiences that I had and best recollections is the attitude -- the friendly and warm attitude that existed in most of the official relationships during President Kennedy's Administration. There was a certain cohesiveness to President Kennedy's team. Everybody that worked on his staff, or was appointed by him to a position in the Executive Branch of Government, shared an admiration -- a true admiration for the President, had some sort of experience with him prior to the Presidency, either in the campaign or prior to that a personal friendship that was maybe perhaps outside the Democratic Party -- and there are many instances of that. But, there was this great "team spirit" and that was evident in practically all of our official actions and relationships and it made doing our jobs, our respective jobs, a very pleasant exercise. There is a lot of competition, as you know Chuck, in the Federal departments and agencies of Government and the agencies are very covetous of their responsibilities. It isn't all smooth and harmonious, and there are arguments and disputes and so on. But the fact that we were all

part of President Kennedy's team seemed to make what we were doing much easier than it otherwise would have been. Those relationships and that general attitude were evidenced, not only in official contact but in such places as the White House dining facility -- the White House Mess as it is called, where at noon as people would assemble -- members of his staff and others who were eligible for membership in that facility -- there was a spirit of good feeling and people were smiling and talking to one another and there were no suspicions passing between individuals and that is the way he wanted it. We never discussed it actually -- I have seen instances where I think he sensed that maybe some frictions were developing and he kind of went out of his way to make sure that that situation was smoothed over and that everybody got along and worked as a unit. There was a great thrill and honor and satisfaction of service under him as a dynamic President. You felt as you went about your work that you shared his ambitions, his goals, and his objectives. He instilled in me, and I think in all of us, the spirit and the attitude that we were making a contribution to something we all thought worthwhile. He made us all --

Daly: I think that part of the lack of pettiness came from the man and the way he lived.

EAM: It would not have been that way had he not provided the example because we've all had other associations prior to this and we know that it doesn't always work that way. He also gave me the feeling, and I think this is shared by others -- he gave me the feeling that I was working with him, rather than for him, and I think that that's a very important thing to recognize in a relationship between the President and his appointees -- whether it be members of his immediate staff, or whether it be selected heads of departments and agencies. But I never on any occasion felt that I was working for President Kennedy as much as I had the feeling I was working with him and he made every action of his -- made you feel that way. And that extended also to the careerists in Government. I sensed during his Administration that practically all of the career Government element that I was exposed to felt praised somehow -- felt like part of a team that was working together; this was reflected in voluntary, uncharged overtime, the willingness of employees to work long hours. I can recall many days when the parking facilities allotted to the Office of Emergency Planning (and there never were enough, by the way) -- on Saturdays when the parking facilities were



often quite crowded with the cars of employees who voluntarily came in to do things they didn't get done the preceding day -- and I am told that on other occasions -- both before and since -- that that situation did not prevail. So I think he was able to convey that attitude beyond his immediate appointees, his immediate staff and down to practically all levels of careerists in Government service.

Daly: I think that's correct -- I recall, and I'm sure you can, staff children participating in White House functions.

EAM: Yes, I think that your reference to the family thing is very appropriate, because he did express to me on occasion in conversation that the real sacrifice is made perhaps in most instances in the families of those that come to Washington to serve the President at his request. The real sacrifice is made by the wife and mother and the dependents of the man who is appointed and he recognized that. We talked, for example, about the fact that as individuals -- we were talking about my own situation -- individuals who leave their family residence, come to Washington, the husband is immediately engaged in exciting, dramatic experiences, but the wife has been uprooted from her social relationships -- the very pleasant life she was living in her own community -- the children have changed schools -- jerked away from their friends and they participate in the situation only by osmosis -- they have very little direct involvement -- recognizing that fact as the President did, he seemed to go out of his way to try and involve, as you suggested, the wives and children so often.

Daly: He was almost uniquely successful in that effort. The families felt that this sacrifice was a privilege .....

EAM: That's true. I can recall in my own professional experience some criticisms on occasions that you were late getting home from the office -- for good and valid reasons -- but I must say I never had a word of criticism in the McDermott household for the many, many instances where my obligations and duties in government took me away from home for longer periods and longer times than I would like to be. That was the attitude of all people in Government and those associated with his team.

Daly: Ed, do you have anything you want to add to this? I think you've done a good job in setting forth your relationship with the President.

EAM: No, I think we've covered it -- Chuck, there are so many things you can talk about -- I realize this is one of a long series of these interviews and I hope -- I expect no one -- no matter how long you talk -- can really record the kind of man John Fitzgerald Kennedy was. When history looks at the personal experiences of a large number of us -- of yourself and myself and so many others -- that the real character of this great man will emerge. It's been a privilege for me to participate in this project and to have the discussions, and I am also grateful to you for your ready accommodation to my schedule and the helpfulness that you have given to this project.

*EAM*

*W*

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