

**Oren Harris Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/03/1965**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Oren Harris  
**Interviewer:** Ronald J. Grele  
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**Biographical Note**

Harris was a Judge of the United States District Court for both the Eastern and Western Districts of Arkansas from 1966 to 1976 and a United States Representative for the state of Arkansas from 1941 to 1966; during his time in the House he served as chairman of the Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce and later as chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce in addition to serving on many other House committees. In this interview Harris discusses John F. Kennedy [JFK] as a member of the House of Representatives; the Arkansas delegation to the 1956 Democratic National Convention and the vote for the vice presidential candidate; the 1960 Democratic National Convention; the results of the 1960 presidential election in Arkansas; the proposed changes for U.S. regulatory agencies after 1960; and various legislative proposals and battles during JFK's Administration, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

OREN HARRIS

November 3, 1965  
Washington, D.C.

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: Congressman Harris, do you recall when you first met John F. Kennedy?

HARRIS: Yes, I recall about the time, not the specific moment. He came to the Congress following World War II. He was a colleague in the House. I had a chance to know him as one of my associates here in Congress.

GRELE: What were your impressions of him at that time?

HARRIS: Well, he was a young man—one of the things that we always noticed of a new member coming

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to Congress if he was especially youthful. And, Mr. Kennedy was, you might say, considered as a very young member of Congress and, as such, he took his place with the other members of the Congress, and particularly with the newer members of the Congress—meeting and assuming his responsibilities and his duties here as a young and new member.

GRELE: How effective was he as a member of the House of Representatives?

HARRIS: Well, as it is with all other new members, it is necessary to be here for a while and to learn the rules, procedures, precedents, and catch on to the work of the Congress as big and magnificent as this place is. It takes a little while to get started and find out just what the work really is. Now, as it is with most every young member, he went about doing his own job, looking after his own district, in a rather quiet way.

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As time went on, he did become more active. He became a member of the Committee on Education and Labor, as I recall, and was active in that field as well as some of the other things in Congress. However, during the time he was here, I've forgotten how many terms he served in the House—two or three, I believe—he became disabled because of a condition he had which was very well known, and he was out for awhile. I think it was during this time that he was hospitalized and during the time that he was getting over his condition, I believe he wrote his book, *Profiles in Courage*.

GRELE: You served with John Kennedy on the House Committee on the District of Columbia when you reported the first home rule bill. Do you recall any of his activities on that Committee—how did he vote, what did he do?

HARRIS: I did serve on the District of Columbia

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Committee for eighteen years. I was chairman of the Committee on Home Rule that you spoke of. However, I do not remember just what activity was taken by him or me or any of us at that particular time, except the fact that I was not sympathetic to what they proposed as home rule at that time and he was.

GRELE: He voted for the bill?

HARRIS: Yes, he'd been for the bill. He was for the bill from the inception of his service on the Committee.

GRELE: Did he do any work on the bill in that Committee? Do you recall?

HARRIS: I'm sure he did, though I do not recall the specific activity that any of us took except I, as chairman, was quite busy with it. We conducted hearings at some length and tried to work out a bill that would give some type of home rule and franchise

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for the District of Columbia. I was willing to provide a delegate for the District and to elect a school board. However, he and others wanted home rule and a municipal government set up accordingly.

GRELE: Did you ever confer with him or discuss any particular piece of legislation that either one of you was interested in?

HARRIS: Well, I'm sure I have during the years we served together but I don't recall any specific discussion that we might have had. At the time, I remember that he was rather quiet in his service on the floor of the House. He didn't very often take the floor, but once in a while he did. During part of the time, he was on crutches and I recall very well that he would sit just inside the door, about midways back in the House chamber on the aisle next to the door. He'd come in on his crutches and he would step up

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and sit down where it was convenient. And that was his usual place from day to day.

GRELE: Who did he confer with mostly in the House of Representatives? What congressmen were his closest friends and associates?

HARRIS: Well, I doubt very seriously if he had any particular close associates. Some, of course, he had closer relationships with than others. We all do. But I don't recall any one or any particular group that he was associated with any closer than he was with another group. He was at all times considered to be on the liberal side, though he was not extreme at all in the House. Naturally he associated with the New England group, the Boston members and members from Massachusetts. But he also associated with members of the Committee on Education and Labor for a few years and was very active in the program: labor, labor-management programs, education, minimum

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wage and matters of that kind.

GRELE: Do you recall any conversation about his work on that Committee?

HARRIS: Oh yes, he was very active with the work of the Committee. He showed a great deal of interest, though he was just one of the members of the Committee and didn't hold any particular responsibility.

GRELE: What particular problems did he show interest in?

HARRIS: Well, as I said a moment ago, matters affecting education and minimum wage which is a part of the jurisdiction of that Committee, any of the



proposed problems affecting labor-management relations, working conditions of the people, education of the country. He was very interested in improving educational facilities of the nation and the opportunities of the people. So he was pretty active in those fields.

GRELE: Moving on to his career in the Senate, when

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he served in the Senate did you have any relations with him?

HARRIS: Only occasionally. I would see him once in a while, probably on the Senate floor or meet him in the hallways, or other places which involved social occasions, but not particularly close or have an opportunity of association as close as we did in the House.

GRELE: You offered an amendment to the Landrum [Philip Mitchell Landrum]-Griffin [Robert P. Griffin] Bill, I believe, to exempt airline and railroad workers from its provisions. Did you discuss this at all with Senator Kennedy?

HARRIS: No, I do not recall having done so. No, I discussed it primarily with the members of our Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce of the House. I discussed it with the members of that Committee. I discussed it some with the representatives of the

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airlines and the railroad industry, but this was done as a matter of principle and procedure. We already have and had at that time established a procedure in the railroad industry by the Railway Labor Act. I did not want to see that act or the procedures of its administration disrupted. Well, as time went on, we included the airline industry under the Railway Labor Act and they were under it at that time and have been under it since. But that was what promoted my interest in the amendment referred to.

GRELE: Did you attend the 1956 Democratic National Convention?

HARRIS: In Chicago, yes.

GRELE: As a delegate from Arkansas?

HARRIS: Yes.

GRELE: How did Arkansas vote in the vice presidential nomination?

HARRIS: We, at first, agreed—we were voting under

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the unit rule in the first place—and if I recall correctly, Senator Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was a vice presidential candidate at the same time. And we agreed, under the unit rule, to cast the first vote for Mr. Humphrey, if I recall correctly. Mr. Humphrey was not in the top running when the vote was cast. And during the usual process, Arkansas was the first, then, to change its vote and cast its vote and cast its vote for Mr. Kennedy for Vice President.

GRELE: Can you recall any of the discussions in the delegations over the various candidates? Why would Arkansas, a Southern state, vote for Kennedy, a Northerner, against Kefauver [Estes Kefauver], a man from a border state if not a Southern state?

HARRIS: Yes, there were some within our delegation in 1956 that were very strong for Mr. Kefauver. We discussed it at length in our delegation meetings. But having previously agreed to

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the unit rule, then a majority of the delegation prevailed. Consequently, whatever the majority decided under unit rule, the vote went for that particular individual. And we had quite a discussion within our unit in 1956. There were those who were very strong for Mr. Kefauver. There were a number who were quite outspoken for Mr. Kennedy. And when the discussion was all concluded, there was—whether by compromise or not—a majority that decided to cast our vote for Mr. Humphrey. I do not recall any particular reason why that was done other than out of the discussion came this decision.

Then when the roll call was in process on the floor of the Convention, it was obvious the contest was between Mr. Kefauver and Mr. Kennedy. I recall that the California delegation was to our right and slightly to the rear of our group and they were very strong for Mr. Kefauver. The Massachusetts delegation was immediately behind

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the Arkansas delegation. Of course, we had an opportunity to fraternize and discuss with both of the groups. The chairman of our group and some of the others talked to members of the Massachusetts delegation while others were talking to some of the California group. I think through the suggestion of Senator McClellan [John F. McClellan] and some of the others, we decided to switch the vote from Mr. Humphrey to Mr. Kennedy.

Senator McClellan, in those days, was very close to the Kennedys—he was a very close friend of Mr. Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], the father of President Kennedy, and the fact that Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], now Senator Kennedy, was Chief

Counsel to the McClellan Committee investigating certain matters, as you recall, of the Senate at that time—might have had something to do with the decision and no doubt did.

GRELE: Was Governor Faubus [Orval E. Faubus] a member of that delegation?  
Was he the chairman of that

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delegation?

HARRIS: I am almost sure that he was present, and of course, he was the titular head of our party, being the governor. But I believe Mr. Tom Harper [Thomas Harper], chairman of the State Committee of Fort Smith, Arkansas, was actually serving as chairman of our unit or else Mr. Mehaffy [Pat Mehaffy] who was the National Committeeman and who is now Judge of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis. They were the leaders of the group, if I recall correctly. Of course, they conferred with the governor and others, too.

GRELE: Do you recall the governor's sympathy in the race?

HARRIS: I think the governor was willing to go along with the general consensus of the group itself, conferring with Senator McClellan and, I believe, Senator Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] was there on that occasion in 1956, and myself and other

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members. I think he did cooperate and we had no difficulty arriving at a decision.

GRELE: Between 1950 and 1960 do you recall any actions by Mr. Kennedy or his supporters to secure support in Arkansas?

HARRIS: I do not recall any specific activity or any special activity during that interim. In view of the fact that Senator McClellan was chairman of the Special Investigating Committee of the Senate and Mr. Bobby Kennedy was the Chief Counsel, and the then Senator Jack Kennedy was a member of the Committee, there was a close association.

GRELE: In 1960, you served on the Civil Rights Sub-Committee of the Platform Committee at the Democratic National Convention, I believe.

HARRIS: Yes, that's true.

GRELE: Do you recall the debates or the issues involved in the framing of that plank?

HARRIS: Oh yes, indeed. I recall all of it. As a

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matter of fact, I was a member of the Platform Committee. After the hearings, which is always the case in our procedure at the Convention, the chairman who was from Connecticut, I believe, the former ambassador to India, Mr. Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles], was chairman of the Platform Committee and he then designated a subcommittee composed of, if I remember correctly, about 18 members in order to meet and write the platform—that is, to prepare a tentative platform for the presentation to the full Platform Committee. We met for about three days, I believe, during the hearings and a couple days later, writing the platform itself. As I recall, there was only one big issue in connection with the civil rights program that caused problems within the Platform Committee itself. That had to do with the so-called Federal Fair Employment Practices Committee. In other words, the federal government

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entering into this business of employment. Mr. Green [William J. Green, Jr.] who was a member of the subcommittee writing the platform from Philadelphia along with myself, Mr. Bowles, Senator Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson], from New Mexico, Senator Ervin [Sam J. Ervin, Jr.] of North Carolina and other others were trying to avoid this issue and so were the candidates, particularly Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. But surprisingly, it was proposed in the subcommittee, and if I remember correctly, it was adopted with only four of us voting against it.

GRELE: Do you recall what your opinion was at the time of the relationship between the candidates and the platform? Was this a Kennedy platform? Was this a platform of a particular candidate?

HARRIS: No, I do not believe it was because the Democratic hierarchy at that time arranged for the Convention and the Convention program

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and they endeavored to have a democratic approach to it. That was Mr. Bowles' responsibility, to write one that would be acceptable to any of the candidates, whether it be Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], or others who were for a time active candidates.

GRELE: Why I asked the question is that prior to the Convention, Mr. Bowles had already announced his support of Mr. Kennedy and at that time there was some talk that this was a Kennedy platform.

HARRIS: I think that he kept Mr. Kennedy advised, or there was someone from Mr. Kennedy's camp that was kept advised. I might say that Mr. Bowles also kept Mr. Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] advised about the progress and what was going on and Mr. Rayburn was very active in the Johnson camp.

GRELE: Do you recall your feelings after the

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nomination of John Kennedy and before the vice presidential nomination?

HARRIS: Well, I recall my interest. I was in the midst of it in Los Angeles, and I remember that I was requested the following morning to meet with some of Mr. Kennedy's people including Bobby Kennedy for the discussion of the campaign and prior to the selection of the vice presidential candidate. I remember the discussions we had and the speculations as to who would be tagged. The name of Johnson came up in the discussions and there were those who did not believe that Mr. Kennedy would ever accept Mr. Johnson because of the keen competition they had for the nomination. But there were those who were just as vigorous that it would be the only way that we could have a Democratic victory.

GRELE: What position did you take?

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HARRIS: I was sympathetic to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. I felt that if we were going to carry the vote in my state that Mr. Johnson would add to it and would help us do so. I actually was closer to the Johnson camp as such than I was the Kennedy, though I was friendly to both. I supported Mr. Johnson because people in our area had taken that position. But I also was very close to Speaker McCormack [John W. McCormack] with whom I had discussed this matter at the Convention—something about the strategy. When they decided to invite Mr. Johnson to join the camp, I was pleased that through the persuasive actions of Mr. Rayburn and Senator Kerr [Robert S. Kerr] of Oklahoma and others interested in it that Mr. Johnson accepted.

GRELE: Do you recall anyone in the Kennedy staff who opposed this nomination?

HARRIS: Well, I heard rumors about it but in actual

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opposition I did not. No.

GRELE: Arkansas did vote very heavily, I believe, for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Do you recall...

HARRIS: Well, we gave it a majority.

GRELE: Forty thousand.

HARRIS: But you can't say this was a very overwhelming majority. I think Mr. Kennedy was fortunate enough to get 50.8 percent.

GRELE: If the election was that close in Arkansas, what do you think was the main issue that we can deduce from this?

HARRIS: Well, in the first place, the Republicans, Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], did not get all the minority vote indicating that it was that close because we had a third ticket in our state. I've forgotten the total number of vote or the percentage vote that the third party, the independent ticket, received. But the Nixon ticket did not get anything like 50 percent

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or not even 49 percent.

GRELE: The third party was a dissident group within the Democratic Party?

HARRIS: That's right. I would say that would be relatively true in our state which is overwhelmingly Democratic. But there were several issues that came into it: the economic picture somewhat—Mr. Kennedy was a known liberal; there was the religious issue that hit a few people—we had some problem with it. As a matter of fact, I as a Baptist, made some very frank comments and speeches in the state on that issue myself. I think it was largely overcome, but it was a factor.

GRELE: In what areas of the state, would you say?

HARRIS: I would think probably it was a factor throughout the state. It is well known that in 1928 when Mr. Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith]—who also was a Catholic—ran, the people in our state had

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to do a lot of work the last few days to keep it from going Republican.

GRELE: Was the civil rights plank an issue in the election?

HARRIS: The civil rights plank was an issue, but it had not come to a head at that time, not to the point it has in the last two or three years.

GRELE: I've been told by a congressman from Georgia that in Georgia, the Supreme Court took most of the blame for the civil rights situation in the South.

HARRIS: The Supreme Court came in for a lot of criticism in my area during the interim, as a matter of fact since the 1954 decision and on some of the other things the Court has passed on since that time. But up until that time, 1960, we had had no legislation that had become law on the civil rights issue except the Civil Rights Commission established in 1958. And as you

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would know, in 1961 it was extended. It was not until 1963 that the civil rights issue went beyond that which culminated in the 1964 Act.

GRELE: After the election, were you consulted at all on the selections for the new Kennedy Administration?

HARRIS: No, I wouldn't consider that I was consulted about the appointments of the Cabinet members. I had some visits during that interim and prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> of January.

GRELE: On any particular appointments?

HARRIS: Yes, but in view of the way it happened and the result, I wouldn't care to go into any detailed discussion of it. We were quite interested in the possibility of Senator Fulbright receiving an appointment to the Cabinet at that time. There was a lot of talk about the possibility of him being considered Secretary of State. But in view

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of the fact that he voted on the civil rights question, and that he was one of those of us who signed the manifesto, following the 1954 decision, there was a lot of discussion but nothing materialized. I'll just put it that way.

GRELE: On November 11, 1960, President-elect Kennedy appointed James M. Landis to head a panel to draw recommendations for changes in the regulatory agencies. Did you confer with the President over this appointment?

HARRIS: The President conferred with me. I'll put it that way. We discussed it.

GRELE: Did you favor the selection of...

HARRIS: Yes, I encouraged it. I thought it was a pretty good thing to do.

GRELE: Did you confer with Mr. Landis over the recommendations?

HARRIS: No, I did not confer with Mr. Landis over his becoming an officer assuming this

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responsibility prior to this appointment. But I discussed it with him following his appointment.

GRELE: While he was drawing up his recommendations, did he discuss them with you?

HARRIS: Yes, we had conversation about what his proposed plan would be towards the regulatory agencies of the government and toward regulatory procedures.

GRELE: Were you in favor of his recommendations?

HARRIS: Yes, indeed. As a matter of fact, I cooperated in bringing them about.

GRELE: Why did you favor his recommendations?

HARRIS: Well, we had been through an investigation and hearings over a period of over three years. My committee of the House went into the regulatory procedures and administration of the regulatory agencies in 1958, 1959, and 1960. And as you recall, as a result of this, we had the tragedy of the Richard Mack [Richard A. Mack] case of

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Florida, the Channel 10, and then the other station next—Channel 7, and two or three others in Florida. There was a total of about 23 stations throughout the country; all the way from Denver and Phoenix and back East. We developed a lot of facts and information that required action. You probably recall the Goldfine [Bernard Goldfine]-Adams [Sherman Adams] incident that came up with it and the bright young man of the quiz shows [Charles Lincoln Van Doren] who finally admitted that he was in fact committing fraud on the whole country through these facilities. We got into a few problems of the Interstate Commerce Commission [ICC], some problems of the Federal Trade Commission [FTC]. That's where the Adams-Goldfine incident started. We had some incidents that had some connection with the Securities and Exchange Commission [SEC]. Most all of the major regulatory commissions were involved in one way or the



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other in some incident that occurred which, as you know, brought about changes in several of the commissions including the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], Mr. John Doerfer [John C. Doerfer]. But we had developed all of this information. We had had reports, recommendations out of them. So I was quite familiar with what had occurred, what was developing and what we had thought, as a committee, needed to be done to strengthen—first to clear up the situation and bring about better administration—and to strengthen the hand of the commissions in an orderly way, to do something about these tremendous economic problems that were affecting our whole country.

Out of those studies and recommendations of our committee came many of these proposals which Mr. Landis adopted as to what we should do toward helping to clear it up. That

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prompted the President [Kennedy] to make his speech at Ohio University, I believe it was. Later he discussed with me in December about the possibility of appointing Mr. Landis as special consultant to the White House for the purpose of going into these matters. I thought it was a good idea and I approved of it. On the subject of that too, Mr. Landis discussed with me what he planned to do and what he was about to undertake. He made it very clear that he wanted to confer with us from time to time which he did. We did get into some controversy and I opposed some of the things that Mr. Landis suggested and I think Mr. Kennedy saw later on that something else must be done. Mr. Landis was going beyond what he had expected.

Well, out of this came legislative programs which the President, Mr. Kennedy, concurred in: to reorganize the Federal

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Communications Commission and others. We would not accept Mr. Landis' proposal to reorganize it by administrative act. We beat that. But we came right back, and through the cooperation of President Kennedy, we enacted legislation in the field which is the law today. By effectively utilizing it, we did the same thing with the Interstate Commerce Commission. In the other agencies, Mr. Kennedy, as a result of all this, sent up reorganized programs which were approved.

GRELE: In general, how did the legislation change the form of the Commission of the...

HARRIS: It permitted the Commission to delegate by this reorganization procedure a lot of the detail work so the Commission could go about its business of administering the program and the law and to deal with policy matters and not be bogged down with red tape and a lot of detailed stuff.

GRELE: I believe Mr. Landis' proposals would have

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given more power to the chairmen of the various commissions.

HARRIS: He proposed that insofar as the FCC is concerned.

GRELE: Can you recall why that was opposed?

HARRIS: Yes. He wanted to set up a one-man commission where the chairman would actually have control of the whole program: the staff, the agenda, and everything but actual votes. By this kind of procedure we would have had virtually a one-man commission and the other members would be only figureheads. We had always intended these to be independent, regulatory agencies and commissions composed of x numbers, five or seven, as the case would be, and eleven on the ICC. It was to be a commission operation and not a one-man type which would have been a trend toward executive control. That we did not want. I was opposed to it. Mr. Landis wanted to make it that way and there's where we disagreed.

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GRELE: Do you recall any discussions with Mr. Kennedy over Bernard Schwartz' book [*The Professor and the Commissions*]?

HARRIS: No, I do not believe we ever discussed Mr. Schwartz' book. He might have referred to it in a jocular way, I'm not sure, but we never did discuss it.

GRELE: I asked that question because I remember at the time many of the liberal journals talked about it at great length. I was wondering if President Kennedy, as a member of the liberal wing of the party, might have talked to you about it.

HARRIS: Well, I think probably some of the journalistic reports on the liberality of Mr. Schwartz did not deal with the real problem involved with Mr. Schwartz.

GRELE: That's the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration. We don't have to get into that too much. While the proposals for the reorganization of the

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regulatory agencies were being considered, I believe by the Committee, Mr. Minow [Newton B. Minow] who was chairman of the Federal Communications Committee bitterly criticized the broadcasting industry. Do you recall?

HARRIS: Well, I recall that when Mr. Minow was chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, he made a speech to the annual meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters at which he referred to the broadcast industry as “a vast wasteland.” It created a lot of concern among the industry and there was a lot of publicity over it.

GRELE: Could this have been one of the factors involved in the refusal to grant the chairman...

HARRIS: No, not at all.

GRELE: No.

HARRIS: No, that had nothing to do with it at all.

GRELE: What was your opinion of this controversy?

HARRIS: I think it was exaggerated. I think it was

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played up far beyond the proportions that it deserved. I never did think that Mr. Minow had in mind with his comment—and which they call a charge, an allegation—that the industry interpreted it to be.

GRELE: The proposed changes in the operating procedures of the Federal Trade Commission I believe were the most far reaching of these reforms granting the power to the FTC to issue cease and desist orders. Did you ever confer with the President or his staff on this?

HARRIS: I conferred with the President on most of these proposals and Mr. Landis, as long as he was there. And as a matter of fact when the thing got to the point that something needed to be done, the President invited me down to talk to him. I told him what was about to happen and suggested he had better take action to make changes. I thought that Mr. Landis' service had reached its climax. I believed

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that he had better do something about it. As a matter of fact, the President said he had been thinking about the same thing and that he was going to keep him until June 20 [1961].

GRELE: Was it your impression that the President directed Mr. Landis or Mr. Landis influenced the President? Who was the senior partner...

HARRIS: Well, at the outset, I think Mr. Landis having the record and background he had, was a man that could have gone into these matters—and the association that Mr. Landis and the Kennedy family led Mr. Kennedy to have a lot of confidence. Mr. Kennedy, I think, and appropriately so, thought he would be the very person to undertake this. As time went on, he went beyond what Congress, in my judgment, would approve, and I think probably beyond what Mr. Kennedy ever had in mind in his efforts. Some of the actions of

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Mr. Landis led to the point that he was doing more harm than he was doing good. That's what prompted me to go down and talk to the President about it. We were getting along pretty well with our programs to reorganize and to reestablish some of the procedures where the commission could do its job. Then, as you will recall, Mr. Landis got into some difficulty with charges—something down there by someone in his own office which came right in the midst of all these discussions. A rather unusual thing. The President told me it was rather ironical that the first person in his Administration that he had to take some action on because of the matters of that kind would have to be Mr. Landis.

GRELE: Was this the tax case?

HARRIS: No, it had to do with his secretary filing a charge against him, if you may recall, which

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accused him of some actions toward her.

GRELE: Oh, I don't recall it, but I imagine it's—is it in the public record?

HARRIS: Oh yes, indeed.

GRELE: Oh, I don't recall it.

HARRIS: Yes, it was in the newspapers. Sure, there's nothin' secret about it.

GRELE: Can you reconstruct for us the history of the legislation to control various drugs on the American market in 1962? Your Committee I believe, handled the President's...

HARRIS: Well, it's a rather long story and I would not want to go into the type of discussion that would be excessive. I think it would be sufficient to say

that the Department [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] [HEW], the President, President Kennedy at that time, my own staff members, and I having discussions and then I subsequent thereto had discussions with certain of the industry,

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we came to a conclusion that there were certain amendments to the Food and Drug Act that would be desirable.

Now out of that, the Department of HEW Food and Drug Administration sent up two bills. They sent up one bill having to do with the drugs. Tied to that was a bill having to do with other phases and activity of our economic life. I don't recall just what the bill was referred to as of this moment. But it got into the field of beauty parlors and having to do with hair dye and things of that kind that was used by our beauticians and so forth. We decided that that was not nearly as important as the drug program. We centered our attention on the proposals for the drug control. Then we got into hearings on it. They were rather extensive. We came up with the bill which resulted in the 1962 act.

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GRELE: Do you recall any of the President's comments on the bill offered by Senator Kefauver or the bill desired by Senator Kefauver?

HARRIS: Yes, we discussed it at length, Senator Kefauver and myself and the President. The President was sympathetic to the entire problem. He wanted a bill.

He did not want to go as far as Mr. Kefauver proposed. But he thought some of the things in Mr. Kefauver's proposal merited consideration. I think that's true. On the other hand, it was rather impractical to expect that we would go as far as he would like to go: having the government to actually run the drug industry from the manufacturers to the wholesalers to the retailers. Consequently, Mr. Kennedy was quite frank, as he was in all matters, trying to come up with a solution that would

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reach the problem and do as good a job as we could at the time.

GRELE: Do you recall Senator Kefauver taking the Senate Floor claiming that Mr. Cohen [Wilbur J. Cohen] had lied to him?

HARRIS: No, I do not recall that accusation at this moment. I just don't remember.

GRELE: Did you work with Mr. Cohen or his staff on this legislation?

HARRIS: Well, I thought at that time when we started, Mr. Boisfeuillet Jones had that responsibility. Mr. Cohen came into the picture a little later. If I

remember correctly, Mr. Jones was primarily the active participant in this program at that time. It might have been the result of Ken Roberts [Kenneth A. Roberts] of Alabama being the chairman of the subcommittee on health. But Mr. Cohen might have been active in the Senate. I'm not sure just when Mr. Cohen

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came to the Department but it was fairly early in the Kennedy Administration.

GRELE: As chairman of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, you played a key role on the debates over many of the legislative proposals in the Kennedy Administration. Can you recall any of the issues involved or personalities involved or conversations with the President on any of these proposals such as the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act of 1963?

HARRIS: Oh yes, indeed. We discussed at length these various and numerous programs. In my judgment he was one of the most active persons and we would discuss a particular legislative proposal. He would immediately and without hesitation make decisions. He was very easy to come to a compromise. His decisions were made rapid, you know. He did

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not hesitate. He was a highly intellectual individual and he caught the point very quickly and made up his mind very quickly on it.

If we reached a point where I would say, "Mr. President, it seems to me that the facts we have lead to this course or that course and this committee in my judgment is not going to do this or that." He immediately would get the point and would say, "Well, let's go then." Right off we would go. He would call me, as an example, as chairman of the Committee down there every so often and sit there and talk about these things, about the direction they would take and advise with us and would accept advice about which way to go. In that respect, he was a whole lot easier to get along with than other Presidents with whom I've had the privilege of serving.

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GRELE: Who do you feel he got his advice from? Which members of the staff or Congress?

HARRIS: His procedure, as I understood, was if I were coming down to the White House, he would be interested, of course, in a program that he had had proposed and was in the making. He wanted to find out just how it was going. He would have some of his staff make him a short memorandum of a particular proposal such as the Drug Act, or the Mental Health and Retardation Bill or the Research Facilities Act, or the Civil Aeronautics Act, or whatever it might be, would prepare him a

little, brief memorandum. Then he would call me down and say, "Well, here is something I am interested in and I'm told that this is it." And would advise me what he had and would just like to see what the situation is. And then I would sit there and describe to him what it was from my standpoint after hearings or where it was

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or the timing of it and so forth and he would take it up from there. He wouldn't depend upon what a staff member had told him as a final effort on his behalf. He used his own mind and judgment and that was, really, a very interesting thing about that fella, as President and as an individual.

GRELE: Do you feel that he understood the legislative process on the Hill?

HARRIS: Oh yes, indeed. Indeed. Now as far as the technique of bringing it about, he couldn't touch Mr. Johnson in that regard. Mr. Johnson is highly skilled in the techniques of legislative procedure and how to bring it about. But insofar as legislative program itself to accomplish an end that he wanted, he would grasp it very quickly. He would not want to quibble about little details and incidents here and there. He was interested in the result.

GRELE: To steer a bill through, did he rely on the

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committee chairmen or Mr. McCormack?

HARRIS: Very heavily.

GRELE: Very heavily?

HARRIS: Very heavily on the committee chairmen and what the committee chairmen told him. Of course we would discuss the matters and the status of them with Mr. O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and the members of his staff just as we have since and before.

GRELE: I believe at one time there was a discussion of railroad mergers that the Attorney General was involved in. Were you at all connected with that?

HARRIS: That started some years ago. As a matter of fact, Mr. Eisenhower set up a committee on transportation, and among other things, the subject of merger in the railroad industry was one of the subjects of discussion. He had the Department of Commerce, the Department of Justice, the Civil Aeronautics Board, someone

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in the ICC, I believe, and others in the Maritime Commission as members of the group. They did a study of what should be the government policy in connection with railroad mergers. That lapped over into the Kennedy Administration. I think, probably, the first report that resulted from that came after Mr. Kennedy came into power. They kicked the thing around from time to time and really never did come up with any definite, firm policy as to what the government should advocate in connection with mergers, and we don't have one yet.

GRELE: There was no definite attitude in the Administration, or was there conflict within the Administration?

HARRIS: I think there was a lot of conflict, as always, within the Administration. I think the ICC probably, in what limited participation it had, had some question as to whether to

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recommend anything because they were going to have the job, sooner or later. But I think there was a sharp difference in the transportation division of the Department of Commerce and the Justice Department. It probably prevented any definite decision from coming out of this long study.

GRELE: Do you recall any other legislative battles during those years?

HARRIS: Oh, we've had many of them in the field of Securities and Exchange...

GRELE: You were investigating the SEC, I believe...

HARRIS: Oh, yes. It was a part of our hearings, but we had a complete overhaul two years ago of the Securities and Exchange Act and the Securities Act of 1933.

GRELE: What was President Kennedy's attitude toward the Exchange?

HARRIS: Well, of course it was very close to his heart because his dad was the first chairman

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of the Securities and Exchange Commission after the Act of 1934. He was very close to the program and of course being, I would consider, in the wealthy group, and having a lot of interest—the family—in matters that either directly or indirectly came before the Securities and Exchange Commission, naturally they were interested in any program that would protect the securities of the country: stocks and bonds and so forth. From that



standpoint he was always interested in a sound and capable and efficient administration of the program.

GRELE: Do you recall any particular changes that he requested or favored?

HARRIS: Not in the way of amendments to the Act. He was interested in better administration. He was interested in the Commission reorganizing its schedule in order to determine certain things that had been delayed for a

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long time as it was in most all other commissions.

The great difficulty is, and was at the time, that many of these commissions had a time lag in their work. Particular matters before the various commissions had been there for years and years. And some of them in those days were being handled in a way to benefit particular people, companies, or special parties. That's what brought on the study and investigation. This whole thing. And I think it was that situation prevailing for a few years, too long, which caused the American Bar Association to come up with the recommendation that these jobs be turned toward administrative courts and the administration of the program itself be transferred to the Executive. Well, that's what brought on my interest and concern which I discussed with Speaker Rayburn and told

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him how this thing was going which caused him, then, to take the floor in 1957 and request that I set up this program to investigate these agencies and boards, as he called them.

GRELE: Did President Kennedy sympathize with the Bar's position that these agencies should be transferred...

HARRIS: I don't believe President Kennedy ever did engage in that controversy. We had gotten so far along with our investigation and recommendation by the time he became President, that the issue had become pretty well moot. I did not approve the American Bar's proposal to make them into administrative courts and the actual administration a part of the Executive level. The Congress always intended them to be independent regulatory agencies and an arm of the Congress. My position was that that should continue and we should strengthen

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the procedures to overcome some of the appropriate objectives that had been raised and probably which caused the Federal Bar and some others to take that position with some merit.

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END OF SIDE ONE

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TAPE ONE SIDE #2

- GRELE: I have heard that early in the Kennedy Administration you were considered for a federal judgeship. Is that true?
- HARRIS: There were some reports in the latter part of 1961 about it but just half-serious that I was considered. I don't know. I didn't give it much serious thought at that time.
- GRELE: Did you speak to anyone about it? Did anyone speak to you about it?
- HARRIS: Yes.
- GRELE: Why was the decision made?
- HARRIS: Why was it made?
- GRELE: Or why wasn't it made?
- HARRIS: Well, I was not particularly interested and I didn't warm up to it at that time.
- GRELE: The Arkansas delegation in Congress was and is probably one of the most powerful delegations on the Hill. Did John Kennedy or his staff realize this? Did they go

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out of their way to be friendly to the Arkansas delegation?

- HARRIS: Well, I of course, along with the other members of the delegation, appreciate the accolade that is extended to us with our position in the Congress. We have merely tried to do our duty with our positions. Four of us are chairmen of important committees of the Congress and we recognize that that does carry with it a lot of prestige and what is referred to as power, but, at the same time, a tremendous responsibility. And I am sure that any President would recognize the position of any member of Congress. I do know that Mr. Eisenhower recognized it and he didn't confer with me very often. He usually would send someone from the White House here.

Mr. Kennedy, on the other hand, recognized it and he conferred with us often on programs

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of his that he wanted. And he would advise with us on his programs and consult with us. Mr. Johnson does the same thing, though not quite as individualistic about it—on certain programs, yes, but generally speaking he would talk to groups at a time, even groups of chairmen at a time.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the change in the House Committee on Rules?

HARRIS: Now which change are you talking about?

GRELE: The change in early 1961 when President Kennedy was...

HARRIS: Oh, yes. I was very much in the middle of it.

GRELE: Who contacted you from either side?

HARRIS: Well, it was a matter here on Capitol Hill. Contrary to general opinion, the White House didn't get actively involved with it. This was an internal matter within the House of Representatives itself. If the President had gotten into it at that time, I don't

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know which way it would have turned. There's been a lot of propaganda and a lot of false charges and accusations that come out of it.

Actually what the problem was, the Rules Committee was primarily deadlocked at a 6 to 6 vote with a 12 membership. There were 4 Republicans and 2 Democrats, generally, against 6 Democrats. Now, Mr. Rayburn didn't have any difficulty of getting a rule when he actually wanted it as Speaker. It wasn't necessarily the problem that he was greatly concerned with about whether he would get legislative programs or not.

But an internal situation developed within the House. In the 1960 campaign, members of the Mississippi delegation openly supported another candidate than the Democratic candidate, Mr. Kennedy. There were many numbers of the Democratic group at that time that were very indignant over it. It was about that time

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that the so-called [Democratic] Study Group, which was sort of a liberal-minded group of the House, was organized. If I remember correctly, Mr. Chet Holifield [Chester E. Holifield] of California was one of the first leaders, if not the first, that discussed the program with Mr. Rayburn, Speaker Rayburn. Speaker Rayburn had a problem. They were going to propose that the Mississippi delegation be purged because of their failure to support the Democratic candidate.

Well, now many of us recalled that four years prior to that, Mr. Powell [Adam Clayton Powell] of New York failed to support the Democratic candidate and there was no proposal to purge him. We discussed at length with the leadership that such a move would be ill advised. Speaker Rayburn, then—it got to the point—had to do something to pacify this group that was becoming stronger and stronger. In doing so, it emerged that there was an alternate

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proposal that he could get by with. That would be the increase in the membership of the Rules Committee to break what was referred to by many of the liberals as the so-called deadlock.

In order to settle the question, Speaker Rayburn consulted with many of us and tried to resolve the issue with Judge Smith [Howard W. Smith], chairman of the Rules Committee. I recall I was brought into the picture and Congressman Mills [Wilbur D. Mills] from our state. He was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and I was chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. We were requested to go to Mr. Rayburn to seek his advice and cooperation on a settlement or a resolution of the problem to avoid this conflict within our own organization. So we did go to Mr. Rayburn and made an arrangement for Judge Smith and Mr. Rayburn to get together and discuss

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the matter and see if they couldn't come up with some mutual agreement. Well, that didn't work. So the other crowd met with Mr. Rayburn and laid it on the line that they were going to pursue in caucus the purging of the Mississippi group. Mr. Rayburn had to make up his mind what his move would be to keep this from occurring.

We then discussed it with him at length and told him that he simply could not join in purging the Mississippi delegation: that it would destroy our Party, that it would be a mistake, that they did not deserve this treatment and it had to be settled some other way. It was through this discussion that Mr. Mills and I and others joined with Mr. Rayburn or at least offered to support him. The only alternate course that he had to take was to increase the Rules Committee to 15. It was for that reason that we joined,

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realizing that the result, insofar as the Rules Committee was concerned and some of these major problems, would be the same as it was with the membership of 12.

Mr. McCormack took the position that we should not try to increase the Rules Committee. He did so because he was afraid Speaker Rayburn would lose. Whether Mr. McCormack at that time was thinking it might be the better procedure to purge someone for failure to support the Party—in other words, if they failed to support the Party—that they ought not to continue to have the same position within the organizational setup. I think he had an idea of not pursuing it at that time but letting it be known that in the future, action will be taken.

So you see, the action that was taken in the Eighty-ninth Congress, which I opposed and still believe was a mistake in penalizing Mr.

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Williams [John Bell Williams] of Mississippi and Mr. Watson [Albert W. Watson] of South Carolina in taking their seniority away from them, didn't start with this 1964 campaign or election. It started actually in 1956 and has come along all these years which led to this point. Because of that, in order to prevent a certain recalcitrant group from pursuing the course in 1961 of purging the Mississippi group, this alternate plan of increasing the Rules Committee was decided upon and passed by a very close vote—I think 4.

GRELE: Did you vote for that proposal?

HARRIS: I voted for it, yes. I felt that I had to at that time because the other course would have been purging the Mississippi group and would have been a very, very bad mistake in my judgment. Now since then, there have been those who say that this increase in the Rules Committee was for the purpose of passing the Civil Rights Act.

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There was never a greater falsehood, or false charge, or accusation, or misunderstanding, or erroneous attitude because all 4 of the Republican members of the Rules Committee were for the civil rights program—4 and sometimes 5 members of the Democratic—which would be 4 and 4 is 8, yes—4 and sometimes 5 Democratic members of the then Rules Committee was for the civil rights program. Therefore, they had 8 and sometimes 9 members of the then Rules Committee, composed of 12 members, for the civil rights program. Consequently, the false and erroneous charges in the 1964 campaign which defeated Gillis Long [Gillis W. Long] in Louisiana and made it hard on others, including myself, was deliberate in my judgment and intentional misrepresentation of what the facts were.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the discussion of civil rights legislation in 1963?

HARRIS: In 1963?

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GRELE: Probably not. It hadn't gotten out of the Judiciary Committee then.

HARRIS: The Civil Rights Act was passed and signed into law in 1964.

GRELE: Or put up in '64.

HARRIS: No. It was before the Judiciary Committee and I didn't have anything to do with it. I mean by that I had no responsibility in the field and was not consulted about it because everyone knew what my position was in opposing the Bill.

GRELE: Do you recall travelling with John F. Kennedy in Arkansas in October, 1963?

HARRIS: Oh, yes. I recall travelling with him in 1960 during the campaign and he was in our state in 1963 when they came down to Little Rock and Greer's Ferry dedication.

GRELE: Were you with him on the day he dedicated the dam and Governor Faubus criticized him?

HARRIS: Yes, I was with him. I left Washington in

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his plane with him.

GRELE: Do you recall his reaction to Governor Faubus' opening remarks?

HARRIS: Yes, very well. I thought it was exceedingly fine for a man who held the position as President of the United States. He didn't show any emotion or feeling about it and neither did he refer to it later when he spoke.

GRELE: Did he ever talk to you about it in private?

HARRIS: Never mentioned it, and didn't mention it that day when we left there and flew to Little Rock and during the time we were together at Little Rock and the time we went back to Jacksonville Air Force Base from which he returned to Washington.

GRELE: Is there anything we've missed?

HARRIS: I can't think of anything. However, I've been around here so long that we could sit here forever and talk about these things, I suppose.

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GRELE: It's a good way to write your memoirs. [Laughter] Do you have any final comments on John F. Kennedy or his place in history which you would like to offer just for the record?

HARRIS:            During the long years I was privileged to be associated with Mr. Kennedy, I came to know him very well. Though he was from one section of the United States and I was from another, I recognized the intellectual ability and I was, as some others in the country, fearful that he was probably too youthful to become President of the United States. But the campaign that he conducted and the intellectual approach that he made to the problems and his capacity to organize and cut through the vast and immense propaganda and wave of detailed information and get to the heart of the thing was very enlightening.

I became very close to him because of my

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position in Congress when he became President. This close association caused me to even become closer associated and to appreciate him and his ability. I think had he lived, he would have gone much farther with his programs, and of course he would have written a lot more history. I think, however, his intellectual capacity and his determination to serve, his firmness in time of crisis, and during the three years that he was President of the United States, that history will record him as one of the great Presidents. His image not only increased insofar as his own capacity was concerned within the United States but his image was worldwide. I think he far surpassed anyone we've had in our generation or even during this century.

GRELE:            Thank you very much, Congressman.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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