

Walter Mondale Oral History Interview – RFK#2, 08/03/73
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Biographical Note

United States Senator, Minnesota, 1965 - 1977; Vice President, United States, 1977 - 1981. In this interview, Mondale discusses Robert F. Kennedy's impact on his fellow senators and the 1968 presidential campaign, among other issues.

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Walter Mondale – RFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

Senator Walter Mondale

August 3, 1973
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project
of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: One thing is, after Robert Kennedy's death I know you became a member of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee and you took care of the Indian affairs and migrant labor subcommittees [Migratory Labor], and, of course, these were areas that Robert Kennedy was very much involved in. How much did he have to do with developing or increasing your interest in these?

MONDALE: I'd say a great deal. You know, we sat next to each other a good deal of the time in the Senate. I'd always been deeply interested in property since as long as I can remember, and his leadership and interest, of course, caused the creation of the Indian Education subcommittee. When Bob was killed, I asked, in effect, to replace him on the committee, and I was privileged to do so.

In addition to being interested in that, I never said that but I always felt sort of a special responsibility to help, along with others, complete some of the work that he had started. One of the things I worked very hard on for what turned out several years was the whole Indian education bill and that bill was finally passed into law, and I think it's going to be a very good measure. We had eighteen million dollars last year, and of course it was impounded and we had all that mess, and this year we have sixty-five million in the Senate purse. It just passed the Senate, so that it's starting to count.

It's starting to make a difference. Educators back home are beginning to talk about how it's helping and so on.

GREENE: Did you find that he proselytized you and other colleagues in the Senate on the issues that were important to him?

MONDALE: Proselytized I don't think would be the right word, at least with me. I never had the feeling that he pressed me or tried to persuade me. He would often talk to me about issues, but just sort of matter-of-factly. I remember one day he showed me a study from, I think it was, the Field Foundation doctors in the lower Mississippi showing about the hunger, and this and that. That sort of thing he'd do.

GREENE: But, of course, you I'm sure he sensed had a sympathetic ear. Do you know how he would be with people who may not have been above persuasion to begin with?

MONDALE: No. I don't.

GREENE: Can you get any feeling now that your. . . . Well, particularly when you first got to the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, do you have comments on his tenure there? Do you see any evidence of the impact from that cause?

MONDALE: I think it was subtle. The Indian educational work is obviously a classic example. A lot of the poverty programs were his or he was deeply involved in them. I think Bob was able to create a national interest and concern about poverty and about its injustice that was one of the dominant forces in the Congress for some years after he died, and regrettably it's starting to diminish as an issue of the day.

GREENE: What kind of a reputation did he have among the members, particularly of that committee? Was he highly regarded? Was he considered the leader?

MONDALE: I think he was very well liked. He was considered to be one of the more important members of the committee. His interest in poverty was well known.

GREENE: Did you get the feeling that people felt there was a gulf after he left, that it really made a difference?

MONDALE: Yeah. Robert Frost said, you know, life can be defined in three words, it must go on, and I think

that's part of the way the committee felt. You just have to carry on.

I think Bob was very much missed and the issues he was interested in I think suffered from his absence. But I guess I don't think of it so much in the context of a particular committee. I think of it more in terms of the Senate as a whole and the country as a whole. His greatest influence was not, as you know, as a technical member of the committee, although that was important, but because he had a national following that permitted him to focus attention and generate national support and a sense of urgency for these programs. That's what we miss today.

GREENE: Well, let's switch gears to Vietnam, which you mentioned last time in the context of the fox and the chicken coop speech, do you remember? Do you remember talking to him at all in, let's say, 1965, '66 about Vietnam and his own feelings and yours, let's say up until the time of that '66 speech? This was when he wasn't speaking out a great deal.

MONDALE: Not a lot. For some reason he didn't talk to me much about that. I was aware of his speeches, and I was aware of his general position. When he finally decided to break with [Lyndon B.] Johnson he chided me once about not joining the ship.

GREENE: How serious was he about that?

MONDALE: He was kidding, and yet I think he was serious too. And that one of the things about Bob, he was a very serious guy. Even when he was kidding, he was occupied with the issues.

GREENE: But he never really put a lot of pressure on you or tried hard to get you to change your. . . .

MONDALE: No.

GREENE: Did he ever talk to you at all about his reluctance to speak out on this not only because of the problem with the president but because of his sense of responsibility from the JFK period?

MONDALE: No, he never did, but I always sensed that both were factors. In other words, he was aware of the fact that in the early JFK period he was a strong supporter of this effort. Also I think it bothered him a good deal that what he thought were honest objections were often dismissed as petty bickering with Johnson. He often kidded about his relationship with Johnson privately, and about how

awful it was. I don't think they were good for each other at all. I think they brought out the worst in each other. I think it bothered him that when he did speak out, and I think if you go back to the newspaper accounts you'll see, that the merits of what he thought he was saying were often dismissed, and instead there would be some political think piece about how here was another attack on Johnson, and the Kennedys and Johnsons are fighting. He hated that because he thought what he was saying was more important and ought to be taken at face value.

GREENE: Do you ever remember him being. . . ? Did you have a sense, I should say, that he was reluctant to speak out on certain things, and he would get other people to do things that he might have naturally been a leader on, because it would be dismissed?

MONDALE: With the Watergate hearings I'm very reluctant to say I can't remember.

GREENE: Can't recall. No one ever says remember.

MONDALE: ". . . at that point in time," yeah. I sensed some reluctance in that early 1965, '66, '67 but I think as it neared 1968--I'd have to go back and look at the papers--I think at some point he just decided he was going to do it. And then, you know, there was that period when he wasn't sure whether he was going to be a candidate, and I can recall he once told me that he said, the word is out that [Eugene A.] McCarthy is a stalking-horse for Johnson. Remember, McCarthy went up and did very poorly at first. They were laughing about that. But then I think that he was getting tremendous pressure from a lot of these people, you know, to make the race. At that point a lot of things fit into place, and when he started that's when he really described his own philosophy, and I think he thought little or nothing of opposing the president.

GREENE: Did you talk to him in that period about the war and how much of a factor that was in his decision?

MONDALE: Not a lot. I think he knew I was very close to [Hubert H.] Humphrey, and I think that may have had something to do with it. When you got into Johnson and political strategy I think he just felt that he was wasting his time. It was on poverty questions, on questions of the Democratic politicals in the Senate and caucus issues, and specific issues like fair housing, poverty, Indian education--that's where we usually had a discussion.

GREENE: But on Vietnam specifically.

MONDALE: Not so much. Once in a while, but very rarely.

GREENE: What about, for instance, when you came back from your trip to Vietnam, the one that you refer to in Elizabeth Drew's article.

MONDALE: I don't remember us discussing that.

GREENE: No particular curiosity about what you'd learned?

MONDALE: No. I'll be fair, I just don't recall, but I don't think so.

GREENE: Last time you did say that. . . . [INTERRUPTION]

You said last time that you thought some of your 1966 efforts for other candidates campaigning, like for yourself, were in preparation for a 1968 race that he already had in mind. Was there anything that gave you that idea, or just kind of an impression?

MONDALE: Well, I don't want to say that's the only thing, because I think he knew in helping me that if it came to a Humphrey-Kennedy race, that the blood between Humphrey and I was pretty thick. I don't think he had that in mind. But if you look at the newspapers of that time there were a lot of stories I think emanating from him or from his people listing the number that he was supporting. I think they wanted to prove in the '66 campaign that Bobby had tremendous coattails. He really covered a lot of ground in that campaign and I believe that was hardly enough to show he had that following.

GREENE: What about the idea that he was thinking about a 1968 race that early, because I think that sort of. . . ?

MONDALE: Well, that was certainly being speculated about though, you know, so I would guess--I don't know this--but just looking in the outside I think I assume that he was thinking about running for president. He hadn't decided yet. He had nothing to lose with a big campaign of this sort, and that's exactly what he did. He campaigned, I forget in how many places.

GREENE: Were there any discussions with him about it, about a popular challenge to Johnson?

MONDALE: No.

GREENE: No. That's not the kind of thing that he would do.

MONDALE: No. You see, I was brand new. I wanted Bob, he had a good name, and I just wanted him to come. Also, in this case, Turkey Day is originally from Minnesota, was run by a close friend of mine who just had to have Bob Kennedy. So I went and asked Bob if he'd do it, and he said he would, so I went down also.

GREENE: No, I didn't even mean in relation to that trip, but just in general did you have. . . ?

MONDALE: I remember on the trip he kept getting notes "Kennedy for President in '68" and he kept handing them to me. "See," he said. Or if they said they loved me, he'd hand those to me, too. This was typical, you see. He kept handing me those notes.

GREENE: Let's see. Did he talk to you at all once McCarthy got into it, other than the business about his being a stalking-horse?

MONDALE: Yeah, he kidded about that. I don't know this, but I don't think there's any love lost between Bobby Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy. I don't think they liked each other, and I've sensed that, but I. . . .

GREENE: Nothing specific.

MONDALE: No.

GREENE: For instance, do you remember his reaction to the [Otto] Kerner Commission [Special Presidential Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders] report which is more in the area where you were close to him? That's something that people have sided with him, talked to him, final decisions.

MONDALE: I assume that he strongly supported that. I don't remember any specific discussions about the Kerner Commission as such, but its recommendations were entirely consistent with his appraisal of the programs. It's hard to recall, but I don't remember any specific discussions.

GREENE: Well, when did you finally learn that he was going to run? What was your reaction what was the reaction in the Senate, do you remember?

MONDALE: I remember being in Washington, you know, in a very interested way, and as I recall [Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy went out to Iowa and gave a speech in which he said we should support Johnson.

GREENE: Prior to that.

MONDALE: Yes.

GREENE: That was long before.

MONDALE: Yeah. And, of course, Teddy and Bobby were very close, and I assumed that that reflected a decision on the part of the Kennedys that Bobby was not going to run and they were going to stick with Johnson even though they were bitter on some of his positions. So on the basis of that I remember I was a little bit surprised by that speech, so I sent a page over to get a copy of it. They were all out. I think they shredded it. I remember being a little bit surprised by that and saying to myself, well, maybe they're thinking it over again. I forget the date of the Iowa speech, but it was before the New Hampshire primary.

GREENE: Yeah, I remember it very generally.

MONDALE: But there was a little story, and they stomped on that story in a hurry. I thought well maybe they're thinking it over. Then there was a lot of public speculation, you know. But, of course, I wasn't in on that. Then when he announced, and so on.

GREENE: What was the feeling with Humphrey and Johnson in that period? How did they feel about the possibility that Kennedy would run?

MONDALE: Well, I'm sure that Johnson detested the idea, but I don't know. From what I could tell, Kennedy and Johnson really had. . . . Kennedy once told me that he and Johnson had a terrible set-to in which I think that he swore at Kennedy, and Kennedy said he. . . . As I recall it, Kennedy had made some trip overseas . . .

GREENE: I think it was 1967.

MONDALE: . . . it was reported in the press. Apparently it was an awful day. So I knew that relationship was boiling.

Bobby and Hubert liked each other. They were very friendly. They had competing ambitions and they knew it, but I think they liked each other. In the Humphrey campaign I never heard him say anything bad about Bobby. People, you know inevitably some of them can't, some of them did. I always liked Bobby.

GREENE: Did Humphrey reflect the feeling that Kennedy was hurting the party, and it was bad for the country if Kennedy ran? Or didn't he care about it.

MONDALE: No, I think Humphrey is mature enough to know those

things happen. I don't think that was it. I think Humphrey resented, as I'm sure Bob resented some of Humphrey's supporters. You know that gets to be an awful thing, even though . . . This always happens, when two people are competing even though they like each other, their supporters always dream up these awful demonic theories about the opposition, and say things and do things that are awful. There were some people around Bobby doing that, and there was, I'm sure, some people around Humphrey doing that. I tried to step on it on our side because I thought it was wrong and it wouldn't have helped him. I think Humphrey was resentful once in a while of some of the things said about him. And I don't think he resented Bobby.

GREENE: He could distinguish what was said. . . ?

MONDALE: Yeah. I always thought that if Bob had won, Humphrey would have been all out and Kennedy would have won the presidency, and if Bobby had lived and Humphrey had won the nomination that Bobby would have supported Humphrey, and we could have gotten this family back together again and won.

GREENE: But there's nothing solid for you to base that on? I mean, you don't remember discussions. . . ?

MONDALE: No . . . And of course both sides would have been foolish to say, well, I'll throw my towel in. You always have to act like you're going to go to the bitter end because otherwise people figure, well, we can compromise him out. They just don't dare say that.

But, as you know Ted ended up working fairly hard for Humphrey, and I think there . . . You know, Humphrey's been, although he's run against Jack, one of Kennedy's best allies on the Hill, and I think the Kennedys appreciated that. It's impossible for Humphrey to be personally embittered. They knew that, and they knew he was not that kind of person. So I've always thought that if Bobby had lived more likely than not he'd have won the presidency, either Kennedy or Humphrey would have won.

GREENE: At the time that Johnson withdrew there's a [Rowland, Jr.] Evans and [Robert D.] Novak article about you and Senator [Fred R.] Harris that dates back three years ago. They said that your reaction immediately after the withdrawal was that you didn't even know if Humphrey should enter, but you thought that Kennedy kind of would automatically get it, you know, be the front runner. Does that ring a bell?

MONDALE: That may be.

GREENE: That was immediately after . . .

MONDALE: I remember being on NBC [National Broadcasting Company] that night. Three of us were supposed to react to Johnson's speech. He was going to talk about Vietnam or something. Instead of that, he withdrew so there we were sitting and supposed to say something. I said, well I hope Humphrey will consider running, but I didn't know what he . . . I more or less thought he would. I guess I also thought that Bobby would have the strength. But it turned out, within a week I realized Humphrey had enormous strength in the party structures around the country and that it was a real prospect.

GREENE: Was there any contact from the Kennedy people after he withdrew? Nothing, . . . huh?

MONDALE: No. Well, frankly . . .

GREENE: But there was no effort to form a reaction then?

MONDALE: No. I heard that Bobby was disappointed in Fred, that he thought they were close and he expected Fred Harris to be with him. Fred and I were very close, and as soon as Johnson had quit, I knew that I would have some role in that campaign, because I always have. I just wanted some help, and I wanted some other support and I thought Fred would be ideal for the moment. And I went to see Fred, and he agreed immediately. I think they'd been thinking about it. But I understand that created some tension from the start, to put it mildly.

GREENE: But obviously you were considered gone?

MONDALE: Oh, yeah. I don't think we questioned it.

GREENE: Did you get much of an impression of the organization they had in Minnesota at that point in time?

MONDALE: Bobby? They didn't contest in Minnesota much. We didn't see him much. They had a few things, but it wasn't much.

GREENE: I think the next thing, and maybe the last thing, is the Pennsylvania . . . Why don't you just recall this as frankly as you can from your point of view.

MONDALE: I've often said, and nobody believes me, that had Bobby and Humphrey gone to the mat in Chicago, Humphrey would have won. Most people don't think so, but I do, and part of my reason is the Pennsylvania

experience.

Bob, for all of his greatness and, you know, he's one of the greatest people I've ever known, was not very strong among party people. For example the mayor of Philadelphia hated him, [James H.] Tate, because apparently when Tate's life was on the line running for reelection, Bobby had come into town and made some derisive remark, and he didn't like it. The business community, and we don't have a lot of businesses in the Democratic party, but there's some--they all had a funny fear of Bobby. I never understood, but they were scared of him.

Of course, Humphrey had been doing party chores for years. He had been speaking for everybody, helping everybody, and Humphrey is very well liked. You know, as a human being he was deeply loved. Then, of course, whatever strength Johnson had in the North tended to be with Humphrey, although there wasn't an awful lot of that around, just spots of it here and there.

So we worked with some of the people left over from David Lawrence, the former governor there, and a lot of the old Jack Kennedy people. I did not spend a lot of time in Pennsylvania. I was there, I think, two or three times meeting with the leadership. We had the mayor of both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, Tate, and I forget his name.

GREENE: Barr?

MONDALE: Barr? Barr, yeah. And we had the top people in the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] and we had a lot of bits and pieces of Humphrey friends and strength all over, and it became quickly apparent to me that we had a very strong . . .

Then Bobby or Teddy, I forget which, maybe both--took a swing into Pennsylvania. They thought they could break that up, but they didn't move it at all. The only opposition we really had was from McCarthy's strength there, and that was basically, you know, the war issue. And we had some of that, but as I . . . [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell and John Reilly and all my friends, you know, a lot of the times. . . . They couldn't pick up anything, and so we had that caucus for the purpose of demonstrating Humphrey's strength, because you know that Bobby was trying to put the position that Humphrey's strength was waning, he didn't have a chance, and so come with me. He was trying to get that bandwagon going. The Pennsylvania caucus was very important to that psychology, and they put a lot of weight on that. I think we out-organized them, but it was then that I realized the basic weakness that Bobby had was regular party people, at least in Pennsylvania which should

have been a strong state for him, I think. They really weren't too anxious to go.

GREENE: Do you remember, I think it was Ted Kennedy that you were referring to that came into the state to try to generate . . .

MONDALE: Yeah.

GREENE: . . . interest, and that was roughly May 24th. He appeared before the delegates at the Pennsylvania . . .

MONDALE: Was Teddy there, for the delegates?

GREENE: Yeah. And supposedly he politicked and they had said that they were going to keep it . . . It's hard to believe, but they supposedly had laid out ground rules that they wouldn't talk about presidential candidates, and that this infuriated Barr, and that's why Barr who had previously been somewhat close to Kennedy turned icy. Does that ring a bell?

MONDALE: I don't remember that. There was some event there, and I heard complaints about it, where Ted came in and had promised just to make greetings. Instead of that he took the meeting over. He gave a big speech and so on, which I find perfectly reasonable under the circumstances, and they were bitching. But I believe that they were just a convenient thing to complain about. I don't think that was sensed . . . Based on what I saw there I don't think it was ever possible for him to get much. But what surprised me was almost a total lack of strength there. I thought, you see, it's a strong Catholic state, a strong John Kennedy state, and I thought, boy, we're going to get wiped out here and it wasn't true at all.

GREENE: There was a whole thing on May 28th about polling the delegation, the Humphrey people wanting to poll the delegation, obviously, to show their strength. Do you remember how much opposition was put up?

MONDALE: Sure. They didn't want to poll . . . They found out they were losers, you see, so they didn't want any polls because they wanted to create this impression that there was a bandwagon. Also, once a person's announced who he's going to vote for the chances are he's going to be more difficult to change. So we knew we were strong and we were anxious to have the poll. When they found out that they weren't getting anywhere, finally in desperation, I think, the McCarthy and the Kennedy people said, well let's have a vote later, or something. Anyway,

they didn't get anywhere.

GREENE: Do you remember any specific things Kenny O'Donnell and [Milton J.] Shapp tried. . . ?

MONDALE: They tried, but it was pathetic. They didn't have any votes.

GREENE: I know, that was over before it had begun.

MONDALE: Yeah, they didn't amount to much.

GREENE: The other area of debate was about the unit rule and that, which I think you also favored as going with the unit rule, was voted down. Do you remember that?

MONDALE: No, I don't. There was a couple of procedural issues there . . .

GREENE: Yeah.

MONDALE: . . . but the really central question was the votes. I forget the final vote, but maybe you have it there--it was overwhelming.

GREENE: No. You don't remember the series of phone calls? It's small potatoes, but it's interesting as background.

MONDALE: You mean when he was . . .

GREENE: Well, apparently what was happening is the Humphrey people were trying to get together with the McCarthy people before the poll?

MONDALE: Oh, yeah. There was something going on there. What was that? I guess what we were saying . . .

GREENE: Clark Clifford calling McCarthy and . . .

MONDALE: I think maybe what we were trying to do is to get. . . I didn't tell you about this. [Thomas] Tom Finney, the lawyer . . .

GREENE: Yeah, he's with People's Rights, he lives in . . .

MONDALE: Tom is a lawyer in town here, and he was McCarthy They're all friends. Tom's a pal of mine, too, so we were all. . . . You know, it's a funny thing there. I tried to tell Tom that I didn't think it was in their interest, and I still don't think it was, to stop that

vote. We should have a poll. That McCarthy was going to prove to be stronger than Bobby, and he might as well show it, and all he was doing was helping Bobby. Tom agreed with me, so I think he tried to get the McCarthy people to vote for the poll. And I think some did, maybe all of them did, I don't know.

GREENE: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

MONDALE: I forget that. Much to do about nothing anyway.

GREENE: Were there any people among the leadership--Barr, Tate, I. W. Abel [Solomon] Al Barkin, any of those people that you weren't sure of, that, you think, at the end of the Pennsylvania. . . ?

MONDALE: I thought Barr was walking a little bit one day. They were trying to get him. We were having a caucus there, and he got a call and he wanted us to come down and do something that day. I forget what that was.

GREENE: I just want to show you a press clipping, and it will be interesting to get your reaction on it.

MONDALE: They didn't vote on it or something. They knew they didn't have the strength. You see they were trying to convey the impression that they were really very strong. In fact, they were pathetically weak, and both Kennedy and John Reilly admitted that to me. About the only people to talk to were each other, so they had. . . . You know, it was a bad show. And I think it was a very chilling experience because Bobby thought he'd do much better, and I heard he was quite upset about it.

GREENE: Oh, I think that's true. Is there anything else on Pennsylvania? Okay. What about the impact of Indiana and Nebraska and, of course later, South Dakota and Washington, and that kind of thing? How did Bobby look to you?

MONDALE: That clearly was moving Bobby forward. As I recall that, the Indiana results were somewhat arguable. The South Dakota and Nebraska and D.C. [District of Columbia] and California results were fairly warranted. But you recall, he lost in . . .

GREENE: Oregon.

MONDALE: He lost Oregon, yeah. You know that shows the strength of the people, there's no question about that. And it also was embarrassing because Humphrey did not enter any of those primaries, and somebody was always

saying Humphrey is afraid to enter, he couldn't win. Humphrey once told me in retrospect he thought that was the biggest mistake he made. He should have gotten into those primaries.

The other thing was that they used kind of a cute tactic. They would toll up the votes that Kennedy and McCarthy or anybody got, and they'd say, well, these are all anti-Humphrey. So instead of getting say 43 percent of the vote, they'd say we got 87 percent. People couldn't figure it out, and that was a very effective tactic.

GREENE: What impact were these primaries having on your efforts to line up key figures?

MONDALE: Well, in a strange way, they almost helped us, because they didn't want Bobby. That gets back to that earlier discussion we had. In the South, among regular Democrats, among a lot of labor people, labor leadership and so on, Bobby had problems. Business leadership, and so on. As they thought he was gaining strength, if anything, it almost brought new strength to Humphrey in delegates.

GREENE: Do you remember specially people, Terry Sanford for one. . . . ?

MONDALE: He was with us.

GREENE: There was no question. . . ?

MONDALE: Well, Terry was working for us. He was in the office.

GREENE: From the early. . . ?

MONDALE: Yeah, he was with the United Democrats for Humphrey. Now when he joined I don't remember, but he was with us for some months.

GREENE: And so there was no question . . .

MONDALE: Well, he might have been a spy, but I doubt it.

GREENE: What about [Richard J.] Daley?

MONDALE: Well, that's a funny game. I never knew what Daley was up to. There were four or five governors and mayors, and so on, that I referred to as the Johnson group, because I always figured they were doing exactly what Lyndon had in mind, and it was Daley, [Buford] Ellington from Tennessee, John Connally from Texas, [John J.] McKeithen from Louisiana, possibly [Robert E.] McNair from South Carolina--

they made up quite a few delegates, and there were some others, pieces around. They were, I always thought, playing games with us. I've never been sure what Johnson was up to, but you know while Humphrey was getting most of the votes at that convention, that convention was run by Lyndon Johnson. We never knew from hour to hour what was going to happen, or whether Johnson was going to show up. There was some talk he might show up. As far as I know, Daley never did say he'd support Humphrey until Monday or Tuesday of the convention. And when they did . . .

GREENE: Were you personally in touch with him?

MONDALE: I called him once but I wouldn't say it was much of a conversation. I visited him once, but I mean it was clear that he didn't intend to talk to me.

My theory was that at the convention Lyndon figured that Humphrey didn't have quite enough votes to win, that it was close. And he was right, and so he got all these governors, and so on, and others to hold back and refuse to support Humphrey either to put pressure on us, not to have a compromise Vietnam plank, which we tried to work out--We tried to get something everyone could live with and that would indicate a direction towards peace--or because he planned to come back. You know, there was talk at one time that if it hadn't been for the Prague invasion and this and that, Lyndon thought maybe the convention would ask him back.

GREENE: There were rumors that he was flying overhead in a helicopter.

MONDALE: Yeah, which weren't true. I don't think that he ever really intended . . . But, he's a mysterious man. Maybe he did. In any event, I kind of figured out what they were up to, so I said, well now, maybe if we could talk that Florida delegation into coming with us they would then know we had enough votes, we didn't need them, and then they would all come aboard. So [Edward J. Jr.] Eddie McCormick from Massachusetts and I went to George Smathers, later to Spessard Holland and to the others, and said we've got to have you, this is it, you're the key delegation. We're right there, but we need you. And sure enough Smathers said, all right, I'll do it. So he announced that he was supporting, and he hoped most of the delegates would support, Humphrey. And within two hours the others start. . . . You know, the train was starting to leave the station and the others started moving with us. Peculiar game.

GREENE: It surprises me that late, you know, in the game that it would have been that indefinite. I didn't realize that.

MONDALE: Well, I don't think it really was, in retrospect.

GREENE: But the people weren't following much.

MONDALE: There were still some games being played. We were so close. When Bobby was killed, which in a real sense I think may have been one of the contributing causes of Humphrey's defeat, because it just contributed to more sense of bitterness and defeat. It would have been so good for the Democrats to have a good convention fight between two clean competitors and go on out of there. I think that would have helped a great deal. But this way it just felt that the whole thing was rigged and suspicions and all of that, plus Vietnam. It was just a terrible . . . Chicago was just a terrible time, so that the convention was almost robbed of its legitimacy.

GREENE: What about in the pre-California period, people like [John W.] Hughes and Walter Reuther and some of these other people? Do you remember specifically California?

MONDALE: Well, Hughes was very active in the party reform issue, and I always thought he was probably planning to support Bobby. I never knew that maybe he did support Bobby. I forget. But he did end up supporting McCarthy. I think he nominated McCarthy.

GREENE: But you didn't personally have any. . . ?

MONDALE: No. I knew he wasn't for Humphrey.

GREENE: What about Reuther, Walter Reuther?

MONDALE: I don't believe he ever made a public statement, did he?

GREENE: No, that's why I was wondering.

MONDALE: I think he hid behind that board of his. They'd always meet, and I think a lot of the vice-presidents came out for Bobby. I always thought that he'd probably be for Bobby if there were a chance he'd make it, but I don't know that.

GREENE: Did you have much to do with the California primary for Humphrey?

MONDALE: Nothing.

GREENE: Oh, because I was going to ask you your approach for out there.

MONDALE: No. I did not.

GREENE: Well, is there anything else on the campaign that you can think of prior to the . . . ? Was that Oregon defeat something that you saw as a watershed?

MONDALE: I think that hurt Bob a lot because it broke up. . . . That's why I say I don't know whether even Kennedy people realized that they needed a fast moving heavy tank to break down our wall. We had a good organization. We knew what we were doing, we knew who the delegates were, we talked to them, we contacted them, we knew what we were doing, and it would have taken a tremendous gusher of public opinion to change that. Now, it may have been that poor Bob never lived so he'd get the benefit California primary. That surely was a big asset to him. But I still double that he could have made it.

GREENE: But do you remember Oregon from the Humphrey point of view of being a big boost?

MONDALE: Sure because it showed that he wasn't uniformly successful, and it showed where there weren't a lot of minorities. His tremendous asset was with minorities. Barring that, he wasn't able to win in all states. What was the vote on that? Was it McCarthy? McCarthy beat him in Oregon.

GREENE: I don't know. It was close everywhere, even California you know. It looked like it was going to be a much bigger spread than it turned out to be as the night wore on. In fact, the next day I think it looked like the support was going to turn out to be . . .

MONDALE: Yea. It was not the . . . They really needed a knock-out punch, and they couldn't get in. You know, I always really liked. . . . It sometimes scared me how people talk about him. They had this demonic concept of Bobby that was completely crazy. That was working against him, and I think it showed up in these votes some.

GREENE: Well, I think he was very polarizing.

MONDALE: Yea, he's very hard to be neutral, and it was very hard not to be sort of deeply committed one way or another.

GREENE: Do you have any final observations, comments, or anything?

MONDALE: You know, I miss him a lot, and I miss what he stood for. When you have a man with national stature, and

full of goodwill and decent objectives, it is an incredible asset. You can work your heart out around here, and I work pretty hard, but if you don't have that kind of national following, it's hard to generate a movement that makes these institutions move. The inertia in government is fantastic, and especially with a guy like Nixon around. When Bobby was killed my generation was almost critically wounded. As a matter of fact, I don't think, we may never get over it. When I fought for Humphrey I was never against Bobby, and I tried to create a civilized campaign. But I didn't realize until after he was gone what you lose. It's just terrible.