

Philip M. Stern Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 6/7/1983
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Philip M. Stern (1926-1992) was an author; the Director of Research for the Democratic National Committee from 1953 to 1956; and the assistant secretary of state for public affairs from 1961 to 1962. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s early political career, Stern's advocacy for education on tax policies, and JFK's political legacy, among other issues.

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Philip M. Stern—JFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

PHILIP M. STERN

June 7, 1983

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

S. STERN: Ok. Why don't we begin with the Fifties when you were working for Henry Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] in the House, and then before that with him in the Senate. Did you have any contacts at all with the congressman, then Senator Kennedy, at that time?

P. STERN: Let me.... this is with regards to whatever, is this [inaudible] is what has to do with what I knew of or had contacts with John F. Kennedy...

S. STERN: Correct.

P. STERN: ...and the subject of this transcript focuses on it.

S. STERN: Right. Well, so that we can certainly go into more general issues of Democratic Party politics and that sort of thing.

P. STERN: In my only recollection of meeting, Kennedy was on a plane trip in 19-, certainly it could be before he became a congressman, but I have no recollection of the specific date.

S. STERN: Ok. When you were working for the Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]

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campaign in '52 under Wilson Wyatt, did you, I know that Stevenson, for example, made a foray into New England and traveled the [inaudible]. There are lots of pictures of the trip he took around Massachusetts. Were you with him at all? Did you have any role in that or....

P. STERN: I rode the train down from Boston to New York...

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: ...and that was the extent of my contact with the New England campaign. But I have no recollections of any contacts with Kennedy there.

S. STERN: Ok. Well, I'm just trying to cover the basic questions.

P. STERN: Right.

S. STERN: And then when you were working for the *Digest*, was there any awareness at all of Kennedy as a [inaudible] of the party. I was wondering, for example, if you might have been at the '56 convention when he was nom-, almost nominated for vice president?

P. STERN: Yeah. I was director of research for the Democratic National Committee, and I had full run of the place. My one recollection of him prior to his bursting forth, was that speech, election speech, he gave in Washington. It would have been in the range of '55, '56. And he was unimpressive! Particularly in his delivery and his.... I can't remember what the subject or the substance was about, but I remember coming away with the feeling of zero charisma.

S. STERN: That was before he was, before the vice-presidency nomination?

P. STERN: I'm sure it was.

S. STERN: Yeah, yeah, Ok. So then let's jump up to the 1960s and the '60 campaign. I began to find some indications of your work for Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]...

P. STERN: Right.

S. STERN: ...in late '59 and early '60. There was an article, for example, in the New York Times, in which you were

quoted as saying that you thought Humphrey would have 150 to 200 delegates by the time of the...

P. STERN: Yeah.

S. STERN: ...convention, and that Wisconsin was gonna be the key. And I wonder if we might talk a bit about that and....

P. STERN: Well, I was for Humphrey before I was for Kennedy in 1960. I first met Humphrey in the Senate when I was.... No, the first time I met him, was struck by Humphrey, was when he came to Springfield in October of 1962. And he had lunch with his speech-writing group, all of whom had their tongues hanging out on the floor with fatigue, and they had been writing, writing, writing and they didn't have a breath of fresh air or inspiration in them. And Hubert Humphrey came through and Adlai presented him, and he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, how America was strong and ought to be generous and help the world. And he.... This is the speech he had been giving throughout the country and I was bowled over. And I was then.... Oh, I had worked with him a bit in the Senate, so I'd come to realize how bright he was, what a quick study. And so in 1960, when he ran, I supported him and did some speech writing for him.

S. STERN: Did you have any role specifically in that primary that we were talking about...

P. STERN: No, never. No.

S. STERN: ... or something that you did?

P. STERN: No.

S. STERN: How about West Virginia?

P. STERN: I never left Washington. My role in that campaign was confined to speech writing.

S. STERN: Ok. Well, let's talk about that. I did find some other thing, for example. What about the convention? Were you at the convention?

P. STERN: The '60 convention?

S. STERN: The '60.

P. STERN: Yes, I was there.

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S. STERN: Can you sort of, for example do you have any insight as to why Humphrey did not in the end endorse Kennedy, which was...

P. STERN: Well....

S. STERN: ... a source of some problems.

P. STERN: I will tell you a story that I am not a first hand, of which I am not a first-hand observer.

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: Well, there are two aspects of this. One of the first, of the first I was a first-hand observer. When I got to the convention [Interruption - problem with tape] I have a distinct recollection of visiting the Humphrey suite early in the 19.... The timing of it has to be the 1960 convention, but I.... Place recollection places it in Chicago, but, in any event, the discussion was who was he going to endorse. And he said, "I'm doing it," to the people in the room, including me. "There's no question of who I'm going to endorse. I can only endorse one person, Jack Kennedy."

S. STERN: Well, then it's got to be 1960.

P. STERN: Yes. It has to be, and I must have the places mixed up. But, I remember his, cried out that declaration, "There is only one person that I can endorse. That is Jack Kennedy." The second aspect of this is not first-hand, would have to be any scholar be checked out with the participant, but I am told that the evening before that, Humphrey endorsed Stevenson.

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: There was a conclave of all people that had been closest to Humphrey numbering 20 or 30 of, something on that order. And they met until, my understanding of this is that they met until two or three in the morning and broke up at that hour with the decision Humphrey was going to endorse Kennedy. My understanding of this, I repeat this would have to be checked, is that remaining on the Humphrey suite were two people, Herb Waters [Herbert J. Waters] and Muriel Humphrey. Sometime between the hours, if this is so, sometime between the hours of three in the morning and nine o'clock in the morning and broke up at that hour with the decision Humphrey was going to endorse Kennedy. My understanding of this, I repeat this would have to be checked, is that remaining on the Humphrey suite were two people, Herb Waters [Herbert J. Waters] and Muriel Humphrey. Sometime between the hours, if this is so,

sometime between the hours of three in the morning and nine o'clock in the morning, the decision was changed. I've always wondered why Humphrey didn't come out immediately with Kennedy. Stevenson wasn't even a contender after Humphrey pulled out of West Virginia. My

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supposition has always been, and this is a purely private supposition, not worth a tinker's damn. If the story is as I told it, that it was Muriel Humphrey, and secondarily, Herb Waters' resentment of Kennedy and all the money he had in the primary campaign, that presented Humphrey from....

S. STERN: I know that rather, I think, well-documented story about that how angry Muriel was when Robert Kennedy came to Humphrey's headquarters in West Virginia after Humphrey had dropped out, and apparently she didn't want to shake hands with him. So that bit of it, of that account.

P. STERN: Well, I remember the account of, I think, it's in Teddy White's [Theodore White] book, of Humphrey sitting in a motel or hotel in 1960 West Virginia campaign and writing out a check to pay for the bus. And he said, "This is my children's tuition, but what can I do?" and I can see what strong, strong feelings would have been generated and he said there, as I remembered, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

S. STERN: Yeah.

P. STERN: He was probably bitter.

S. STERN: How about his selection of Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]? Was that a surprise to you?

P. STERN: The...

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: ...vice presidential thing?

S. STERN: Yeah.

P. STERN: But you have to understand that I wasn't on the inner circle at that time. Far from it.

S. STERN: How about during the campaign itself? I know that you.... Harris Wofford mentioned to me that you had played a role in the black voter registration drive.

P. STERN: I think I may have put some money into that, but I have no specific recollection of it.

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

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P. STERN: But I think now....

S. STERN: That was from the campaign?

P. STERN: No. I did have an eight-minute car ride with Kennedy during which I gave him a check, I think, for something like a thousand dollars. But that was a *pro forma* thing, and I tried to become involved in the pre-planning scene with Archibald Cox, but...

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: ...nothing to that.

S. STERN: So you didn't [inaudible] Nothing at all? Well, let's move on then to your appointment as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. I wonder how that happened. Let's talk a bit about the background to that.

P. STERN: Well, that came, I assume, must have come about through the intercession of, primarily through the, at the instigation of George Ball, with whom I had been associated in the '52 and '56 Stevenson campaigns...

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: ...and with whom I was business partners in the northern Virginia *Sun*, and he was number three in the State Department. And I had known Roger Tubby from previous Democratic politics. So, that was the way it came about.

S. STERN: Ok. Can you give me any insight into the.... Well, I know that Tubby had some real problems right from the start with Dean Rusk. Apparently Rusk didn't, had not wanted to appoint him and made things rather tough for him, and he was out after one year. Did you have any sense of that while you were there? I also wondered if you might talk a bit about Carl Rowan and his role as a deputy....

P. STERN: Well, I did not know anything about the.... This is the first I've heard of trouble between Tubby and Rusk.

S. STERN: Oh, really?

P. STERN: Do you know anything about why?

S. STERN: Well, apparently Rusk felt that Tubby was simply a Truman [Harry S. Truman], he called him a Truman hack,

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used the word. And that he really didn't think he had very much experience and that he basically equates that of Truman and Truman's people. And he didn't think that he really understood the relationship with the press and the role of the press in the State Department. And that eventually got Robert Manning in there who's the person in early 1962.

P. STERN: Hmm.

S. STERN: Oh, let me go back to just one other point. John Sharon in his oral history mentions that your name came up as one of the people who was pressing to get Chet Bowles [Chester Bowles] appointed as secretary of state. You have any recollection of that?

P. STERN: No. I had some dealings that are now vague, and I think [inaudible] was the, I don't know whether you would call them the headhunters, Yarmolinsky [Adam Yarmolinsky] and....

S. STERN: [inaudible]

P. STERN: Yeah.

S. STERN: Was Harris Wofford part of that?

P. STERN: He was associated with them. Yeah. And I would have been in favor of Bowles, but I don't recall that I a) I had anything like substantial influence and b) that I made any great headway.

S. STERN: Ok. Well, then let's talk again about your perceptions of Tubby, his performance; likewise Carl Rowan. I'd also like to talk a bit about your own experience in that job.

P. STERN: Well, I have no way of appraising Tubby's performance. I liked him and was a good friend of his. He was not.... I don't think anyone would accuse him of being a forceful personality. I have doubts that anyone could have played a very important role in explaining Rusk to the public. Because Rusk was one of the most

closed people I've ever dealt with in public affairs. I have one particular recollection, vivid recollection I have, is of briefing him for his first press conference after I got there. I had been used to briefing the chairman of the Democratic National Committee for "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation"...

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S. STERN: Sure.

P. STERN: ... And we would sit around the room and we would throw the rudest questions, the most abrupt questions that we could. And the chairman would give a response and Mr. Sec [Secretary of State] would say, "well, no, I think that's not the best way of putting it" and "why not try it this way," and it would be a free for all.

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: And everybody understood that the object of asking those rude questions was so that the chairman would not be surprised. So, the first time Roger and Carl Rowan and I went up and Lincoln [Lincoln Wright], the spokesman...

S. STERN: Lincoln White?

P. STERN: ... Lincoln WRight...

S. STERN: Wright.

P. STERN: ... went up to Rusk's office before a press conference, and there is this enormous briefing book, that is the bureaucratic State Department briefing book that would brief him on the most [inaudible] question there was. And none of them got to believe how critical it was. And nobody seemed to be asking Rusk any of the tough questions. So I was number three and age 34 piped up and, you know, "What about this?" And Rusk looked up at me as if to say, "Who is this guy and what's he doing here?" And rather than answering the question and giving us all the chance to have at it, he walked up and down chain-smoking and said, "All..." and thought of what he wanted to say and said, "All right. Next." And....

S. STERN: Without telling you.

P. STERN: Oh, without. I think it worked. So, I don't think he would have let, my guess is he would not have let any press person close to him and share. He wouldn't. Carl Rowan, I felt, I'd be frank to say I felt competitive with him. He was getting a lot, into a lot more things than I was. And he went on that trip around the world with the vice president...

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: ...and I would like this to be closed.

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S. STERN: Ok.

P. STERN: Carl was and is an ambitious man. That's not to say anything against him. He had a good thing. He was going to make the best of it. But I have no reason to believe that his performance was anything but good. He's an able man.

S. STERN: I wonder if you could talk.... This is a sort of a, may sound silly and elementary, but there is a good reason for it. Many of the interviews are used largely by undergraduate students who have done research for papers at the Library. And very often they say to me, "What does a person who holds this job or that job actually do?" So very often when I do these things I try and get someone who was, say Deputy Secretary of State for Public Affairs to talk about, "What exactly do you do in that job?" and if you could talk about, if there is such a possibility of a typical day when you would come in in the morning and what would you expect to do?

P. STERN: Well, I was atypical. With the.... That second deputy assistant secretaryship was really an amalgam or a created position. A.I.D. [Agency for International Development] did not have its own press...

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: ...assistant administrator for press. And that was, the third deputy assistantship was that. It was supposed to be in charge of A.I.D. publicity. So to the extent that I did anything, I worked with the creative, with the graphics people, and the booklet people and so forth. But I will say in retrospect, that was not a good fit between me and that job. I had, my background was almost entirely in domestic affairs, very little of foreign affairs, and I was ill-suited both substantively and by personality to that job. I had no clear-cut mission. You know, I'm embarrassed to say this now. I wanted terribly to get into the New Frontier. Everybody was going then. And I took the first thing that came along, pleased at the appointment. So, I am not a good person to ask that of. I will say that an enormous, egregious amount of time by any bureaucrat is spent in meetings. And what comes out of those ones doesn't know. But one from one meeting to the next and very little creative effort comes out of it.

S. STERN: I saw a communication that you wanted to take over the whole public affairs section of a, you were interested in that. You were interviewed by Fowler Hamilton for it and that he gave it to somebody else. Is that your recollection?

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P. STERN: It corresponds dimly with my recollection, though I didn't say it.

S. STERN: Uh-huh. How did you get interested in the whole question of taxes and tax [inaudible] such that you became...

P. STERN: Well.

S. STERN: ...the resident expert on that question?

P. STERN: Well, now we're jumping to another time in....

S. STERN: Well, I know. I found articles you had written in '61, '62 on that subject.

P. STERN: Well.

S. STERN: [inaudible] The book came out later, you know.

P. STERN: Well, at the, after a year, I gather that there was considerable unhappiness with me at the State Department. I was slipping in on meetings that I.... There was considerable unhappiness with me at the State Department, and I was an embarrassing person to have on that respect since I had some contacts with, distant contacts with Kennedy, and close contacts with George Ball. So I was.... They told me that the second deputy assistantship was being abolished and they sent me over to the O.M.B. [Office of Management and Budget] building to work on the new [inaudible] bill with George Ball. After about a month of that, the head of that, whose name I'm blocking on, told me that there had been a mistake and there was no such slot for me, and I was out. So, I turned to [inaudible]. And over that Christmas I had met [inaudible] Kaplan who was the Commissioner of Internal Revenue...

S. STERN: Right.

P. STERN: ... and he had talked about the [inaudible] gap, the [inaudible] gap. And so I proposed to the *New York Times* that I do a piece on that for the April issue. Would you like more coffee?

S. STERN: No thanks. No.

P. STERN: I would. You don't want more coffee?

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S. STERN: No. No thanks.

P. STERN: So I proposed to the *New York Times Magazine* that I do that piece with my interests in taxes as, so, and did that piece that had appeared in April of '62.

S. STERN: '62, correct.

P. STERN: That quited, that requited my interests in taxes that had sprung from sitting in the Senate with Paul Douglas, in a fantastic debate that [inaudible] *Congressional Record*. The earlier incarnation of Hubert Humphrey took on the whole subject of the loophole. At that time, there were no liberal members of the finance committee. And in the United States Senate, "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king," and there were two one-eyed men. One was George [Walter F. George], the chairman, from Georgia, and Eugene Millikin, the ranking Republican from Colorado. Only they knew what was in that tax bill. And Humphrey had the audacity to mount in three days an assault on the loophole. He held the floor for three days. And I sat there next to Douglas and I looked around and I saw the control that these two men had, because no other senators knew anything about it. And if the United States Senate was ignorant about taxes, think of what the public must feel. So, after I got my feet back into the tax field, through that *New York Times* article, I got the idea of writing a popularized book about the Republicans.

S. STERN: Um-hmm. Why don't we go back at this point to this one thing I noticed here that I missed. I found in a report in the *New York Times* that on July 15, 1961, President Kennedy arrived at Hyannis with Johnson, Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger], McHugh [Godfrey McHugh], and Philip Stern. I wonder if you have any recollection of that meeting or....

P. STERN: Well, I had a summer place on Martha's Vineyard, and used to ride Air Force One up to Otis Air Force Base...

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: ...when [inaudible] arrived.

S. STERN: Oh, so there was no [inaudible].

P. STERN: No.

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S. STERN: I see. Ok. Well, I just wanted to check that one out. Did you have any insights at all after the Bowles Massacre? Are you still there, of course, at that time? The Bowles Massacre?

P. STERN: Yeah. No, I had no insight into it. I had no notion of the way a fix was going on. I was out of it entirely. I remember on one of those Air Force One trips, what, on the Air Force One gathering at Otis Air Force Base, on Monday morning after he told me he was fired, he and Mac Bundy, who was going to replace him, he came looking around to see me if Ball would be the man. I was out of that.

S. STERN: Uh-huh. Ok. So then I assume that you were not particularly involved in any other major, other than State Department press issues and the Berlin Wall and all other things.

P. STERN: No.

S. STERN: It happened in '61.

P. STERN: No.

S. STERN: Were you still there?

P. STERN: Remember, I was number three and there were two people ahead of me.

S. STERN: Did you have any part in the regional briefings and things that Robert probably organized?

P. STERN: I'm sure I did, but I don't remember going out on any of them. I remember first sitting in a meeting of the, what's the [inaudible] organizations, that, in Washington and in something to do with the preparation of materials of that.

S. STERN: Well, ok. Anything else then on the series of the Kennedy presidency? Did you ever see him again or talk to him again after you left the government? Any contacts at all? Anything?

P. STERN: No. After I left the government?

S. STERN: After you left the government.

P. STERN: No. No. No.

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S. STERN: Ok. What about Robert Kennedy? I did find some indication that you had a role in the '68 campaign. I wonder if you might talk a bit about that.

P. STERN: Well, the D.C. [District of Columbia] delegation ended.... As the D.C.

delegation was forming, Robert Kennedy was in the process of announcing that Spring. And I was to be a member of that delegation. And the question was whether I was going to be a McCarthy delegate or a Bobby delegate. And when Bobby sprang, I was a Kennedy delegate, although that was a mixed delegation. I saw Bobby twice in that campaign, once at a rally at, I think, 14th Street and U, which was in the heart of the black section of town, and I, that was an outgoing evening rally, that was one of those ? And I went into that crowd with Ethel [Ethel S. Kennedy], you know, right next to them as one, as in, as only a crowd can crush people close to each other.

S. STERN: Yeah.

P. STERN: And it was scary and that is, it was not unfriendly, but there's just a force to the crowd. And I have never forgotten that. I, if there had been fear in Ethel's face, I would have been the one to see it, being that close, and....

S. STERN: You don't think there was?

P. STERN: Oh, no. I thought [inaudible] I was very impressed. And I saw Bobby on a Sunday afternoon campaigning around Washington by car. One other recollection of this, of that campaign, I mean, of that spring, dealt with taxes...

S. STERN: [inaudible] At that time?

P. STERN: ...and I would ask him to come up and advise on tax policy matters. And I had one particular recollection of that. At one of the sessions in Bobby's office, the.... Joe or I, I think Joe, brought up the question of whether Bobby ought to be dealing with the [inaudible] issue of income credits [inaudible]

S. STERN: Uh-huh.

P. STERN: This was enacted by the Republican Congress in 1948 and remains to this day one of the enormous tax gifts to the rich and the most inequitable feature of the tax

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law, costing huge revenue. I think there was, even then in '68, it was in the tens of billions as much. And this, obviously, would have been a very unpopular thing to tackle. And Joe and I were still one of the few people who were bothered by it, and we brought it up. And Frank Mankiewicz, who was from California, a community property state, just began jumping up and down. And I remember Bobby sitting behind his desk sitting stiffly. He says, "Fine." Because my sense was he knew we were right on that subject, and he knew damn well he wasn't going to touch that with a ten-foot pole. He [laughter] [inaudible]

S. STERN: [inaudible] Mankiewicz addressed politically?

P. STERN: Oh, clearly.

S. STERN: Yeah.

P. STERN: Oh, there was no question about it.

S. STERN: Yeah. And that was the last of your contacts with Bobby Kennedy as far as you can recall?

P. STERN: That Sunday afternoon campaign with Rosie Greer [Roosevelt Greer] who was in the car.

S. STERN: Ok. Let me just ask you that one final question with the more general kind of thing, and that is now that we are at the 20-year point of the end of the Kennedy Administration, as you look back on it, have your.... You have something you wanted to add?

P. STERN: Yes.

S. STERN: Ok. Go ahead.

P. STERN: I felt Bobby, we.... As far as I'm concerned, I'm a late plane catcher. I've got another half hour.

S. STERN: Ok. That's great. You have another half hour?

P. STERN: Yes, that's true.

S. STERN: That's fine. Go ahead.

P. STERN: I saw the, I saw Bobby before, once, and rode with him on an American Airlines plane between Washington and New York. And he told me, this was in, this was while he was still attorney general, I'm almost sure. But I can't swear

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to that. But it was....

S. STERN: Was Kennedy still President?

P. STERN: Oh, no, no. Yeah.

S. STERN: So this was between the assassination and when he left the, to come out to run for the SEenate.

P. STERN: It was after Jack's death.

S. STERN: Yeah. Ok.

P. STERN: And we talked about tax policies.

S. STERN: Um-hmm.

P. STERN: And he said, "If my brother had lived, we were going to make this a major issue in the second term." He said, "I have been asking Internal REvenue to give me the cases of super, hyper-rick people like, and who pay no taxes,, and maximize it. And when I would get these, I would take them to him to grab his attention about it. And if he had lived and been reelected, we were going to make this a major issue." It was easy enough to say after his death, but it is an interesting insight into Bobby if nothing else.

S. STERN: You didn't have any role, then, in the '64 campaign in New York at all, did you, for the Senate? No?

P. STERN: No. No, I

S. STERN: Did you have any contact with him while he was a senator, before he ran for president?

P. STERN: Only the one that, only with the tax policy question that I've just described. I was very much in awe of all the Kennedy, and I was intrigued. I was intimidated by Bobby and his entourage, held him in awe. I....

S. STERN: Ok. Well, for the last period I was telling you before your last thing. As you look back now, after 20 years, on the Kennedy presidency, has your view of Kennedy changed? Do you feel pretty much the same as you did in '63 or '64? Do you feel differently about it now after 20 years? Has your assessment of the years been altered by subsequent events or by, just by the general way in which people's perspective often does change?

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P. STERN: I would like beyond, I would, my mouth waters for the chance to see Kennedy in a second term, with the two-term amendment, where he only had his place

in history in mourning.

S. STERN: Without running for re-election.

P. STERN: Without the possibility of running for re-election. I think he was a much more conservative president, a conservative man, cautious man than many of us felt he was when the New Frontier started. I, in retrospect, I'm distressed by the arms buildup that he sanctioned, and we have no way of knowing what to extent the American University speech would have made a difference in his foreign policy. I, is there an oral history with Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner]?

S. STERN: Yes, there is.¹

P. STERN: 'Cause I think, I would commend students to that. Wiesner, in my view, was a comparatively lonely but immensely sane voice. He more than anybody else close to Kennedy knew the absolute power and the danger of the arms race. And I don't know what role he had in the American University speech, but I would think that he would have had a major influence on Kennedy. I have the impression that a lot of times in that university speech Kennedy had been testing the waters around the country on a peace line. And I would like to believe that in a second term, when he'd have nothing but his place in history, he would have made a major overture. And I would like to think that the [inaudible] would not have come about. But my main comment was that I think he was a much more conscious, conventional than he had reason to believe. I'm repeating myself, but I think the arms buildup after the Berlin Wall is striking. His appointment and belief in McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], who really lent his name, the liberal name, to a [inaudible] of the arms buildup is notable. One anecdote that Wiesner has told me that has struck me, and I don't know what [inaudible] Wiesner, while he was science advisor, found out that the Russians, that the air force was flying planes into the Russian coast on the deck with their instructions for only a few feet off the water. And when they hit the Russian coast, they would zoom up and block out all the major Russian radar inflight systems and then [inaudible] Wiesner tried to get a briefing on

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this from the Pentagon. And from what he has told me, they would not let, they would not permit a briefing of the President's science department, because he was not cleared for that. President's science department! And he had to get Kennedy to personally order a briefing of him.

S. STERN: One other issue I just realized that I should have mentioned. I thought...

¹ Although an interview was done with Professor Wiesner for the Kennedy Library his office was unable to locate the tape when queried in 1989. Professor Wiesner died October, 1994.

P. STERN: I just....

S. STERN: Ok. Go right ahead.

P. STERN: I realize that I'm cribbing Wiesner's oral history, but this incident is singularly significant in my view. There was an issue of how much the administration was going to go ahead with a new bomber or a new weapon. I think it was a bomber. And Wiesner was convinced that this was a major error. And so he had done colossal homework on it, got an array, an entire array of arguments against it. And so he, and Kennedy and McNamara met on this issue. And he did his dog and pony show and laid out all of his famous, his arguments, and according to what he told me, Kennedy turned to McNamara and said, "Well, not this, Bob." Oh, there was a question of whether they were going to go for 75 new bombers or 10, and McNamara said, "If you go for less than 75, you'll get killed and conquered. And Kennedy went for the 75. That's...."

S. STERN: Ok. On one last point. I've done a series of interviews with people associated with Adlai Stevenson...

P. STERN: Yep.

S. STERN: ... dealing with his period at the UN [United Nations], and his relationship with Kennedy and such, and I was wondering if you had kept up your contacts with Adlai Stevenson, if you had any insight at all into his, how happy or unhappy he was at the UN, or anything relating to the period in which he was ambassador.

P. STERN: No. I saw him very little in that time. I think he was probably disappointed that he didn't get the secretaryship of state. But are you going to do interviews with Clayton Fritchey?

S. STERN: I've already done it. Yeah. He was very good.

P. STERN: He was forthcoming.

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S. STERN: Oh, I think he was. Yeah, I think he was. Of course I can't be absolutely sure, but I think he was. And I've done a number of other UN people.

P. STERN: [inaudible]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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