

**Ronnie Eldridge Oral History Interview – RFK #4, 7/13/1970**  
Administrative Information

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**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene  
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**Biographical Note**

Eldridge, New York City district leader for the Reform Independent Democrats (1963-1968) and vice chairperson of Citizen's Committee for Robert F. Kennedy (1968), discusses the 1968 Senate race and Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 Presidential campaign, among other issues.

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Ronnie Eldridge – RFK #4

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Fourth of Four Oral History Interviews

with

Ronnie Eldridge

July 13, 1970

New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program  
of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay, last time we were talking about the Senate race. You were about up to the point where you were asked by the Senator to go up to Albany to try to prevent their nominating Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein]. So maybe you could pick up....

ELDRIDGE: Right. The executive committee of the Coalition for a Democratic Alternative recommended Lowenstein's nomination. However, they also stipulated that whoever ran would have to run as of that date and run pledged to McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy]. Allard had gone down to Washington the night before and had been down at....Did I go into all that where he called me up at the restaurant late Friday night and got me and said, "You'll never believe this, but the Senator wants me to run for the Senate?" Had gone

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through all these discussions. Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] did in fact and would have been very happy with him running for the Senate but not pledged to McCarthy. That was the big

thing that caused all the uproar. So when he appeared before the executive committee in Albany he said he would not run pledged to McCarthy, he'd like to run for both candidates. They expressed their displeasure, etcetera, then because he wouldn't agree to run that way, then recommended Paul O'Dwyer [Peter Paul O'Dwyer]. I do believe.

Now at the time, Percy Sutton was still a candidate or a potential candidate. There was large support for Percy. So the effort was to delay the whole thing. Allard was nominated at least ten times, I think, from the floor and each time he would get up to turn it down. He has later felt -- and I would sit next to him, sort of to be sure that he would say no -- he eventually and I guess very soon after, really became very angry at me and felt that he could have agreed to run pledged to McCarthy and eventually over the campaign shifted it to supporting both of them. But our feeling at the time was that it was really a very undesirable thing and it was the one thing that would give the state-wide movement a

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unified kind of push. So the outcome of the whole things was that O'Dwyer was nominated by a very close vote because Lowenstein never left his name in nomination but Sutton got a very good vote. I can't remember if one of the alternatives -- I suppose the alternative was no endorsement and that that was what we lost the first vote on. I can't really remember. So after that conference which landed up with O'Dwyer nominated for the Senate pledged to McCarthy, the state committee and the Kennedy forces had no candidate. Shortly after that, Percy withdrew. I think he had officially announced.

GREENE: He withdrew the night before the state committee actually met.

ELDRIDGE: Right. But the state committee met after the Coalition met. I don't remember the date. Some people said that he withdrew because he got no guarantee of money. Publicly he had always said the Senator was very good to him and that he did say that he'd help with money but that he was as much afraid of running as the first state-wide black. I think it was most likely a combination of both. I really think it was mostly the fear of Sutton's that he would not really

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do well. Of course Kennedy got the brunt of a lot of criticism from that because it was the undercurrent that Kennedy wouldn't cooperate. So a few days before the state committee was to meet -- I don't know where the thought came, although we had been talking about Lowenstein running for a long time -- I called the Senator out in Wisconsin, I guess. I couldn't get through Angie [Angela M. Novello], who was very protective. So I finally called Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz]. Frank called me back and we talked about it. I proposed that we support Allard as a candidate, two ways: Either that the state committee made no nomination so that nobody would get the majority and that we'd let Lowenstein run by petition, because at that time he was really at the height of his attraction to the kids and everything else, and once he qualified himself by petition then the senator would support

him; that he would run opposed to Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], supporting both Kennedy and McCarthy. Or that we managed to give him the state committee nomination. I felt that we were going to be in very bad trouble in the state with the McCarthy campaign and that the reaction to Kennedy having

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come in so late and everything was really one of... I thought that the split was very deep and it was going to be very hard for Kennedy in this state, and that the best thing for him to be would be to sort of have that position of humility. It's sort of a romantic position where he would agree to support this, you know, young, grass-rootsy, anti-war person and that that would be about the best way we could help improve his image as not being aggressive, ruthless, selfish and coming out at the last minute. Somehow Mankiewicz, I guess he spoke to the senator and called me back and said, fine, talk to Steve [Stephen E. Smith] who was in California. I spoke to Steve and Steve said he'd call me back. He called back and he said, "Okay, go ahead with it. I agree. We think it's the best thing." Somehow vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] got into this. I'm very confused on it as far as the time sequence and everything else. At one point I spoke to Steve and Steve said, "Alright. You finally got yourself and Senate candidate." And vanden Heuvel called and was supposedly doing the work in New York. I remember Allard and I went to see him at 2 o'clock in the morning. I met Lowenstein at vanden Heuvel's

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apartment at 2 o'clock. The upshot of the whole thing was when we left, you know, vanden Heuvel said, "Well, good-by, Senator" and then laughed and said, "The last person I said 'good-by, Senator' to was Percy Sutton." So we all laughed a little bit. But it seemed to be that that was the way we were going. The next day which was the day before I guess the state committee thing, I arrived at the Hilton Hotel. What?

GREENE: Well, I was going to say that it must have been because I think Sutton dropped out almost on the eve of the committee meeting.

ELDRIDGE: Yeah. We knew that Sutton was dropping out. I think that was what the thing was. I'm not sure. Anyway it got down to the Hilton Hotel and found a lot of my reform friends there –Blumenthal [Albert H. Blumenthal], Ohrenstein [Manfred], Justin Feldman – all of whom have always disliked Lowenstein. When English [John F. English] and Burns [John J. Burns] asked them...I guess Peter [Peter B. Edelman] was there but Peter wasn't involved in it ...They were so busy cutting up Al Lowenstein that day that it was incredible. I mean each one of them, the thought of Al Lowenstein being a Senate candidate I think was just too appalling to them. All these meetings

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in and out in which we just didn't know what was happening.

I'm trying to think of who it was that was so secretive with both Peter Fishbein and me. I don't know if it was vanden Heuvel. Somebody that we really didn't expect it from. Peter would remember. I mean it was just obvious for several reasons that English and Burns – that Burns felt that he'd be very embarrassed as chairman of the state committee either to have the state committee come out with no candidate, which was one of the routes that we were going to take, or with an Al Lowenstein, which was just incredible to him and he felt he couldn't do it. I think English didn't like it at all. Vanden Heuvel was supposed to be calling up the CDA people to ask them if they could withdraw O'Dwyer, if we would have Lowenstein get the nomination. He spoke to Ellie French [Eleanor Clark French] and I don't remember who else. And their instinctive reaction was no. I can't believe that that couldn't have been worked on, but that no was taken very quickly.

Lo and behold, before you knew it of course, English came up with Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson]. How Lowenstein had felt all along that Nickerson was told that the Senator wanted him

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to run. He has in subsequent conversations with Nickerson found out that Nickerson really was not that anxious to run and that he ran on the direct request of the senator, which I don't know if it's really true or not. I just rather doubt it. My feeling was that what most likely happened was that Burns decided it was a position totally unacceptable to him, that English was a little concerned about it for I don't know what kind of reasons – I suppose many reasons, at that time he was not particularly friendly with Lowenstein at all – and that together the two of them decided that if Nickerson would say he'd run, then Kennedy would say, "well, all right. If you've got a state committee candidate like Nickerson, then I guess that's better."

So with kind of fuzzing over, with nobody being totally dishonest but certainly not really being straight and open, they really decided the course of putting in Nickerson. Which I think had the senator lived, I think he would have done very badly in the New York primary. We then subsequently had many arguments about strategy and tactics in the state. I think the

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Lowenstein candidacy would have been very good. Kennedy supporting it then would have really – rather than clarify the position between the so-called bosses and the people and the whole reform of the party and all of that, it really would have been of immeasurable help. So at the last minute we went into the state committee with Nickerson as a candidate with vanden Heuvel saying, "Well, Lowenstein thing fell because the CDA people wouldn't cooperate", which was partially true but I mean really if people had wanted to do it... I think had Steve been in New York it would have been different. I think that's true with the whole campaign further on. Steve came back to New York, stayed here for a while, set it up at the beginning and then went out, you know, to California mainly. And we limped along.

We really had two distinct organizations. I remember calling up – this is after the Senate nomination – and the thing was incredible. Vanden Heuvel was making a lot of



political decisions. I'm very fond of him but I've always thought he was one of the worst politicians around. His decisions were incredible. Everything that we did reinforced the image of really not having

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a base of support but of having the establishment...and when it came time to determine delegates and whether we would run separate slates and the McCarthy people would run separate slates and that kind of thing, I just felt that they always made the wrong decision. English is very close to Sarah Kovner and I was always in a very impossible position because there I was supposedly, you know, knowing the liberals and reformers and the peace people but really constantly being undercut because of the Jack's direct relationship with Sarah. I just think everybody was playing games and I never could understand why.

I remember once complaining – I used to talk to Kennedy; every once in a while he'd call to see how things were going. I remember once after the Senate thing or maybe while it was still on, saying I felt Lowenstein was either going to run for the Senate or he was going to run for the Congress in the 17<sup>th</sup> or from, the 4<sup>th</sup>. Is that where he is now? And then people wanted him to run in the 19<sup>th</sup>. I remember once Kennedy calling from Washington. We had a long chat about other things and I told him how lousy I thought the

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campaign was in New York and we weren't able to zoom it up or get above all the crap. We got on the subject of Allard and I said, "He doesn't know what to do. He says he's not running in the 17<sup>th</sup> because you personally asked him not to. And he didn't want to run in your home district and run for McCarthy." And I said, "Is that true?" He said, "No, it's not. I never not asked him to run." He said, "You know what I really want for Al." And I said, "What? Just to be in Congress?" He said, "No, just to help me," which I thought was kind of cute.

But Allard was using him as an excuse not to go into the 17<sup>th</sup>. Then one day I called, I guess it was Steve or somebody. I don't remember what happened but it was just really appalling what was going on. We got into a terrible argument about the delegates in the 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Vanden Heuvel invited in all the district leaders from the 17<sup>th</sup>, none of whom were supporting Kennedy really, none of them, but all were because he was a senator and they thought that was where the power was. They recommended a slate of delegates that was incredibly bad. I thought in the 17<sup>th</sup> we really had an

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opportunity to put a little zip into it and everything else. We just had a terrible fight in which I landed up crying. I was just hysterical. Actually the person who was determining the slate, it turned out to be, was Shanley Egeth, a guy I ran against for county Leader. There was vanden Heuvel taking Egeth's advice, and Shanley has never been on our side. I mean it was just incredible.

The Senator called me back and Steve....Pauline [Pauline Fluet] called me back first of all to say that, rest assured, everything will be all right. Somebody's coming in from Washington to take over in New York. And Bobby called and he told me that Bill Walton [William Walton] was coming up and that I would like him very much and it was going to be all right, blah, blah, blah, blah and everything else. Then Walton called. He said he was arriving in New York the next day but could he come for breakfast and meet me before he got to the headquarters so I could give him a rundown of what was sort of going on. So this charming gentleman arrived at 9 o'clock in the morning. I'd never met him and I had just heard he was sort of the artist friend of....And I thought he was going to

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be kind of a dilettante and I really was very fond of him. And we went through and I gave him a rundown of what I thought and everything else. Then we pretended that we hadn't met each other. He arrived at the new headquarters having got my whole thing and then somebody introduced him to me and that was how we got started. Then very clearly the split came. And English and John Burns moved to the other side. I think it was more mostly likely Jack. I don't know. Wendy might know more about that than I. But we really – I mean it was just terrible in New York. We had the 37<sup>th</sup> Street headquarters where Carter [Carter Burden] and Bill and I and Citizens. And then across the street was Burns and English where they would be talking to all the delegates and all the county chairmen and making arrangements, and we'd be making totally different arrangements, and nobody would talk to each other. We all got paranoid about it. There was no doubt. People who spent more time across the street at the hotel, you know, we all looked upon them with great suspicion and I'm sure it was vice versa here. They also had a terrible press person here in New York which was on Jack's contract, I

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think. I mean the whole operation was just so dull and bad.

My contention was that we should try in as many districts as possible to run combined slates of Kennedy-McCarthy delegates, and we broke it down across the state. Jack's feeling was that we would not do that. That we had to run our own and that we had the county organizations in large sections and when we did we had to run them. I would work out independent arrangements with these districts and then somebody would go up someplace else and screw it all up. This was sort of the history of the whole thing. We had several negotiating meetings with a couple of people from the CDA executive committee. Paul O'Dwyer. Well, I don't know. No, Paul wasn't there. Izzy Sipser [I. Philip Sipser] and Sarah Kovner. I. Sipser and O'Dwyer's campaign manager. Clarence Jones. Eleanor French. Paul Aron, a guy from Queens who was outrageous. At which time we said, "We're going to split the vote three ways in some of these areas and Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] delegates are going to be elected. In the interest of everything, let's combine the slate and either agree that they go on one ballot for McCarthy and the second ballot for Kennedy or do something." I mean

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it made so much sense. And it was just sabotaged or turned down. As soon as we got anywhere close to success either somebody from the McCarthy people would go up there....Harold Ickes went up to Rockland County and spent...[Interruption]

The two places that we came the closest to working out agreements were Rochester and Rockland County. And in Rochester, Harold Ickes went up there and really stayed for I think thirty-six solid hours. And the fighting! We forget what the bitterness was like. But it was acute. It was just very bad. And I kept talking coalition slates, coalition slates and everybody....Peter Fishbein told me later that when he was traveling with the Senator – he had taken Fred Dutton’s [Frederick G. Dutton] place in Oregon – he was traveling with him one night and they were going to a rally. They were in the car and Bobby was in the front, Peter was in the back. All of a sudden in the middle of nothing, he turned around – this was after, I guess he was in

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New York so I’ll have to go through that – he turned around to Fishbein and he said, “We SHOULD have a coalition slate in New York. Why don’t we?” Peter said that was the greatest, nicest testimonial thing to me that....I mean I knew I was so right about that and it was really so crazy.

GREENE: Who was actually opposing it?

ELDRIDGE: English was basically actively opposed. And the McCarthy people. Somehow together they were working together. I just don’t know what it was. At one of the negotiations with the McCarthy people, I mean Jack actually said, “Well, if you don’t want to do anything with us, we’ll make a deal with the Humphrey people. They want to make a deal with us.” And that was really stupid to say that to a McCarthy people because that’s the kind of thing we were arguing about. We kept running the information on the delegates, trying to get as much information on the McCarthy delegates on our delegates. Over at the Citizens headquarters we did not have too much information because we weren’t getting it really out of English’s office. When Kennedy came back here – was it after Nebraska or after Indiana? I can never remember. His last visit

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back here.

GREENE: I’m not sure. I think maybe it was right after Nebraska.

ELDRIDGE: Yeah. He spent a full day here seeing delegates. It was a luncheon or something for delegates at that Inn of The Clock or Clock of the Inn or something. In preparation for that, Carter Burden set up kits for all the delegates and he ran lists of the delegates. We had what we call, you know, Kennedy

delegates, uncommitted, and McCarthy or Humphrey. We had been working on the assumption at the Citizen's headquarters, that in Brooklyn Stanley Steingut and those delegates were for Kennedy. And really that shit hit the fan that day because Carter put them all down as Kennedy delegates. And then it turned out that they were really all committed. And they were running as a single slate. So there was no justification... You know, nobody knew whether they were going to be Humphrey or they were going to be Kennedy. My feeling had been that we really could have done very well running delegates in some of these districts. I think that was shown by the fact that McCarthy delegates beat the organi-

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zation delegates in a lot of the districts in Brooklyn as in other places. We really were kept back from being able to do anything because we had been told they were Kennedy delegates and it turns out that they're not at all. Some of the people we had, we had Stretch Hanofee [Francis Hanofee] was the county leader in Sullivan County as a Kennedy delegate. Stretch Hanofee was known all over the place as being a Humphrey delegate, and we were relying on him to be our... I mean it was just incredible.

GREENE: Do you put most of the blame for this kind of thing on English and Burns?

ELDRIDGE: Well, I just think a lot... Yeah, a lot of it was. I really at one point was just so upset about it. Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], who finally came on board, was coming to New York. Bill Walton made me sit down and write a memo. And I am not a memo writer. I went through writing a thirty page thing of all the different districts and what I thought and everything else. Walton took it and then set up an appointment for me to go up to see O'Brien. He was staying at the Plaza. I'll never forget that day. I'd never met Larry

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O'Brien and that sort of was the height of my, you know, being a real politician to go and meet Larry O'Brien. I walk into the Plaza and there in the living room are Jack English and John Burns. O'Brien opens the door. We went in to the bedroom and talked for about an hour and I told him what direction I thought we were going into that was wrong and where I thought we were really losing delegates. That even if we elected some of these so-called Kennedy delegates, they were not going to be good on the first ballot.

We went through the whole thing, and then he made me go into the living room. And we sat there and we went through it point by point and I just... I mean it was a ludicrous conversation for me. And I remember telling John Burns Stretch Hanofee should be asked to withdraw because this was the one area we could work out a coalition slate with the McCarthy people. He kept saying, "How can I ask Stretch Hanofee to withdraw? He's a county leader and everything else." Well, you could just tell him, you know, put it to him that that's what the senator needs and wants and it's possible." They eventually did get Hanofee to withdraw and we did

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support the slate. I think they lost. I don't even remember now what happened but it was a very bad show. There was no doubt we would lose running a three-way race up there. As it was, we lost to Humphrey with a coalition slate.

GREENE: I don't really understand why English and Burns would have been so uncooperative.

ELDRIDGE: Well, I don't think....It wasn't that they were....I mean Burns and I have always been friendly and fond, and Jack and I on the surface are. But Jack is very close to Sarah and that part just historically. I suppose there's a great conflict there. Jack is basically a very regular politician. I think that they were very concerned with things like the prestige of the state organization, the state committee and that kind of thing. I've never really been able to understand the whole relationship between Sarah and Jack but it was obviously they were just talking directly and really running things that way. The whole Nickerson thing was really wild and I think that Jack got double-crossed on that. I think really that he thought they weren't going to work

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that hard for O'Dwyer. They were very slow in circulating their petitions. Sarah and Harold were in charge of the petitions. They sent out all the petitions for delegates all over the state. It's a very hard job in some upstate places to get the required signatures. They waited until all those signatures had been gotten and then they sent out the O'Dwyer petitions. And O'Dwyer had a very hard time of qualifying. It was only eventually when Sipser and some of those guys who were not in the Kovner part of the CDA got involved in it and Resnick [Joseph Yale Resnick] cooperated and got O'Dwyer qualified that O'Dwyer got on the ballot. Now, I think Jack and Sarah had that understanding, for instance. That that was Sarah's way of protecting Nickerson. Very complicated and that screwed it up.

GREENE: What about vanden Heuvel? Was he a problem in trying to get....?

ELDRIDGE: Vanden Heuvel moved out to Oregon. I always sort of felt partially responsible for the defeat in Oregon because I think I was partially responsible for getting vanden Heuvel out of New York. I don't think anybody was

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pleased with vanden Heuvel in New York.

GREENE: Was he one of those that was opposing the coalition?

ELDRIDGE: He was out before that really became an issue. Yes, he was in the 17<sup>th</sup>, for instance. He went ahead on Shanley's advice on that kind of thing. But by that time then he got out. The day that Kennedy was in he saw all the delegates. It was really Queens that we had tremendous problems with. We were running Moe Weinstein [Moses M. Weinstein] regulars as Kennedy delegates. And I mean there was just no doubt how those guys were going to be voting, you know, for instance. They were just going to vote Humphrey if it looked like Humphrey at the convention. There's another place where McCarthy people elected a lot of delegates where we really could have run some very classy slates. The senator saw them and he saw I don't remember what other delegates. Then there was a delegation of Orthodox Jews which really got him upset and they decided to hire a special press person for Orthodox Jews and we had the worst press person for any press. The whole thing was awful.

After the

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meetings I went over with him to the filming – they were watching some commercials – in the car and we had a long discussion about this coalition stuff. That's really where we talked about it. And he said, "Oh, the polls" – we were talking specifically about Rochester – I remember I had a guy fly down from Rochester, a friend of ours who used to live in New York; Andy Golden who lived in Rochester and was sort of one of the big organizers in the anti-Johnson stuff. We had such a great opportunity there to put together a very good coalition slate. Anyway he said "Well, the figures show we can win our own slate up there and he went through the whole thing. And they were....I mean they weren't really. I said, "Figures! Thirty phone calls and you have a thing." And he said something and I said "Well, if this is the way we've going to do it, I'm just not going to work on it anymore." He said, "Well, that's a fine thing to say. Just think how it would be if I just said, "All right, I'm not going to run anymore." My answer to that was, "Everybody knows you're going to run because you want the money." But that was the time where we really talked about that.

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Then that was a couple of weeks later where he said to Fishbein we should have had coalition slates in New York. And we should have. We had a terrible campaign in New York. We were just paralyzed; it was really insane.

GREENE: How do you think you would have done according to your own delegate count?

ELDRIDGE: I don't know. I really never counted. I mean I really don't work in figures. I think he would have done better with his two weeks of campaigning here. I don't think there's any doubt about that. I mean we just lost very obvious places like the West Side of Manhattan which I don't think we would have lost if he'd been here. But I still think that we would have lost some. I think he most likely would have carried the state. And I think in the long run the McCarthy people would have

voted along with him at the convention. But it was quite messy; of that there was no doubt. It was a horrible experience. It really was not fun or pleasant at all. It was very bitter, and we just constantly seemed to fall into the trap. There was an article in the New York Post one day somewhere during the

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campaign. It was leaked from Washington, a Warren Hoge story, which said that sources close to Kennedy said that Kennedy, if he couldn't make it, would throw his votes to Humphrey. Now that in the New York Post – I mean that just killed us. Now I never wanted him to say that he'd support McCarthy because I wouldn't have supported McCarthy and I think it was insane and nobody could do it. But to deliberately leak stuff that people would go to Humphrey was so harmful.

GREENE: Whose responsibility was that?

ELDRIDGE: I'm not quite sure but I landed up arguing with Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] about it who didn't understand what I was talking about at all.

GREENE: Because Kennedy has been quoted later in the campaign as saying – do you remember – that if he lost he would support Humphrey but he would never support McCarthy.

ELDRIDGE: I'm sure that that's true but I just – I mean to be in the New York Post at a time before a primary when he was still arguing, and then to have Sorensen not even understand really what the implications of it were were really unbelievable to me.

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GREENE: How much did he get involved in the...

ELDRIDGE: Very little. I used to have to speak to Sorensen when there was nobody else left in Washington. I just have a feeling he was not really that involved. We worked very closely with a lot of the people in California because we had similar problems. I remember the first time this young kid called me from California, Rick Tuttle [Frederick Tuttle] and was telling me about Los Angeles and said somebody suggested he call me because I'm working with similar groups in New York. He said, "Ronnie, if we don't do something quickly, we're going to lose the whole west side of Los Angeles", which was very funny because we always worried about the West Side of Manhattan.

And then towards the end, just before California, we started working up a joint thing on a coalition of McCarthy-Kennedy people, which Steve was interested in. Steve evidently, being more political, could see the advantage of trying to be anti-Humphrey and making the line hazier. We got quite a nice group of people – I mean Maytag [Robert Maytag] in

Colorado who I guess was always a Kennedy person – but then there was a person in, I can't remember her

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name, a city council woman from Wisconsin, a black. It was just all around. It was a good group working very closely with Bella Abzug who's that new Congresswoman. And we drafted a statement about the fact that after California, the Kennedy and McCarthy people had to work together against Humphrey and went into this whole long thing about trying to do it. Steve used a lot of that that night in California. He was on television. He was very big now on the fact that we had to work together. We had talked about it back and forth on the phone and laughed about it. It was all kind of funny and ridiculous but it was kind of important. I mean it was the thing that that campaign was all about.

GREENE: What kind of arrangements were you really trying to get in coalitions? Was it "We'll go into it together and winner take all"? Were you agreeable to that kind of arrangement so that if McCarthy did win, you would have supported him?

ELDRIDGE: Well, or that some of the McCarthy people would vote for McCarthy on the first ballot and then switch to Kennedy or something like that. I mean we were

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very hazy about it because we still had time to figure that out. Lowenstein, I remember calling just before Indiana. It was the beginning of the McCarthy canvassing in Indiana. Allard was very upset during this time because he really wanted to be with Kennedy and was really stuck with McCarthy and really just didn't know what to do and kept sort of looking for a way to do something but never quite finding it. I remember he called before Indiana and said that the first canvassing reports of the McCarthy people showed Kennedy coming in third, very upset about it and they were very worried. A lot of the people doing the canvassing were really Kennedy people who really hated McCarthy. It was a time when the dissension was very great. If the senator really needed them, they would come out for Kennedy – because they thought he was going to lose. I remember speaking to Kennedy and saying that Al says you're going to lose and do you want them now and their help. And he said no, he doesn't think he is going to lose and he doesn't think that it's right now to start to move people out of the McCarthy cam-

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paign because he hadn't yet won a primary or campaign to prove himself and so to tell Al that he was all right in Indiana and that he felt he had to prove himself in several primaries before he could begin to make that move. Al, I don't think, was happy about that because it kept him in the McCarthy campaign too long and the longer he stayed in there, the deeper he



got into it. So we went through Indiana, and obviously he was doing very well and Al's canvassing reports if they were very accurate were not very good. Nebraska and then into Oregon which was, of course, the problem.

But then in California, it was really also very split and very bad. A couple of days before the primary, Steve called and we were talking about Lowenstein and, if we can win the primary in California, how we were going to get Lowenstein to switch and to lead that movement and talked to Allard and we went through different things. The day before the primary, Steve called and said, please find out where I can get hold of Lowenstein that night so we can call him and see what we can do. We talked about who should call now and we should do it, and I said I

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thought he should call him. So I got a phone number for where he was and that was it. At about 11:30 out time in New York, I guess Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] had come over from English's office – we were all watching the returns; we were over there and they were across the street – and said that Steve was trying to get me and I tried to get him and I couldn't find him and then finally I got him and he said we were going to call Lowenstein and we checked the number and checked a little bit about what he was going to say and that was it. I got home I guess at around 1:00 or 1:30, I don't remember what time it was, and I called Allard to chat and, thinking that had he gotten a call from Steve he would have mentioned it. In the middle of the conversation the operator interrupted and said, "I have an urgent call from Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Would you please get off the phone." Al, in his bravado and usual way of handling, said, "Oh, that's for you. I have to get off the phone." I said, "Well, it's not for me, I think it's for you but we'll get off the phone. Call me after you speak to him." And he said, "Oh, no, it's for you." I mean just even that

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was stupid. He couldn't even handle that. Anyway, we hung up. And he called back a little while later to say it was Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] who evidently got on the phone and made a lot of calls and couldn't get through to people and would tell them it was Kennedy – asking him about switching to Kennedy and what he was going to do the next day. Al replied then that there was really nothing he could do alone. The only thing that could happen is that if the senator or Goodwin should call Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] and Galbraith should speak to McCarthy. Without Galbraith and talking to McCarthy, Al didn't think they were going to be able to do anything, which was really quite a switch in the box that he had gotten himself into. It was interesting that it was at that point that we got such a funny kind of response.

GREENE: Why do you think that was?

ELDRIDGE: Well, I just think Al was very tired by this time and I think his credibility also had suffered greatly in the last two months before. By this time a lot of McCarthy people really began to distrust him and through his own inability to

just say “screw it, I’m

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going to go with Kennedy” and to stay in the McCarthy thing – I mean he just came out of it not winning either side. We hung up and then a few minutes later he called me and told me that Kennedy had been shot. I had gone upstairs to bed, turned off the television set, and then that was when it was.

Later, I didn’t see him – I mean I went through a whole thing with him at the funeral and all that stuff – but I saw him about a month later and he was already running in Nassau and I picked him up and drove him out to Long Island and he was recapitulating that night and he said, “I will never get over the shock of speaking to the senator just before he was shot.” I was driving along the Grand Central Parkway and I was really so horrified; I could not believe it. And I looked at him and he really believed it. I mean there’s just no doubt that he...

GREENE: Well, he told it to you.

ELDRIDGE: Right. It’s his version but he spoke to Goodwin. He didn’t speak to him. Then he said, “And knowing that one of the last things Kennedy said was, “Now we

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have to help Al.” And I knew that never rang true. I mean I just knew that there was something kind of cockeyed about that story and I later had checked it out. But he had made some problems and incurred the displeasure of some people coming back on the plane when they brought Kennedy’s body back, by saying that Ethel [Skakel Kennedy] said that now ....I don’t know, something to do with Ethel said, “Now we have to help you,” and this kind of stuff. But what obviously happened was that Kennedy was taking a bath and he got out of the bath and he said to Sorensen and Goodwin, and Steve was there, “Now we have to get Al to help.” And whether it’s Goodwin who – because Goodwin I think is very similar to Lowenstein – whether it was Goodwin who said to Lowenstein, you know, he said, “Now we’ve got to help Al,” or whether it’s just Al in his mind. But that’s how history gets written. It’s all now come back in such a crazy kind of reversal. I mean it’s so obvious that it was, “Now we have to get Al to help, Lowenstein to help.”

GREENE: Because he did tell that version, the version that he told you.

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ELDRIDGE: Oh, I know. He tells it all over.

GREENE: Even to Newfield [Jack Newfield] in his book. But you don’t know that there was any actual commitment from Lowenstein to come over after California?

ELDRIDGE: Well, I think that Al would have come over eventually. But I don't know when. It may well have been after the primary here. I cannot imagine...

GREENE: Because I heard that he actually did promise that if Kennedy won in California, he would come over and then just simply reneged.

ELDRIDGE: Yeah, he might well have done that. I don't see how he could possibly have come over the Kennedy before the primary here having met his campaign group afterwards. I mean they were such a group of McCarthy people that Al just could never have done it.

GREENE: In the discussion way back with Steve Smith about running Lowenstein where he said, "Congratulations, Senator" or whatever it was...

ELDRIDGE: Vanden Heuvel.

GREENE: To what extent was this Steve Smith and to what extent was he reflecting the senator's interest?

ELDRIDGE: Well, I think Steve was in California and the senator was in Oregon or some place. I think that he most

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likely would have seen that it was smart and didn't really care that much except that he really a) wanted to stop Resnick, that he was anxious not to have a three-way fight, and b) he was kind of annoyed at O'Dwyer and that whole thing. This was so good because it put it to everybody. I mean it really would screw O'Dwyer, which I don't think he would have minded. I think also that he understood it.

GREENE: Well, Smith didn't go out to California on a permanent basis until three or four weeks before the primary.

ELDRIDGE: Right. But he was in Washington. But he was in California then I think. He was not in New York for that state committee meeting, I don't think, at all, was he? I don't think so.

GREENE: I don't know. I know that he did a lot of consulting back and forth but whether he was here for the actual meeting I'm not sure. But how much did you see of him during the campaign?

ELDRIDGE: Not very much. Not much.

GREENE: So who would you go to in Washington?

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ELDRIDGE: Well, I'd call Steve. I mean after a while I just, you know, I sort of get...I spoke to Steve quite often. As a matter of fact, by that time, he was out in California. I really didn't go to anybody else in Washington.

GREENE: You went to California?

ELDRIDGE: No, I never went out to California. Senator called and asked – I mean he wanted Blumenthal, Kretchmer [Jerome Kretchmer] and me to go out to California and talk because he felt that there were a lot of liberals like us. I was afraid of flying. That was number one. So I wasn't that anxious to do so. And I had the three kids and it was just all very difficult, and I never really pushed it. After a while it got to the point where it was such a mess here that...I don't know if Al or Jerry actually ever went to California. I don't think so. I think they went just to Indiana.

GREENE: How much movement could you get after each of the primary victories, after Indiana, Nebraska? Were there a number of people you had lined up in advance who said they'd come over if he won.

ELDRIDGE: No.

GREENE: Not much movement?

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ELDRIDGE: No.

GREENE: And how much do you think you could have expected after California?

ELDRIDGE: In New York, you mean?

GREENE: Yes.

ELDRIDGE: I don't imagine very much. I think we would have gotten people who would have after the primary. And we would have gotten some. That's not fair. But I don't think we would have gotten any delegates, except maybe the regular delegates. But the McCarthy people were just, you know, they sort of got harder and harder and the lines got more and more distinct. We did pick up individuals. There was no doubt about that.

GREENE: Anybody that really carried weight?

ELDRIDGE: No. Nobody quite knew who carried weight, that was another problem. I mean we were going into some crazy lists of you know crazy...Such a topsy-turvy thing where Murray Kempton suddenly became a big, you know, political expert. How do you combat that. It was just sort of wild.

GREENE: What about the Burns and English relationship with Walton? Did they get along very well with him?

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ELDRIDGE: Very bad I think. I mean Walton liked Burns. I don't know what Burns thought of Walton. But Walton didn't like English. And I don't think English liked Walton. Well, he really had nothing to do. He could really do nothing except design buttons because really all the decisions were being made by English and nobody was telling us. So he was really waiting for Kennedy to come here, for that part of the campaign to start. Because we really didn't even know who the delegates were. We had no money and English designed literature. I remember that bulk mailer, and I don't remember what the argument was about that. But there was nothing we could do. We had no money. There was nothing.

GREENE: Did you ever attempt to get someone with some weight on your side to see the fact that you were being circumvented, that you couldn't....

ELDRIDGE: Well, I think what it was was really sort of a basic philosophy and imagination and willing to do something a little differently. And it was almost too late to do anything. You know we kept talking about it. I can't help but feel that had Steve been here it

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would have been different. I think that there would have been some more aggressive things done and taking more chances. O'Brien, I think, understood the problem. But then he left again. Where did they take him out, to California or he stayed in Oregon? When he lost Oregon....

GREENE: Well, he went to California first.

ELDRIDGE: Well, I guess he was supposed to come right here after Oregon and instead they got scared. So we really had nobody else here and everybody else was just sort of just waiting till the last minute where we'd do the whole thing on his campaigning. It would have been all right because Joe was here and they were doing the scheduling stuff.

GREENE: How much of a word could you get in on that, as far as scheduling goes?

ELDRIDGE: We just did our own memos to Joe.

GREENE: You don't know the results.

ELDRIDGE: No. No.

GREENE: Because he was working pretty closely with English and Burns.

ELDRIDGE: Right, right.

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GREENE: I'm going to turn this so we don't run out in the middle.

GREENE: Let me ask you if you had much discussion with the senator when he did come to New York. I guess he was in twice. Did you try to make him aware of....

ELDRIDGE: Oh, he knew how I felt. Yes. He was always totally aware of it.

GREENE: Would he commit himself as far as how he felt it should be run?

ELDRIDGE: No. He really didn't want to hear about it. It really bugged him. He was always annoyed when he came to see me because he really knew New York was doing badly and I think it always bugged him that he really didn't have New York. Here he'd been the Senator of the State and he'd been a very good senator and to have to get into this same bitter fighting and losing that whole liberal constituency all over again; it was a very upsetting thing. He knew that and I think he just really didn't want to pay too much – he didn't want to hear about it. I sort of hated, you know, I didn't

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want to tell him about it. We talked around in circles. The one time we did talk specifically about delegates was that Nebraska thing.

GREENE: Could you get much of a feeling on these occasions or talking to him on the phone how he felt the rest of the campaign was going and what his general mood was at various points?

ELDRIDGE: Sometimes. Certainly the Indiana thing was very concrete and he thought he was doing well. California I think he thought – well, I just really don't know; I don't really remember. I always said he was not a big chatter so I didn't small-talk a lot about it.

GREENE: Was there anything else on '68?

ELDRIDGE: No.

GREENE: Well, let me ask you one thing. I find the Lowenstein relationship kind of an interesting one. Do you have much of an impression of what Kennedy thought of Lowenstein personally? To what extent he sort of saw him as someone that could be of value politically?

ELDRIDGE: I think he enjoyed him and I think he thought he was very bright and everything else. It went through

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different stages. I think that he was sort of caught up in that inner kind of romanticism about '68 also and the fact that he was late in going in and that he had been ambivalent and that he had wanted to do it and the McCarthy thing...When he first met Al, he had heard about him and he thought he was very bright. And then he did some stuff on the South America – South Africa speech – I don't know. Not very much, but he met him then. And then Al, you know, approached him about running for president. We'd see him a couple of times in the car. I think he enjoyed him. I think that as '68 came along his whole feeling about that this one guy going out and putting a lot of this together and helping to do it that really developed into a very kind of romantic thing for him. It was that state committee dinner and coming back on the bus that he wrote that lovely, you know, quote and I can only think that that was the night when they were singing folk songs on the bus and the snow and everything else. He really got carried away with this kind of romantic version. And I think he had great admiration for him. I mean Al did a superb job. I remember very much

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trying to tell him at the airport, you know, that Al really was, I think, off and a little crazy by this time when Kennedy had announced, that he should be careful listening to him, that I don't think his judgment was as clear and his thoughts were as clear as they had been earlier. And at the airport Kennedy said, "Well, I know you don't like Al but we need him," or something like. That came as such a shock because I was very fond of Al and really had devoted my life. But Allard is a very funny person. It takes a long time to know him and he always seems to fall down just sort of at one point. He's very good at building something and then he has a total inability to keep it together and follow it through. As far as the '67-'68 Dump Johnson thing, I think he really fell apart when Kennedy announced and that his judgment and his whole usefulness as far as creating and controlling that movement disappeared. What I was afraid of was that Kennedy would think that he was still in control the way he was prior because he really wasn't. It was such a shock when he said, "Well, I know you don't like Al." I thought, "Oh, God!" He was so intensely talking to me about why

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he came in late and what I should say to all these people and what his personal decision was. I didn't remember three-quarters of it but I sort of got the gist of it. But by this time also, Al was somebody he wanted, he really had a need to see and talk to. I was really very concerned about it because Allard was really kind of crazy.

GREENE: What about Newfield? Was that a handy person to have in your corner, or was he someone he actually admired?

ELDRIDGE: I think he kind of enjoyed him. I don't think that one ever really had feelings of admiration for Jack. I mean he's a funny little guy. But Jack had contacts – you know, with the Haydens [Thomas Hayden] and this thing – which was very helpful. And also, you know, Bobby was always very good with radicals. He sort of had that feeling. I mean he enjoyed Jack I think. And he learned some things from Jack. Jack, of all the people, he was better with Kennedy than with anybody else. He was a little scared of him, I think. Jack tends to overexaggerate a little bit – everything's either black or white. And he was much more careful with Kennedy than he is with other people.

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I think that helped. As far as having him support him, I think it was very helpful because Jack had written this book, A Prophetic Minority and people looked to him as the spokesman of the New Left. For a while his supporting of Kennedy gave Kennedy that New Left kind of image. After a while everybody began to feel that his judgment was not the best as far as Kennedy goes. But I think that he was helpful. I don't know how much admiration... But also a good influence.

GREENE: The only other thing, I wanted to go back to that January 19<sup>th</sup>, I think it was, when you and Newfield spent a whole day with Kennedy. Is there anything that you remember that hasn't been written that's important or anything that's been written that you don't think is accurate about that day? Were you as convinced that he was going to run at that point?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, absolutely. When we got in the car after this reception for Freddie Ohrenstein that we had stopped in coming down from Westchester where Melina Mercouri saw him and said, "You're too much of a man. You can't let them say the things they're

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saying about you." He got in the car and said, "God, she's so perceptive." He said, "Do you know what she said to me? She said, "You can't let them continue to say the things that they're saying about you, that you haven't got the courage to run." And that of course, really got him. That was the thing – that someone would think he was afraid of losing or afraid to run. And he kept commenting on how perceptive she was. Then I said something about how some of us had been saying that also, getting a little touchy about the whole thing. And he



said, “Yes, but...” Then he said, “All the people who tell me not to do it.” He said, “You can’t think that the whole country is like New York. Why you’ve never been out to blah, blah, blah.” And I said, “Well, I can’t really say vanden Heuvel is reflective of the national view or that Arthur Schlesinger spends his time in” —well, Schlesinger was all right. “Sorensen and I don’t know – the whole bunch of them – they spend their time on the farms.” And he sort of laughed and he said, “Well, maybe you’re right.” I had always felt, though, that he was going to run. I mean I just knew that that part of him was most likely to come out, and I was surprised, I guess,

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because of the back and forth business. The Pueblo thing is what really did it because we saw him a few days afterward when we had breakfast with him and he really had made up his mind not to run.

GREENE: Do you think the Pueblo had a lot to do with his decision?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. He was so concerned about the president’s own power to react to him or to stop major things. The Pueblo thing just hit him just at that time. He saw Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] that weekend too. He had spent the next day. It was very sad; he was very depressed about it. I guess Jack wrote about the car. I can’t remember the time sequence any more. We met him at the airport and he said to Jack, “Now you’ve been privy to a lot of conversations. How are you going to handle it in the book?” You know, and “I don’t want you to....” Did you ever hear about that.

GREENE: I don’t remember seeing that, no.

ELDRIDGE: We met him one day – this is after he decided not to run. And we’re driving in and he said, “You’ve been privy to a lot of conversations, Jack, that we now have to be very careful about. And I don’t want them to be printed. How are you going to handle it?”

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He was really very depressed that day. We were kind of depressed. So Jack said, well, he’ll appoint a reader and it’ll be me. And I said, “Oh, no.” We lived through the Manchester [William Manchester] thing. I’m not going to have anything to do with any of the things that Jack’s going to write.” Anyway, so they decided that he would submit a manuscript to Kennedy and Kennedy would have people go over it and take things out.

GREENE: Was he fairly free in front of Newfield?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, yeah. Oh, very. Exceedingly so. I mean he really gossiped with Jack. Jack’s a great gossip. And really. I mean some of the, you know....It was incredible. I was very surprised. He had moments when he was very free

with people and you were really kind of shocked at the indiscretions of it. He was very comfortable with Jack, for some reason. I could never quite understand the whole thing.

GREENE: There's sort of this little gap. You haven't really said why you think he finally decided definitely to run after this period of the decision not to run. Was there any particular incident you would pin it

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on?

ELDRIDGE: Not having thought about it for a long time – and I really haven't read up and I don't remember exactly what happened – I think that Johnson's reaction... I mean it's a standard thing: Johnson's reaction to the Tet offensive, his reaction to the Crime Commission [President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice] report, and there was a third thing – what was that? I don't remember. Plus the fact that McCarthy was doing well in New Hampshire and the act that he always wanted to run. I don't think he was ever comfortable with the decision not to run. He could justify – and he once said, "If I thought that Lyndon Johnson was psychotic, I would run." I think he came around to justifying that fact the he was psychotic by his reaction to the Crime Commission report basically and most likely, the Tet offensive. But I think basically he just always – that he was going to run.

GREENE: What about the McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] resignation and the way that was handled?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, I thought that was terrible, but I didn't know any of the details about it? Was that the one about the commission? Is that the Sorensen idea? What was that? No, that was a Kennedy thing; it had nothing to do with McNamara.

GREENE: No, McNamara's resignation was where he was announced

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as the future president of the World Bank before he'd even been notified himself.

ELDRIDGE: Right. He always had such very kind things to say about McNamara. He and Jack would always get to arguing because Jack always called him a war criminal. Jack had lists of war criminals and they were all Kennedy's friends. Kennedy used to laugh about it. We were with him the day that Clark Clifford was announced.

GREENE: Yes, that was the other thing I was going to ask.

ELDRIDGE: And that really happened that way. We were going through I guess it was the Sony plant, I don't know, some place making hearing aids. And somebody came over and said, "Senator, Clark Clifford has just been announced." An interesting thing about that day was one of the stops was at the Gannett press up in White Plains where he sat with the editors and talked. Dick Witkin [Richard Witkin] was with us from the Times. Witkin was nice, quite friendly, and I always said that he was going to run and Witkin always thought I was crazy. And Dick sat through that interview and could not believe it. He took a lot of notes. Some-

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body really should talk to him about that because that was a most revealing interview which I don't think Newfield even talks about. Where he said he had no plans to run but he wasn't....I think they asked him if he was closing the door and he said he didn't want to answer that and he went on. But it was just so obvious that was going to run.

GREENE: Do you know the date of that?

ELDRIDGE: It was the same day that we were in Westchester.

GREENE: Oh. The 19<sup>th</sup>?

ELDRIDGE: Right. His speech at the first coffee-klatsch. From the beginning of the day until the end, it was obvious that he was going to run. He had Luddy [William F. Luddy] in such a total state of confusion by the end. And I understood from somebody that Luddy appeared at his Senate office the next day or two days later asking and said, "Why doesn't somebody tell me what he's going to do!" Luddy had been very pro-Johnson. Was having a terrible argument, was up at a dinner party at Morris Abram's house a few months before. And Luddy's son was a draft resister in San Francisco with a beard and everything else. And there's Bill Luddy talking about

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how he's supporting the war and Johnson and everything else, convinced, of course, that Kennedy was never going to run. He's the county leader of Westchester. And there we are at this day in Westchester with poor Bill Luddy. Anybody listening to him speaking at the coffee-klatches, the gannett press thing, all over the place, it was just so obvious that this is what he was going to do. And Luddy came into the office a few days later and he said, "If you don't tell me what's really going on here, I'm going out of my mind," because Luddy loved him and would do anything for him and yet he was getting tied into the Humphrey campaign. But Witkin, you really should check with Witkin because that was a most revealing time. It was about an hour and a half. Sort of a meeting with the editors. It was just along that same pitch. It was a lovely day. He was in a very good mood. The weather was lovely; everything was lovely. And it was really very funny.

One thing that was so amusing was we stopped at all these schools, all parochial schools. And the nuns would have all the kids lined up. And it was just a big, you

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know, joke. I guess that was Luddy's scheduling, but it was kind of funny. And Jack's comment about how we got into Vietnam. You heard about that, didn't you? We had a police escorts. He really didn't like, you know, having all police escorts. There was quite a lot of press that day. It was a good day. As we would cross one town line for another, a new police car would zoom into this procession and the light would go and sirens and they would lead this procession. We left the coffee-klatch; it was really our first stop. We crossed some kind of township line and there's a new police car with its lights on and everything else and he zooms out in front of us. And the whole entourage follows this police car. And all of a sudden it makes a right turn and into a hospital zone. The first stop was a factory or something. And we got on hospital grounds and nobody knows what hospital we're in. We come to a stop in front of the hospital and everybody stops and gets out, and everybody is saying, "Where are we?" There's the whole staff of the hospital, the nurses and the doctors all outside to shake hands with us. Nobody knows where we are but we go in anyway. And New-

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made the comment he guesses this was how we got into Vietnam. [Laughter] Really very funny. And Kennedy heard about it – we were not in the car with him at this stop – and he comes back and he laughed. He thought it was really funny. It turns out later that the head nurse was the sister of the police sergeant of this township and they had put this stop up. And it really was how we got into Vietnam. But you could just tell. We went through several factories and we walked down the assembly lines and shook hands with all the guys and it was so obvious. Another guy who was so impressed was that nice guy from ABC [American Broadcasting Company]. What's his name? John Parsons, the redhead.

WENDY: John Parsons. That was the day that....

ELDRIDGE: That's right. Yeah. It was a beautiful day and he had his little boy with him. It was really tough little, adorable looking kid and he and Kennedy played together and they really had a good time. But he also said, "If this doesn't...He's running!" I remember at one of the factories the ABC crew followed him around taking pictures. And he really talked to these guys. And he says, "He's running! He's running!" It was just incredible.

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We went to General Foods and spoke to the employees and then we went to Grasslands Hospital. That was the day where he took those kids out for ice cream, disappeared. It was incredible. And then he was just himself and we really just had a great day.

GREENE: Was a lot of support lost in the next month when he moved back again?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, I think so, yeah.

GREENE: Do you think there would have been a big difference?

ELDRIDGE: Yeah. I think January was still early because McCarthy was still doing very badly. People were disenchanted. Had he come in then it would have been a little different. But I think he would have always had this. In retrospect maybe it was better that he let McCarthy come in. Because had he not let McCarthy come, it could well have gotten onto the personal basis that he was just running for president against Johnson. So you let that whole issue of anti-Johnson and anti-war be developed by somebody else. That might really have been the only effective way for him to counter it. The question was – I guess he could have come in a little earlier.

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GREENE: I don't think I have anything else. Do you?

ELDRIDGE: Not really, no.

WENDY: I have one question for you. You say he was disturbed by the Pueblo thing. Why? What about it would you think about it was....

ELDRIDGE: No, it was just the way the president could react, the power of the President could react to something happening.

GREENE: And the unpredictably of ...

ELDRIDGE: Of what could happen.

WENDY: It wasn't anything that Johnson had specifically done; it was an illustration of....

ELDRIDGE: No, no, no. It was an illustration of how things could happen that you didn't expect to have happen and what the power of the Presidency was in responding and how, almost irrelevant it could make you appear as a candidate against him or as another person talking about it. And then he always felt he could stop the bombing and negotiate. At that time we hadn't stopped the bombing yet. And that if Kennedy came in, then Johnson would say, "All right, I'll stop the bombing," then why is Kennedy running?

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GREENE: There's one other thing. After March 31<sup>st</sup>, when Johnson withdrew, did you do a lot of telephoning around and contacting of people to see if there was any movement? Or was that left to other people?

ELDRIDGE: I didn't really because most of my contacts were not Johnson or Humphrey. The only people I knew who were in the Johnson camp would have been very pro-Humphrey, the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] people who were really supporting Johnson for Humphrey. So when Johnson removed, they became even stronger in their position for Humphrey.

I never understood why they were so shaken up by Johnson's withdrawal, frankly. I also never quite understood this whole argument about the prerogative of the president. But I've always credited it to my being too simple-minded and not fully understanding the implications of all this stuff.

GREENE: You mean the prerogative of the president to...

ELDRIDGE: I mean he kept talking about the Presidential power, he kept saying, "Well, the President will stop the bombing." And I said, "Well, so what." I mean the point is, he wouldn't have stopped the bombing unless he was being pressured and the question is how long

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will he stop the bombing for. And he's only going to do as long as there's pressure there to make him do it. You know.

GREENE: But for political reasons that's probably not....

ELDRIDGE: Well, I'm not so sure. I don't think it is. And I think that's where they misunderstood what the climate of the country was, essentially. I mean I think there were enough people that way and enough people impressed with Kennedy as a political kind of thing, you know, so that you could have put the combination together to win. I think he would have been nominated. I don't know why but I just always felt that way. I don't think he understood the depth of the anti-war sentiment and what was really moving those people and that they were not going to be mollified by just simply, "All right I'll stop the bombing for such and such a time" or "I'll stop the bombing." Also basically the people really hated Lyndon Johnson.

GREENE: The personal aspect, yes.

ELDRIDGE: Right. And it wasn't even....The war gave them an excuse for really hating him, but they didn't like him for many reasons. I mean he replaced John Kennedy, he was a Texan, everything else. I mean any prejudice

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the people had also. That I don't think they really understood. And I think that's because they really hated Lyndon Johnson so much themselves on a very personal basis that they weren't able to really understand the whole thing.

GREENE: Did he really talk freely about that, about his feelings about Johnson?

ELDRIDGE: Yeah. Although he really never talked about his brother that much. I mean he'd talk about his brother, and as the years went on, he could talk about that much happier – much, much healthier in the last two years. In the beginning of '65, I remember we were talking the other day, during traveling with Christmas parties, when Pat Reilly who was a...

GREENE: Yeah.

ELDRIDGE: I think we talked about that. I mean just this closing down. He never got that way later.

GREENE: But I meant about his feelings about Johnson.

ELDRIDGE: Yeah, he talked about that. And he was always talking about the bugging that was going on all over the place. I mean I never could follow that. I was very unsophisticated with the taps and the bugging and the

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this and the that.

GREENE: Newfield had a section where he says that Kennedy told him he thought his phone was tapped. And when Newfield tried to get details from him and he said when you're finishing your book, let me know and I'll, you know, tell you why I suspect this and you'll make your book a best-seller. Did he ever?

ELDRIDGE: I don't think he ever did.

GREENE: Did he ever talk about bugging – not bugging but wiretapping of his own phone?

ELDRIDGE: Oh, yes. And then he always talked about wiretapping, he just talked about it a lot. It's another technical kind of thing. I sort of always...The law enforcement part of him I never totally understood. I do remember one time getting in the car – Ethel was in the car and he and me were going someplace. I don't remember what. They were still at the Carlyle. He said something to Ethel, "Well, it's better Hoffa's [Jimmy Hoffa] going to jail today," or something. Which was very interesting. The talk that they had about their fear of Hoffa which think was always very real. I think that

they had a lot of these horrendous pressures constantly. But

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I sort of didn't focus in on a lot of this stuff. It's very overwhelming to be thrown into the midst of it. I'm kind of naïve about some of it. But it was interesting. You don't want the funeral kind of stuff.

GREENE: I think not.

[END OF INTERVIEW #4]

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