

**Myer Feldman Oral History Interview – JFK#6, 4/10/1966**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Myer Feldman  
**Interviewer:** Charles T. Morrissey  
**Date of Interview:** April 10, 1966  
**Place of Interview:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 51 pages

**Biographical Note**

Feldman, (1914 - 2007); Legislative assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1958-1961); Deputy Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964); Counsel to the President (1964-1965), discusses counting votes and meeting with delegates at the Democratic National Convention, the Texas delegation, and choosing Lyndon B. Johnson as vice president, among other issues.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed January 8, 1991, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

Myer Feldman, recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey, April 10, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of  
Myer Feldman

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Myer Feldman, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of personal interviews conducted on January 23, 1966, February 28, 1966, March 6, 1966, March 13, 1966, March 27, 1966, April 10, 1966, May 29, 1966, August 6, 1966, August 20, 1966, December 11, 1966, July 29, 1967, August 26, 1967, January 6, 1968 and September 21, 1968 at Washington, DC and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Donor

11/30/90  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Archivist of the United States

Jan 8, 1971  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Myer Feldman – JFK #6

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
239	Counting votes and meeting with delegates at the Democratic National Convention
247	Calculating in the “Black Chamber”
250	Voting support from each state
259	The Texas delegation
260	Lyndon B. Johnson [LBJ] and John F. Kennedy [JFK] relations at the time of the Convention
263	LBJ’s errors in strategy
268	Choosing LBJ as vice president
280	Reactions to the LBJ announcement
283	Advise to LBJ from his advisers
285	JFK and LBJ tackling legislative issues
288	JFK’s health as an issue during the campaign

Sixth Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

April 10, 1966  
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FELDMAN: I think in earlier interviews we discussed the preliminaries for the Convention so we don't have to go into them anymore. I left for the Convention I guess around July first. I discussed with the candidate whether or not I should leave at that time. The choice was between coming out even earlier than that – and he said there wasn't much purpose to that unless I wanted to have a good time in Los Angeles – or coming

[-239-]

out sometime after that point, just before the Convention began. And he decided there would be a lot of preliminaries that would have to be done, a lot of delegations to see even before the Convention got started, arrangements to make before the....So I came out around July first.

As I remember, the Convention began on July eleventh. I got there about ten days in advance and proceeded to do two things. Number one, I had to get housing accommodations for myself and my wife who I brought with me. We lived at the Thunderbird Hotel which was seven or eight miles from the Biltmore where the Convention was held. But I thought that was good. That way she'd be a little bit away from the Convention, and she could use the pool and enjoy herself out there. But I stayed most of the time, even slept during the Convention days, at a room in the Biltmore. So I had two places to stay. And this

[-240-]

was typical of most of the people who were with the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] forces. We had a room in the Biltmore, and we had a place for our families someplace else.

Next to my room in the Biltmore was another room which we converted into a kind of an office. I shared that office with Margaret Price. Margaret Price at that time was national committeewoman for the state of Michigan. And Michigan we knew before we went to the Convention was going to be for John F. Kennedy. There were one or two holdouts, but not many. Margaret was solidly for Kennedy and so was Mennen Williams [G. Mennen Williams]. So we were pretty sure of the Michigan delegation. It was useful, the candidate thought, for me to work with Margaret Price to see what other liberal elements we could enlist in support of him.

I might say that we also made a calculation of how many votes we had before we went out there. And in this calculation it showed

[-241-]

that we had enough to win on the first ballot. So I knew before I went on July first that we would probably win on the first ballot.

MORRISSEY: How much more than enough to win?

FELDMAN: It was pretty close. We just had a few votes to spare. As I remember, it was just twenty or twenty-five votes over the number. As a matter of fact, I can tell you what it was because I think that on the first ballot if it had gone beyond Wyoming we would have won by seventeen. That ballot up to, well, I'm ahead of my story. Let me come to that.

MORRISSEY: Okay.

FELDMAN: Well, anyhow we knew we had enough votes to win. But the problem was keeping them and, if possible, enlisting enough to give us some kind of margin. Margaret was very active with the women. Margaret was also chairman of one of the committees – permanent procedure or something – and was on the credentials

[-242-]

committee, which we thought was very important. So, Margaret and I would consult about her duties. Of course, she couldn't help me much with mine. Mine were not so much seeing delegates although I did a little bit of that. I would see delegates who were wavering because they had a lack of confidence in the ideals, or idea or programs, of John F. Kennedy. I didn't see delegates the way Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] did, who were going to talk in strict political terms – “What can you do for me?” or “Just what can you do for our state?” and so on – with some minor exception. I saw the West

Virginia people on that basis because I'd been in West Virginia. But generally it was my job to see delegates when they had some question about where John F. Kennedy stood on a particular issue.

MORRISSEY: Were they wavering towards any other particular candidate?

[-243-]

FELDMAN: No. We knew at that point that our major opposition was Lyndon Johnson. And the only people I would see...I didn't see any Southerners at all. The only people I would see were people in the North who might have some difficulty with Kennedy and who might favor, therefore, Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], or conceivably Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], and I guess to some extent Symington [Stuart Symington, II] in one or two instances. But I didn't have much to do with the major opposition, the pro-Lyndon Johnson forces, because there was nothing I could concede to them. I just wasn't authorized by John F. Kennedy to adopt a point of view that might have enlisted some of the support that Johnson had among the Southern states and among the very conservative element. As I think I explained earlier, our basic appeal had to be to the liberal elements in the party. We knew that from the very beginning. And if we

[-244-]

could get all of that, we'd get the nomination. By that, I don't mean that we kidded ourselves into thinking that the knee jerk liberals or the Adlai Stevenson people would necessarily be enthusiastic about John F. Kennedy. We didn't regard them as an important element in the Democratic Party. So, the people I saw, I guess in most instances were devoted to John F. Kennedy anyhow. The fact that they did vote for him was not a tribute to my having talked to them. It was just that I was keeping them happy.

As a matter of fact I did other things, too. I would meet delegates as they came in. I met the Hawaiian delegation, for instance, when it came in. I met the Virgin Islands people when they came in. They stand out in my mind because the Hawaiian came in and had some difficulty at the airport. He didn't have transportation and so on. And I, who knew nothing about Los Angeles, under-

[-245-]

took to drive him around and formed a kind of friendship that lasted through the Kennedy Administration.

MORRISSEY: Didn't they come committed to Johnson?

FELDMAN: Part of them. I think the delegation split. I think actually in the vote the delegation split. My recollection may be a little faulty. But I do know that the national committeewoman, Mrs. Dolores Martin

[Dolores M. Martin], was for John F. Kennedy. He was the fellow that I drove around. Now, the Virgin Island delegation I remember because of the steel band they brought with them, and they were kind of fun. In addition to that I saw people in the Pennsylvania delegation because that was my home delegation. But in most instances I did more answering of questions than I did of going around to see the delegates and trying to keep them happy and trying to convert them to something. In fact, I guess I was the major person doing that. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] would do

[-246-]

it occasionally, but he had so many duties that he couldn't spend much time on this. Well, so much for the initial responsibilities and the way in which we were set up.

In addition to that, down the hall from my room there was another room which we called the "Black Chamber." And in this room we had four to six girls. In the end, there were only four of them, but occasionally there were two others. I remember Helen Lempart was one of them. I don't remember who the other three were. But it was their function to receive reports from everybody, noting any change in our original calculation. When we went there, we had a calculation, and we thought we'd win on the first ballot. As fires rose and as it required somebody to go there to put the fire out, or as somebody talked to a delegate and he said he was leaning a particular way, then information

[-247-]

had to be fed into the "Black Chamber" and put on a card so that we could tell the current status of each delegate. And as we approached the balloting for the nomination, we started having roll calls in there just like a convention roll call. Very few people were permitted access to that room. Even the girls the last day were told to eat their lunches in and not to go out and talk to anybody. We wanted to keep this pretty confidential. This really was our intelligence.

It's interesting that the votes changed but they didn't change very much. This is what I referred to a little bit earlier. On the very last day when we undertook the final roll call before the balloting started...I have a copy of that. Actually, I should refresh my recollections with it. After the roll call, they wrote the thing on a sheet of paper, and they distributed it to a

[-248-]

half a dozen people so that each person could see where we stood. And he in turn, of course, would keep it to himself. He wasn't authorized to talk to anybody about that. But, when the balloting started on the Convention floor for the nomination for the presidency, I followed that ballot that I had, which was taken in the Black Room, and it was accurate up to one vote. There was only one vote difference between that ballot and the Convention balloting when they reached Wyoming. You know, at the time of the Wyoming vote when all of the bets were off and everybody got on the bandwagon. But we were off only one vote from what we had calculated. That showed we had a pretty effective system, I thought. Anyhow, the



information was fed to this room, and it was done pretty accurately. This room served as the focus of attention. I think Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] was in charge of

[-249-]

that room. He then went on, later on during the campaign, to take care of the correspondence and that sort of thing. But his first active involvement, I think, was in charge of that room. He did a little bit during the primaries, but not an awful lot. This was the major responsibility that he assumed.

Now let me see what I can recall about the activity prior to the voting. Of course as far as Pennsylvania was concerned – and I followed that pretty closely – there wasn't much doubt about where we stood. I think Wyoming was always a problem. I didn't follow that however. But there we weren't quite sure of ourselves. Again, on organization each state delegation had a member of the Kennedy staff assigned to it. Wyoming happened to be Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy]. Teddy was assigned to Wyoming. But that person, the person assigned to that delegation, was responsible to be there and see

[-250-]

if there were any changes. And I remember Teddy telling the candidate that he wasn't absolutely sure of Wyoming. We were certain of one member of the Wyoming delegation. That was Teno Roncalio. He was always a strong supporter of ours. He was helpful in leading that delegation.

MORRISSEY: How about Tracey McCracken?

FELDMAN: Tracey we didn't think was particularly friendly. And that of course was the conflict. I'm not quite sure. Teno would know all the details as to how he persuaded Tracey, or failed to persuade him but got his vote anyhow. I think, though, that he got Tracey just at the very last minute because this would be enough to put this over. Tracey agreed that, "All right, the whole delegation will go for John F. Kennedy," and that Wyoming would come out as the hero.

I believe all of us were pretty disgusted with New Jersey. We didn't seem to be able to make any head-

[-251-]

way with Governor Meyner [Robert B. Meyner]. But Governor Meyner for every conceivable reason should have been for us and should have been with us all the way. He, of course, would have benefited if he had been. But I guess he retained the hope to the very end that there might be a deadlock. This is what I have been told since then. Since the Convention I've been told that Meyner was unwilling to do what most of his delegation wanted him to do. Our nose count of the New Jersey delegates showed that if they were free, they would have all gone for John F. Kennedy. But because they were held by Meyner and were committed to him, they had to wait for him to release them. He did not release them

because I guess most politicians feel that, no matter how hopeless their cause is, at some point they might be able to make it. And I guess he retained that illusion to the very end.

[-252-]

MORRISSEY: You mentioned that there was no problem with the Pennsylvania delegation.

FELDMAN: No.

MORRISSEY: Was that because of Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence]?

FELDMAN: More because of Bill Green [William J. Green, Jr.] than because of Lawrence. Lawrence came around, and before the Convention he was solidly for Kennedy and did what he could to help us. However, Billy Green was the person who persuaded Lawrence that it was in his interests to be with us. I'd say Billy was a more important force in our behalf. But Lawrence was solidly behind us at the time of the Convention. Pennsylvania was very well organized. None of the delegates to the Convention really dared to oppose Lawrence and Billy Green. In Philadelphia the whole delegation was Billy Green's. In Pittsburgh the whole delegation was Lawrence's. And there were very few independents.

MORRISSEY: Why did you have to talk to the people from West Virginia?

[-253-]

FELDMAN: Well, I only talked to the people from West Virginia because I knew them and there was a residue of Johnson support there. Although we won the primary in West Virginia, that did not compel them to vote for John F. Kennedy. And Senator Robert Byrd, who was the leader of the West Virginia delegation and still a Johnson supporter. And he had been mousetrapped, as I remember, by our victory in the primary. It would have been difficult for him to oppose us. But he still owed his allegiance to Johnson. So, because I'd been in West Virginia and because I knew most of them, and because I knew Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough], who was our chief supporter in West Virginia – Bob McDonough I think was national committeeman – I did talk to them too.

MORRISSEY: How about California?

FELDMAN: I didn't get into the California battle. The

[-254-]

only things I knew about California were the reports I got from others, and I did not talk to Kennedy about California at all. So what I would

have to tell you would be second hand. However, I'm perfectly willing to do that.

MORRISSEY: Well, let me try to find out first hand if I can. [Laughter]

FELDMAN: Okay.

MORRISSEY: I'll come back to it. Wisconsin?

FELDMAN: Well, we had no problem with Wisconsin because they were committed by the vote. And anyhow we reached....By the time we reached Wisconsin it was pretty clear we were going to win. I'm thinking of the Convention floor now. There wasn't any serious disaffection there.

MORRISSEY: How about Minnesota?

FELDMAN: Minnesota. I did talk to Orville Freeman [Orville Lothrop Freeman], and Orville was strongly for Kennedy. Because

[-255-]

Orville was governor, Orville I think was the chief reason we had the Minnesota delegation with us. I don't remember the exact split there. But it was all Orville Freeman and we owed Minnesota to Orville Freeman.

In Wisconsin I don't want to neglect Pat Lucey [Patrick J. Lucey]. I think Pat Lucey was our chief supporter in Wisconsin. You should get Pat's....

MORRISSEY: He's been taped. The Illinois delegation?

FELDMAN: Illinois. I didn't have much to do with Illinois. I talked to Paul Douglas [Paul H. Douglas]. But I talked to Paul Douglas because he was a friend, and the only purpose from my discussion with Paul was to reaffirm his own conviction that Kennedy was good and that Kennedy would make a good president. Paul Douglas had supported Kennedy in 1958 when Kennedy ran for the Senate and gone out of his way. Now, when we got to California, there were strong pressures on Paul

[-256-]

to withhold any support for Kennedy, but to go Adlai Stevenson because Adlai was the favorite son of Illinois. And Paul could not overtly be for Kennedy for that reason. He had to restrain himself. But I always knew that Paul would be for us. And in fact he was in the last analysis. So, I did discuss things with Paul. I've forgotten what his chief interests were. He was interested in the oil depletion allowance I remember. He wasn't quite sure of what a couple of Kennedy votes on that meant. He was interested in the farm problem and he wasn't quite sure what the Kennedy position on that was. He was generally satisfied. He is a

good politician as well as being a great liberal. So in his discussions he recognized the need for Kennedy as a person from Massachusetts standing for the things that he did.

[-257-]

MORRISSEY: Did he talk to any Southern or border state delegations?

FELDMAN: No, no. The only person I talked to from the South... Yes, I did talk to South Carolinians. I did meet several delegations of South Carolinians because the governor of South Carolina had come up to the office in the period during that session of Congress... I guess that was after the Convention. Yes. I talked to him during the Convention, too, and got to know him then because even at that time he was interested in what the position of Kennedy would be on textile problems. So we did have a discussion at that time. And then after the Convention, he did come up to the office, and we did discuss in detail what the now candidate, the nominee could do to carry out things that we had discussed during the Convention. But South Carolina was the only exception.

[-258-]

I talked to the Texas people because I knew them. I knew a lot of the people from Texas through Donald Cook [Donald P. Cook] and through Jerry Siegal and through Walter Jenkins [Walter W. Jenkins]. Walter I saw a number of times, and we would joke about the way the ticket should read, whether it should be for Kennedy-Johnson or Johnson-Kennedy. I even attended a Texas Fair, I remember, and told the candidate about it. He said, "That's good. Keep them happy." As you know, John F. Kennedy also attended that Texas-Massachusetts joint meeting. That in itself was pretty interesting. At the time the invitation was received by Kennedy to go to that meeting I was present and somebody there, I guess it was Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] – Steve didn't usually comment on strategy; he usually kept very quiet at all discussions that I attended – who said, "Oh, this is a mousetrap.

[-259-]

Johnson wants to get you on friendly field. And if you go to the Texas meeting, why the reception is bound to be bad for you and good for Johnson." But in the ensuing discussion Kennedy said that he thought it might not be bad to go to the Texas meeting. Even if the audience was not wholly for him, the reaction generally might be good particularly since he had said that he was available to go to any state caucus. And since Texas was a state, they thought it would be consistent with that. He said that he could then invite Johnson to come to Massachusetts and see what Johnson would say about the issues that were dividing the Convention between the North and the South. He thought it would be more embarrassing for Johnson to come to Massachusetts than for him to go to Texas. So it was decided at the meeting I attended that perhaps Johnson would come

[-260-]

to Massachusetts if he would go to the Texas caucus. Subsequently, at a meeting I did not attend that was changed to have the Massachusetts delegation and the Texas delegation caucus together for the purpose of hearing from the two front runners. I believe this suggestion was the product of a discussion between Kennedy and Johnson, but I'm not sure. Following our meeting, they discussed it together. And then Kennedy came back and said it had been arranged that they would both meet together and both of them would appear together. I don't have to go into what happened then.

MORRISSEY: I've heard that the origin of that whole episode lay in a telegram sent erroneously to the Texas delegation.

FELDMAN: Well, I'm not sure it was sent erroneously. The telegrams we sent indicated that John F. Kennedy was available to meet with any

[-261-]

delegation, that he would attend the caucus of any delegation. That's exactly the point I was just making. Now there was no reason for omitting Texas from that. We didn't omit New Jersey from it. He did, in fact, go to New Jersey. They had an active candidate in Meyner. We didn't omit Florida and they had an active candidate in Smathers [George A. Smathers]. He even went to Missouri which was Symington's home camp. So, just because Johnson was a leading contender was no reason why that should be omitted. So when it said that this telegram was sent erroneously, I'm not sure that it was an error. I think it was appropriate for him to go to Texas. It turned out very well I think. After this meeting, Ted and I both saw the candidate and we complimented him on the television show – I saw it on television, I wasn't there – and on the manner of his responses. We thought he had

[-262-]

done it exactly right. And his comment was that you can always count on Lyndon to be a little bit corny.

I think really that that sums up the difference between the two and the impression they made. Lyndon was very serious. In his speech he tried to be homespun – and then did a typical Lyndon Johnson thing. He tried to just twist the knife a little bit in the opponent by telling him about his absences from the Senate. This was the point at which all of the Texas people were concentrating on Kennedy as an absentee senator. Now I think that was a serious strategic error on the part of Texas. Kennedy was delighted that this was what they were concentrating on because he knew when he started campaigning that this would be a defect. But he also knew that nobody would pay a lot of attention to it. So their concentration on that in their discussion – they also had a lot of other

[-263-]

things which I'll go into in a minute – but their concentrating on his absentee record if you will, just left no impressions on a practical politician. He knew that the record was because

Kennedy was out campaigning. So Kennedy handled it beautifully by turning that phrase, you know about, in which he said that he'd be delighted to have the great record that Johnson has as majority leader and hopes to have him as a majority leader so he can continue that record. Now, we didn't mind that kind of criticism I think that was a serious mistake in strategy. There were a great many mistakes of strategy.

The other thing that they seemed to emphasize, and even did it on television on one or two occasions, was charges directed at his health. There were rumors throughout the delegations that Kennedy would not survive the four year term, that he had Addison's disease, that he

[-264-]

kept alive by pills and all of that sort of thing. Well, that was nasty. That was resented by Kennedy, and we never forgave the people who actually said it. People like Perle Mesta and India Edwards, for instance. And when the stories would come back to us with a nasty overtone, all of us made a mental note of it. The only person who didn't resent it too much was Kennedy himself. I think that Kennedy's attitude toward this kind of mud-slinging was that it was part of the game of politics, something that he had to assume the risks of if he got into politics. He just expected it. So he never held it against them. He was a little mad, I think, at India Edwards because she was so blatant about it. But he never was critical of Lyndon Johnson for doing it.

I think Kennedy had a good deal of respect for Lyndon Johnson and for his strategy as a legislative

[-265-]

technician. But he didn't think he had very bright people around him. And he didn't think that he knew how to run a national campaign. We used to discuss all the mistakes that Johnson would make in a course of a campaign and, indeed, up to the very time of the nomination. He was always campaigning as if he was majority leader of the Senate. And Kennedy realized that these weren't a group of senators that owed something to the Majority Leader you were trying to impress, but these were grass roots people from all over the country. And they would look more to their local leaders than they would to anybody in Washington.

So I think this was the basic error in strategy that Johnson made. He never did get much beyond the solid South vote. And this was a vote that he received more because they didn't like the civil rights record of Kennedy than

[-266-]

for any other reason, and because Johnson could appeal to them as a fellow Southerner. And he had Russell [Richard B. Russell, Jr.] actively working for him. Russell was a leader of a whole bloc in the South. So, he had the real relationship of the South with him, and he could count on them. He didn't get much outside of them. He should have. I think if he had not approached this as one who is a senator and who thought the sun rises and falls in

Washington, D.C., had he approached it from the standpoint that this was the whole nation with a lot of grass roots people each of whom had local concerns and discussed their problems with them in the frame of reference of their local interests, he would have done much better. It was true in the primaries because if he had approached it from the Kennedy point of view, he would have been in the primaries. It was true at the Convention because there he was concentrating on the senators, the people he knew

[-267-]

from the Senate. And usually a senator has very little influence in his home state. Kennedy knew this, but apparently Johnson didn't realize it. So, in the confrontation before the Texas delegation, which I, and I think Kennedy, always considered one of the turning points of the quest for the nomination – not a turning point really, one of the crises is a better term.... We had the votes before that time, as I have said, but we could very easily have suffered a reverse there and caused a band wagon effect to set in from which we couldn't recover. If he had muffed it. So, this was a very crucial meeting, and it turned out very well.

MORRISSEY: Throughout that period when you were dealing with the Texas delegation and with Johnson, did you have any anticipation that the ticket ultimately would be a Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

FELDMAN: Well, before we went to California Ted and I wrote a memorandum for John F. Kennedy in which we listed the possible nominees for

[-268-]

vice president. Assuming Kennedy became the presidential nominee, who should he consider for vice president? And we both listed Lyndon Johnson as far and away the outstanding candidate for vice president. He had few of the defects of the others, and he had some major advantages – all the major advantages went with him. So, in our minds we thought that Johnson would be a suitable vice presidential candidate. And in my discussions with the Johnson supporters, I always talked about a Kennedy-Johnson ticket while they talked about a Johnson-Kennedy ticket. The candidate himself, John F. Kennedy, as a senator seemed to consider Johnson a possibility. He had, as I said, a great deal of respect for Lyndon Johnson. I think he had a lot more respect for Lyndon Johnson during that period than he did when Lyndon Johnson was vice president. So I think in his mind he certainly considered him a possibility. But not many other people did. Other people didn't for

[-269-]

basically two reasons. Number one, they didn't think Lyndon Johnson would step down from the majority leadership which is a much more powerful, much more influential post than that of vice president. That's a reduction in power, and Johnson – everybody knew that – liked power above all. And number two, they didn't think of Johnson as the vice

presidential candidate because he had a very conservative image. There had been a caucus of liberal senators, for instance, that had opposed Johnson on everything. They had even tried in their own way to get one of their number to take a more active role in the Party councils. Now since Kennedy had to rely on liberal support to get the nomination, it would be difficult for them to think in terms of Kennedy betraying the liberal interests by selecting a vice president who had this strong conservative image.

[-270-]

In fact, when Kennedy made known his choice of vice president, there was quite a furor. I'm convinced that the full story of how Kennedy selected Johnson as vice president will never be told. I'm convinced the only person who knows it is John F. Kennedy. I've read Phil Graham's [Philip L. Graham] report. I read Phil Graham's report on how Johnson was selected just before we took office in 1960. I've also talked to perhaps all of the other participants. I've talked to Arthur Goldberg who claimed some part in it. He was present. I talked to Dave Lawrence who was around there all the time; Ted Sorensen; Walter Jenkins; Bill Moyers [William D. Moyers]; Walter Reuther; Abe Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff], who had something slight to do with it. I talked to most of the people who had something to do with it. Each one of them seems to think that they played a part in this selection. Phil

[-271-]

Graham in his now famous memorandum claims a major part in the election of Johnson as vice president.

Now in January of 1961, shortly after we took office, I went into Kennedy's office and told him that I had read the Graham memorandum. And I said, "You know, Phil Graham in that memorandum, and in conversations with me and with others, just assumes that it was he who made Johnson vice president. He said that he had a major part in this. And that's why he wrote the memorandum. He wants history to record that. Now I know that a lot of what Phil says in that memorandum is inaccurate, or at least just a statement from a very small point of view." A lot of other things were happening at the same time. He was going around trying to act as the coordinator. So I said to Kennedy, "Now what were the true stories?" And he said to me, "Well, you know, I don't think anybody will ever know." Now I didn't press

[-272-]

him because he normally in his conversations with me was very open and freely gave information. But when he says something like that, it's not an invitation to continue with discussion.

MORRISSEY: That was the totality of the answer?

FELDMAN: That was all he said at the time.



MORRISSEY: What do you think are the major points of controversy or vagueness between all these people who were party to the ticket making?

FELDMAN: Well, number one is the position of Bobby Kennedy; Phil Graham is insistent that Bobby was always opposed to Johnson. Bobby says he was not opposed to Johnson. Number two is the part that Sam Rayburn played. That had nothing to do with Kennedy, but that had to do with the part of convincing Johnson. There is a dispute among the Johnson people and Phil over what Sam Rayburn said. And on the same basis, Walter Jenkins has told me about Bob Kerr [Robert S. Kerr] being insistent and using very profane

[-273-]

language when it was suggested to him that Johnson might accept second place on the ticket. Bob Kerr was very insistent that Johnson couldn't take that. Now, there is a difference of opinion on Kerr's part in that.

Perhaps the most important differences of opinion, though, center about what motivated John F. Kennedy in getting through in one way or the other; whether it was through Bobby, who was to act as messenger boy, or whether it was through the telephone as Phil Graham describes it or whether it was in some other way. Another suggestion has been that he actually went to see Johnson. And I know that's not true. But anyhow the major controversy, I suppose, is what motivated John F. Kennedy in making the selection.

There is one point of view – some of the people who were with Kennedy say to me that he felt that he had to ask Johnson to accept second place for two reasons: number one, because he wanted to get as much Southern support as he could. If he

[-274-]

had a Lyndon Johnson retire to Texas to sit out the campaign the way Senator Byrd [Harry F. Byrd, Sr.] of Virginia did, this would hurt him in the South, and he couldn't hope to get that support. And number two – and perhaps more important – even if he were elected President, he had to make a record as President. And so Kennedy thought, the version goes, that he would need Lyndon Johnson as majority leader as President. Otherwise, he would be a very effective President and wouldn't be the kind that he could.

So in order to cement relationships he called Johnson to offer the vice presidency, expecting that it would be declined in which event he would be ready to nominate Symington. Symington or Jackson [Henry M. Jackson]. These were the other two. Various people on Kennedy's staff were proposing Symington or Jackson. Bobby, for instance, wanted Symington. There were some others who wanted Jackson. In fact, there's

[-275-]

also confusion as to whether or not Symington wasn't told that he was going to be the vice presidential nominee. But anyhow, for these two reasons it was suggested he would offer the job to Johnson, expect to be turned down, and then offer it to Symington. I don't believe

that's true. I do know that Bobby favored Symington. I know that there were a lot of people around to see Kennedy in behalf of Jackson, including labor people on whom he had to rely for support. But I also know that Kennedy himself had high regard for Johnson. And I can't help but feel that he had our memorandum which set forth, at least to me, very persuasive reasons for taking Johnson and not having any of the other two.

So it's my belief, based on my conversations with all the people involved – very confidential conversations, some of the things told me I can't reveal – and based on what I know of what took place during those hectic

[-276-]

days and based on just that cryptic statement from Kennedy after it was all over, my guess is that he honestly wanted Johnson to run. It was such a logical team. Of course, having selected Johnson, he then had a major job. This, too, proves that he wanted Johnson because he started on that job the minute he called Johnson. He had a major job convincing the liberals that they ought to support Johnson. And he started that immediately, even before he had Johnson's answer. All the liberals weren't completely taken by surprise. He saw Walter Reuther. Walter Reuther went along with him no matter what you may read in the papers. He went along with him on Johnson. Dave Lawrence went along with him. He talked to Dave Lawrence.

MORRISSEY: I was wondering how many of the old time activists within the party, like John Bailey [John Moran Bailey] and David Lawrence, saw it this way.

[-277-]

FELDMAN: John Bailey would just take orders. John has no opinions about any persons or programs; he just does what he is told is the national program and what his leader tells him to. He is a good organization politician.

MORRISSEY: But in terms of being a good missionary.

FELDMAN: But in terms of his own thoughts I would guess that John Bailey would see it exactly that way. John has told me that as a matter of fact. John has told me that he was always for Johnson as the number two man as making it the strongest possible ticket in 1960. But I don't think John Bailey would have had a great deal of influence on the selection of the vice president anymore than I think I would have had a great deal of influence on the selection of the vice president. I think the selection of the vice president was a combination of a great many influences. Of course, Bobby was always very persuasive with the President. In this instance I think he

[-278-]

lost. Bobby has lost in a great many other areas too. Although he had a great, tremendous influence on the President, the President was always his own president. He wasn't Bobby's man or his father's man or anybody's man. He made up his own mind. He demonstrated his independence time after time after time.

I think most politicians would see it the way I saw it, and the way Ted saw it, and the way John Bailey saw it. I think most liberals of the Joe Rauh [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] type would see red. That's all. They just couldn't stand Lyndon Johnson. And Joe Reuh, as you know, tried to take the D.C. delegation and move it away from Johnson. This was requested of him.

MORRISSEY: If word had gotten around before Kennedy was nominated...

FELDMAN: That he would take Johnson? I think he would have lost a lot of support. Face it, our support was liberal. And if the liberals

[-279-]

thought it would be a Kennedy-Johnson ticket, they'd have looked around for somebody else.

MORRISSEY: So, you must have been very careful to keep this question out of circulation.

FELDMAN: Oh yes. It's even more important to do this: to make everybody think that they have a chance to be vice president. You'd walk a fine line between making everybody that was important think he could be either a Cabinet minister or vice president and not promising any of them anything. Kennedy got the nomination without a single commitment to anybody for anything. I think this was one of the few times in history when that had been done. He made no commitment to anybody for any job. He had a personal, private commitment to himself to give Ribicoff a Cabinet job because Ribicoff was one of his earliest supporters as far back as 1956. But that wasn't conveyed to Ribicoff. So everybody had to think that they were possible vice presidential nominees. Now Jackson was a little bit miffed when

[-280-]

Johnson was selected. He had to be mollified. And the way he was mollified was by making him chairman of the National Committee. Jackson was the candidate of the liberals. So when Jackson was not nominated, they were very distressed and he was very distressed. I guess that's about it for the manner in which the vice president was selected.

There are some other things. The stories are a little bit amusing about that time. I remember at the time that Johnson was being notified, the telephone switchboards were just as bad as they could possibly be. They were bad all the time anyhow. You couldn't get into that hotel or get out of that hotel. You just had to rely on messengers most of the time. But on that day, the day after the nomination, they were just impossible. Everything was tied up.

You couldn't even get messengers, as a matter of fact. You couldn't get a telephone, you couldn't get messengers – you couldn't get anything. You had to go around by yourself to run any

[-281-]

errands. The lack of communication didn't help matters in so far as the candidate's relationship to all of his past opponents for unifying the party.

MORRISSEY: Who informed the unchosen vice presidential candidate that Lyndon Johnson was the choice?

FELDMAN: I'm not sure. I didn't do it. I do know that Symington was told a half hour before it was announced on television so that Symington knew about it, because Symington, I think, was expecting to be the vice presidential nominee. I believe that Johnson was also told. The others pretty much knew that they couldn't get it. Humphrey pretty much knew that he couldn't get it. He couldn't have Kennedy and Humphrey on the ticket. It had to be Kennedy-Symington, Kennedy-Jackson, Kennedy-Johnson, or Kennedy-any state governor. That was the possibilities. So as far as the close friends and former opponents of the candidate were concerned, I'm pretty sure that Symington and Jackson were both notified.

[-282-]

Symington was notified about a half hour in advance. I don't think Bobby went to see Symington. I think somebody else went to see Symington. But I'm not sure of this.

MORRISSEY: I was wondering if Senator Kennedy had called in these people.

FELDMAN: No. No, no. He did not do that.

MORRISSEY: I asked you a couple of weeks ago if you had read Evelyn Lincoln's [Evelyn N. Lincoln] book?

FELDMAN: I skimmed it very quickly.

MORRISSEY: She reports Kennedy returning from Johnson's suite as saying, "I offered him the vice presidency like this, and he took it."?

FELDMAN: Kennedy did not go to Johnson's suite to offer him the vice presidency. I think Kennedy went to the Johnson suite to talk to him about the vice presidency and to see whether or not this was a possibility. And then I think he called him after that to say, "Well, will you....?" I think that's the way it went. But what she says is fairly accurate if you consider that introductory conversation.

[-283-]

Now, I wasn't there so I can't verify the accuracy of the gestures and the feeling. It's my own feeling, though, from what I know of Kennedy's thoughts about Johnson and his respect for Johnson that Kennedy probably really wanted him to take it. I don't believe that he offered it to him with the viewpoint that he wanted him to turn it down. I do know also that there was serious disunity in the Johnson camp about it. And there was a famous breakfast the following morning at which Johnson told his close friends he had been offered it, and he would probably take it. The breakfast was attended by only a few people: Sam Rayburn, Bob Kerr, Walter Jenkins, Bill Moyers, Lyndon Johnson. I suspect that Johnson all along wanted to take it, but all of his advisers were advising him against it.

MORRISSEY: Were you involved in the effort to prevent opposition from this nomination arising from

[-284-]

the floor when it was voted on?

FELDMAN: Well, only very briefly. I wasn't really involved in it, no. I did talk to Joe Rauh as I remember. I talked to one other member of the D.C. group. The fact that I would talk to them would indicate that it was just considered more of a nuisance than anything else. It wasn't any serious threat because everybody knew he would be unanimously endorsed with the possible exception of a few people in the District of Columbia who couldn't vote anyhow. So their only opposition was an indication of the lack of unity in the Democratic Party generally, not an effective opposition. It could only hurt as an element of publicity that was unfavorable. It could not hurt in any critical way. So we didn't consider that important.

MORRISSEY: You mentioned a few minutes ago that you thought that Kennedy's respect for Johnson was higher at that period than it was when

[-285-]

Johnson was vice president.

FELDMAN: Yes. I don't know how much I should go into that. But Kennedy had a very high regard for Johnson's legislative. After he became President, when he and Johnson in my presence discussed legislative matters, Johnson either because of a diffidence toward the presidency, or because he didn't want to assert any leadership, or because he didn't like to be acting for somebody else, never seemed to put himself out in behalf of any legislative effort. I really cannot think of a single major legislative effort by John F. Kennedy that Lyndon Johnson advanced as Vice President. It's quite different from Humphrey as Vice President today. Humphrey is in the

forefront of every important legislative battle. Now this was not because Kennedy did not ask him. In my presence Kennedy would mention an important legislative matter. He would always ask Johnson's advice about it.

[-286-]

Johnson would give the advice, but it was kind of a half hearted advice. It was the kind of advice that I would feel free to criticize, and other people who were there would criticize, too. And we would go on from there. It wasn't the advice of a master tactician or a master legislative strategist, which was the way Kennedy thought of Johnson. So I think that this aspect of Kennedy's respect for Johnson decreased a little. And secondly, when a man becomes President and he has a vice president, you naturally tend to lose a little bit of the awe anyhow that you may have had for the legislative leader.

MORRISSEY: I've heard it said that the relationship between Kennedy and Johnson when Kennedy was President and Johnson was Vice President was much better than the relationship between Johnson and the Kennedy staff people?

FELDMAN: That's something I really wouldn't want to

[-287-]

comment on. Let me think about whether I should comment on that at all. I'd say in general that's an accurate statement. But I don't want to get into that kind of personality because it's just a little bit too sensitive even if this isn't going to be published or isn't going to appear any place else. Let me think about that.

MORRISSEY: Okay. One final question on this tape. With respect to the questions raised about Senator Kennedy's health at the time of the Convention, did you get many inquiries about this sort of thing back in 1959 and during the primary season of 1960?

FELDMAN: Oh yes. We got it as far back as 1958. Even when he was running for the Senate in Massachusetts, he got a little bit of that, not much; very, very little.

MORRISSEY: Where was it coming from?

FELDMAN: Oh, it was more because people had heard rumors. I don't remember anything written

[-288-]

about it until 1960. In 1960 there were a couple of statements in

articles that said something about his health and how important health was. We always thought they were planted by somebody in the opposition. But it reached a peak, I think, during the Convention. And then after the Convention during the campaign against Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] it stayed at the plateau. A lot of people were talking about it. There were some stories about it. Although I was aware of it in '58, it really didn't reach anything that deserved public attention until 1960. Where did it come from? I would guess that in every instance it came from the opposition to Kennedy. Whoever was running against him would use this as an argument in his favor. We had that choice too. We could have used Johnson's heart attack. But on the instruction of John F. Kennedy, we did not. We thought that was an unfair political

[-289-]

practice. So we never made a point of the heart attack as the fact that Johnson would not serve out the presidency. In fact we thought it took a little bit of nerve for anybody on Johnson's staff to raise it in view of Johnson's record. He was a fellow with a well known heart condition. And to talk about somebody living out the presidency who was as active and vigorous and had the kind of a physical record that John F. Kennedy had we thought was a little bit outrageous.

MORRISSEY:           Why don't we stop here?

FELDMAN:            Okay.

[-290-]

Myer Feldman Oral History Transcript – JFK #6  
Name List

**B**

Bailey, John Moran 277-279  
Byrd, Harry S.,Sr. 275  
Byrd, Robert C. 254

**C**

Cook, Donald P. 259

**D**

Douglas, Paul H. 256,257

**E**

Edwards, India 265

**F**

Freeman, Orville Lothrop 255,256

**G**

Goldberg, Arthur J. 271  
Graham, Philip L. 271-274  
Green, William J.,Jr. 253

**H**

Hackett, David L. 249  
Humphrey, Hubert H. 244,282,286

**J**

Jackson, Henry M. 275,276,280-282  
Jenkins, Walter W. 259,271,273,284  
Johnson, Lyndon B. 244,246,254,259-290

**K**

Kennedy, Edward M. 250,251  
Kennedy, John F. 241,243,-246,250-261,263-277,  
279,280,282-290  
Kennedy, Robert F. 243,273-276,278,279,283  
Kerr, Robert S. 273,274,284

**L**

Lawrence, David Leo 253,271,277  
Lempart, Helen 247  
Lincoln, Evelyn N. 283  
Lucey, Patrick J. 256

**M**

Martin, Dolores M. 246  
McCracken, Tracey S. 251  
McDonough, Robert P. 254  
Mesta, Perle 265  
Meyner, Robert B. 252,262  
Moyers, William D. 271,284

**N**

Nixon, Richard M. 289

**O**

O'Brien, Lawrence F. 243

**P**

Price, Margaret 241-243

**R**

Rauh, Joseph L. 279,285  
Rayburn, Sam 273,284  
Reuther, Walter P. 271,277  
Ribicoff, Abraham A. 271,280  
Roncalio, Teno 251  
Russell, Richard B.,Jr. 267

**S**

Siegel, Jerry 259  
Smathers, George A. 262  
Smith, Stephen E. 259  
Sorensen, Theodore C. 246,262,268,271,279  
Stevenson, Adlai E. 244,245,257  
Symington, Stuart,II 244,262,275,276,282,283



## W

Williams, G. Mennen 241