

Myer Feldman Oral History Interview – JFK#5, 3/27/1966
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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 the organization of the senate office, deciding where to run 1960 primary campaigns, and evaluating the primary candidates, among other issues.

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Myer Feldman – JFK #5

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Fifth Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

March 27, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FELDMAN: We've already discussed a little bit about the organization of the office prior to the Convention, and we've talked about the Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries. I guess we didn't talk about the organization of the Senate office; the fact that we had in the Senate office two people who were primarily concerned with the seeking of delegates. One was Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], the other was Jean Lewis. I

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people who were there. He would come back to the office and put them on cards. Then it was Jean Lewis's job to write letters to these people and tell them how pleased the senator was to have met them and express the hope that they would meet again in the future. She would maintain these lists and use them also for such purposes as sending Christmas cards, for informing them of the position of Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. I was instructed to write letters whenever there was an issue that would be of concern to a particular section of the country and, frankly, to ask these people their opinion about the issue that was before the Senate. This was a way of tying them in to the Senator that was very good.

Jean Lewis, who had come from the South, had been an assistant, I think, to a fellow named Read, but I'm not sure of his name....

MORRISSEY: Read?

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FELDMAN: Yes. But I'm not sure of his name. But anyhow she had been an assistant to the director of the Alabama League of Municipalities, and she had become quite familiar with the names of the important Southern politicians. And she herself was from Alabama. So she knew Alabama fairly well. That meant that she was invaluable in our efforts to cultivate the people of the South, and particularly states around Alabama: Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and so on. So Jean I think played a very important part in this pre-Convention maneuvering for delegates.

The list of names that we accumulated by 1959 when the Esso office was established – we discussed the Esso office earlier – had increased to over twenty thousand. I remember a Christmas mailing of twenty-four thousand Christmas cards. This kept most of the staff busy sending out cards. I guess that must have been Christmas 1958. We had this

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system of communication throughout the country. In addition we had a kind of a haphazard assignment within the office of functions. Now Ted and Jean handled most of the political work in the office. I handled most of the legislative work in the office during this time. And this freed Ted for just the political work. Of course when the primary time came around, we all had to work on the primaries. In fact, I guess toward the end of 1959, the only person in the office that was doing any really just senatorial work was Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]. All the rest of us were doing mostly work that had some relationship to the political campaign even if the work was the determination of the position of Senator Kennedy.

In addition to this organizational activity at the office....And again let me say the organizational activity was largely taken over by the Esso office when it was organized in '59. In addition to

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the organizational activity in the office there was also the intellectual organization. This meant the development of positions on major issues. This meant the drafting of speeches that could be given wide circulation, that could be sent to the list and could be distributed pretty widely. It meant the planning of, perhaps, publicity in national magazines and so on. It meant a very extensive clipping service. When I first came to then Senator Kennedy's office, we had a clipping service. We'd get clippings maybe once a week, and there might be, oh, a hundred clippings in each of these mails. But by the middle of 1959 the number of clippings in the clipping service was so enormous that we didn't have any time to even look at it. We still continued to get a clipping service, but we asked them to cut down on it so that they would no longer give us the entire – they

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wouldn't give us every item that appeared that mentioned Senator Kennedy's name. But instead we asked for only editorials. I would read those carefully to find out what so called "opinion leaders" were thinking.

MORRISSEY: Did the Senator read those?

FELDMAN: Yes. Oh yes. They went to him first. And after him they would go to the office.

MORRISSEY: The reason I asked if he read those clippings is that when he was President some newspapermen claimed that he was hypersensitive to what the press was saying about him. I was wondering what your view of that was.

FELDMAN: Well, let me come to that. He certainly read the clippings. This was an important factor in determining just where he stood. These came from small town newspapers, big town newspapers; they were editorials. He saw the way the press treated his speeches.

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It enabled him to see whether or not the people were learning his name and so on. So he would glance through them first. Then he'd send them in to Ted and me, and we'd go through them. As I said, they came in such enormous quantities by the middle of '59 that we instructed the clipping service to leave out all except the big items. The big items were useful. We could gain some impression of where we stood. It also helped us to determine where our weaknesses were. For instance, at one point he, President Kennedy, felt that the editorials we were getting in the small town newspapers were uniformly unfavorable. Now, we knew that many small town newspapers – in fact, I suppose most small town newspapers – don't write their own editorials. They get their editorials from either the NANA [North American Newspaper Alliance] or from an independent edi-

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torial service. One of the chief editorial writers for NANA I guess it was – that's the North American Newspaper Alliance – was a fellow named Bruce Bioassat. I was asked and Ted was asked too, to see Bruce; we would talk to him; and we would explain to him what Kennedy was doing. And he became a very strong supporter of John F. Kennedy, and the editorials began reflecting this. He'd write an editorial, and we'd see the same editorial appear in fifty or sixty papers. It was better than having an editorial writer for *The Washington Post* or for the *New York Times*. It would get out into local circulation. I thought it was very useful.

Anyhow, all this was part of, perhaps, the pre-nomination activity, pre-primary activity. Although we continued this kind of intellectual work after the Esso office was established, we no longer had

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any need to continue any of the organizational activities. Anyhow I didn't get involved in the organizational activities much. This, as I say, was mostly Sorensen and Jean Lewis at that time.

Then this takes us down to the actual primaries in 1960. We had discussed the two major ones. I think the only remaining questions are the questions about the President's reactions to the primaries other than Wisconsin and West Virginia. Let's discuss that for a minute.

MORRISSEY: Okay.

FELDMAN: With regard to those primaries my recollection is a little hazy, but let me see if I can reconstruct the attitudes of Senator Kennedy and people around the office – each of them. Let's take them in order roughly in which they occurred. First, of course,

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there was the New Hampshire primary. We always knew that he would be in the New Hampshire primary. We always knew that he would probably win that. We hoped – and I remember Senator Kennedy expressing the hope – that somebody would engage him in the New Hampshire primary; but saying that he doubted that anybody was that foolhardy. And, in fact, nobody did, and we made no elaborate plans for an extensive campaign. It's my recollection that he only spent a couple of days in New Hampshire. But he opened his effective campaigning for the presidency in New Hampshire. Of course, you know what the results were. The only thing we had to do in that connection was to develop for him what we thought might be an appropriate series of issues that he could play upon in the speeches he made there. And we did that. I remember one of the things

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was an REA speech that we prepared for him for Burlington, Vermont – which was contiguous to New Hampshire, of course, and we thought that would get across in New Hampshire – which he decided then he couldn't give and never did give. But my strongest recollections of the New Hampshire primary are merely statements of Senator Kennedy about how cold it was up there and how difficult it was to get around. But yet he had a feeling of exhilaration from that campaign when he came back to the office because he felt he had made an impression; he had been well received, and he felt confident as a result of that that at least the New England states would be solidly for Kennedy at the Convention. I think that was the major function of that campaign. That really solidified the New England states behind Kennedy.

MORRISSEY: Teddy White [Theodore H. White] has written that

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there was a little Symington [Stuart Symington, II] sentiment and some Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] sentiment in New England. Did you ever detect this and fear that you wouldn't get a united delegation from the six states?

FELDMAN: Not much. As I remember it, I thought we felt that Maine presented some difficulties. But apart from Maine, we were pretty sure of the rest of New England. It was true that there was some Stevenson sentiment, but we never regarded Stevenson as – neither Senator Kennedy nor the people in the office....When I say we I'm really reflecting the conversation we would all have. We never regarded the Stevenson candidacy as a serious one in 1960. It was expressed I think best by Senator Kennedy when he said that Stevenson could be a spoiler, that Stevenson could not win the nomination for himself. I think that was

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perfectly accurate. In retrospect I'd say that Stevenson....I'm a long time admirer of Stevenson. I've served with Stevenson on the Eleanor Roosevelt Foundation and in various other capacities and we're good friends. But I'm still convinced that Stevenson had a great deficiency which he exhibited during the campaign. And that was a difficulty in making up his mind.

If Stevenson had made up his mind early and had supported Kennedy.... And Kennedy was the only person Stevenson could support. He could not possibly have supported Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and it would have been foolish to support Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]. And there was never any effort made to, or no suggestion made even, that he might support Symington or Meyner [Robert B. Meyner] or Smathers [George A. Smathers] or any of the other secondary candidates. So Stevenson always had the choice of either running himself or supporting John F. Kennedy.

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It would have been a real wrench to his image if he had supported Johnson. Johnson ran as the conservative, the Southerner. He didn't have a particularly good civil rights image or, indeed, voting record. While Kennedy was much closer to Stevenson. He was the liberal candidate by that time. Not as liberal perhaps in image as Stevenson, but he was a liberal candidate. Stevenson had the choice, if he was going to be effective, of either supporting Kennedy or running himself. Now realistically he should have recognized that he could not have been nominated, and if nominated, probably couldn't be elected. But I guess when people reach that point in political life they don't view things impersonally; they start losing their objectivity, and even the remote possibility that they might be elected president colors their judgment. So he deferred making decisions and deferred making decisions in perhaps the vain hope that he might become

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president.

I think he was supported in this by a number of people. And I think these people gave him bad advice. Among those was Mary Lasker, who's a strong Stevenson supporter and, I'm told, supplied a good deal of money to maintain the Stevenson campaign, such as it was, going. When it got to the Convention and there was a big Stevenson rally and the delegates were all flooded with telegrams urging them to nominate Stevenson, this was paid for, I understand, by Mary Lasker. Then secondly there was Senator Monroney [Michael Monroney]. He continued to express a preference for Stevenson in spite of everything else. He and his wife were active in Stevenson's headquarters at the Convention itself. And I suspect he continued to give Stevenson the kind of advice that Stevenson was readily ready and willing to take; and that was to continue in the fight for the nomination. And

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thirdly there were people around Stevenson who perhaps had more to gain by keeping Stevenson in the race than if Stevenson went over to Kennedy. If we went over to Kennedy, a lot of them would then not have any further duties.

One of those who did not fit into that category was Newt Minow [Newton N. Minow]. Newt Minow was always around the office trying to bridge the gap between Kennedy and Stevenson. At least he told us; and we used to see Newt regularly. Whenever he came to Washington, he would stop in and talk to us about the merit of Stevenson and Kennedy getting together and asking what he could do to persuade what he called the "Gov" to go along with Kennedy. Newt's advice was good. If Stevenson had accepted it, I think, one, Kennedy would have felt indebted to Stevenson. Stevenson could have

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had almost any position he wanted in the Kennedy Administration. I think there would have been a stronger rapport between Kennedy and Stevenson. I think it might have simplified matters for us. We then would have had the nomination. The liberal community would come over to us. We would not have suffered from some of the liberal aspersions toward Kennedy. I doubt that we would have had the people like Jackie Robinson, in one instance – and as far apart as Jackie Robinson and Eleanor Roosevelt – expressing opinions about the credibility of Kennedy as a liberal. So, it would have helped us a good deal to have Stevenson. We would have been indebted to him. And Stevenson would have been better off. The country would have been better off. I think the election might even have been a little easier because we wouldn't have had this

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kind of question that was raised about the authenticity of Kennedy liberalism. But anyhow, faced with this conflict, Stevenson decided he would stay in the race to the very end. And there was nothing that could move him. A number of people went to see Stevenson; went to

Libertyville, I remember, to talk to him.

Now, later on as I say, I got to know Stevenson quite well. When he was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations, I would work with him on a number of problems. On one occasion I had the temerity to suggest to him that he should have been for John F. Kennedy a lot earlier. And he at that time maintained to me that he never was against John F. Kennedy; he just didn't think that it was.... We had a very frank discussion. As I remember it, we were in an automobile riding up Fifth Avenue to an appointment we both had

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to keep. And we discussed it. Stevenson said he never was either for or against John F. Kennedy. He felt that, as the earlier standard bearer for the Democratic Party, it was not up to him to express that opinion among the various candidates. I think at that time Stevenson was honest. I think he meant what he was saying, but I believe this was probably a case of him convincing himself after the fact rather than before the fact. I think that before the actual nomination there was still in the back of his mind the hope, if you will, that lightning might strike, and he might again get the nomination. And for that reason he was unwilling to rule himself out completely.

Back to the New England race. Stevenson had some liberal support in the New England states: Massachusetts and other places. We didn't consider that formidable. Symington,

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we thought, actually had more support than Stevenson. But again we were fairly confident we would get the New England votes, and we were certain of it after the New Hampshire primary. That served the function of solidifying New England for John F. Kennedy.

Now we had to turn our attention to other primary states. Well, the chief difficulty with most of them was that they were popularity contests which were not binding on delegates. A popularity contest that isn't binding on delegates means very little. In fact, in some states like Pennsylvania it was just a preference and really didn't mean very much. And the professional politicians more or less could afford to, and did, ignore the results. I think there were seventeen primaries altogether. It was very easy to rule out such states as Pennsylvania

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and the District of Columbia. We felt that there was no need to run in those states. In the District of Columbia there were two reasons for ruling that out. Number one is because Kennedy wasn't as well known in the District of Columbia as any of the others; two, it would take a lot of time and effort which wouldn't be justified by any conceivable results because nobody paid much attention to what the District of Columbia says. In Pennsylvania all they do is express a kind of preference, and there wasn't much point to making a major campaign there. Moreover, there wasn't anything else we had to prove. If we had West Virginia and if

we had New Hampshire, we've proved the major points of interest to the East. So running in Pennsylvania would be a little silly. The important primaries that we had to consider other than Wisconsin and West

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Virginia were Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, California, and Oregon as I remember.

MORRISSEY: You excluded Maryland?

FELDMAN: Maryland, that's right; Maryland too. Maryland, though, suffered some of the same defects as the District of Columbia. Moreover we had no organization, and we didn't have the power structure in Maryland although we had some good friends. We had, as I remember it, Goodman [Philip M. Goodman], who was a member of the city council and who was influential in Baltimore politics. And I think Jack Pollack [James H. Pollack]. And, of course, Joe Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings]. We had others in Maryland that could form the nucleus. But it too was again part of the District, and you get into the same District of Columbia problem. And it wasn't particularly important. We did consider more seriously Maryland, however, than we did the District. We finally

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decided that running in Maryland wouldn't advance our interests appreciatively. So there wasn't any serious race in Maryland. I think we won the Maryland race anyhow.

MORRISSEY: Easily.

FELDMAN: Yes, but there wasn't any point to making a major effort there. Now, Oregon we didn't have much choice. In Oregon they have a system under which everybody gets put on. We thought for a while we would welcome Oregon as an opportunity to confront Lyndon Johnson directly, and that would have given us a reason for running in Oregon. However, it also had the big disadvantage of having one, a favorite son – and we stayed out of favorite sons normally – and two, strong Stevenson support in Oregon. We didn't think Stevenson was, as I said, a major factor, but he could be a spoiler. If we ran in Oregon and we lost to Stevenson, it would indicate a

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lack of the kind of major support that John F. Kennedy had to have in order to win the nomination. Now I think we won Oregon anyhow although I don't remember exactly what happened. But we decided we didn't want to risk Oregon. Let me just interject at this point that we took the position that we had to win in every primary where we appeared. If we won in every primary in which we were entered, then the nomination could not be denied us. But

if we won in every nomination in which we appeared, it would be difficult to deny us the nomination. I think this was Senator Kennedy's general feeling. Now he was not at all reluctant to enter primaries. But he could not enter one under an insuperable handicap. Although we won Oregon as I remember, it wasn't that clear, in view of all the other factors, that we would. And it wasn't worth extending the

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time and the energy and so on that would be necessary to make a major fight there.

Now Nebraska was different. And Indiana was different. Here were two different sections of the country. One of the objections to Kennedy was he didn't have a very good agricultural policy. By demonstrating a win in Nebraska, he could argue that at least voters in Nebraska thought highly of Kennedy, and his qualifications as an agricultural state were impeccable. So Nebraska was one of the states that we early decided we would be in. And it didn't matter much who would run against us. I don't think we had any opposition in Nebraska as it turned out. But we were spoiling for a fight there. That would have been a good one, and I think we would have won it against any opposition. That's probably why Humphrey and all the others weren't anxious to get into it.

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Indiana, for similar reasons, represented a different kind of state. So then we had the East, the two parts of the Midwest which had completely different kind of people. Again we didn't have any opposition in Indiana. But we wanted to show that we could carry it. I think he made a couple of speeches in Indiana.

MORRISSEY: I read somewhere that you hoped to pull Symington into that contest and beat him.

FELDMAN: Yes. Yes, that's right. We were hoping that we could get some of the people who were potential candidates into one of these contests. But they were smart enough to stay out. I'm convinced we would have won. All this time we spent a lot of money on sampling public opinion with polls and determining just what they thought of Kennedy. We also made analyses of the religious and ethnic backgrounds of each of the states. Now even

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if Kennedy wasn't well known, there was a tendency we knew for Catholics to vote for Kennedy against Johnson or against Symington. We knew, also, that he was very strong with the Poles, and the Polish voters would all solidly support him. He was strong with the French voters. They would support him. The Italians would support Kennedy above all others. After we got started, why, the Jewish vote we felt was all with Kennedy. So we knew that these voting blocks were all Kennedy votes, and we could count on them regardless of what the polls would show. So where in the Democratic Party these groups

were strong, we were confident we had a better than even chance of winning. The only exception was West Virginia. West Virginia didn't have any of these. So we took a chance on running in West Virginia. But in all the other states, in the Democratic party there were

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these blocks. Now, he didn't, as a matter of fact, win the election in Nebraska and he didn't, as a matter of fact, win in Indiana. But the reason for that is that among the whole population there was a substantial anti-Kennedy feeling.

Let's see now. California was a very, very tough problem. And up until the very last day for filing, as I remember, we hadn't finally decided whether we were going to run or not run. I think that, as I remember it, Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] was still a possible candidate. And we always had the excuse that he would be a favorite son candidate and, therefore, we couldn't run against him. But the California primary was close to the Convention too – it was in June, as I remember it – and there was a reason for running in order to have a final victory just before the Convention. This

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would give us some impetus going into the Convention. I don't remember any of the other primary states.

MORRISSEY: How about Ohio?

FELDMAN: I don't remember our considerations with regard to Ohio. I suspect that we had a choice between Ohio and Indiana. They were similar types of states. He made a crack about Ohio. I'm trying to remember what that was. When Mike DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] came out for him?

MORRISSEY: The Polish story is that Kennedy took polls and showed DiSalle he could beat DiSalle in his own state; therefore DiSalle should run as a favorite son committed to Kennedy.

FELDMAN: Well, I'm not sure of that. But I do remember the Kennedy Press Club speech which came right after the announcement that Ohio's votes were going to go for Kennedy. And in answer to a question, he referred to the Abraham Lincoln statement

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during the Civil War when the Ohio volunteerism joined the Union Army, and Abraham Lincoln said something like, "Thank God that Ohio's come to the defense of the nation." He said, "I felt very much like repeating those sentiments recently." So that's the only thing about Ohio that stands out in my mind.

MORRISSEY: Was the Senator irked by George Smathers' insistence on standing as a favorite son in Florida?

FELDMAN: Yes. I asked him about Smathers once and he said, "Well, you have to learn to love George, and that's about all there is to it." He was irked, yes, many times during both the primaries and after he became President, he was irked at George Smathers. But it never really affected their friendship. It annoyed all of us, and we all thought that he wasn't.... You know, we made the crack often, "the last time George Smathers stood up for Kennedy was at his wedding." But it

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didn't bother John F. Kennedy. He had lots of friends like that – people who were personally friends of his and who he associated with and who he did favors for, but who never really supported him in other things. This went for newspapermen as well as members of Congress. It includes people like Rolly Evans [Rowland Evans, Jr.] who would attack him regularly in the columns of the New York Herald Tribune. But he was friendly with them and spent a lot of time with them.

MORRISSEY: How about Meyner in New Jersey?

FELDMAN: Well, we watched Meyner very carefully. The one thing that Meyner had that we wanted a good deal was Charlie Engelhard [Charles William Engelhard]. Charlie Engelhard, we assumed, was providing all the money for Meyner's campaign, and we thought it was a waste of money. We never thought that Meyner had much chance.... I don't know that Meyner really believed that he

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had a major opportunity. Early in 1960 Meyner made a swing around the country. It was just a bomb. All the reports we got – by that time we had people in each of the states. We were organized in a way so that we would get a report from every state very quickly. And we were organized by areas too. Meyner made absolutely no impression whatsoever. But he was spending a lot of money, and Charlie Engelhard was paying for it. He used Engelhard's plans, and Engelhard would pay all of his campaign expenses for literature. As far as we knew nobody else was contributing much to it. After this swing I think Meyner got out on a limb a couple of times. I think he had a conference at the National Press Club at which he made some stupid statement about foreign affairs that showed he didn't know what it was all about. And after that, his candidacy

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for the presidency was not more than a token candidacy. His headquarters in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles in 1960 was little more than a token headquarters. There wasn't anybody there; one room, rather small. Even Smathers had a bigger place than he did.

The two big places at that Convention of course were Lyndon Johnson's and John F. Kennedy's. Johnson had a lot of space and they always made plenty of noise. Smathers had a very nice room I remember, but nobody was very excited. Stevenson had an office with a lot of noisy people, but it was obvious they weren't pros. Meyner's candidacy I think became just a token candidacy after that swing he took around the country in which he accomplished nothing.

MORRISSEY: There was a lot of Kennedy sentiment in that New Jersey delegation.

FELDMAN: That's correct.

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MORRISSEY: And was that the product of your efforts?

FELDMAN: Well, we concentrated on the New Jersey delegation. We thought New Jersey was a logical Kennedy delegation. And New Jersey, I think, is over 30 percent Catholic, I think its point of view was almost identical with the kind of image that Kennedy represented, and the votes that he took were New Jersey votes. More than that we knew most of the political figures in New Jersey. We felt that in a contest between Meyner and Kennedy in New Jersey Kennedy would probably win. So that too meant that Meyner wasn't very important. One of the major disappointments of the Convention, as you know, was Meyner's action in holding that New Jersey delegation to him. I'd say that was the stupidest thing. I think the second stupidest was probably Adlai Stevenson's failure to throw his forces to Kennedy. But there is just no excuse for Meyner. And that was the

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end of Meyner really as a national political figure. If Meyner had very graciously conceded to Kennedy there's no telling where he might have gone from there. But that incident destroyed Meyner as a national political figure.

MORRISSEY: How about Williams [G. Mennen Williams] in Michigan?

FELDMAN: Well, he got started early. He had a book published – a biography of Williams – which he distributed widely and gave to all Convention delegates. But Williams depended for his support upon labor. And by labor we meant Walter Reuther. John F. Kennedy was a pretty good politician and he knew that Reuther would be a key figure from the very beginning. So we paid a lot of attention to Reuther, and I think it paid off. Reuther early indicated to Mennen Williams that Kennedy was going to be his candidate. So Williams' candidacy disappeared pretty quickly. He got off to a glowing start with the book but went nowhere very quickly. In

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fact it was in the Michigan delegation that really gave us perhaps the deciding votes at the Convention, I think. We worked with the Michigan delegation from the beginning – even before the convention. In fact, I shared a room at the Biltmore Hotel with Margaret Price who was the national committeewoman from Michigan. And all we did was confer on what was best for Kennedy. By that time Williams was not a candidate anymore. Margaret Price, as a result of her actions, was then named vice chairman of the national committee and director of women’s activities. We looked around for a place in the administration for Williams and found one as Assistant Secretary of State. So I’d say that although Williams had what in effect was a trial balloon early in the campaign, we never considered him seriously. We felt confident of the Reuther support. And without

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the Reuther support, Williams couldn’t be a candidate.

MORRISSEY: Did Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley] control the Illinois delegation?

FELDMAN: Oh yes. No doubt about that. Mayor Daley was the key to the Illinois delegation, and knowing that, we were fairly confident of our strength there. Just as in Pennsylvania we felt the key was Billy Green [William J. Green, Jr.] – not Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence], but Billy Green. The reason for that was that Dave Lawrence, who was the governor of Pennsylvania, could not control Pennsylvania without Philadelphia. Philadelphia has about one third of the vote in Pennsylvania. And with a closely knit organization, it can throw the nomination to anybody it wants. Now, the newspapers speculated for a long time about how Billy Green was going to go and how Dave Lawrence was going to go. As a matter of fact, Dave Lawrence was always reluctant to support John F.

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Kennedy. Dave Lawrence had run for governor. I talked with Dave Lawrence at the suggestion of John F. Kennedy. And Lawrence said to me that he had had a difficult time being elected governor. In spite of a very excellent record as mayor of Pittsburgh, in spite of a good campaign organization, in spite of the large Democratic registration in the state of Pennsylvania, he was elected governor by only a little over a hundred thousand votes over a pretzel manufacturer that was running against him named McGonigle [Arthur T. McGonigle], I think. The reason for his near defeat he ascribed to the fact that he was a Catholic. So, he said that a Catholic could not be elected by the state of Pennsylvania to an office like the presidency because if there is an anti-Catholic feeling against a Lawrence – and the man is not obviously Catholic – the anti-Catholic

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feeling against Kennedy would be enormous.

So, he was, for a long time, against Kennedy as the nominee. But, on the other hand Billy Green gave us his assurances early. Nobody knew about it. There were only two or three people that knew that Billy was with us from the beginning. But he was.

MORRISSEY: Despite that speech to the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] in Philadelphia?

FELDMAN: Well, now we were worried about that ADA speech because this we thought might upset our relationship to him. But he had given us his assurances. And with his support we felt that we could bring the rest of the state along. And at the right time – his sense of timing was pretty good – he then went to Dave Lawrence and persuaded Dave Lawrence that he was going to go for Kennedy and Lawrence better go otherwise Lawrence would be in trouble. So

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I think really Billy persuaded Dave Lawrence. And then once Dave saw that he had to use his influence on behalf of John F. Kennedy and could not be an anti-Kennedy factor, he then went the whole way and became strongly pro-Kennedy. And of course the two of them – nobody could withstand these two in Pennsylvania. They threw the Pennsylvania delegation to Kennedy.

MORRISSEY: In Arizona where you harvested an unexpected batch of Kennedy votes did you place close attention to that maneuver? Or did it come as something of a surprise?

FELDMAN: Well, I think we paid more attention to New Mexico than we did to Arizona. In New Mexico we had as our representative a fellow named Beatty, Jack Beatty. He didn't hold any political position other than, I think, he was a county chairman. But he was the most important figure we could find in New Mexico. Clint Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] was for Lyndon Johnson. He was

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neutral, but neutral for Johnson. However in seeking the New Mexico votes....The population composition of Arizona is very much like it. We were also active in trying to get the Arizona delegates. Now Clint Anderson was perhaps more effective than Jack Beatty. But we organized Spanish Americans for Kennedy and built up such wide support that it even carried into Texas – Texas, New Mexico and Arizona were strongly persuaded. Now I didn't pay much attention to what was going on in Arizona. None of us did. Most of us were concentrating on New Mexico. Arizona we considered the by-product of the New Mexico effort. So, I'd say that we were surprised at the Arizona victory and disappointed at the New Mexico loss.

MORRISSEY: How about states like Colorado and Montana?

FELDMAN: Well, I don't really remember much about that. I remember Teddy Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] was in charge of it, and he very nearly

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broke his neck campaigning for John F. Kennedy. He decided the way in which he could be popular in the Northwestern states and in the Midwestern states were in two ways: One, he could show his proficiency as a skier, and two, perhaps as a horseman. Now, he had never been on a big ski slide before. But he went up into Montana, as I remember it, and got on one of those big ski slides and made a very creditable jump. The papers were full of it and he felt he'd been successful.

As far as Wyoming and the other Western states were concerned, he, for the first time in his life, got on a bucking bronco. He stayed on for a few seconds, but just about broke his neck. You know there's a limit to what you can do for your brother and I think Teddy went that limit.

Teddy also was in charge in California. But Ros Wyman [Rosalind Wiener Wyman] tells me that they were always calling up to try and

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straighten out things that Teddy might have done that he didn't know about.

MORRISSEY: Who would they call?

FELDMAN: They'd call me, or they'd call Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], or they'd call John Kennedy – most often Larry O'Brien. So, for a while they thought that Teddy was a handicap in California. However they noticed that in traveling with Teddy he got an enormous amount of applause and response from crowds even if he didn't speak to them. On one occasion they went to a political meeting at which Sammy Davis Jr. was going to appear and Frank Sinatra was going to appear. Well, Sammy Davis Jr. and Frank Sinatra got their usual applause, and it was fairly enthusiastic. But when Teddy Kennedy entered – he wasn't even on the platform; he was in the back of the room – that crowd just erupted. So, when they saw that effect, they said, "Gee, we've

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got to bill him all over the state." And from then on they kept Teddy busy making appearances all over California, and indeed all over the West. So that after a while Teddy was complaining. He wasn't sure that it was worth campaigning. I forgot, Pat Lawford [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] had made a crack about that, too. Something about the... She said when she was attending one of these meetings that she wasn't sure that it was a particular benefit or honor to be the sister of a presidential candidate, even if he became president because there was just too much furor and too much uproar created wherever she

appeared.

MORRISSEY: One final state and that would be New York state.

FELDMAN: Well, New York state was a very complicated state. There we felt that we had to have Carmine DeSapio, and we had to have Senator Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman], and we hoped we could get

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Eleanor Roosevelt. They seemed to be the three key figures. Now, Carime was lukewarm.

MORRISSEY: Why?

FELDMAN: Well, he just wasn't ready, it seemed to me, to make his decision at the time I'm talking about. Lehman and Eleanor Roosevelt were both Stevenson supporters. We did have Peter Crotty, I guess, and we had some of the other county leaders. Oh, we had Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] of course, also early and Sharkey [Joseph T. Sharkey]. Buckley and Sharkey. Now those very people prevented us from getting the Finletters [Thomas K. Finletter] and the Lehmans and the Roosevelts because they had the images of bosses. What we had to do was convince them that Kennedy was a liberal – we got tired of telling people he was not like his father because they all thought his father was the most conservative and the most reactionary person in the Democratic

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Party – and that he was independent and his record showed that he had not been pro-McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]. It was tough. I remember talking to the Lexington Club which was the “reform, reform” club of New York. What was the name of that newspaper reporter who committed suicide? A girl who used to be on the stage. I forget now. Lisa Howard, Lisa Howard. I remember trying to convince her. And after a good deal of effort convincing her that Kennedy was an authentic liberal, then she became enthusiastic. This was pretty much the process all the liberals, the reform clubs in New York went through, until finally by election time, they were ready to vote for him. But that was a tough state and a very complicated state.

MORRISSEY: Again Teddy White says that the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] lined up some of the votes in the New York delegation.

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FELDMAN: I don't know anything about that.

MORRISSEY: I think it's probably through the O'Connells [Daniel P. O'Connell] in Albany.

FELDMAN: Yes. Oh yes, oh yes, that's right. I forgot about Albany. That would be the only influence the Ambassador would have. He'd have no influence in New York City, except possibly Sharkey and Buckley. He knew them. But I don't think the Ambassador played a major part in New York. A minor part I'd say. New York state divides into the upstate vote, the Catholic vote, and the Jewish vote. Now the upstate vote... There were a couple of political leaders that would keep writing to us that we had to have a good dairy program for upper New York state and we had to show that Kennedy knew their needs and that Kennedy reflected their wants. But we had political leaders, the Democratic political leaders, up there, and we tried to organize the farmers for Kennedy even in

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the primary days. The Catholic vote he could get anyhow. His father helped with that, I think – with the conservative Catholic vote. The liberal Catholic vote he got that anyhow because they idolized John F. Kennedy. The Jewish vote's the one I'm talking about as being the very tough vote. That's generally the liberal vote, even the so called "reform Democrats."

MORRISSEY: Partly because of the Ambassador's reputation?

FELDMAN: Yes, yes. We had to fight that and fight the McCarthy charges all the time.

MORRISSEY: Did you meet head on with Dubinsky [David Dubinsky] and some of the other labor party people?

FELDMAN: I did. I...

MORRISSEY: Liberal party, rather.

FELDMAN: Yes, yes. Alex Rose and Dubinsky. Arthur Goldberg was very helpful with them. And obviously they came to his support. But it

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wasn't easy. This was a gradual process. And you had to demonstrate to them, you had to prove to them that Kennedy was for them.

Our most important asset, I think, was the fact that we were against Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. They were all against Nixon so their choice was really between sitting home and not voting and being for Kennedy. They made that choice and were.... Oh, you're talking about the primaries now and not the election.

MORRISSEY: The pre-Convention period.

FELDMAN: There was also the charge that the old man had contributed to the Nixon campaign, if you remember, which we had to answer even in the pre-Convention period. I'd say that the New York people came around reluctantly. At the Convention it was important to have the DeSapio contingent; it was important to have the upper New York state contingent; and the O'Connell contingent. And we had those for the various reasons I've mentioned. We also

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were beginning to get....Although they started out as Stevenson supporters, once Stevenson didn't look like the likely candidate, they were ours.

MORRISSEY: Why don't we stop?

FELDMAN: Okay.

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