

Frank Burns, Oral History Interview – RFK, 4/17/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Burns was a California political figure and aide to Jesse Unruh in Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) 1968 Presidential campaign. In this interview, Burns discusses the long debates among RFK's staff and advisors over whether or not he should enter the 1968 presidential race, efforts to put together a California delegation to represent RFK, Jesse M. Unruh's relationship with Lyndon Baines Johnson and RFK, and the organization of RFK's 1968 campaign in California, among other issues.

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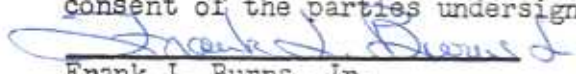
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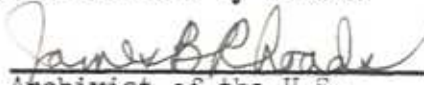
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Frank Burns—RFK

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Oral History Interview

with

Frank Burns

April 17, 1970
Los Angeles, California

By Larry J. Hackman

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

HACKMAN: Why don't you just start off by telling me what there is before 1967 between you and Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], or you and Robert Kennedy and his staff. How much were you involved in the earlier campaigns, '60 or...

BURNS: I was not involved in the 1960 campaign other than just a club president, in a very "I voted for John Kennedy" [John F. Kennedy] sort of way, no real knowledge of what was going on at all. And I would say that insofar as dealings with Robert Kennedy at all, they would start during the year 1967. There had been—I had met him before that; I had some contact with him through Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh], but just like he had met a million other people. And so I wouldn't consider that, in fact, I had any contact with him until 1967.

HACKMAN: Can you remember in '64, on the Salinger [Pierre E. G. Salinger] race, being involved in or just aware of any conversations between Unruh and Robert Kennedy about that race? What kinds of conversations went on during that campaign, reports or whatever?

BURNS: Well, actually, I did not have a great deal of contact with Robert Kennedy in conjunction with the Salinger race, and certainly none in

the time period prior to Pierre's entering the race. Pierre arrived as a candidate. There were a few conversations during the summer months, but mostly those that I recall were with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] or Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], who were interested in it. But I wouldn't have any particular knowledge of anything directly with Robert Kennedy, nor do I recall any particular conversations between Jess and Robert Kennedy at that time.

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I would have been aware of them, had anything of substance taken place, because I'd been back with Jess to see President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] prior to the convention—prior to the choice of vice presidential nominee—when Jess had suggested that Johnson should go with Senator Kennedy. But I don't recall anything specifically concerning the Salinger campaign with Senator Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Can you remember in the meeting with Johnson, Johnson's response to that suggestion?

BURNS: It was essentially a non-response. He asked Jess what he thought—actually, he had stated what Jess had thought because Jess had stated this to Walter Jenkins [Walter W. Jenkins] prior to meeting with Johnson, and Jenkins had given a very thorough report as it was his want. He was a good reporter. And Johnson said, "I understand that you think that Senator Kennedy should be the choice for the nominee." He said, "Yes." And that ended it.

HACKMAN: Do you know, are there Unruh conversations with Robert Kennedy, or your own with Kennedy or Kennedy people about the vice presidency in '64? Did you ever get any feel for how he thought that would work? How a relationship between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson as president and vice president could work?

BURNS: No. You mean what Jess thought? Or...

HACKMAN: Or what Robert Kennedy—did he ever explain how the two of them could get along, what kind of role he could play as vice president?

BURNS: No, not in my presence, and any conversations I would have had on that would have been about third hand hearsay.

HACKMAN: In the conversations with O'Brien and O'Donnell, can you remember what kind of reports you people were giving them on the Salinger campaign, what they were trying to find out?

BURNS: Yes. The first one that was really significant, I'd say, would have been at approximately the same time we met with Johnson concerning the

vice presidency, which should have been about July of 1964. And I can remember telling Kenny O'Donnell at that time that I thought that Pierre was in serious trouble, that the most recent poll indicated that he would lose the election and that was because he simply didn't

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have enough of the vote. There was too much undecided, and Murphy [George L. Murphy] was an absolute unknown. And that, I'd say, was about in July. There really wasn't much further conversation on that until fairly late, perhaps early October, late September, by which time it was fairly apparent to everybody that Pierre was in trouble. And then there was a lot of conversation, and O'Donnell and O'Brien were out here for some little period of time. But it was pretty much over the dam by then.

HACKMAN: What about '66, then? Any conversations on that Brown [Edmund G. "Pat" Brown] campaign that you remember? Or Tom Braden's [Thomas Braden] effort in the primary?

BURNS: No, nothing particular about that. I can remember somewhere in there, Senator Kennedy had come out here for a fundraiser for George Brown and some of the other congressmen, which I was extraordinarily miffed about, and had a tremendous argument with Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] about—which I since confessed to Fred that he was right and I was wrong on it. That was really about all. When Kennedy was out here for Brown, during the course of that campaign, I had no direct contact with him that I recall or at least not other than in a large crowd of people.

HACKMAN: Was Dutton the primary instigator of that fundraiser? Was that the feeling you had?

BURNS: No, it wasn't so much that. It's just that Fred was the liaison man, and I knew Fred. And he had called in conjunction with it, was unhappy that we were not supporting the effort, and I unloaded on him and he unloaded on me. At the time, I thought I was right. He had some evaluations of politics that I just didn't share at that time, so far as what Kennedy really should be doing and what was important. I subsequently changed my general approach upon it and basically agreed with him. This was sort of a gradual type of thing.

HACKMAN: Did you see that over that whole period '64 to '68 that Dutton's viewpoint predominated in—or carried with Robert Kennedy in terms of what he did out here?

BURNS: Oh, I think that Fred certainly had a very heavy influence on Senator Kennedy insofar as California, which I think would only be natural.

He was from here and had a very successful political career within the state and certainly could be relied on. That was somewhat of an assumption. I don't think that there was ever an assumption on my part or Jess that Robert Kennedy listened or took the advice of just one person on any subject.

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HACKMAN: What kinds of things can you remember in that Senate period that you, or you and Unruh, would have liked for Robert Kennedy to do in terms of California that he didn't? Or what kinds of things did you ask him to do that he did do?

BURNS: Well, I think our general feeling at that time was that he had more strength than he thought he had; and that he, in fact, could have the establishment, and that he didn't need really to just concentrate on the minorities, that really the party out here—or sort of the mainstream—was much more attuned to him than he thought. And we therefore thought that he was building too narrow a base when essentially he kind of owned the whole state all the way along insofar as the Democrats were concerned. So I think that would be a very generalized description of the conflict.

HACKMAN: How would that come up, for instance, let's say he came out a couple of times to see Cesar Chavez [Cesar Estrada Chavez] and held hearings out here. Would you get involved in conversations at that point?

BURNS: Very minimally. Usually there'd been a decision to do it and then we would come in and perhaps just say, well, all right, do that but do some other things, too. Touch the other bases. Don't ignore the party leadership and that sort of thing. Don't ignore the elected officials, because most of them are favorably disposed towards you. You could have them too. You wouldn't have to just concentrate on what we would call the liberal base.

HACKMAN: Was there anyone around him, particularly on his staff, that you could take your viewpoint to, that would make the case to him? Or does that just usually go directly from Unruh to Robert Kennedy? How does that work?

BURNS: I'd say during that period, Fred was probably the person that the case was taken to insofar as California is concerned. If we were talking about national politics, Kenny O'Donnell was the one to talk to frequently. Perhaps some conversations with the staff, although relationships with Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] and some of those people became closer later on, I'd say, starting in '67. Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz], when he came on the staff, of course, was an easy person to talk to, because there'd been a long-standing relationship there, also.

HACKMAN: What can you remember then during '67 about the development of Unruh's thoughts, and your own or other people around you, about '68 coming up as a presidential year? What Robert Kennedy should do, and what Unruh should do.

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BURNS: I think it would really start in early '67, after mulling over the results of the '66 elections and getting some sort of idea of where politics were going in the country. And by that time, there was a considerable disenchantment within the Johnson administration—not a breach, but a feeling that things weren't going well, and that something needed to be done. I would say early in '67, we started to make contact with Senator Kennedy concerning his coming out here to broaden his base. And in fact, the first really specific meeting that I recall—I recall it simply because it was St. Patrick's Day in New York, and it was a wild mess—we'd gone back to meet with the Senator, and did in fact.

God, there was a snowstorm, and the planes couldn't land. And I had come up from Washington. Jess was up in the air for about four hours. I kept calling back and forth to the Senator's office—or the apartment, actually—and we finally did get together later on that evening at the Bull and Bear at the Waldorf. He walked over there and we talked for quite a while about his coming out here and doing a dinner for the legislators and getting plugged in with other elements of the party that he really didn't have much of a base with. At that time he agreed in principle that he would like to do this and suggested that a follow-up take place with his staff, particularly with Dolan and Mankiewicz.

HACKMAN: Is that the meeting for the fundraiser that then comes about finally in August of '67 in San Francisco?

BURNS: Yes. That, I believe was the first—well, that was when the Senator agreed to do it in general. There was no date picked, no format, and the details were left to be worked out with the staff. I worked out most of those with Joe Dolan and Frank Mankiewicz. We had a couple of meetings during the course of the summer about it.

HACKMAN: In that period, when you say “elements that he didn't have that much contact with before,” what kinds of people are you talking about? What groups?

BURNS: Oh, the state legislators, just as a group. I'm not speaking of it as ideological, particularly—just making contact with more people in California than say just Cesar Chavez or Paul Schrade or some of your liberal groups. So, it was just a “come out and get acquainted with all the folks” kind of an approach.

HACKMAN: In putting that together, then, with Dolan and Mankiewicz, can you

remember are there any problems getting the thing lined up in terms of who takes part

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and who organizes and everything? Or is that always pretty well understood?

BURNS: No, that all worked out pretty well. Somewhere in there—and I don't recall the date on this, but I'm sure it was subsequent to St. Patrick's Day and before the dinner—the Senator was out here on another trip. And it was something to do with the Farm Workers. We had a meeting with him in San Francisco at which time Jesse brought over eight or ten of the Democratic leaders in the assembly, kind of across-the-board people insofar as their ideological viewpoints. And the real purpose of that was to point out to the Senator that he really had a cross section of support within the party, because all of these people were for him and they didn't classify as liberal or conservative. They were for him personally. And I think he was somewhat impressed by knowing that. Mankiewicz, I believe, was with him on that trip.

HACKMAN: Yeah, that's right, he was. Can you remember any of the topics discussed at that point with him?

BURNS: No, it was just a general discussion of things all around. You know, there'd be disagreements on issues, and one thing or another, but the significant thing was that he was not a narrow, ideological candidate, or the candidate of just one faction insofar as these people were concerned. I think he must have drawn that conclusion also.

HACKMAN: How well did he do on something like that? Did you ever get the feeling, when you set up meetings for him, that he wasn't enthusiastic, or let you down in terms of the way he dealt with the people that met him?

BURNS: I thought he was fantastically good, but that's sort of a personal bias, because he had that diffidence that I liked. You know, he didn't come into a group big and strong; he held back. But I thought it was tremendously appealing, and I think it was appealing to the people. At least I thought in small groups, when I was with him, I thought he was just damn good.

HACKMAN: How well did the fundraiser go in August?

BURNS: It was excellent. It was the best fundraiser, I think, there's ever been in San Francisco insofar as the Democratic party is concerned. It was a very nice affair, a tremendous crowd, and a lot of money was raised.

HACKMAN: At what point do you—in your conversations with Unruh—do you

people start thinking in terms of a possible challenge to Johnson in '68?

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BURNS: Well, certainly you were thinking of that at that time, and during the course of that dinner we had a couple of smaller meetings. I remember a breakfast meeting with Tom Lynch [Thomas C. Lynch] and Jess and the Senator, and I was present—I don't know, I think Mankiewicz was, two or three other people. And it was clear that Tom Lynch was very pro-Kennedy in his own thinking and that, should Kennedy decide to move, he would have an excellent chance of having Lynch's support, for whatever that might have been worth. But it was certainly a topic of discussion at that time.

Now, I dropped out for about three months there. Right after the dinner, I had just a routine physical and it turned up with a spot on my lung. I went into the hospital for lung surgery and then took a trip and got back from the trip in December. And the day that I got back, Jess and I went east. I guess during that period that I was gone, the Senator had not made any moves toward running. If anything, there might have been sort of an indication that he intended to do nothing. I remember Jess sort of bringing me up-to-date on where things were. During the course of the trip east, Jess said he didn't know what was going on, but he just didn't really think that Bob was going to do anything, but that he thought he should. He was going to call him when he got back there, and he did.

What I remember out of that phone conversation—and it was just a phone conversation, quite lengthy—was hearing the one side of it. I might have talked to him on the phone for a minute or two. When it was all over, Jess' attitude was, well, he hasn't totally forgotten the idea, it's still there perking. That strongly reinforced Jess' feeling that he was not going to get involved in the early part of that Johnson delegation, that he was going to hang back, that it was not a foreclosed situation yet.

HACKMAN: By that time, there had been one or two meetings of Kennedy people—Salinger, and Dolan, and Dutton, and all these people, O'Donnell and Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. Had Unruh talked to any of those people in that period and gotten any feel for what was going on?

BURNS: He had certainly talked to them, and had many conversations back and forth, particularly with Dutton, and O'Donnell, and perhaps some back and forth with his [Kennedy's] staff. But I'm kind of lost for that almost three month period, except to say that when I came back—it was like December 8—certainly Jess was feeling that the Kennedy candidacy had not progressed any from where it was in August, and if anything, might have dropped back a little bit. But after talking directly with the Senator in early December, Jess felt that he was not dead.

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HACKMAN: What's Unruh's thinking and your own at that point about a possible

Unruh run for the Senate in '68? And how does that tie in with how he's looking at Robert Kennedy and Johnson in that late '67?

BURNS: They didn't really tie too closely. Jess explored the Senate idea more as a political exercise, I think, than anything else. I don't think he ever in his own mind seriously wanted to run for the Senate. I personally don't think he was ever really sincere in his exploration of it, although he did polling on it. He talked to people about it, he kept things up in the air about it, and he talked to President Johnson about it, who at that time had some interest in getting Jess tied up with something or other where he'd be on the line.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURNS: But certainly Jess was a lot more interested always in being involved in a presidential campaign. During this time period he was exploring the Senate sort of on his own behalf, but he was really devoting his interest to the presidential race. That's where his heart was, so to speak. He [Jess] certainly, in essence, used the possibility of Bob running for the presidency as a reason not to run for Senate. But I'm not sure that he ever would have, anyway. I just don't think he was inclined to want to be a senator.

HACKMAN: Yeah. You say he'd taken some polls on the Senate. Who was doing Unruh's polling at that point, and was this primarily Steve Smith's [Steven E. Smith] West Pacific Management [Associates]? Were they doing things for you at that point?

BURNS: The polling that was done was done after Bob was out here in early January. We'd had some conversations with Dutton on the phone and he said that Bob wanted to talk to Jess. And I guess this was over the Christmas holidays, and Kennedy was at Sun Valley.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURNS: He came down here and, reconstructing it, I think it was January 4 that he and Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] were in town. Jess and I and Jack Crose [Jack C. Crose] met with Kennedy out at the International Hotel. At that time, you know, clearly Kennedy was interested in becoming a candidate, and he was exploring possibilities. He was interested to know if Jess would aid him in the exploratory process, so to speak, and go around and talk with people. That was quite a long conversation on a lot of subjects,

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one of which was polling.

Out of that conversation, a decision to poll the state for Unruh and Kennedy was taken, and Jess said that he would do that. We talked about pollsters, and we had had contact with John Kraft [John F. Kraft] by then. We knew he was highly regarded by the Kennedys and that if the polls came out the way we thought they were, we wanted to have it done by somebody that had credibility in the Kennedy camp. So we suggested that we would use Kraft for the poll.

HACKMAN: But that poll was not just a Kennedy poll, then. That's also an Unruh poll in terms of the '68 Senate race?

BURNS: Yes, right.

HACKMAN: Okay. Who pays for the poll?

BURNS: We do.

HACKMAN: What other things were discussed at that conversation when he came in?

BURNS: The question of the whole problem of running for the presidency against an incumbent president of your own party. The difficulties in doing that. How you would go about making contact with people, and the question of whether Jess would do this or not. Jess' position sort of essentially was, "look, I want you to run for president. I think you should run for president. I'm for you if you run for president. But I don't want to be out asking people to support a person who hasn't made up his own mind. You've got to make up your mind before you can effectively get people out soliciting help for you."

He did give the Senator a commitment at that time that he would support him, but was less enthusiastic about trying to drum up other people. Although it was right after that conversation that Jess did move, out here, to try to hold people back from the Johnson delegation, both privately—which he did a lot of—and a little bit publicly, just to kind of keep the door open.

HACKMAN: At that time, did Robert Kennedy clearly propose that Unruh go around and see some other people?

BURNS: Well, Robert Kennedy, in the very limited dealings I had with him, was so different about asking anybody to do anything for him that it didn't come out as a hard request at all. It came out as he would appreciate it if you could do it without hurting yourself type of thing, which I

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considered one of his greatest appeals—his approach in that fashion. And Jess read that into it. But it was never laid out that coldly.

HACKMAN: Any discussion, or does Robert Kennedy or Edelman talk at that point about who within the Kennedy camp was for and against running? Can you remember?

BURNS: There was some discussion back and forth on that, but not too much, and not a lot of discussion about personalities. It was sort of—the impression was that most people didn't think he should. But not a lot of specific talk about people as such. And in fact, I'd say at that stage of the game—January 4th—we were not as aware as we later became of the very sharp differences of opinion and the conflicts.

HACKMAN: Can you remember discussing other leading Democrats around the country at that point? Daley [Richard J. Daley], Tate [James H.J. Tate], Barr [Joseph M. Barr], Labor, whatever?

BURNS: Yes, again in a generalized sense that nothing much had been done with those people, with the exception perhaps of Daley, who Kennedy basically felt would be somewhat friendly, or at least not hostile. But a recognition that an awful lot of those alliances or lines of communication had been dropped, and there was a tremendous amount of work that had to be done with all of those people.

That was sort of the gist of the conversation with Jess, that perhaps he could talk to some of these people where the line was down and see what was going on and where they did stand. Because I don't think that the Senator really knew where he was with an awful lot of them and perhaps had been a little bit encouraged by the fact that out here, at least, some people that ideologically you might not have expected to be for him were, and he thought maybe there was some hope in other places, too.

HACKMAN: What were your thoughts at the time on McCarthy's [Eugene J. McCarthy] challenge to Johnson? Was there any discussion of that at that time? What Kennedy might do in that regard and what Unruh might do and how that would tie in?

BURNS: I think our feeling at that time was pretty much conventional wisdom in that we thought the McCarthy challenge was doomed to failure. The challenge should be made, but it wasn't going to be a responsible, effective challenge and that, if anything, it might well be damaging to the cause that it purportedly was for. And that McCarthy would not be an effective challenger, and even some speculation as to

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what his motivations were and why he was in there, what that was all about.

HACKMAN: What did Robert Kennedy feel on that? [Interruption]

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

BURNS: ...in the sense that under our laws out here, if you weren't on the ballot, you were going to lose the California delegation, and we felt that we could win the California delegation rather handily, and that to wait till the convention was way too late—it was long gone by then. That the challenge had to come up early, and it had to come in the primaries, because you lost too many states by not doing it that way.

HACKMAN: Was there ever any push, from your point of view, for Robert Kennedy to enter New Hampshire or Wisconsin, any of the other ones? Can you remember those being batted around?

BURNS: No, not really in that conversation on the fourth. I think that that was discussed a little later on. But the principal discussion was that you couldn't afford to throw away California, and that your California timetable was early March. It was almost as early a decision as came along. You could almost be in everything else if you were in California and that therefore, the time for a decision was coming. That you didn't have that much more time, that you maybe could fool around for another two or three weeks, but by the end of January, you would have to decide. Because if you were going to go, it had to be in the primaries.

HACKMAN: What further conversations take place, I guess primarily with his staff, through the rest of January? My understanding is that you were in contact with Edelman, or Dolan, or someone like that.

BURNS: Well, what happened next was, of course, right after that conversation, when I made contact with John Kraft and he came out here. Around the tenth of the month—yeah, January 10—we had the details of the poll worked out. Kraft came in and we worked out the questions and the format, and he went into the field. Then there was further discussion, say between that January 4 date and around and through the twentieth of the month.

There was a big state committee meeting in Fresno on January 13 and 14 and Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was out here. That had gotten sort of sticky because we were trying to stay away from Humphrey and yet not create an open split in the party out here, so it was sort of a waltzing-around time with conversations back and forth.

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I don't think there was a lot of staff conversations at that time, but some time prior to the nineteenth of January we were asked to come back to Washington to meet with Kennedy and other people to discuss the thing in more detail. And that was the weekend of January 19 to the 22. We went back. At that time there was—aside from Kennedy and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]—Jack Crose and I and Jess went. Kenny O'Donnell was there, and

Sorensen, Steve Smith, Burke Marshall. During one meeting, it was obvious that people were sort of coming in and out because later the next day when we were leaving, Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] was arriving, and so it was obviously a major gathering time for Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Was Larry O'Brien around at all?

BURNS: No. And there certainly wasn't any conversation with O'Brien during any of that time about what Jess was going to be doing. Because Larry was postmaster general at the time.

HACKMAN: Was there any....

BURNS: I shouldn't say that there weren't conversations with Larry O'Brien. There certainly were. But they were on different subjects. It was like—what was Jess going to be doing in conjunction with the Johnson campaign, because O'Brien was involved in the question of putting the California delegation together.

HACKMAN: Can you remember where the various people who attended that meeting stood? Or could you get a clear idea from Burke Marshall?

BURNS: Yeah. No, it was a pretty clear-cut sort of meeting because we had come in, I guess, on the Redeye [night flight from California] on Friday night and had gone to bed there at Kennedy's house. And the meeting started in the early afternoon, or around noon time, maybe two o'clock. I don't remember the time of day. I remember sacking in in the morning and getting some sleep. And when we sat down to talk, it became fairly apparent to me that the people for Bob running were Ethel and the kids, and Jess. And that was about it. Sorensen was very much opposed and argued it well. Kenny O'Donnell's position was that he was ready to march at any time but he was unenthusiastic, sort of like not wanting to throw cold water on the idea, but doing nothing to encourage it. Burke Marshall's position, I think, was the same—very cautious and reserved, as was Steve's. Sorensen really was leading the arguments against, but there wasn't any question that insofar as their indirect comments, Marshall, O'Donnell, and Steve felt the

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same way and were bringing out the liabilities all the way around.

HACKMAN: Was Dutton around any of those two days?

BURNS: No. I saw Dutton very shortly thereafter in Washington. Can't think—I know what the occasion was—it was when John Reilly [John R.

Reilly] quit the Federal Trade Commission and Bob came to his party; I was there and Fred was there. Fred and I got into quite a long discussion at that time. I never formed a clear opinion of what Fred's position was. I sort of got the impression that he was not pushing for running, either, but that he was doing it cautiously. I just really couldn't read Fred at that time.

HACKMAN: Any one at all saying that if Robert Kennedy goes in, Johnson might drop out and run from the fight?

BURNS: I don't think so. I don't think that that was a principal assumption on anybody's part. Certainly not on mine.

HACKMAN: Any conversations with Salinger?

BURNS: No. Not, at least, in any depth. You know, again it might have been casual comments, but all of these things were kept very close. In other words, we didn't know who we were free to talk to. We were asked not to talk, so Jess and Crose and I were kind of holding it in out here, and unless we met somebody in Kennedy's presence and he discussed it, we didn't really feel free. That's why the discussions, even with Dutton, were very awkward because I didn't know whether Fred knew that we had been to Bob's house. I didn't know whether I was supposed to tell him or not. And he wasn't talking, either. So we both might have felt the same things but there was not communication. And we didn't feel that we could do anything—other than just a little bit of floating around out here to keep everybody from lining up behind Johnson, to keep things a little loose—we just kind of waited along.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about the efforts in California to keep people off the Johnson slate? Who can you recall that you were particularly successful with? And who wouldn't pay any attention to you?

BURNS: Well, all Jess was really able to do on it—there was no way of going to individual people—he was able to tell some of the legislators that he knew and

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trusted that he hoped that Kennedy would be a candidate, and if they could, to hang loose. And he floated that out a little bit in the corridors in Sacramento so that the press picked it up. And then he kind of, you know, wish-washed around in the press statement. But it got out—the concept that Jess thought or hoped that Senator Kennedy might become a candidate, and that he was holding back. Then the response to inquiries on that was very, very difficult.

If Lew Wasserman called up and said, "What's that mean?" well, you were really stuck. You didn't have any authorization to say anything to those people, so you just had to say, "Well, gee, it's a gut feeling." Or, "You can't ever tell." Or, "Politics is a funny thing." And, "Don't get frozen in." So, it was an awkward time for Jess insofar as handling that. And

it wasn't long after this—well, I note here, his being in Washington around the nineteenth to the twenty-second. Then the next weekend, Jess had a dinner out here on the twenty-sixth, which was a testimonial dinner in his honor, a major fundraiser, at the Century Plaza. And Steve Smith [East; Stephen E. Smith] was going to be coming out for it.

Well, during the course of that week, between the twentieth and the twenty-sixth, Steve called Jess—there were many calls back and forth then—but Steve did call and say, “He’s not going to go. The decision is made. And do you still want me to come out anyway?” And I remember calling Steve back on that and saying, “Yes, come out anyway.” Because, again, decisions to do or not to do something change and we felt, you know, why not come? There was absolutely no harm in Steve coming and that if he didn’t come, that would further give emphasis that there was a final decision, no. We had not gotten the poll back by then. We were arguing, well, “You know, wait a while. We’ll get some results and let’s talk about it when we have something to talk about other than just speculation on the thing.”

HACKMAN: Did Smith ever say why the decision had definitely been made at that point not to run?

BURNS: Oh, a lot of reasons were given, I guess. And I don’t particularly remember them, but I guess that all of the concepts of challenging an incumbent president, all of the things we talked to Bob about when he was out here on the fourth. He was terribly concerned about the fact that the people that marched with him—that the retaliation against him could destroy all of their careers. It was going to be a hideously unpleasant sort of battle. The power of the presidency was so great and the things that the President could do for or to a politician—or to anybody that had a desire to hold public elective office—were so enormous that even to ask people to support him was to ask them essentially to commit suicide, political suicide. He was very reluctant and concerned

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about all of that—reluctant about and concerned about his effect, you know, what effect this had on the country and if it wasn’t totally divisive and not serving a valid purpose to challenge. That his challenge would throw the election automatically to the Republicans and instead of improving the situation in Vietnam, or whatever, was going to make it worse. There was a lot of talk about, well, we’ll negotiate with Johnson and get a softening of the Vietnam position, which just struck me as the biggest lot of crap in the whole world, you know, to even approach it on that basis.

HACKMAN: Did he ever say how he hoped to do that at that point?

BURNS: I don’t think that Senator Kennedy ever said that. That was more people around him and I can’t even remember now who was going to put that together, whether that was Sorensen or not. I don’t remember the grouping of people that approached it that way. I know there were those that disagreed

with that. And I remember talking with Kenny O'Donnell, who I am sure was not a part of that operation—I know, because he had some strong feelings on it, too.

HACKMAN: I understand at the meeting at Hickory Hill there was sort of a back and forth between Jess Unruh and Sorensen refuting each other's motives, or something. Can you answer that?

BURNS: No. I...

HACKMAN: Or is that inaccurate?

BURNS: I don't think that there was a back and forth. It was a pretty gentlemanly discussion all the way around. It was just a question of—well, I think our argument was, “what the hell are you saving yourself for? “You know—talking about Knute Rockne [Knute Kenneth Rockne] and the senior prom—that this was the time. And at that stage of the game somebody—I guess the kids, you know—rolled down a sign from the upstairs window and somebody put on *Man From La Mancha* and turned up the volume full blast. And all of this was going on insofar as the—so there was a lot of conversation about that would be the theme song of the campaign.

But certainly there was a definite disagreement between the position we had and what Sorensen was really presenting on behalf of the other people. The sharpest exchange that I recall was with Ethel's comments, because after Sorensen had really presented a very articulate argument she said, “Why, Ted. And after

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all those high flown phrases you wrote for President Kennedy.” And she really chopped him off right at the ankles. That was the exchange I remember, because it made me wince and it wasn't even said to me.

But it was a serious discussion and I think everybody there recognized that you were talking about taking an extremely big step. And one that would be very, very difficult for a lot of people. It was going to put an awful lot of people's feet to the fire.

HACKMAN: Had you done any checking at all with the California congressional delegation to see who might support a challenge there?

BURNS: We felt that there was little hope of getting many California congressmen. They were—congressmen are all affected with the Washington syndrome and they think that all power resides there. And we knew that, at best, there'd be two or three congressmen that would march against the President.

HACKMAN: Were you getting any indication in, say, that January, February period from either Lyndon Johnson or the White House staff? Sort of warnings, either open or sort of....

BURNS: Yeah, there was a dual series of conversations going on, starting in mid-December, when the issue of putting a delegation together out here on the President's behalf was going on. And that was coming. Of course, they approached Lynch, like in mid-December, and he went back there. Now, we had very close relationships with Lynch and with people on his staff. And so, sort of indirectly, I was a party to those conversations. At the same time, I had direct contact with Marvin Watson and John Criswell, particularly Criswell, and rather frequent meetings with him [Criswell] during this period of time, culminating in a very long meeting with Jess and the President in the end of January on the whole subject.

So you really had both things going at the same time, and we were just staying off the presidential delegation. And there was this constant attempt to box Jess into a position where he had to go aboard or he would be considered a party-wrecker again, which was a charge that Jess was very sensitive to because it had been leveled so many times.

HACKMAN: Is that something that the President would say to Jess Unruh when he was talking to him?

BURNS: No, no. The President did not talk to him until the end of January. This was more the maneuverings that was going on. They were lining up all of the names.

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And then the varying people out here were pushing Jess, well, get aboard—your political future's on the line. We were getting sort of an emissary-a-day type of approach, and from people that were close to Jess in one way or another. So that the pressure was on. But it was being put on in a gradually increasing fashion from all directions, all the way around the clock, and without the President doing it directly. I think the schedule for meeting with the President was probably set up around the time that Steve Smith came out here for the dinner. In fact, my recollection is—let's see here.

HACKMAN: Lou Cannon [Lou S. Cannon; in *Ronnie and Jesse*] has a date of February 4 for a meeting, I believe.

BURNS: Yes, that's correct. I went to Washington on January 30, and was there and met with Criswell and with varying White House staff people for several days. I was there on business and doing that. I'm not terribly sure it isn't during that time that John Reilly had his party. Yes, it was during that time that I saw Dutton and Kennedy. But we had several conversations at great length on the California thing, and the question always was, "Will Jess support the President? Will he go on the delegation? You know, what's your problem? Will he run for senator?" And I was just trying to not get into fights, really, but not to get committed, either.

Well, Criswell finally got it around to the fact that would—Jess meet with the President? And that got a little sticky and I had to allow as how he would. That was set up for

the weekend of February 3 and 4. Jess was going to be East that weekend, anyway; in fact, we'd had an appointment for the third to meet with John Kraft in New York to get the poll results and to meet with Steve. So it was set up for one of those marvelous weekends. We were going to see Kraft and Smith on Saturday, and the President on Sunday. And of course, during the course of that week, I'd been in Washington and seen the White House people and, of course, seen the Senator and Dutton and varied Kennedy people. And everything was bubbling at that time. Because although we had received the word from Steve that it was definitely no, there were certainly those people around the Senator who had not accepted that as an answer.

Not, though, people that we had any contact with—at that stage of the game, I didn't have any relationship with Adam Walinsky or Peter Edelman. I mean, I knew who they were, but no communication. Fred's position was inscrutable; I didn't know whether he was pro or con. And I wasn't about to ask—and he wasn't calling us on the thing—so I wasn't saying much of anything to him. And you felt that O'Donnell and some of the other people were not wildly enthusiastic. Certainly Steve, who I was talking to the most daring that period of time—was always arguing that this would throw the

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election to Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon]; it would be bad for the country, bad for everybody that'd ever been a friend of the Kennedys. And I could never tell whether Steve was just seeing if I'd argue back with him. You know, he's so damn cool that I've never been able to read Steve.

So I'd report to Jess that I didn't know what the hell a conversation meant—that Steve said A, B, C, and D but I didn't know what he meant, except that we were just continuing the idea of going ahead with it. And then we got the poll results in New York on that Saturday, talked to Steve about them, and then Jess called Bob down in Florida. Got him off the tennis courts, gave him the results, and his comment was, "You son of a bitch! Why did you have to tell me that?" But I think that's when he turned back around again. I think that was a critical call in reversing the "don't run" process. Because the results were damn favorable and would indicate that on a three-way race, he was going to win rather handily.

HACKMAN: Can you remember from listening to that phone conversation any other reasons that had turned Robert Kennedy around? The Tet offensive had just taken place and...

BURNS: It was just starting.

HACKMAN: No real....

BURNS: Nobody knew what was going on. I think it started like that Friday.

HACKMAN: That's right, yeah.

BURNS: Because when we were in the White House on Sunday, nobody knew

what it meant yet, either—including the President—or the extent of it.

But I don't think that that had made an impact at all. I think that if Bob started to turn back around, it was his own basic desire or feeling that he should run. Maybe his "feeling" rather than "desire" is a better word. And just the idea that not running just didn't basically fit his nature, I think. But it was clearly a back and forth situation.

I think the poll type of thing, well—I don't believe that that is the type of thing that changes a man's mind about running for the office of the presidency. I don't think it had a God damn thing to do with Bob Kennedy's personal decision. But I think that that type of thing, the support of a Jess Unruh, a demonstrable political argument that he could make, gave him something to talk about with other people. And I think therefore it was significant, not on his thought process, but on his ability to deal with other people around him, and to say, "look, this isn't totally screwy. The people really think I might be a

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good president. There are a few political leaders around the country that are willing to march. And maybe if we asked a few more, they might be willing to, too. So don't just throw cold water automatically on the thing."

HACKMAN: What did that poll show in terms of Unruh's own possible Senate race out here? And how important is that to a final decision not to run?

BURNS: The poll was fascinating. It indicated that Max Rafferty [Max L. Rafferty] was going to beat Tommy Kuchel [Thomas H. Kuchel], very narrowly. The figures were like: 40 percent Kuchel; 30 percent Rafferty, and the rest undecided. Yet Kraft drew out of it, and said, if he had to make a prediction, he would predict 51-49 Rafferty, which is what it turned out.

HACKMAN: Yeah, that was pretty good.

BURNS: Jess had the Democratic thing hands down, beat Rafferty easily. Kuchel, obviously—if Kuchel were the Republican primary winner, he was going to win as far as that poll was concerned. The key decision was whether you wanted to run the risk of the Republican primary. Our feeling was that if Rafferty didn't win it, it was going to be right down the wire because Kuchel had estranged himself from the Republican voter, and therefore, that was a very serious consideration. We didn't have the final meeting on that until late in February, because the polling that Kraft did was in two stages. [BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I]

Yeah, I see here that Kraft came out here on March 2 with the final report on the thing. And then we went into a whole other round of things. But after the conversations with Kennedy on that weekend of the third and fourth of February, the next day we went down to the White House. It was Jess and I, and John Criswell, and Arthur Krim [Arthur B. Krim], and the President. We went into the mansion itself initially.

The Tet offensive was just going on; the President was on the phone very frequently during the course of the meeting, to the Situation Room, and was obviously very deeply

involved in it. That conversation went on for an hour or so, at which time the President decided, you know, let's take a walk. So we all went out for a walk, and when we got around toward the Oval Office, he just took Jess by the arm and they disappeared into the office and stayed there for about four hours. My knowledge of that conversation is secondhand, because I was sitting there with Criswell and Krim who were getting progressively more nervous by the minute, until they finally asked us back in and then we all talked for a little while and then we left.

But there wasn't any question at all that Lyndon Johnson was running for president on that date—tough, hard, and very, very

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capable. He was using all of his political talents upon Jess, and effectively. I mean, he was not making silly appeals or doing anything unintelligent; it was a very well done performance. He wasn't bullying Jess, or pushing him. He was asking for his support, hoping that he could serve on his delegation, encouraging him to run for the Senate and promising him support on that, and ticking off Arthur Krim to work with us on people out in California that the President could influence to help. All that sort of thing. It was a masterful performance in the sense of trying to pick off somebody politically.

HACKMAN: Were the details of that reported to Robert Kennedy or to his staff?

BURNS: I'm sure—I have to think now, how the timetable went there. I did not talk to Senator Kennedy again personally, I do not believe, until March. I'm sure Jess did. I know I talked to Steve Smith. I did not have any conversations with the staff on it. I think the only conversations I had were with Steve. And certainly the substance of the meeting with Johnson was communicated.

HACKMAN: Did Jess Unruh ever ask Robert Kennedy for his view on whether or not he should run for the Senate in '68? Do you remember what his response was?

BURNS: If I do, if he did, I don't recall. It was not a—Jess was really so emotionally involved in the presidential thing that most of the discussion about running for the Senate kind of took place in the backwater time. And I don't think that he ever discussed it with Senator Kennedy.

HACKMAN: What can you remember, then, the rest of February?

BURNS: The rest of February was just a waiting process. I can remember being sort of up and down. One day we'd think, by golly, it's going to go. The next day we'd think not. I'm sure at that stage of the game, I must have been having a billion phone calls with all sorts of people connected with Kennedy in one way or another. I know at the same time I was having conversations with Criswell and

Krim and all those people about running for the Senate, and what they could or couldn't do for us in that regard.

I just remember it as being a totally busy time, but nothing of any great significance. It would trend one way one day and the other way the next. Jess I'm sure, had several conversations during that time with Bob. I know I had several with Steve Smith. And I think that, you know, Kraft was re-polling, at that time. We meeting scheduled out here for March 2, when we were to get the final results. And we had set a meeting where

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when we would make a decision as to what we were going to do. We were right up to the wire. And also we kept informing Kennedy that he was right up to the wire, because you had to get on the ballot, and time was just about to run out.

It was our decision that if you let California run out, forget it, and I suspect that our position was hardening at that time on him. I don't really recall this, but I know it must have come through. Because I know Jess felt—and know I felt—very, very strongly that, you know, boy, you don't just willy-nilly ask somebody to run or president. It's a god-awful thing for anybody to have to do, and so there was a tremendous reluctance to push him—at the same time you wanted to push. So there was a back and forth emotionally on our part, too, on the thing, and a recognition of what the hell it did all involve and what the hell he'd be getting into—a very squeezey thing.

But I'm sure as February went along, we must have, apparently at least, indicated that, “look, if you didn't go in California, we were just out of it. We couldn't help any more.” Because that would have been pretty much a political reality, if our own delegation was lost, and Johnson had it for free, Jess' ability to help would have been virtually shot. You know, he wouldn't have even been a delegate to the convention. We had made the decision not to go on the Johnson delegation in any form. That had long been, well, you know, settled. So if Kennedy didn't run, Jess wasn't going to be in Chicago—at least not in any fashion where he could do anything worthwhile. So I'm sure we were making the argument, “if you threw away California, how the hell could you hope to recoup it at some later stage in the game?”

But all was done with very mixed emotions and with a feeling that if you in fact—well, whenever you really hit resistance—sort of backing off because it wasn't one of those things you really wanted to go in and yell and scream about. The next sort of clear thing was that meeting out here March 2 with Kraft to go over all of the final poll things and make the decision on Jess' part. After we'd gone through the meeting, Jess talked to both Bob and Steve at some length on the phone. You know, we were talking to everybody around the country at that stage of the game on all sides to try to figure the situation and figure the Republican situation, too.

But the figures were given back again, which were even better than the original go around. And at that time—I think that was a Saturday and Wednesday was the last day to do something as far as getting on the ballot out here—and so it was presented with the idea of now is the time—and it was accepted. Bob's comments were that he would be back to Jess the next day with the final decision on the thing. I would say at that stage in the game—hell, I don't know—I guess maybe the best thing to say was that we were trying to know.

I don't know whether we thought was going to run or not. I guess we thought he was, but it was sort of like out of our

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hands in a sense, you know. I don't know as I would have been wildly surprised either way, or either excited or depressed. By that time, the thing had kind of gone on long enough, you were sort of emotionally drained on it. And you were just going to be told something, and that was going to be it.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURNS: And then—I believe it was Monday morning, on the fourth—that Bob called Jess and said, “Okay, get me on the ballot. But...”

HACKMAN: That's a call directly from Robert Kennedy to Unruh?

BURNS: Right. “But don't get caught at it,” was what he said. And Jess called me and said, “Bob says get him on the ballot, but we can't get caught at it.” That was on Monday; it was Wednesday that was the last day. And so I then made contact with Bill Norris [William Albert Norris], who—it occurred to me that the Committee of California group was the group that would be the most desirable to front. They were not considered Unruh people but yet they were responsible, liberal, good-image guys. It was sort of a...

HACKMAN: That's Harmon [Robert L. Harmon] and Leydecker [Byron W. Leydecker] and all?

BURNS: Yeah. And Warren Christopher [Warren M. Christopher] and Vic Palmieri [Victor H. Palmieri] and Bill Norris, Alan Becker [Alan D. Becker]. Really the younger, better people of the Brown administration. Sort of the people that had risen from the ashes a little bit. And we had a good relationship with them, but it would not be considered that this was an Unruh front group doing it. At the same time, as a backup—and this just got totally screwed up, because then Dolan and Mankiewicz were on the phone and gosh, I can remember a monumental argument with them, with Dolan because he....

Well, the other group I got cranked up was the Citizens for Kennedy people, with Clayton Rost [Clayton O. Rost], who was connected with—what was that guy from Oregon, ex-congressman [Inaudible], Head of National Citizens for Kennedy? Anyway, there was a group here which were just people. You know, they were school teachers and students, and what have you. But an ideal front group to do it. Rost, who had been a delegate to the '60 convention and was really the only person that had any political understanding of the thing, had by that time been rebuffed so many times by the Kennedy operation that he really wasn't going to buy it. And he called Joe Dolan to say were going to do this. And Dolan told him not to “Well, you know,” he said “Fine. To hell with it.

I'm not going to." And I had a fit about that. So he finally got three of his people to do it. Fortunately, Jack Crose found three of the gals in Sacramento to do it. Which was fortunate, because the lawyers screwed up the God damn filing, and Bobby's name would have never been on the ballot, and we'd have lost the election, if it hadn't been for the little old ladies.

I can't conceive of how that ever happened at all, because they didn't even think they had done it that way. At least they swore they didn't think they had done it. But they filed the God damn thing wrong.

HACKMAN: But the little old ladies are clearly Rost's people, then?

BURNS: They were Clayton Rost's, yes. But Rost finally took the position that he'd be damned if he was going to drive over to Sacramento and do it because he figured we didn't know what we were talking about. And Joe Dolan had told him no, and all that sort of thing—or Kennedy's office had told him no. So he said, "Well, I'll give you the names of the people in Sacramento." So Jack Crose actually, in fact, did it mechanically, and got the gals together and got them to sign the thing and to file it.

And I remember, by Tuesday—or maybe it was Wednesday—Dolan calling out here. We were going back and forth, you know, all Tuesday. It was Tuesday night that I first made—Monday night that I started on this. And during the day on Tuesday.... Initially, I don't believe that Dolan and Mankiewicz—or at least I'm sure Dolan—did not know that we'd been asked to do this. Because he was pretty hostile about, you know—"what the hell was going on out there? And who's this guy Rost and why is he calling me?" And then by Wednesday, Joe had been clued in apparently, so then he's calling, you know, "Is it filed?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Well, God damn it, you're pretty casual about all this sort of thing. For Christ's sake, we're talking about the presidency." I said, "Don't yell at me, you son of a bitch. We've been through this for months." And we had a big exchange. Because the papers were lost, you know. The God damn guys in San Francisco—their car broke down driving over, or something.

Anyway, we had staff people waiting at the Secretary of State's office to make sure they got there and filed it. But it was about like three in the afternoon on the last day that they finally got there with the papers. Well, we got the little ladies in, and they were so befuddled and bemused as to what was going on that they didn't really—they were somewhat concerned. We had to come a lot more open on that than we really wanted to, because Jack Crose was just physically taking them there and he was taking them into the Secretary of State's office, where he'd had some personal relationships, and getting the stuff processed.

And it wasn't going to be too hard to trace it right straight back to the Speaker's office on that one. But we were—everybody was really getting frantic. I'm sitting down here and Jess is trying to stay out of sight up there. So he's calling me down here to find out what I know

about what's going on up there. And, Jesus, it was just a really screwed up thing. Anyway, we finally got them both filed.

HACKMAN: Let me just get back to one other thing. In your conversations with Criswell and Krim and whoever, what kinds of things were they saying they could do for you in California in terms of a Senate race? You said you were trying to get some feel for that.

BURNS: Oh, that they could help us with those people who were the President's friends out here—essentially the major Democratic figures out here, which we didn't have a big relationship with. In other words, if we were running for the Senate, that they could assure us that there'd be a united party. That Jess wouldn't just be running with the faction of the party that he had. That if we were all marching together, and Jess was supporting the President, that the President would be supporting him. And that...

HACKMAN: Was that primarily in terms of funds, from what most people call the checkbook Democrats, who might not have been...

BURNS: I think so, yes. Yes, that would be taking Hillcrest Country Club and turning it around, putting it—supporting us. You know, leaning on Wyman [Eugene L. Wyman], and Al Hart, people like that, that might otherwise have openly supported Kuchel. Or certainly, would not have supported Jess.

HACKMAN: When do you finally get a definite word from Robert Kennedy that he's running there? Maybe I should ask you first what else you can just remember up to the time you do get a final word. What else in early March goes on?

BURNS: Well, the sixth, I think, was the day we filed the delegation papers. And during that time, I had conversations also with Steve, and Steve told me that he was going to dispatch Johnny Nolan [John E. Nolan] out here to meet with us to talk about putting a delegation together, and who should be on it. So Nolan was here the weekend of the ninth through the eleventh and again at the International Hotel. Jess and I and Crose and Nolan met and I believe he met with Bill Norris—or he had known Norris so they—maybe Norris was there.

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Anyway, we had a couple of secretaries out there, and we just went through every damn name we could think of in the state, as to who might be willing to support Kennedy, to create a laundry list delegation to send back with Nolan for the people back there to review as to what they thought of the thing and to add names and comments. I think the first official word, flat word, that Bob was definitely going to run, came on the eleventh, the day before

the New Hampshire primary. It was on Monday, the eleventh, or at least that's what Jess told me. It could have been the Sunday night before, that Bob told him.

HACKMAN: Do you know how it came? Directly from Robert Kennedy?

BURNS: Yes. Kennedy called Jess, told him he was going to run for sure. By that time, you know, Jess had had, during the course of that week from the fourth to the eleventh, several conversations, and I'd had several with Steve. We'd filed the papers and we were putting a delegation together. We were cranked up. So it didn't come as a great thunderbolt announcement. It was just a confirmation of things—once Bob had called Jess on the fourth to say, "Get me on the ballot"—whether Bob knew he was running or not, he was. He had in fact gotten himself committed by that act. I'm sure, emotionally, he may have still been arguing, but we'd considered that that was the decision. And that the call on the eleventh, formalizing that decision, was really the signing of the orders that had already been made. Because it would have been, I think, very unlikely for him to have backed down after Nolan had been here and was actually in fact here and all of that.

So, Jess called me sometime on that Monday to say that it was formal. I think a date like the twenty-third or something had been agreed on—I don't remember the date—for the announcement. But it was later than, in fact, happened, because then the next day was New Hampshire, and I know Jess and Bob had a couple of conversations that day, and well into the night, because that threw everybody's thinking out of whack. Bob was very concerned of how the hell did he announce now, when he would appear to be coming in and running over McCarthy. And that it would look so bad.

The decision was, of course, that you'd already made the decision to run, and you just had to go ahead, but to speed up the timetable. That, of course, really speeded up things out here, because we had a complex procedure where you had to get petitions signed; you had to first pick the delegation and they had to sign their names—a tremendous amount of work. This decision on the twelfth to escalate it just shoved the timetable way up. Because they were, you know—we hadn't even gotten the list back insofar as delegates, or anything proceeding at a more leisurely pace. Once the New Hampshire thing, the whole

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question of—that's when Pierre came into it very heavily. From the twelfth through the announcement, I had several conversations with Pierre, and that's when I remember his heavy participation with me.

HACKMAN: Was that in terms of selection of the delegation? Or on what?

BURNS: No, it was more in terms of when should Bob announce, timetable of announcement, how that keyed in with what we had to do, and how we had to put a delegation together. It was sort of like, "for Christ's sake, put a delegation together. We don't have time to worry about the details, just do it. And do it yesterday. And why are you so slow on it?" And then talking about when he should make his

first swing out here, and all of that sort of thing. When could we be ready, because we wanted him out here quickly, but we wanted at least to have the delegates selected so we could get petitions signed in conjunction with his being here. So we had to get the delegates selected, qualified, the petitions printed, and all of that sort of thing done.

HACKMAN: Can you remember in terms of—at the time either when Nolan was out here early, and then when the list went back and then a final agreement was made on who should be on the list of delegates, what problems there were, if any, in deciding who should be on it?

BURNS: Multitudinous problems, but not the kind of problems that you'd think. The problem was then, since our timetable was escalated, who the heck could we get on it? The timing really went: Nolan being here the ninth to eleventh; on the eleventh—or ninth and tenth—I guess on the eleventh, Kennedy announcing that he was going to go; on the twelfth, New Hampshire; and on the sixteenth, Bob announced. Well, between Tuesday and Saturday, all planning was scrapped and redone about three different times. At that stage of the game, the conversations were timing Bob's announcement and his first swing to California, and when we could get a delegation qualified and have petitions ready and all of that sort of thing. It then became a question of how fast can you do it? The whole thing became an issue of moving as rapidly as possible.

So it was just decided to go ahead, and when we would hold a press conference over here. Jess held one right following Kennedy's announcement to announce the formation of the delegation here. We grabbed some staff guys, grabbed the people we could get a hold of, and got a wing of the International Hotel, and just moved in. And moved in, I guess Thursday or started putting phones in and moving people. Just calling

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everybody we could get a hold of to say, "Come in and help." Then Nolan came back. Got here around the sixteenth, I guess. I'm not sure the exact date that he did come back. He brought back—well, nobody had really done anything with the list. Pierre had looked it over, and didn't have much in the way of comments on it, and that whole process was just scrapped. It became a question of going through the congressional districts and getting the people, because we have this situation where you had to have four delegates who lived in each of the congressional districts. So you had real problems.

We had set a timetable then of the following Monday to have the delegation selected. We worked sort of around the clock over the weekend, and we had to get the forms printed and get ahold of people and get them in to sign, because they all had to sign a verified petition that they agreed to serve. So we had people running all over the state to get signatures, and to get the thing put together. It was just tremendously harassing at that time. I'd say the conflicts then were more over who could we get ahold of. The argument kept—somebody would say, "We ought to get so-and-so." Everybody was feeling a little short-tempered, and the answer would be, "Well, God damn it, don't tell me about that. Get him. Get him signed up. Don't bother me with the details. We've got to have a hundred and fifty-six people"—or whatever number it is. I don't remember it.

HACKMAN: A hundred and seventy-two, I think.

BURNS: Yeah, a hundred and seventy-two. “We’ve got to have them by Monday. Let’s make sure that we don’t have too many convicted felons, and things like that, on the list. Let’s get the best group we can get under the notice.” We were concerned about trying to get some cross-sectional representation. The labor problem was massive, because we wanted labor people on. That was extremely difficult. We were trying every labor guy we could get a hold of. We did decide to put a student group on. We did... [BEGIN SIDE II TAPE II]...but he [Clayton Rost] was also concerned that some of his key people were on the delegation. So I worked out some arrangement with him where he’d get ten or twelve of his people to be delegates, and we were doing that sort of thing. We went through the officeholders in the state. We wanted to get as many officeholders as possible to try to give the thing as much power as we possibly could. We tried to get as many assemblymen, state senators, mayors, or public officials as you could get, and congressmen. Certainly insofar as the congressmen were concerned, we were very solicitous of them. Phil Burton [Phillip Burton] showed up and spent a couple of days on the delegate thing, because he had a big interest in it. We have two Congressmen and we were going to be damn nice to them. Jess and Burton and Rees [Thomas M. Rees] were the incorporators—became the head of the thing.

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The issue of who should be on the delegation just did get wildly out of hand, because we had so many people making contact. The only way you could do it was to just fan everybody out soliciting for delegates, and then as it came back in, trying to pick the best four out of each congressional district of those people in an area that had indicated a willingness to serve. In most instances, our problem was not having too many people, it was not having enough. We had some real trouble in some of the outlying districts. We were overloaded with people in San Francisco and in good shape in Los Angeles, so we had some people reregistering. Bob Harmon, who had a place in Tahoe, registered up there, and went on the delegation from Tahoe. We did several things like that in northern California to cover the backcountry congressional districts.

In the final analysis, I guess starting Friday, we had meetings where quite a number of people were involved in it. Burton certainly was involved. Tom Rees was involved for awhile, Paul Schrade—oh, hell, a whole gang of people that were sort of in and out. Bill Norris was very much involved. Carmen Warschaw [Carmen H. Warschaw] was involved. Of course, you had an awful lot of people coming together who hadn’t spoken to each other for a long time, so things got fairly touchy. Nolan, of course, was sitting there watching this total ferment going on and people roaring in and out of the hotel and yelling and screaming and all of that sort of thing. We finally got it systematized where we had a different pile for each congressional district. In the final analysis, I guess somewhere along the line about Sunday, Jess had to go back to Sacramento. We didn’t have a delegation by then. We had a lot of people being contacted. We had so many cooks by then, it was really getting terribly confused.

Cröse and I just took all of the names into a great big suite at the end of the hotel, and locked everybody out, and took about six girls in there, and just picked the delegation. Pierre was there and very helpful, because he knew a lot of the players from his own experience, and had a real good grasp of what was going on in California. He was very helpful with Nolan, because Nolan would hear these conflicts and he didn't know how to resolve them, because he didn't know who was who. Pierre was able to help on a lot of that decision making, and very effectively, to get the thing moving. I guess about late Monday night, we'd pretty much wrapped it up and gotten the stuff up, I think, to the Secretary of State Tuesday or Wednesday.

HACKMAN: Were there many people that early trying to make end runs around and go back and call Steve Smith and Robert Kennedy and all these other people because they were upset about...

BURNS: Could well have been. But if they were, I wasn't

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aware of it. Because you simply didn't have time. We were working twenty-four hours a day. Everybody was sort of sleeping there on the floor, or wherever they could sleep. If there were a lot of end runs, I don't know.

I know that Nolan and I got down to the point where we were grating on each other somewhat. I remember one exchange when I told him that, "God damn it, what I didn't need help on was making decisions; I could make all the decisions in the world. What I needed help on was getting some people that wanted to help and could find some delegates. If we had a pile, I could make the judgments, and that I could do that accurately. What I needed was to get some names in and to stop the bickering about whether, you know, Susie was better than Rosie, when, in fact, nobody had been in touch with either one of them to know if they would in fact serve, or if they were even in the state. You know, let's get the affidavits in, and then we'll file the four best."

It was obviously a time when you get down to the point where there just isn't time to discuss it any more, you just have to do it. And I'm sure if we'd had more time, we could have had a better delegation, although I think just about everybody that was willing to serve was asked. We didn't have any big complaints, say, shortly thereafter, of somebody that popped up and said, "Boy, how come you didn't ask me?" In fact, there wasn't any pressure to get—by anybody—to get on the delegation from then until after the primary. Then, of course, everybody wanted that honor to come to them.

HACKMAN: What conversations had there been to this point with Robert Kennedy or with any of the people around him about how the campaign functioned in terms of how much independence you people would have to run it, who might come in from the outside, money, the whole thing?

BURNS: There really were almost no discussions on those issues, simply because the—up until say March 4, the whole issue had been, would

Kennedy run? We'd never raised any of those questions. Nobody had gotten around to thinking about any of that part of it. At least, if they had, we'd not been in any real discussion with them about it. We hadn't thought about it, either. During the course of that weekend, we were interviewing staff people to try to get a staff established immediately, because there were a billion things that had to be done. Steve had indicated that Nolan would have some seed money on the thing to get it started, or the ability to commit to hiring people.

There were sort of two sets of meetings going on that weekend: one on picking the delegation and the other on picking who you were going to get in to staff on it. We were trying to find a headquarters, trying to do everything all at the same

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time. We had different groups meeting at the same time. Manny Post [Manning Post] was out trying to find a headquarters, Seltzer [Arthur Seltzer] was trying to put a staff together, and those people were also involved in the delegation selection process. We were just in a turmoil on it. Pierre was there, and shortly thereafter Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] showed up, because [Interruption]...and all I really remember of it, as far as an overall impression, was that it was just total chaos between, say, March 12 and March 23, when Kennedy arrived here. There was just ten days of absolute confusion on it, during which time it really did all get put together. And it was a hell of a successful swing; in fact, it blew the state wide open. It worked out well.

So, I think there were a lot of conflicts during that time, but I don't think any that were tremendously serious other than Bill Norris and I had a fantastic fight. Now we're great friends and back together, but that fight happened sort of in the late stages of picking the delegation. I remember I just kicked him out. I said, "You know, we don't have time to argue about it any more." I threw him out of the room. Nolan was upset about that, and I said, "It's just down to the fact that we can't argue any more. We've just got to *do*. And we just have to take somebody's word for it. We have to come out the best way we can, and it's not going to be perfect."

Christ, I remember at the last minute, we still didn't have a delegate from San Bernadino. We finally got some housewife, absolutely just a plain housewife, who was the only person we could find in San Bernadino who wanted to be a delegate. Because so many people were saying, "Yeah, I want to." But they were hedging around, or they wouldn't show up, or they couldn't drive in, or whatever. So we wound up with some people as delegates that, under any normal selection process, would never even have been considered. It was simply an absolute imperative that we have a body that would sign an affidavit, and it didn't really make a hell of a lot of difference who they were by that time, because we had to get the thing filed with the Secretary of State and approved so we could print the petitions and have them available by Saturday so we could get the damn things signed.

HACKMAN: Did Dolan in fact have seed money, or was he able to commit it?

BURNS: Nolan.

HACKMAN: Nolan, I mean. Nolan.

BURNS: If he did; it was mighty small and kept well hidden. I think finally an account was opened, but with just a few bucks in it. Everything was really done on the cuff. Most of the stuff was—well, Jess had good credit,

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good political credit. The telephone company would put in the phones, and we could get the headquarters on our credit. So we didn't have to actually commit a lot of cash. Everybody knew Jess had raised a hell of a lot of money, and had a lot of money in the bank, and nobody was going to demand cash in advance, because Jess' reputation as a politician was such that he'd always paid his bills. So it operated on credit exclusively during that time, with one person or another personally guaranteeing it. I think Manny guaranteed the headquarters. I don't know who guaranteed the phone bill—probably whoever we could get who was standing there to sign it. That was all straightened out later on, once we'd formed a corporation.

HACKMAN: How was that budget drawn up? Now Lou Cannon again says there was an initial budget, or a budget some time in the early period, of 547,000 dollars. Is that something you put together?

BURNS: No. I don't know anything about that. I don't know where he got that from; he didn't get that from me. If there was a budget, it would be like you and I would sit down and say, "Well, what do you think the campaign will cost? Well, let's see—bumper strips, ten thousand; billboards, fifty thousand." If anybody drew up a budget, they didn't spend more than half an hour on it—just sort of things off the top of your head that you normally know are going to be run up in a political campaign. Certainly there was never any budget that I participated in drawing up that I was willing to say, "This is my budget. This is what I think," because I wasn't thinking about budget or anything like that.

You were thinking about the things that, if you didn't get them done in the next five minutes, you weren't even in the race. Those things were all going to be straightened out later on. It was just operated on, you know: "don't argue with me; rent a headquarters; don't worry about whether it's good or bad, we just have to have one." As it turned out, we wound up with a hell of a good headquarters. I know I did not go see the headquarters; Post found it, he said it was good. It was good enough for me. I said, "Rent it. We'll worry about the details and the lease and who's going to sign it and ail of that later on. Just give the owner a commitment and get the carpenters in."

HACKMAN: How did Art Seltzer and Steve Smith [Steven E. Smith] [West] and Ray King come in? How were they chosen? How did the Kennedy people get into the act?

BURNS: That was done during the course of the same weekend that we were picking the delegation, and this was really bringing people in to see Nolan. Art, we brought in as a suggestion of the guy to run it. Art at that

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time really came in as a volunteer. He said, "Look. I'll take it over for now. We can worry about whether you want to hire me or want me to do it, later." So he just sort of took charge as a volunteer to put a staff together. He didn't need the money and was not a professional campaign manager. Steve Smith we got down here; he was the only pro that was around that wasn't committed on something else. We grabbed him. We had a hell of a time in northern California because the Humphrey operation had really taken everything up, that...

HACKMAN: Johnson had done that.

BURNS: Yeah. Johnson had sucked up everything. So you just grabbed the first guy that came along and King was available, and had been a long time campaign-type up there—had run some statewide bond campaigns. So we just grabbed him. He came down here and I think the staff decisions were basically Nolan's. He personally interviewed the people, and he personally hired them. He was the hiring authority. I don't think he had a whole lot of choice in the sense that really we were dragging in those people for him to see, so it's hard to say. But nobody had, again, a lot of time to think about it.

My intention was focused primarily on getting a delegation and on getting somebody hired. It didn't really matter. We knew we had the Senator coming in less than a week and we had to have some people working. If they weren't any good, we could get somebody else two weeks later, but we had to do something during that time period. So we just grabbed those people that were immediately available. Pierre took over being press secretary. We were just sort of impressing people into service.

HACKMAN: How long did he stay down?

BURNS: Well, he was here and then he left—went back east and then came back again. He was here for four or five days, maybe about four days over the weekend, then went back east, and then came back again on the...

HACKMAN: For the first trip.

BURNS: For the first trip. It seems to me he left like Monday or Tuesday and then returned again. Jess went back east, too, and came out with the Senator. He went up to that dinner in New York; I guess Jess joined the party there, in fact.

HACKMAN: Are there any understandings—let's say then, when Unruh comes back with Robert Kennedy for that first trip about how things are going to function in terms of...

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BURNS: No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody ever got into it. That was probably somewhat of a mistake, because through the first trip, the issue was—let's just get it done and we'll worry about the details later. The result of that was, when the first trip ended, there was a total vacuum, really, as to who had real authority. A lot of that existed because there wasn't any authority back east; there wasn't any place that you could go for anything. Steve [Steve East], who really was the only guy that you knew could make a decision that might stick, was just wildly harassed because during this time the discussions of how many primaries to go into—you know, we're going to go into Indiana and all of those things were decided. Your available people were just spread terribly thin, and the question of badgering people became kind of—about the details—unimportant. And then I must say, also, there was a great euphoria, or cockiness, or whatever, as a result of that first swing and our own polling. Everybody sort of thought they had the world by the tail. Within the Kennedy camp, there was such a strong desire to want to think that *something* was orderly that I think, at the upper levels, there wasn't much thought given to California any more. Indiana and the other places took precedence. Your top people were going with the candidate to where he had to go, and there was almost no way to communicate with them, because they were working twenty-three hours a day. Unless the state had blown up, nobody wanted to hear about it.

Then you got into a very doldrum period without much of anything going on in the way of improvement. You were really straightening up the shambles that had been created during the first ten days, and doing all the things that should have been done six months earlier—forming a corporation, actually renting the headquarters.... Steve Smith [West] got the first bunch of bumper strips, snipe sheets and buttons and everything done right away, which I always thought were better than anything that came out of the national campaign, anyway. I thought the original California stuff was cleaner and better literature than finally came forth.

You had that whole period of organization, say, from March 30—well, you know Johnson pulled out and that threw everything into a cocked hat for awhile—but from then until April, year, about a month, the month of April, which was really consolidation. Really, there wasn't a lot of concern about things. Steve came out here for awhile; I guess he was here for about a week or so. He was engaged almost exclusively in trying to pick up chunk money on the thing and didn't really fool around much with anything. San Francisco never got off the ground at all, and in fact never really straightened out until Seigenthaler [John Seigenthaler] showed up.

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HACKMAN: Why was that? Could you tell what was the matter in San Francisco?

BURNS: No talent, really. Ray King was not nearly strong enough to do the job. The leading people in the Democratic establishment up there were not for Kennedy; the people that were for Kennedy were young and didn't really know what they were doing. The activists were all for McCarthy. We just didn't have anything going for us in San Francisco in the way of people. And what few people we had were bickering with each other and Ray was not able to control that; actually he came just about—well, he quit because he was about having a nervous breakdown. It's as simple as that. He just couldn't put it all together. He was trying to play traditional politics in a wildly frenetic situation with the McCarthy activists on one side, and the Establishment on the other, and the Kennedy people—a very small band—down the middle—the CoC [Committee for California] and that sort of thing.

About all you really had was the Burton people, and the Burton people and the Committee for California people just didn't talk. It was a tremendous struggle between them, and King couldn't come close to controlling that. And then several other people from back east—Chuck Spalding [Charles Spalding] went up there, and Christ, he was no help at all. And Braden went up and he couldn't do anything. It wasn't until Seigenthaler showed up that you got any sort of control on that thing, because he was the only guy that commanded enough personal respect for anybody to listen to. Up until then, it had just been total chaos. Seigenthaler and Seltzer got along famously and began to get something pulling together. But that was a good month or six weeks later.

HACKMAN: What was your role during the whole campaign? Where did you spend most of your time?

BURNS: Here in Los Angeles, I guess, almost totally in trying to get people into the campaign and then working with Art and sort of all over the lot on the thing. At the same time, I had the—bubbling along were the legislative campaigns which we were committed to supporting. We had some real problems there in the sense that we had raised money for those campaigns and then even with the legislators who were for Kennedy—you know, we got into a lot of fights with them about diverting resources. Everybody—well, "I'm for Kennedy, but not if it's my money that you're taking away from my district. Give to me, and I'll run the Kennedy campaign in my district."

So I was trying to straighten out a lot of that sort of thing and put out a lot of the fires that had built up.... But I'd say if there was a major error, it was in assuming that things were better than they were and, frankly, relaxing the grip on

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the campaign. Well, Jess was highly conscious of the Unruh control charge, super-sensitive about it to the point where he became totally diffident about exercising control over the campaign out here. I think that, in retrospect, was a major blunder. The result was that nobody exercised control.

You had a different guy coming out from the East every day with a different idea, and pretty soon the squabble was between a lot of people from out of state fighting with each

other—chaos in the leadership. You had four people that thought they were in charge of San Francisco, none of whom were from San Francisco, and it wasn't until John got here that those people were all pulled together. You had a similar sort of problem here, where, in effect, there'd been people here and then Steve came and he took a look at it, and he took everybody out of Los Angeles and shipped them off to San Francisco or somewhere else.

I think where it got out of control was not having a defined command structure and the assumption that it really wasn't necessary—that you could go with a fermenting sort of situation, and it was all going to be all right. And as it turned out, it all was all right. We really got exactly the vote—Kraft was fantastic—that he said we would get. What happened, though, is that there wasn't the split. McCarthy got the Humphrey vote, because at least some of the strategists there were smart enough to realize that they shouldn't be running a campaign. And they threw in behind McCarthy.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about discussions then? You...

[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

BURNS: ...really settled. There was never any formalized method of fund raising. There was never a finance chairman. It was kind of an individual effort type of thing—of everybody call up anybody that you know that might give some money—but no real systematized approach to it other than the fact that Steve was clearly finance chairman and was running whatever finance operation there was. The major expenditures were not going to be made locally, anyway. The media, the printing, and all of that was going to be centralized nationally, so finances just were—we weren't involved in the thing. We kept screaming in the early stages that we needed to spend money, and to run a deficit campaign was the only way it could go—that it wasn't possible to raise the money before you spent it, that we should have kept that early momentum going by subsidizing some local headquarters and things like that.

But there was never any money brought out here for expenditure within the state. There were an awful lot of people brought out here who spent an awful lot of money—in fact, fantastic amounts of money in the sense of hotel bills and that sort of thing to accommodate people who didn't have a local base. So there was a tremendous telephone, travel, and accommodations

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bill. You had an awful lot of personnel, but not operating under any centralized direction—not operating under the California campaign. As far as I really could determine, there never was a national campaign with any centralized source of authority. There were varying groups so that one group of people would basically be working with Bruno; somebody else would be working with students; somebody else would be working with somebody else. And they were all kind of running all over each other which is, of course, the essence of a political campaign anyway. But this was worse than normal. The central decision making functions, which are generally concealed anyway, were so concealed that I never did find out where they were.

After Oregon, and everybody was in a panic, you did have everybody here in Los Angeles—all your advertising guys and everybody else. So this was the headquarters of the Kennedy campaign for the last two or three weeks of the campaign. Then you did know what was going on, but there were all sorts of people wandering around. You know, Larry O'Brien would walk through—well, who the hell knew what he had to do with anything, if anything. And so on down the line. Your advertising setup, Fred Papert [Frederic S. Papert] was here and Don Wilson [Donald M. Wilson] and everybody else for that matter. And we were all in there, making stew every day, which was what it was really like. These meetings—we'd go away and nobody knew what the hell anybody had decided on, if anything. I think that all of that really didn't make all that much difference. The decision to do the debate was enough to stop the slide that had started to come in in early May, and stabilized the thing. It probably would have gone back up again.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about discussions of what—maybe you can look at this in terms of schedules—what voter groups to try to appeal to in California; minorities, basically, versus the suburbs, or maybe the liberals...

BURNS: Well, we had some ring-ding fights on that subject, because we always felt that we were overplaying our strength; that we were scheduling way too heavily into the minorities and that, you know, forget the campuses because nobody votes there anyway; that we had the black and the brown voter and that you didn't need to devote that type of heavy scheduling there; that what we needed was the blue collar guy, which our polling showed Bob could get. Those people would vote for him if he would make an appeal to them. He, in fact, did get a pretty good hunk of it.

We got creamed in the suburbs. McCarthy just swept them on the thing, but that was largely because, until the last few days of the campaign, there was never any appeal directed toward those people, and this was a big conflict. The problem was, though,

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that Jess personally was so tender to the charge that he was trying to dominate the campaign. The fact is he didn't do anything until after Oregon. I would say that the next time that Jess—the first time really that Jess personally moved in from the date of the New Hampshire primary was right after the Oregon primary. Jess played personally a very reticent role. He stayed out of even the delegate selection process for fear that he would be accused of freezing people out from one thing or another. I was, in essence, doing it on his behalf, but he was staying away and felt that he might have been a hindrance.

I think that was just a tremendous error. He should have just said, "Look. I'm the only guy that's here. Somebody's got to run it. I'll do it, and if you don't like it, drop dead." I think that was just a big mistake. And I think if that had happened, it would not have been a particularly close election in California, because we dropped that early momentum almost entirely.

We really didn't need all of the people that showed up. We needed a couple—we needed Seigenthaler. We needed a couple of good guys, north and south, to serve as liaison,

and we needed big help in fund raising. Because the fact of the matter is, if you're raising money for a candidate, even a person in California is not going to give money to Jess Unruh for Bob Kennedy. They'd give it to Steve Smith, but we needed Steve, a guy like Seigenthaler, and somebody else like Seigenthaler down here. That's about what we needed to run the campaign.

HACKMAN: Were you ever able to get a feel for how well Smith and Spalding, I guess, to some extent—did on fund raising? And what happened to that money?

BURNS: No. The fact of the matter is, I don't think there was that much attention paid to it. The money that was raised out here—which wasn't much—was raised either by us or by Steve. I don't think anybody else contributed anything toward the fund raising. In fact, if anything, I think that they were a liability, really. The functions that were put on were basically disasters. But it wasn't going to be an easy campaign to raise money. There wasn't any question, it was going to be tough.

HACKMAN: Can you remember, at the time you were talking about organizing the campaign, any discussion of doing it other than on the traditional north-south basis? And having separate campaigns?

BURNS: Yeah. The concept was that we wouldn't organize it north. In fact, that we would organize it statewide as a statewide campaign. And we didn't have time

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to go through all of the traditional negotiating to achieve a multitude of things. That, I think, to a certain extent, rankled and made the situation in San Francisco somewhat more difficult. But the attempt was to put it together on a statewide basis, to do your scheduling and everything else statewide. And to do your media, all of it, state-wide. Which is the way it should be. It's stupid to have a north-south campaign, because they run over each other, and you can't fund them. You wind up with everybody's uncle and cousin on the payroll.

HACKMAN: In the discussions of where he should concentrate within the state—suburbs versus minorities—what arguments did you.... Did you use polls to back up your arguments?

BURNS: Well, we had our early polling, the Kraft stuff. Then there was some polling done by Steve Smith [West], but really not till fairly late, when we began to get concerned. It started showing the concerns, the fact that we were in serious trouble in all of the suburbs and even in a lot of blue collar areas, where we shouldn't have been.

HACKMAN: In terms of trying to get out the minority vote, can you remember

discussions of how you go about that? And what leadership in the community you work with? And the problems there?

BURNS: You know, wild, wild situations, both in the Mexican-American and in the black community, because that was something that Art Seltzer should have been running exclusively, and which he needed no help on. He wound up, though, with people from out of state—you know, from the black community coming in here and the bickering of all your black politicians. Everybody's got a program that's going to deliver the black vote, and everybody's got a program that's going to deliver the Mexican vote. The fact is, it's all baloney. You don't need any of it. You just need somebody that's willing to work on the thing. This business of buying off all of the alleged heads of the Mexican community or alleged heads of the black community, it's preposterous. But that became a major concern, particularly from people who were unfamiliar with the players. Somebody would come running, screaming in, "By golly, if you don't give me the money to run things in Watts, I'm going to quit the campaign." Well, the fact of the matter is there wasn't one of those guys who could afford to quit. We could have gotten by without any of them.

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But the national campaign didn't see that as clearly as people out here.

HACKMAN: This is like—can you remember Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves], or Walter Sheridan [Walter J. Sheridan], these other...

BURNS: I remember Earl Graves. I know Sheridan, but I don't remember...

HACKMAN: He was around here in both the black and Mexican-American campaigns.

BURNS: Yeah. I didn't realize he was there. I kept seeing him. You know, there were so many people here, I didn't know what any of them were doing, or supposed to be doing. But we didn't need anybody there, because we were going to get all of that vote anyway. It's like buying ads in the black newspapers. That's just being held up, and an unnecessary waste of dough.

HACKMAN: Once Steve Smith [East] comes here, what kind of—in terms of the California campaign—what kind of change takes place in the way things have to be cleared, or just how does he function?

BURNS: The first or second, time—he's here two time periods.

HACKMAN: But he comes out then and I think he comes out in late April and he stays most of the rest of the time.

BURNS: I guess it was around the first of May. When was the Oregon primary?

HACKMAN: Oh, let's see. The Oregon primary is May 30. No, it's not quite that late. It must be May...

BURNS: But they came out and sort of opened a command post here after Colorado, I guess, wasn't it? I mean, Nebraska.

HACKMAN: Yeah, right. Well, he's here a little bit before the end of Nebraska.

BURNS: I don't know how other people regarded it, but I felt that at least Steve was the responsible person in charge, but he was again, wildly harassed, and going in a thousand different ways. By that stage in the game, if I had a real input, I'd make it to Steve if it was of any across the board major significance. If it was a press matter, I'd talk to Frank Mankiewicz or whoever was in charge. But I don't

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think Steve or anybody else ever got control of the campaign. It was moving too fast for anybody. There had never been a chance to approach it on any sort of organized basis, and what you had to do was, when people came in and said, "I want to do something," was say, "Fine. Go do it." And hope that it really wouldn't have hurt any.

The place where it hurt was when that inevitable confusion would take place between the three people who'd been sent to go do it. It's when they kicked back. The problem was then the complaints were listened to. Everybody should have had enough sense to realize that the nature of the campaign was going to create those sort of difficulties. You were telling five guys to do one job, and certainly they were going to start fighting with each other. The only way you could handle that is when they came back to say, "Well, fellows, you'll just have to work it out. I'm too busy. Work it out for yourself." And the best guy will survive, or maybe the worst. It wouldn't really matter a hell of a lot, as long as it didn't distract the campaign leadership to try to referee a fight in Watts, or wherever. But much too much attention was devoted to areas where if everybody that was active in it had all gotten a gun and shot each other, it wouldn't have affected the vote a bit. They just didn't matter. The people were going to vote for Bob Kennedy, no matter how badly we screwed up the campaign.

HACKMAN: Can you remember having a feed-in in terms of issues and things you felt he should be talking about in terms of the California audience that either did or didn't influence him?

BURNS: Yeah. We constantly felt that more attention needed to be paid to the suburbs and to the white labor; that we were much too much off on appealing to the vote we already had that we were overdoing it, and it wasn't necessary. Those people were already there, and we needed to get the people we didn't have. It was a question of—I can remember a million arguments—it was really a

question of guts, of saying, "Look. Every political campaign has a risk." You've got to say, "All right. The Mexican-American voter is going to vote for us, and the black voter is going to vote for us, and we'll take our chances. Now we'll go talk about the people that we don't know whether they're going to vote for us or not. We might lose some of these people over here in the sense that they won't go to the poll, but we won't lose many. They're not going to vote against Bob Kennedy. They may not be motivated enough to in fact show up, but we're not going to lose many of them. The ones that we'll lose, we'll lose anyway. And just play a little bit of risk politics."

That was fine except when your people from out of state came in, they basically had had relationships in those communities

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from the whole history of the Kennedy base. And so, when they would come here and somebody there would say, "I can't get Bob to this project in Watts or something in east L.A. [Los Angeles] that we know he's interested in. Why won't he come?" Then that would make an impact, because they'd have a line of communication in the Kennedy staff people and or associates, and everybody's get upset about it. You know, "God damn, you're not letting him go to see some project or some group of people or something or other." Well, that was true. But there wasn't any need for it. The theory was you were here to try to win an election rather than to make your old friends happy.

HACKMAN: What about registration? What different viewpoint did the Kennedy people have on how important registration is than you?

BURNS: It was too late to do any registration. Registration had closed by the time the campaign started. It was closed by the time the campaign started. It was closed around April 10. There was really no way. We did get whatever registration drive we could off the ground. The Cesar Chavez people did a hell of a job, the most effective and most honest registration I'd ever seen conducted; they turned back money, if you can believe it. They did a good job, but there wasn't much time to do it in. And so I don't think there was a dispute about registration. Everybody agreed that where you registered is your strength, and whatever registration efforts we had time to put together were in the black and brown communities, particularly the brown, where you had support that was unregistered. So I don't think there was a disagreement that whatever time and energy you had in registration should go first to Mexican-American voter and then secondly to the black. Let's worry about winning the other people before we register them.

HACKMAN: Did you get much involved in press relations down here? And working with any reporters or the newspapers in trying to get support that wasn't there?

BURNS: Not really. On a personal basis, talking to a few of them, but not trying to work with the publishers or anything like that. Jess did a little bit of

that to the extent that he knew editors and some people that he had relationships with, but in most instances, the Kennedy relationships directly were better at that level. But you weren't going to pick up much there anyway. So it really wasn't worth the effort. It didn't matter. Who really cares whether the publisher is going to write an editorial or not anyway? The important thing is how Channel 2 is going to treat you on the big news.

HACKMAN: How well did they handle TV out here, do you think?

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BURNS: That's so hard to say, because, again, who was in charge, really? Technically, your press secretary should be doing that so that you have some sort of natural flow and the reporters are a hell of a lot happier if they know who it is to talk with and they have a nice, tidy way of working. That never happened. First you had Pierre acting as press secretary, then you'd have Frank in and out. We had some local people—such a confused situation that the reporters were always bemused as to where they could take a story, who they could get a story from and run it without having it knocked down two minutes later.

So there were good press relations in the sense that I think the press corps was essentially favorably disposed, not hostile. I don't think they were harming us deliberately, but they were also wildly bemused and cautious, because it was sort of campaign-speak-with-forked-tongue type of thing. And they weren't terribly sure what they should do. In fact, they'd see the airplane land and all these people disgorge, and seventy-four correspondents from around the country. And the local guys and they'd scratch their head was going on. They thought it here would look at all of that, and they'd wonder what the hell was going on. They thought it was a cuckoo sort of a thing.

HACKMAN: That's really all I've got, unless you can think of other things that...

BURNS: That's about it. Actually, looking back on the campaign, under the circumstances, I really seriously question that it could have been much better. The only thing that I would say in summary is the major mistake was that Jess should have just taken iron control over it and dealt with Steve and Bob and said, "Look. Trust me. It will be a confusing sort of thing, but let's not worry about it." That didn't really happen, and, in fact, nobody ever did get control of the campaign. But it worked out.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any real late conversations that you might have been in with Unruh, with Robert Kennedy, like the night of the assassination, or anything?

BURNS: Yeah, before we went downstairs. But nothing—Bob was obviously exhausted. I'd never seen a human being work as hard as he had worked in the last two weeks. He was concerned about going downstairs. He certainly didn't think he had any big cinch. And Jess is cautious in that regard

too. I was urging that we claim victory earlier, sort of on the theory that what do we have to lose? That by delaying, it diminished the significance of the victory. That we, should have claimed it. If it didn't happen, we were cooked anyway. But I didn't

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think so. I thought we had won, and rather handily. I thought we'd won by more than we turned out winning by. Had we claimed it earlier, I think it would have always been considered a bigger victory than it was.

HACKMAN: Any discussions of the future that night? What to do after California?

BURNS: Some discussions—between the time of the debate and the last few days—of the necessity of going out to get delegates now that you had a different thing, discussion of Bob staying around here for a few days to talk and rest. I'd say a recognition that the structure of the campaign would have to be totally reoriented—that the frantic pace of the primaries was over. There'd have to be a pause at the top to get some sort of central control and central planning and that you now had also to move on, trying to crack the delegate blocks around the country in a systematic way. And that this would be something that Jess would have to do a lot of on a personal traveling basis, to go in and talk to people. And that that type of an operation, really—you know, Kenny had been working on, all of that sort of thing, but it had been lost in the confusion of the primary campaign.

Yeah, I think Bob knew what needed to be done. I think he would have done it. And I think he would have been president. I don't think there's any doubt in my mind that it would have happened. He could have taken Chicago, and he would have won. I think he knew the things that needed to be done. He articulated them. I think he knew that the razzmatazz of the primary had to be pretty much the way it was. There wasn't a hell of a lot of choice. You were going from one date to another, and it was a crisis every minute, but that there was time now to do the things that would have to be done. I don't think there was any question that it was his intention to win. I think he would have. But that's neither here nor there, I guess.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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[Please note: Both Stephen E. Smith and Steven E. Smith are referred to in this interview in as “Steve,” and it is possible some of the indexed references to one of the men may actually be references to the other.]

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