

**Joseph T. Sharkey Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 11/1/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Joseph T. Sharkey (1893 - 1991) was a New York political figure who was best known for his term as County leader in Brooklyn (1956-1962), during which he worked actively to achieve the Democratic Party nomination for John F. Kennedy (JFK) in 1960. This interview focuses on Sharkey's responsibilities as County leader, his reasons for supporting JFK, and his active role in campaigning for JFK, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Joseph T. Sharkey

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Oral History Interview

with

JOSEPH T. SHARKEY

November 1, 1967  
Brooklyn, New York

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: So why don't we start, Mr. Sharkey, by my asking you if you recall when you first met John Kennedy?

SHARKEY: Well, I met.... Informally, I met the Kennedy family at the Emerald Ball at the Waldorf. This was before 1956. This might have been 1953, something like that. And I remember almost the entire family were there on that occasion.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: Yes.

STEWART: Had you known Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] before that?

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SHARKEY: No, I hadn't, not before that time. And my next visit, meeting with him, really was.... Well, of course, in 1956 in Chicago I had become the county leader of this county, the largest county in the country, and things.... Let's see, what year would that be? '56, '50.... Well, anyway, we went to Chicago and there's where John Kennedy made his run for Vice President against Kefauver [Estes Kefauver], and he was

only beaten out by a very small margin. And I fell in love with the fellow right there. I liked his attitude; I liked the way they come over and thanked our delegation for the support we had rendered to them in standing up. We had a considerable division in our delegation at the time. Bob Wagner [Robert F. Wagner] had other ideas and so did Harriman [W. Averell Harriman], but we in Brooklyn were very much for John Kennedy.

STEWART: Were you at all consulted or involved in the initial decision that was made to support Wagner on the first ballot and then switch to Kennedy or someone else on the second ballot?

SHARKEY: At the '56 Convention?

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STEWART: Right.

SHARKEY: Yes. We stayed with Wagner and then when it... We were all uneasy about it and felt that this was just a gesture. And when we looked for Wagner, we couldn't find him. He was missing. I think afterward he said he'd been in the men's room. I don't know where. Nevertheless, we pressed and pressed, and I think DeSapio [Carmin G. DeSapio] then was the leader of the delegation.

STEWART: Right.

SHARKEY: I'm not sure about that. And we kept shouting to him, "Let's get on, let's get on this bandwagon. Let's get with Kennedy." This was the feeling of the delegates, and we made the move without asking Wagner. And he was perturbed afterward when he came back. He wanted to know who had said to go ahead. Well, we couldn't wait forever, and this was just a delaying tactic that he was employing. And we just wanted to be for Kennedy and we finally got on that, as I say, on the bandwagon. And I liked the way the Kennedy boys came over afterward and

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thanked us for what we had done, immediately after the vote was taken. They had lost.

STEWART: There was a report that many of the Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] people were urging people in the New York delegation to vote for Kefauver because, in fact, they wanted Kefauver. Do you recall this at all?

SHARKEY: No, I don't. Honestly, I can't say that. It might have been some underneath maneuvering and that might have been the reason that Bob kept himself scarce because he probably wanted to stay away from the pressure. The pressure was all for John Kennedy. Very much so.

STEWART: Why was this? Was it because of the help that a Catholic on the ticket would have in New York or....

SHARKEY: No, I don't think that entered into it at all, Mr. Stewart. I really don't think that entered into it at all. It may be that they felt that they were helping their own cause somewhat in New York by having a Kennedy at the head of the ticket. This may have been a political viewpoint, but I think it went deeper than that. I think he had caught the

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imagination of people at that time: young senator came up and beat Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge], and as congressman came up and beat, become a member of the Senate, and they liked the.... And his contacts had been good. In the meantime, I had received books from him autographed *When England Slept* [*Why England Slept*] and other books that he had written. And he seemed to keep a good rapport between people, between.... I don't know -- he had something. He had the touch. He had the touch.

STEWART: Did you ever come to any conclusions as to precisely why Kefauver won? There've been all kinds of rumors of deals made between some of the Stevenson people and people to push Kefauver.

SHARKEY: I've always been suspicious of that. I really don't have the answer to it, but I've been suspicious that he did as well. I thought that this might have been staged considerably in a great many of the delegations to give him, make him look good, Kennedy, but not let him win, maybe to appease the followers of Kennedy. This I've had my suspicions of and I've heard wild rumors about it, but nothing

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authentic that you could point to.

STEWART: Yes, yes.

SHARKEY: I think it was the best thing that ever happened that he lost in Chicago.

STEWART: Did he campaign at all in 1956 here, do you recall?

SHARKEY: No, he didn't, but I'll tell you what he did. He came in for me. A nephew of mine was running for the Council, the City Council, down on Bay Ridge. And he came in and spoke off the back of an automobile in several places in that area, in Bay Ridge. And that's about the extent of any campaigning he did around that time. Might have come to one or two dinners here and there. But I have pictures of that, by the

way. My nephew won at that time in a very bad district, Bay Ridge, which was Republican and very few people win there -- Democrats. It's been changing somewhat recently, but they're very independent. I won there. I was assigned to that district twice in running for the Council through the years under proportional representation. I did win it the two times I ran, but

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very few had won it, and he came in and helped this nephew of mine to win -- we have pictures of it, as I say -- and made a nice impression.

STEWART: This was in 1956?

SHARKEY: This was previous to 1956.

STEWART: Oh, yes. What contacts, if any, did you have with either he or members of his staff in the period '57-'58, before the real drive began for the 1960 nomination?

SHARKEY: Really, I didn't have any. There seemed to be a lull there where he was giving his time to the duties down in Washington and building up a reputation through that area. I don't know what contacts there were then. I became the County leader.... See I had -- there may have been contacts. I wasn't the leader of the county at that time; I might not have been in touch with the thing. But as soon as I became the county leader -- now, I think I became the county leader in '56. I was county leader eight years.

STEWART: From '56 to '62.

SHARKEY: '64.... '56 to '62. Well, I might have become....

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STEWART: Well, that's six.

SHARKEY: Probably just the year before. I'd have to check back on that. But after I became the county leader, then I was, knew what was going on, you know.

STEWART: What were your earliest intentions as far as the 1960 convention were concerned? Let me ask you. When did you first feel that Kennedy would be a strong candidate, and what were your original intentions as far as your position in the New York delegation was concerned?

SHARKEY: I had the feeling from '56 on that he was destined to secure the nomination.



And I didn't know whether he'd win or not, but I thought that he'd certainly secure the nomination after the '56 situation and after Kefauver and Stevenson had lost. We supported Stevenson, and I went all out in Brooklyn, and we carried for these people. But they didn't win, and I felt right after that election that this young fellow was destined to become the candidate of the Party.

STEWART: Were you intent on remaining uncommitted publicly until

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June as, the reports go, most of the other New York leaders were?

SHARKEY: I was never uncommitted. I was committed from the start.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: That's right. Even though others were not. Mr. Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] and I were committed thoroughly from the start. Mr. DeSapio wasn't, and I'm a dear friend of his, but he wasn't. And Wagner wasn't. And a great many of them were not. And I was blatantly loud about it. I was in every day in the newspapers, headlines, front page, shouting Kennedy, Kennedy from the housetops. This was always so.

STEWART: Well, you didn't make a public announcement or -- maybe I'm wrong on this, but in checking through the *New York Times*, until some time in May, May 12th of 1960.

SHARKEY: Oh, I think that's wrong. I may not have made a public announcement, but I was certainly going around everywhere saying so. It may have been that out of courtesy to DeSapio and others and Wagner

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that I might have been a little, might not have made a public announcement. But I don't think that's true, because I was working on Wagner all the time to come out for Jack Kennedy -- working on him because I was in an embarrassing position.

I was the majority leader to the City Council for twenty-one years, and here I am working with Wagner, who's my mayor, and I'm shouting, "Kennedy, Kennedy." And I went into him one morning, and I said, "Bob, I think you're making a mistake here." I said, "I'm embarrassed, because here I am shouting 'Kennedy'" -- and now this is before May -- "here I am shouting 'Kennedy' all over the town and people are saying that you're for someone else, Lyndon Johnson, something like that. Now," I said, "I'm for Jack Kennedy, and I think you're making a mistake, 'cause here's a young man I think is going to make it. I think he's going places." And I said, "You should be on the bandwagon." I said, "You have a future in

this. Who knows, you may be, you know, be taken to Washington; could even make the Cabinet. You have

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the ability, and you're the mayor of the biggest city in this town." I said, "I think you should be on this bandwagon." He said, "Joe, I'm not against Jack Kennedy." And he said, "In fact, we have a party for him next week up at the Gracie Mansion, and you are invited to it." He said, "We'll talk about it there on the lawn."

We were there. He was there. There was no conversation, though. We didn't get around to it -- it was a busy thing, you know. But the following day the newspaper boys came rushing into my office. They said, "Did you hear the news?" I said, "What's that?" They said, "Wagner declared for Kennedy today." I said, "That's fine." Then, he sent for me, Wagner, a few minutes later. Said, "Joe," he said, "I declared for Jack Kennedy today." I said, "Bob, I think that's the smartest thing you've done up to date." But he played around with it for too long. Indecisive. That's one of his weaknesses.

STEWART: Well, again, according to the stories, there was some hope that leaders in New York would wait until openly endorsing anyone to have more weight, to give

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weight to their...

SHARKEY: Let me let you in on something, Mr. Stewart. Now you remind me. I was called up to a breakfast at the Biltmore one morning. They asked me would I be at breakfast at the Biltmore at 9 o'clock. I went there, and at this breakfast Dave Lawrence [David L. Lawrence], Jake Arvey [Jacob Arvey], our friend in Jersey....

STEWART: Kenney [John J. Kenney]?

SHARKEY: No. Former prosecutor, prosecutor of the Hauptmann [Bruno R. Hauptmann] trail, friend of mine, just can't think of his name. He's a lawyer over there; he's the former attorney general of the state of New Jersey years back. Prosecutor of Hauptmann. He's very active politically over there.

STEWART: Well, we can fill in his name later.

SHARKEY: DeSapio, Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast], myself. Buckley wasn't there. He was in Washington. And the gist of the breakfast was, after we got going, "Let's go into the Convention uncommitted. Let's go in...." Now, here you had Pennsylvania; you had New Jersey; you had Illinois and New York. These four big states could control the Convention very easily,

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the votes. "Let's go in uncommitted to the Convention. Wouldn't it be smart for us to go in uncommitted and, you know, law back and...." So they kept talking, and finally I said, "Gentlemen, I'm not with you on this." I said, "I'm committed to Jack Kennedy." I said, "I've been committed to him a long way back, and not only that, I'm in this position where my leaders here around the areas and the districts have had primary fights, and they came into me and said, 'Look, my people in the district, I'm being criticized by my opponent saying I'm not for Kennedy. What can I do about this?'" (Because we had asked them not to go out publicly.) "I said, 'Go out and declare for Kennedy. Go out and declare. Don't let your opponents take advantage of you. You declare, too, for Jack Kennedy.' They did." So I said, "Here I am. I've told my leaders go out and declare themselves for Jack Kennedy." I said, "I couldn't go along with this." Well, that ended the breakfast. Now that isn't generally known, I think, but this happened.

STEWART: When, about, was this? Do you recall?

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SHARKEY: This would be about two months, probably, before the Convention. And, as I say, Jake Arvey was there. I remember distinctly his son or daughter had just married and they were coming back from Europe and I loaned him my car and chauffeur to pick them up at the pier. This happened on that day and some of the little incidents.

Now, this is some of the things that used to annoy me. There's a fellow like Dave Lawrence, whom I liked Dave was one of the last ones on the bandwagon. Wagner was one of the last ones on the bandwagon. Bill Green [William J. Green, Jr.], the leader of Philadelphia, one of the very last ones on the bandwagon. And after the election of Jack Kennedy these fellows could go in and out of the White House with ease. It seemed, you know, so, I don't know, strange. Now Bill Green, they worked on him for.... Charlie Buckley and Gene Keogh [Eugene J. Keogh] worked on him night after night in Washington for months and months, and he was adamant. He kept holding out, holding out. Finally, at the last minute, come in and went for

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Jack Kennedy. But these are some of the little troubles you have in politics, of course.

STEWART: Falling on this Pennsylvania thing, I've heard it said that there are very, very few people that know the real story of how the Pennsylvania delegation was won over. Of course, Lawrence being gone now and Green gone now, is there anything more than what you've said that you know as to what happened in Pennsylvania?

SHARKEY: No, I really.... I couldn't add anything to that. I really don't know, unless Dave, being a smart maneuverer, he probably tried until the last minute and then saw that he couldn't prevail and probably gave up. Maybe the same thing goes for Bill Green. I don't know. I think probably they had the same ideas as this breakfast seemed to indicate, that probably they were playing a little political game and they felt with these four big states they could control things and probably have an iron hand over it. But I was in love with this fellow, and I just couldn't.... And I had my entire delegation, which was the biggest in the country, feeling the same way about it. I had

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worked on this all through the months.

Now, I had people in my delegation who I had trouble holding. Everyone does. Manny Celler [Emanuel Celler], Congressman -- Manny came out and voted for Stevenson. He said to me, "Joe, just one ballot."

STEWART: Symington [Stuart Symington], I think.

SHARKEY: Is it Symington?

STEWART: I'm pretty sure, because I think he seconded the nomination of Symington.

SHARKEY: Is that so? Well, anyway, I guess they had approached him, and he probably owed a debt there, and he said it would only be for one ballot. Then, I had another fellow who's passed away since, Anfuso [Victor L. Anfuso], who was a congressman, and he was for Lyndon Johnson. And he came to me, and he said, "Joe, just want to vote one ballot for Lyndon Johnson. I'll be with you from there on." Well, at the end of the -- when Kennedy won, at the end he was frantically waving, trying to change his vote and couldn't, wasn't heard. And then I had others who wanted to put in a vote for Stevenson. I had

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Weinberg, my leader out there in Bay Parkway, came to me and said, "Joe, can't we just give a token vote to Stevenson?" I said, "Now, look" -- this is the morning of the vote.

STEWART: Yeah.

SHARKEY: And I said, "If we're going to break this up into little pieces, we might just as well quit right here and now." We held them together, and they held, and we would have gained a couple of other votes on the second ballot from these others whom we permitted to just cast a token vote.

STEWART: Let me ask you, do you recall when and to whom you originally made a

commitment to be for Kennedy? Who was...

SHARKEY: I didn't make it to anybody, really. I made it to myself at '56 at the Convention. I simply grasped the chance to do everything and jump on everywhere possible.

The thing that you might -- my first meeting with Joe Kennedy was arranged by Gene Keogh. Gene said to me, "Joe Kennedy would like to have lunch with you, like to sit down with you." I

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said, "He doesn't have to sit down with me. I'm for Jack Kennedy." "Well," he said, "he'd like to meet you. He's heard a lot about you and so forth." As I say, we had met informally. "Well," I said, "All right."

So the appointment was made for the Pavillion up at 57th Street, and we walked in there, and I met Joe Kennedy. Blue, gray-blue hat on and a gray blue overcoat -- he looked very natty. And we sat there, I'll bet, for three hours in the north wing of the Pavillion there. And during our conversation a little French couple walked in, youngsters. And they were babbling very loudly, you know, and Joe Kennedy sent for Henri Soulet, and he says, "Henri, didn't I tell you I wanted this part of the restaurant for myself?" Henri started to tell, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, this is love." "Love, hell, get 'em out of here."

We had a very long and interesting conversation. He disclosed so many things, talked about many.... At that time Mrs. Roosevelt [A. Eleanor Roosevelt] was very antagonistic toward Jack Kennedy's nomination, and he brought out letters showing me how she had almost given herself to the

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Kennedys, that she was so grateful to them. He seemed to have been the liaison between the President and Mrs. Roosevelt, the two of them, any time they had any differences and so forth. He disclosed a lot of things that probably shouldn't go in the record.

STEWART: Well, as I say, you can close this for as many years as you want or put whatever restrictions on it, so....

SHARKEY: Well, there were some personal things that he had said, you know, the reasons for President Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] and his wife's differences and so forth. Then he told me about when he was Ambassador. See, there was a story out at one time that Joe Kennedy was anti-Semitic, and this would hurt in New York. And it was gaining ground. It was being told in various areas like in this area which is heavily Jewish and Bay Parkway, and I didn't want that to gain too much ground. So we discussed it, and he told me a story about when he went to.... Am I registering?

STEWART: Yes, yes.

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SHARKEY: When he went over as Ambassador, one of the first duties he had, the Equerry to the Queen came to him and said, "Now, Mr. Ambassador, each year there are ten, I think, girls, American girls, presented at the Court of St. James, and you'll have to select these ten." And he presented a list with probably three hundred names on. So Joe Kennedy said, "Well," he said, "I don't know one from the other here." He said, "Take the first ten." He said, "Take the first ten." So this Equerry to the Queen said, "Oh, you can't do that." He says, "Why not?" "Well, there's a Jewish girl among the first ten, and never has a Jewish girl been presented to the Court of St. James." "Well," Kennedy said, "well, then, I don't want to have anything to do it. I come from a country where we don't look at these things this way, and I just can't." "Well, that would be an affront to the Queen." "Well," he says, "I'm going to a tea party tomorrow, lawn party, and," he said, "I'll see the Queen there." And he said, "I'll discuss it with her." And he did. And she says, "I understand it very thoroughly; I'm in sympathy with you."

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And for many years -- I don't know whether it's still continued -- no one was presented while he was the head of the Court of St. James. I don't know whether it's started up and continued again, but not while he was there. There were -- no one was ever introduced.

Now, I use that story. I was at City Hall. Of course, my office was there. I was the majority leader. And the newspapers was across the hall, all the newsboys. And one day they came in and asked me this question about, "There is a story that Joe Kennedy's anti-semitic gaining ground." I told them the story, and they went back and checked. Joe Kennedy wouldn't let them use it.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: Yes. But it was the truth. This is what was said.

STEWART: Is this meeting with him the one that has been written up that also included Buckley, Prendergast, et cetera.

SHARKEY: Nobody else was there. Just Keogh, he and I. Nobody. No, there wasn't anyone there at all. Oh, I, you're...

STEWART: Remember this other meeting?

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SHARKEY: Yes. You're referring to a story -- someone wrote a book and mentioned that in the book.

STEWART: William Whalen [Richard J. Whalen]. *The Founding Father*.

SHARKEY: Yes, and he's absolutely wrong about it, and I often wanted to write to him and tell him because I know Whalen. He had been around the Hall there for a while. He's absolutely inaccurate in a great many things he said and especially about that story. That story is this way, goes this way: I used to meet with Joe Kennedy once a week at least, and sometimes twice a week. We'd meet at different places. We'd meet at the Hampshire House. We had an apartment there that someone loaned us. We'd meet at the Plaza. We'd meet at the Brook Club, his private club, or we'd meet at the Pavilion. There are the various places. Now, each week we'd probably meet somewhere else so the newspapermen wouldn't catch on and be following you and annoying you, you know what I mean, and telling stories about it.

So this one day we met at the Hampshire House, and we sat there, and at this time Joe Kennedy came along. This was during the Appalachian campaign, I believe, around

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that area.

STEWART: Right, it was. In fact, it was, well, it was probably a week before the West Virginia primary.

SHARKEY: That's right.

STEWART: Because the story, according to Whalen, is that...

SHARKEY: Whalen is wrong. You can tell him for me he's wrong. At that meeting, here's exactly what happened. Buckley was there. Prendergast, DeSapio, I was there, and Joe Kennedy. And he was...

STEWART: McKinney [Joseph A. McKinney] and Koehler [Herbert A. Koehler].

SHARKEY: Who?

STEWART: McKinney -- is that his name? From Staten Island.

SHARKEY: McKinney, yes. And Koehler. Were they there?

STEWART: Yes, according to this, according to Whalen.

SHARKEY: Might have been. I'm not so sure. But anyway, he, Joe Kennedy, propounded a question to DeSapio. He said, "Look. I'd like you fellows to come out the

day after West Virginia and declare for Jack,” because they were uncertain about the vote. And I said, “Mr. Ambassador, why did Jack go to West

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Virginia when it’s so uncertain?” He said, “Joe, we did it for good reason. West Virginia is only 4 percent Catholic. If Jack can show he can cross the lines in a state like this it’ll mean something in his campaign. It’ll show the people that people are willing to cross lines.” And he said.... “Well,” I said, “that sounds all right to me.”

DeSapio wouldn’t move, wouldn’t commit himself, nor would Prendergast. So I said, “Look, Mr. Ambassador, I tell you what I’ll do. The day after the West Virginia primary, you sic the newspapermen onto me.” I said, “I won’t declare my delegation for Jack. I’ll declare myself for Jack.” He said, “Joe, if you do that, I’ll never forget you.” And he said, “Your face will be on the front page of every newspaper in the country, which is what happened, but it broke before that. And he said, “As for you, Carmine, if we do alright in West Virginia, you can go to hell.”

He got up, walked to the next room, picked his hat off the bed, and started to walk out, and Tom Shanahan [Thomas J. Shanahan]

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was in the room. He said, “Don’t go away sore, Irish.” “Aw,” he said, “if I stay around here I’ll say something I shouldn’t say.” He’d already said it.

This is exactly what happened, so help me God. Now, he had Joe Kennedy saying, “You can all go to hell.” This isn’t so. This is absolutely wrong, absolutely untrue.

STEWART: Yes, because he said that you all refused.

SHARKEY: That isn’t so. That’s an absolute untruth. It’s too bad that.... Well, I guess DeSapio would tell the truth about it and so would Prendergast. McKinney probably would. Buckley is gone, and so is Tom Shanahan, but this is exactly what happened. He didn’t say it to all of us. He wouldn’t say it to me because I wouldn’t take it from him or anybody else. I was never built that way. But this is exactly what happened. And Carmine didn’t say a word, didn’t answer him in any way. He was a gentleman.

And, of course, I could see why Carmine didn’t do it afterward when this breakfast came up. This was the one of the things he had probably been

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working with Pennsylvania, you know, and others, I suppose I didn’t know this. I was for Kennedy, and everybody knew it, and nothing could change that. This is exactly what happened, and Whalen is absolutely wrong.

STEWART: You say you met with Ambassador Kennedy quite frequently in that period.



Could you give some other examples of the kinds of things that he was trying to find out or the kinds of things you used to talk about?

SHARKEY: Well, in the early days, of course, Jack wasn't winning handsomely. I mean, he was -- there was a great deal of uncertainty in the campaign. It was only after West Virginia, I think, it started to jell really in that Texas speech he made down there to the ministers, you know.

STEWART: Was that -- no, that came later during...

SHARKEY: Yes, well, I mean, these are some of the things that really jelled for him and really started him going. And, of course, being Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] out there in Minnesota didn't hurt a bit. I remember

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that I met with the President when I got this picture from him up at the Carlyle. He wanted to see me. It was Sunday afternoon. This is about fifteen days before the Inauguration, and I was up in the country. And I got a call. I was playing shuffleboard with some of the localers, local talent. I got a call that the President was going to call me there. He had called my house, and my missus gave him the number where I was.

Sure enough, I got the call. And, I think, it was Pierre Salinger was on there and said, "The President would like to see you tomorrow on Sunday at 2 o'clock at the Carlyle. Can you make it?" I said, "Well, if he wants to see me, I'll do it." So we packed up and we came down to the city here Saturday night.

The next morning, the next day, I went to Carlyle at 2 o'clock, and my youngsters, three girls -- see, he's endorsed that to the three daughters -- gave me a picture of him for his autograph, asked if I'd ask the President to autograph it. So I gave it to him, on leaving I gave him this. I said,

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"The girls asked me to get your autograph." He said, "Oh, that picture is no good, Joe," and he sent Salinger for this picture that had just been made. See, the boy wasn't born there. AND that's how that picture....

But, what I'm leading up to, I spent an hour with him all along up there in the Carlyle, and he discussed a lot of things. And one of the things he was most interested in at that time and -- maybe I'm too far away from this...

STEWART: No, that's alright.

SHARKEY: ...was that he wanted to know whom we had to run for governor. I think he was a little afraid of Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller], that he might

become a candidate, you know, and I guess he was thinking in advance as he always did. So I said, "Mr. President, we don't have anybody at this time." He said, "Joe, don't call me Mr. President. Call me Jack." I said, "This I'll never do. This is a great honor, and you deserve to have it." And I said, "Mr. President, we don't have anyone at this time in the state of the stature to run for governor."

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I said, "We have a fellow by the name of Levitt [Arthur Levitt] who comes from Brooklyn whom I had put on the ticket and who has won in spite of a Republican landslide. He won with Rockefeller, the only Democrat on the ticket to win. But," I said, "I wouldn't say that he was the caliber for the governorship."

So he said to me, "How about Frank Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.]?" So I said, "Well, Mr. President," I said, "Frank's a nice fellow. I like Frank," I said, "his mother has made some powerful enemies in this state which might injure the fellow if he tried to run." I said, "He was defeated for attorney general." "Well," he said, "he knows that, Joe, about his mother. But," he said, "she won't be around in another year." And I didn't question him why and he didn't volunteer why, but sure enough about fifteen months later she passed away, see. So, you see, as he said Roosevelt helped him a great deal in West Virginia and Minnesota and he was grateful about that, but after he became President nothing seemed to jell about this.

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He didn't seem to mention it again. So I don't know what happened in the intervening time, but this is exactly what happened that Sunday.

STEWART: Do you recall what else was discussed? Again, if this is the same meeting you're talking about on December 11th, you criticized the President because he had appointed no New Yorkers to the cabinet. Was this discussed at this time at this meeting, do you recall?

SHARKEY: No. But tell you what happened at that time. There seemed to be... They seemed to be ignoring the contribution that had been made here in this big city. As I've always said here, I don't think he could have won without New York. And I speak about the pre-Convention time, the sentiment just as when Joe Kennedy wanted DeSapio to go along the day after West Virginia. The smaller states out West were waiting to see what we were going to do. This would have meant a bandwagon rush, see. This was what they were counting on. So, as I say, the sentiment that was coming out of New York with Buckley and myself shouting "Kennedy" had a great effect upon

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the other states -- the fact that we stuck, we stayed, and we held together tight, and the contributions that were made in every way. I felt that they weren't, were not giving the proper recognition here in New York to people who had helped. Now that went for Buckley and for me.

I was in power. I was the leader of this county, and patronage is an important thing. And they were making up the slates and so forth, and at that time they were fighting bitterly with Prendergast, Mike Prendergast. I always admired Mike Prendergast in spite of the fact that he wasn't with Kennedy from the start. And the same with Carmine. They're very dear friends of mine. And they had a right to disagree. They had to come over, finally. But here they were pounding to get rid of Prendergast, and there were a couple of fellows connected with the Kennedy outfit -- one fellow was an artist; I forget his name.

STEWART: Walton [William Walton]?

SHARKEY: Yes. He had a bitter fight with Kennedy, and one day

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he called me up during the campaign, and he said to me, "Hey, I've been trying to get a hold of you. Never find you." I says, "I'm no damn good to Jack Kennedy if I'm sitting here on my rear end at this desk in a big county like this." So this is my only contact with Walton, but he had had some scrambles with Prendergast, and it seemed that he was taking it out on him. And I resented the fact that they were being so vicious about this. And all the things started to add up.

So this, on a Saturday or some day just before this, the newspapers had gotten hold of me and said something about this, about Prendergast, trying to get rid of Prendergast. And this is when I exploded and said, "Well, instead of talking about getting rid of Prendergast and upsetting the organization in this state, which has helped, we should be discussing a member for the Cabinet. In this great Empire State of New York, we ought to be able to come up with somebody of stature enough to get into this Cabinet." And this is what I said, never thinking it was going to make the headlines.

Next Sunday

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morning it's in the papers, front page, my picture, and I get a call from Charlie Buckley. He said, "Joe Kennedy called me this morning, Joe." There was a heavy snowstorm that Sunday. He said, "Joe Kennedy called me, and he said, 'What's the matter with Joe?'" So Buckley said, "I don't know. Why? He's alright." "Well," he said, "You see today's *Times*?" Buckley said, "No." So he said, "I can't get out in this snowstorm to get a paper." He said, "I'm snowed in." So he had Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] call Buckley from Washington to read the account to him, see. So this is the story on this. This is what happened there. But it didn't make any difference in my....

I was invited to the President's box for the Inauguration, my missus and I. At that meeting that Sunday when he was looking for some information and I called my missus to get the information from me, off my calendar, I think it was, and he broke in on the wire in another room. He said, "Mrs. Sharkey, I hear you're coming to my Inauguration." She said, "Yes." He says, "You're invited to

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my box." And we sat in his box for the Inauguration.

STEWART: Very good.

SHARKEY: I was very fond of the fellow. Politically, I felt they were doing things probably that didn't... They were having fellows down there who hadn't been with them at the start. Oh, I don't know.

STEWART: Well, we're jumping a little ahead. I'd like to go back to the time just before the Convention. There was an attempt to remove DeSapio from office just before the Convention. Did this have anything to do with the Convention?

SHARKEY: I don't think that's so. I think the move to remove DeSapio was after the election.

STEWART: Well, I think in the spring...

SHARKEY: I knew of no attempt to remove him previous to the Convention.

STEWART: No?

SHARKEY: Not that I know of. If there was some subtle movement on that I didn't know about, but nothing in regard to our organization.

STEWART: How did, in addition to the Kennedy people getting the forty or so delegates up-state

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from Peter Crotty and then people in the Bronx and here, how did precisely you get the rest of the delegation?

SHARKEY: Well, I handled my own in Brooklyn here, which was the largest. The only county larger than this is Cook County, and that's the entire city of Chicago. We're just a burrough in the city of New York, and we're the largest. I mean.... I don't know what was done except -- I took care of my own. I had job enough on

that. I had a big delegation here, and I had to stay in contact with them all the time to make sure, because everybody was trying to move in and grab a vote here and there. "Just one. Just one," you know. And it got to be that I said, "If we're going to break this up into little pieces, forget about me. I'll get out of this and you fellows...." Well, they wouldn't stand for that. But I did nothing outside of this, except to meet with these fellows whenever it was possible. No, I know of nothing that was done except the example we set, you know, to hold meetings and to....

What I did do, I held four get togethers down to Washington

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which we paid for from Brooklyn here for Jack Kennedy before the Convention during that year.

STEWART: Oh, really.

SHARKEY: Every three months. Held at the Mayflower. I'd have a beautiful spread down there, dinner. We'd invite senators and congressmen from other states. We wanted to become acquainted with them so we could work with them on the floor, things of that sort. I ran four of those and paid for them from here.

STEWART: There was a big controversy when they were making up the delegation because former Governor Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman] and Mrs. Roosevelt were left off the delegation. Do you recall this?

SHARKEY: I do recall that, yes. I immediately went to work. I said there should be one no question about that, no question about that. That was wrong. That was done in Manhattan. It wasn't done over here. I was against that, very much so, and said so, both Buckley and I.

STEWART: But this was strictly DeSapio and Prendergast?

SHARKEY: That was remedied. That was foolish. Very foolish.

STEWART: There was also a bit of a squabble over the chairmanship

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of the delegation. Some favored Averell Harriman, some Mayor Wagner, and some wanted to have Prendergast as the chairman. Do you recall this?

SHARKEY: Yes. Well, you see you had fellows here, a fellow like Wagner who wasn't with Kennedy til the last minute. These things don't match up. These are not

on the level things. A fellow who was working from the start for Kennedy and that was an ardent Kennedy man, here's the man should be in there. How did we settle that? Was it Harriman who became the....

STEWART: Harriman became the honorary chairman and Wagner the chairman and Prendergast was the caucus chairman. I think one of the factors was, of course, that Wagner still held out hopes, or presumably held out hopes, of becoming vice president if...

SHARKEY: If it was Lyndon Johnson.

STEWART: ...Kennedy wasn't the nominee.

SHARKEY: Sure. They tried up to the last minute. In Los Angeles I had a half a dozen requests to get to come to see Lyndon Johnson. Some of my own fellows.... Pete Brown, Peter Campbell Brown, New York

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here, a dear friend of mine, said, "Why don't you come up and see Lyndon for a few minutes?" I said, "Pete, I love Lyndon Johnson. How do you say no to a guy you love? I don't go up there and say anything but no. Now, what's the sense in my going up there?" This came from various places. "We'd like you to sit down with him. Sit down with him." These things are grand if you can concede or do something. Just couldn't do it.

STEWART: You mentioned before the meeting of the party at Gracie Mansion. Theodore White in his book *The Making of the President, 1960* -- you may have read it -- described this party at Gracie Mansion, and he says that Kennedy was quite angry with people in New York, primarily.... It was the day that Mrs. Roosevelt and Lehman had been left off the delegation. Do you recall that party, that meeting on the lawn?

SHARKEY: I remember it, yes, but I don't recall that he was angry about it. He may have been angry, but he didn't [unintelligible] or didn't show it in any fashion that I know about. He may have discussed it with Wagner at the

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time or -- no, I don't think so, because Wagner at that time wasn't on his bandwagon. Well, he knew how we felt about it, Buckley and I, because we immediately said it was wrong to do and we went over there and said so to DeSapio and Prendergast. No doubt about that. And that was corrected immediately. There are some hot heads in these things that they try to placate, I suppose, and said, "They shouldn't be on. What have they ever done?" So, you know, these things, but you just can't.... You have to swallow a great many things in this political game.

Look, I was in this business for forty years, and no one could point a finger at me at any time that I didn't have the help or the friendship of Mr. Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt for no reason in the world except that I was an organization Democrat. My reputation is as good as Herbert Lehman's or Mrs. Roosevelt's. It always was. I was born in this town, born in this neighborhood, lived here all my life. There's something about me -- they never were able to point it out, in spite of being in active politics, right in the middle of everything.

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But these things would annoy you. But these are just some of the things you have to go on...

Look at Buffalo when we nominated Hogan [Frank S. Hogan] for United States Senator. I don't know of a cleaner man that you could nominate than Hogan, but Mr. Lehman came back from Zurich and objects as everything that was done. He couldn't say here and go to the Convention, but after it was over, he gets off the boat and objects to everything.

STEWART: This was in '58?

SHARKEY: Yes. I mean, these are some of the things that irked people, these kind of actions, you know, where they were really the bosses running things and they'd accuse us of being boss. I was never a boss in my life.

STEWART: Did you have any contacts with any of the Kennedy people aside from Ambassador Kennedy in this period, for example, with Robert Kennedy or...

SHARKEY: Yes, with Robert Kennedy I had quite a little contact.

STEWART: Again over what types of things...

SHARKEY: Well, I'd meet him with meetings and so

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forth. He'd ask me would I attend a meeting, some meetings that were being held. They were trying to raise funds, of course. And I recall one at the Waldorf where we met and he said to me, "Joe, can I see you after the meeting?" I said, "Sure." So we went in the back room and he said, "Joe, do you hear any beefs?" This was the early part of the campaign when it was most uncertain what would happen.

STEWART: Before the Convention, you mean?

SHARKEY: Oh, yes. This was way early. And I said, "No." I said, "There's only one beef I hear." And he said, "What is that?" "Well," I said, "can you take it?" He sort of dropped his head a little bit. He said, "Sure." I said, "The only beef I hear is there are too many Kennedys in the campaign." This was the time when all the sisters and

everybody were running around. There was some criticism, you know. I was honest with him. I said, "I'm being honest with you, Bob." "Well," he said, "I thought my mother'd be different." What he meant by that was that his mother was supposed to come over

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to Brooklyn the following week and I said, "Oh, that is different." I said, "I want your mother very, very much. She can do a great deal." I said, "I'm just giving you a reaction." So the following week she did come over here, and I took her all over Brooklyn, to the homes of many people and to places and the teas and had a good day.

But you see, these fellows write these books, like White. They don't get down to the basic -- they're dealing with surface things.

STEWART: They're dramatizing.

SHARKEY: Yes. They deal with Gene Keogh, for instance, as being.... Gene had no more to do with the campaign. Gene was a great help to Kennedy a year or two even before the Convention time, from '60 on, in Washington, contacting, down there he was a great help, but in Brooklyn here he didn't have anything to do and this, White would give you the idea that he carried Brooklyn. The truth of the matter was if Gene had evidenced any too great interest there would have been considerable objection from various places in Brooklyn, you know

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well, some people who just didn't like Gene, that's all. It's just one of those things. He didn't attempt even to run anything in Brooklyn. Once he got Joe Kennedy and myself together, that was the end. A fellow like White... give you the idea that....

STEWART: Yes. White's primary explanation for the whole New York delegation is that John Bailey was able to get the people up-state and Ambassador Kennedy was able to get people down here and that Prendergast and DeSapio weren't really aware of what these two people were doing and that -- again, in the dramatic fashion that White describes things -- he says that the New York delegation was, in effect, stolen from under their noses because....

SHARKEY: Oh, that isn't so. Mr. White is just dealing in fantasy. They knew everything that was going on every minute. Let's give them credit. They're astute politicians. They knew, but what could they do in the face of Buckley and Sharkey being against them? This was their problem. I mean, without casting -- I'm not trying to take any roses here, but the fact is that Buckley was ardently for Jack Kennedy and I was, too.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]



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And if Buckley and I had gone along with DeSapio and Prendergast there wouldn't have been any doubt about the delegation down state here. Joe Kennedy couldn't have done a damn thing about it. Nothing.

STEWART: Did you have any contact with the people upstate, with Crotty....

SHARKEY: Peter Crotty? Yes, with Peter Crotty, fellows like that, all of the leaders upstate who I was friendly with.... We were friendly with them. Yes, I think they...  
[Interruption]

STEWART: You were mentioning the people upstate. You say you did talk to them quite frequently?

SHARKEY: Oh, yes. Yes. We used to meet with them. We'd have meetings down state here. I think they did a good job up there in view of the fact that was tough territory.

STEWART: Did you have any contact with John Bailey in this pre-Convention period?

SHARKEY: Oh, yes. Yes. Not only the pre-Convention, but immediately thereafter, after the election, in December. There was a snowstorm in December. I had a date with John Bailey and Dave Lawrence at the

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downtown Athletic Club on a Saturday morning. Had a hard job getting there, I remember. There was snow, and I didn't think that they'd show, because for me to get over there is easy – I'm a member of the downtown Athletic Club. And I thought for Bailey and Lawrence it would be a difficult task, but they were there. We had breakfast there, the three of us.

STEWART: This was when, did you say?

SHARKEY: This is immediately after the election. This was in, well, I'd say, early December. Early December.

STEWART: Could we just get to the Convention now? Do you recall any significant problems on holding the people you had at the convention?

SHARKEY: Well, there were isolated cases, of course, but most of my delegates were with me. But there was a great deal of sentiment, especially, you know, this town –

there's a great many Jewish people in this town, and they were very strong for our friend Stevenson. A lot of sentiment for him. But they'd come to me in a nice way and say, "Can't we give Stevenson some votes and support?" And I was

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adamant about it. I said, "We can't break this up into little pieces." I said, "To have strength and to show that we're a delegation, we have to stand together." And there was quite a little of that, quite a little of that.

STEWART: According to the stories, the relationship between Mayor Wagner and DeSapio became worse at the Convention. There were recurring problems there. Were you at all involved in this dispute or these bad feelings?

SHARKEY: In Los Angeles?

STEWART: Yes.

SHARKEY: I don't think the Convention added to it. I think they were in that shape before they went out there, really, and the strange part of it was I was a friend of both of them. Bob and I worked together. I was the majority leader for twenty-one years; during his whole administration I was the majority leader. We worked together handsomely until our final break that began five years ago. And I was a good friend of Carmine's, too. I consider Carmine an excellent politician. There's nothing he ever did in my presence

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in the eight years I was the county leader that I'd be ashamed, to have to go into a dark room to do. Frankly, he's been maligned unmercifully and I think he's a darn good politician. This is the trouble with Manhattan politics today. They needed him; they need a fellow like him at the helm of it.

STEWART: Was there some publication, then, at the Convention or before, of the problems that were later to arise during the campaign?

SHARKEY: There wasn't a bit of indication, no, except, as regards, as I say, Prendergast and DeSapio. I feel that they were, more or less, always under sort of suspicion, possibly, by the Kennedy group, you know. But I don't think they worried much. I believe Joe Kennedy was quoted one time as saying – I don't know whether it was the President – "Anything we want in New York, we get ahold of Buckley and Sharkey." Now, I don't know whether that was said or not. It's the rumor I hear. But I don't think there was.... Although I think he played fair after the Inauguration – I mean, after the Convention.

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No question about that. He went all out.

STEWART: What was your reaction to the selection of Lyndon Johnson as the vice presidential candidate?

SHARKEY: I thought it was a darn good move. I didn't believe he would take it at the time, but I thought it was an excellent move. It might have made the ticket; it might have been the difference – I don't know – cause he won so small, you know.

I said to him at this meeting.... There was considerable discussion after the election that there was wrongdoing and the vote – you know, remember, there was a recount in Chicago, I believe, in Illinois, in Cook County. I was furious about it. I said, "Look, Mr. President, why didn't we have recounts in these other various areas where it was questionable?" He said, "Joe, we were trying to contain it as much as possible rather than spread it. Let it be settled right there." And this was done.

STEWART: Getting on to the campaign, could you describe generally what your role was during the campaign that is, after the Convention?

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SHARKEY: Oh, gee, I was a busy fellow in this county. We organized this county, rented stores all over the place, banners all over the county. We held meetings in every conceivable place. We had every speaker that we could get, and we worked with the people in the districts, and anywhere that there was any weaknesses, we immediately rushed in, and we really carried this country for him.

STEWART: They eventually did set up a Citizen's for Kennedy group here in New York. There was some problem at the beginning in setting this up. There were stories that Prendergast had an agreement with Robert Kennedy that there wouldn't be a citizens group and there later was a meeting which I think you attended with Robert Kennedy at the beginning of the campaign to discuss this. Do you recall this meeting?

SHARKEY: Yes, I do.

STEWART: Wagner, DeSapio...

SHARKEY: Now that you remind me, yes.

STEWART: ...Prendergast, Lehman and Finletter were there.

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SHARKEY: Yes. Yes. We worked with anyone in this county at the time in the spirit of cooperation and unison. They didn't mean a damn thing, honestly, but we worked with them. I mean, anything they wanted we supplied them with. We were grateful for any help. Take anybody's help, this was my attitude. Take anybody's help. They meant nothing before the Convention; they meant nothing afterward; but they were willing to help. They wanted to help in their fashion. Fine. It's perfectly alright with me.

STEWART: Do you recall this particular meeting? Again, according to the stories, Robert Kennedy laid down a law or made some pretty strong statements about the need to cooperate and get along during the campaign.

SHARKEY: He may have said that, but I was in agreement with that. I mean this. I mean, I was willing to work with anybody. I wouldn't let them take over my functions, and they didn't mean enough in this county. They may have meant something in Manhattan, but they didn't mean anything in this county.

STEWART: All right, so they...

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SHARKEY: I was glad to have them. Glad to have them.

STEWART: They didn't create any problems, did they?

SHARKEY: Oh, none at all. None at all. And I think they'll tell you that themselves. They were happy with us.

STEWART: Yes, yes. You mentioned one phone call from Walton. Did you have any other contact with people? Tony Akers [Anthony B. Akers]. I believe, was the state-wide chairman of the citizens group. Do you recall anything about that?

SHARKEY: I tell you, they didn't bother me, Mr. Stewart, at all. They left it entirely in my hands. I think they were quite satisfied with what, they were overwhelmed with what we were doing here, frankly. He talked about it many times, privately and everywhere else. We covered every feature of this thing. We held rallies and, God, it was fantastic the things that were done. And it was the best campaign. So much so, that my alter ego in this county, John Crews, the Republican leader, who's a very dear friend of mine and a good politician and a great fellow, and the papers came to him and said, "Gee, John, the Democrats are – no one hears the Republicans in this campaign. This is the

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greatest campaign that has ever been run in this county.” And he said, “Well,” he said, “you know, Joe Kennedy’s money is doing this.” So they came to me the next day, and they said to me, “Is that a fact, Joe, that Joe Kennedy’s money is running it?” I said, “Let me tell you something. Joe Kennedy hasn’t put a nickel in this county, and,” I said, “not that I wouldn’t take it if he did, but” I said, “he hasn’t put a nickel into it.” Now, they came to me looking for a contribution, and I said to them, “Do you want me to run this county, or do you want a contribution?” And this is the way it was settled. We ran it, and we paid every dime of expense and never got a five cent piece. Never.

STEWART: From any outside source?

SHARKEY: From anybody except our own people within our own county who could contribute. Never from any outside source. I don’t know whether any was put in the state. If it did, it didn’t trickle down to Brooklyn. Never. It did. That’s the record, and they know that. I didn’t need it honestly. I left a quarter of a million dollars in the campaign

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funds in this town in the treasury. This was never heard of in this country in any county. When I got out there was a quarter of a million dollars in there. It was gone a year later.

STEWART: As far as fundraising generally, were there requests for contributions from you people in this county to either the New York state organization or the national organization?

SHARKEY: Never asked them for a penny. And this is true of.... There’s a congressional campaign committee. We never got a dime from them in the eight years I was in there.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: No. I guess they figured we had enough money, I don’t know, I suppose because I made a fetish of going out and telling them how much I had in the treasury. Every six months or so I’d tell the papers how much I had. I wanted it known so as they couldn’t come in and try to put a blitz on me and ask for money. I wanted to show a continuing progress. I had hoped to leave this organization with a million dollars some day, maybe more, and

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live on that in the bad years where you could live on the income of this. I had the money in savings banks even getting an income on this money. This was never heard of before. This was “silly” in politics. Buckley said to me, “I hear you left a quarter million dollars over

there in the treasury.” He said, “Are you crazy?” I says, “Charlie, what do you want me to do? Go to jail?” Never interested me at all.

STEWART: President Kennedy came to Brooklyn at least once during the campaign.

SHARKEY: Oh, yes, he was in. We had more than one. Gee, I never saw such crowds.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: Oh, tremendous. We had him cover the entire county. We had places set up in each.... Of course, every leader wanted him in his district or we got the leaders to band together, three or four districts, so as to make it easier for the President. I tell you, I feared for my life. I sat in the car with him, and the car would – they’d practically life it up. It would shake, you

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know. And down on Kings Highway we stopped for a bite to eat. The President had a steak, and they broke the window in the restaurant trying to get them in. And I was lost. I couldn’t follow him. I had to go in to a devious side door entrance, and coming out we had to get him out a side door entrance, ‘cause you couldn’t get him out. And it was fantastic, the crowds he had. You could sense that he was going to win, that is, in this town, anyway.

STEWART: Do you recall any of his comments or his reactions to all this, any anecdotes or anything that you can recall from your contact with him when he came here?

SHARKEY: Gee, no. There are so many things. I’ve often wanted to sit down and make memorandums, you know, on this thing, because I could write a book on it, almost, especially that year previous to the election. So many things that occurred, and he was the sweetest fellow who ever lived. I don’t know of anybody that I ever met in my life who was as sweet as he was. He was a wonderful, really a wonderful fellow. It was a shame what happened to him.

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STEWART: Were there any problems because of the whole religious issue during the campaign here?

SHARKEY: No. You know, honestly, the Protestant people supported him generously, wonderfully well. We had more trouble with our own people.

STEWART: Really?

SHARKEY: Honestly. I suppose through the years you have the same trouble. I had the same trouble. I'd been running for forty years for office. But your own people are the ones that you had to prove to. Now we had a good deal of – I've heard people say the Catholics elected Kennedy. This isn't so. It isn't so in this area. I can't speak for the entire country, but in this area, honestly, we had opposition from priests, not from the nuns, but priests. Now our priests proverbially in this area are Republican. I don't know why. Have been through the years. It's always been that sort of a thing. And, as I say, our only opposition came like out in Bay Ridge, which is an Irish area, strictly Irish. This was our toughest area to carry. I don't know why. Could never understand it. Seems that the Irish

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probably oppose their own. I don't know. But he, after he was elected, I think that wore off somewhat. I think they sort of came around. Most of them did. But they didn't help much in the election. As I say, when people tell me that the Catholics elected Kennedy, I seriously object to that. I think the Protestant people were wonderful in this country. This was a great demonstration. They were terrific.

STEWART: After the election and during the first few months of the administration what, if any, arrangements did you have for handling patronage in this county?

SHARKEY: Well, I didn't have any specific arrangement. I used to make demands from the payroll that I'd see, you know, what I had to work with and, honestly, I haven't a complaint in the world. They were very decent, very good to me. I got almost within a fair degree, almost everything that I asked for. Sometimes they'd disagree with me and they'd have other ideas, which is alright with me. But honestly I couldn't complain about it. They were very fair, more so than they were even with Charlie Buckley.

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And it should have been just the opposite. Charlie had his difficulties. I didn't.

It might be – honestly and I say this maybe with a little go about this – we always gave them good candidates. This has been the history of this county. It was while I was in there. I wouldn't put forward anybody who wasn't eligible for it and didn't have the background, just wouldn't go for it. There were places for people like that, but not in spots that could be pointed at. And it might be that that was the reason. But they went along with me.

They gave me the attorney general. The U.S. Attorney General, Joe Hoey [Joseph P. Hoey]. They gave me a judgeship. I put Rosling [George J. Rosling] in there. They didn't give me the man I asked for originally, Nova. And there were difficulties about that. He was a partner of Multer's [Abraham J. Multer], and there was some difficulty with Multer with the time. They explained it, and it was perfectly legitimate and right. We gave them another

name. And Small Business Administration. Kriger [Charles H. Kriger] went in there. We always gave them people who were well

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qualified, and that might have been the answer. But I haven't a complaint in the world about that. Nothing.

STEWART: Was most of this done through John Bailey or through someone at the White House?

SHARKEY: Yes, it was through John Bailey, mostly.

STEWART: In 1961, of course, in the mayoralty race, that's when you split with Robert Wagner and supported Levitt.

SHARKEY: Yes.

STEWART: What role did the White House play in this whole campaign, this whole...

SHARKEY: Well, yes, it was rather unfortunate. Bob and I were very good – and we're best of friends now, that it's over, and I think he has told all my friends he always regretted that he had gone as far as he did on it. It's all right with me. It was better for me. I remember at that time that Joe Kennedy got in touch with Buckley – was it Joe Kennedy or Bobby? I think it was Joe Kennedy – and said, "Gee, why didn't you let us know what you were going to do this? We would have taken him down to Washington." And

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Buckley said, "Now, stop kidding me. We tried to get him down to Washington six, seven months before that, and they wouldn't have him." So they regretted, I guess, that there was a break in the organization and this thing happened.

STEWART: Did you specifically make a request to the President that the mayor be given either a Cabinet post or some other post?

SHARKEY: No, I didn't do that. Why, did someone say that I did?

STEWART: No, no.

SHARKEY: No, I didn't. No, I wouldn't presume to recommend to the President anybody in the Cabinet. I might have said that I thought he was material for the Cabinet, but... Because of his experience in cities, you know. Some post that might deal with cities or populations or something of that sort, possibly he was.... And he's a



good plugger, and he would be a good man, but evidently they didn't want him down there. They had the opportunity to take him, and then when we fought him, why they....

You see, when we fought Wagner, this, honestly.... We were circulating

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petition for Wagner, and our people couldn't get signatures for Wagner. This was general, throughout the city here. And they were coming back and saying, "We can't do it." Then, I met with my leaders, forty-eight of them, and they said, "Joe, you'll have to give us another name. We can't win with Wagner." I argued with them, and I said, "Now, wait, this fellow...." "No," they said, "Joe, we can't. We won't be responsible if -- we'll have to go if you give him to us, but we can't guarantee the win. We're going to have difficulties." Now, this was true throughout the city. It wasn't because of DeSapio disagreements with him or anything else. That didn't have a thing to do with it. It was just that we couldn't carry.

And every newspaper was opposed to him. Editorials. Editorials. The *New York Post* said, "Your usefulness to the city is ended. You ought to quit." Mrs. Roosevelt was opposed to him. Governor Lehman was opposed to him. They all thought that he had had enough, three terms. They needed a new face. But just as soon as we opposed him, they all jumped on

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the bandwagon. And it was bossism. And we were just going with the trend of the times. We thought we couldn't win with him. I think he would have lost if we had nominated him. Honestly, I do. It was just because.... And then the others all rallied to him. Then we were the bosses trying to keep this fellow out of office. It was really a dirty thing, a real dirty thing.

STEWART: You met with the President, according to our records, on April 29th, 1961, along with Buckley. Do you recall this?

SHARKEY: At the Biltmore?

STEWART: I believe so.

SHARKEY: That's right. He was going out...

STEWART: He came to New York for probably a fund raising.

SHARKEY: No, he came to New York at that time with one of the generals, and he was dedicating something, I think, in Queens -- I don't recall now -- because they waited there while we spoke to him. Buckley and I spoke to him. The general waited outside to take him away. He immediately left.

STEWART: Do you recall what this was about?

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SHARKEY: I can recall what it was about. They were riding DeSapio, wanted to get rid of -- no, Prendergast, wanted to get rid of Prendergast. This was a renewal of this old feud. And this was after my blast in the papers, in the *Times*, see.

STEWART: Yes.

SHARKEY: We got together with him, and we sat down, and we talked for a few minutes. And he said, "Look, Joe, if you and Charlie want me to go along with Prendergast, I will." So I said, "Mr. President, why don't you leave Prendergast to us?" He said, "Oh," he said, "he talks off the top of his head." And I said, "Look, why don't you leave Prendergast to us. We'll cure him. If we don't, we'll be as disgusted as you are about this." He says, "All right. If you and Charlie want to stay, fine."

And we went back and had a talk with Prendergast, you know, told him off, told him, "Look, you can't just..." But they didn't ever seem to keep the promise on that because they seemed to immediately go right to work on him. There were too many elements in there that were opposed to him, I guess. Mike was a square shooter.

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STEWART: Who primarily do you know and did you ever find out among the Kennedy advisors was interested in getting rid of Prendergast?

SHARKEY: Well, they thought this -- Walton was his name?

STEWART: Walton.

SHARKEY: There was always some talk that he might have been the one who was pressing on this. And then, you know, in a campaign it's a difficult thing. It's a testy, tedious operation. People come in from Washington and immediately want to take over. "You should do it this way. You should do it this way." You're in the midst of running a campaign. You're doing well. We know your reports are good. And there's objection to interference. And sometimes, I imagine, Prendergast was in the spot where he had to resist them. They didn't get down as far as me, you know. And evidently he had to say "no" on a great many things. And I supposed he stepped on a lot of toes. And this is quite possible. But after you win, I think you should forget these things and try to heal them up if you can. And Prendergast was a good leader, state-wide. He was a good leader,

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well-liked. But I imagine he did step on a few toes.

You know, some fellows attach themselves to a campaign. They get pretty close to the heads there like the Washington situation, and they come back and sell themselves. And they say, "I'm doing this in New York" and "This should be done in New York" and "This should be done in New York." And not being on the scene, people may go along with them. It's a vicious and a dangerous thing to do, because if you're doing well and you know you're doing well when you're on the job, see, and you can tell when you're not doing well. We could tell in the last ten days we weren't doing well with the Wagner thing. We knew it. You can sense these things, and you can.... But when people come in from the outside and try to change a winning system, it's bad.

My only clash with Walton was what I told you. He was looking for me, and I tried to get him, but I couldn't. Two weeks intervened, and he said, "Jeez, I'm having a hard job finding you. Aren't you ever in?" or something like this, see. And I was kind of vicious with Mr. Walton. I didn't even know him, and I says, "I'm

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no damn good to Jack Kennedy if I'm sitting on my rear end here at this desk in a big county like this." This was the end of it.

STEWART: Well, that's just about all the questions I have unless there's anything else you can think of. Did you see the President after this at all after this April 1961 meeting?

SHARKEY: Gee, I don't recall, honestly. Gee, I don't recall. I'd have to go... I must have seen him. We went down to Washington, dinners and things of that sort. Met him, said hello, things of that.... When he'd want anything he would, you know, get in touch through John Bailey or someone else. He was a busy man.

STEWART: How effective would you say John Bailey was as chairman of the Democratic National Committee during the Kennedy administration?

SHARKEY: I'd say John Bailey was an effective.... I don't know how he is now, since I've gotten out, what has been done down there, whether he has much.... But I think under Kennedy, I think he was quite effective. He seemed to be.... The errands -- not

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errands, but the contracts you'd have you would get answers on them. They usually were very good, good common sense. It looked like he was getting them from the White House, whether from the President or not or someone in there, I don't know, but he pretty well knew what their thinking was.

Like he -- there at one point, they were going to make Vincent Keogh a federal judge. I knew nothing about it, knew nothing about it. And I had listened to this rumor for a long

time without paying attention. Suddenly it became very hot, and I finally called John Bailey. I said, "John, what is this about Vincent Keogh going to be made a federal judge. Is there anything to this?" He said, "Well, there was some thinking about this. There is in the White House right now." I said, "Well, I don't know anything about this." I said, "I'm the county leader here, and if they're going to make a judge in this county, I should know something about it. It hasn't been called to my attention, and I'm not for it."

"Well," he said, "all right, then, I'll withdraw it." He did.

And the following week in comes Gene Keogh,

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brother of Vince. And in mock contrition or whatever it was, he knelt down and kissed my ring, you know. So I said, "What is this all about?" He said, "Well," he says, "I'm crazy." He said, "Joe, when I make a mistake I make a good one." He said, "I'm sorry that this was never called to your attention and forget about it. Vince's name is withdrawn." I said, "Look, Gene. Sit down. Did I ever oppose or would I opposed your brother? What is the idea of going over my head and doing this without my knowledge, trying to accomplish this without me?" I says, "Do you think I'd say, 'no' to you and your brother?" "Well," he said, "I know I was wrong. I'm sorry." So I says, "Now, you're asking me for it, I'm not for it." He said, "Do you mean that?" I says, "Yes." I said, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "Will you call John Bailey?"

I picked up the phone, called John Bailey. He was in Connecticut at some board meetings, and insurance outfit up there. Tried to get him there. He was gone. He was up to Framingham, Massachusetts. So I wanted to call there. I said, to the girl, "Get him." Gene

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says, "No, you've gone far enough, Joe." He said, "Vince is playing golf with him tomorrow up at Framingham," or wherever it was. "Can Vince say to him that you've withdrawn your opposition?" I said, "Certainly."

So this is -- next day I'm up in the country again. I get a call. My wife transfers it to where I was. It was John Bailey. He said, "Joe, is that so that you've withdrawn your opposition to Vince Keogh?" I said, "Yes, John, 100 percent, 'cause I'm for Vince." "Well," he says, "I don't know whether or not I can get it back on the tracks again at the White House, but," he says, "the first thing Monday morning, I'll do this." And it was a lucky thing we delayed it. That's when this trouble came out about Vince. He's a grand fellow, a nice fellow, but it would have been disastrous if he had been a federal judge and this thing broke, see. This little delay just did it. Unknown. I didn't know it. But this....

I always took the attitude: I'm the leader; if I'm not the leader, the hell with it. Either you're a leader or you're not a leader, and if people are going to maneuver behind your back and

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get what they want without the -- how are you going to run a county, a big county like this, satisfy all of your leaders, pull the strings together? You don't have to be a boss for this: you're a coordinator. You're just pulling things together.

STEWART: Were people in Washington at all involved in the contest.... Well, I'm not sure. Did you lose an election for county leader or you left in January 1962?

SHARKEY: I resigned, yes.

STEWART: You resigned.

SHARKEY: I could have stayed in and fought, but my thought was that I was only embarrassing fellows underneath and you know what the pressures are. The mayor can take jobs away from little fellows and, you know, it can cost you if you have the wrong county leader. I wasn't going to have anybody suffer through me, and I didn't care. I had enough of it. I was fed up with it. I'm glad I did get out. It's been chaos ever since then.

STEWART: Is that right?

SHARKEY: Pretty much. All over the state.

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STEWART: Well, as I say, unless -- gee, you have an appointment, too.

SHARKEY: I'm sorry. Maybe I should have just sat down and written these things to you and...

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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