Stewart L. Udall Oral History Interview – JFK #4, 4/7/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Stewart L. Udall
Interviewer: W.W. Moss
Date of Interview: April 7, 1970
Length: 24 pp.

Biographical Note
Udall was the Secretary of the Interior for the President Kennedy and President Johnson Administrations (1961-1969). This interview focuses on Department of Interior appointments, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and evaluations of Kennedy Administration Cabinet members, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation
Stewart L. Udall, recorded interview by W.W. Moss, April 7, 1970, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Stewart L. Udall
JFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

STEWART L. UDALL

April 7, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By W. W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: All right. Mr. Udall, this morning I'd like to ask you some things about the appointments. We were talking earlier about some of the appointments at the assistant secretary level and I had at first thought I'd go into the bureau level, but I think we'd better do that as we come to each area.

UDALL: All right.

MOSS: It might be more in context. But I would like to ask you about several appointments and appointment problems, particularly with Republican holdovers. In going through the material in the Library [John F. Kennedy Library], I ran into a couple of things where some of the Democratic congressmen and senators were complaining that there were some Republican holdovers in the department. And I understand that you did have a problem, particularly with Herschel Schooley [C. Herschel Schooley], who was your Director of Information. What happened in that situation?

UDALL: Well, there are two pressures that come on a person, I found at least: one is from members of Congress who usually have some friend that wants a job; and the other is from people within the department, you know, usually at a career level, who feed in information to the new administration and identify people as being leading, you know, staunch Republicans or vice versa. This is what happens. And of course

you have to evaluate all of these things in terms of the kind of people that you want and the extent to which you are going to let partisanship dictate decisions. I tried to go slow on this and to evaluate people. You might have very valuable people who, it's true, might have had some connection with the other party. But there are different kinds of partisanship. There are people who simply are nominal Republicans or Democrats but are basically

public interest types. So these are the things you evaluate.

Schooley was an example. Of course, this is a very sensitive checkpoint in the department. The Director of Information, he had been Seaton's [Frederick A. Seaton] secretary. He got a lot of the press people, as I remember, to encourage me to keep him. He also had some friends on the Hill as I recall. But I decided not to make any quick decision on this and to go along with him, and I think he stayed for two or three months. I became unhappy with him because of his performance and not his politics. He and I didn't seem to work together well. He didn't seem to be sensitive to what I was trying to do. And one or two things happened where I thought we made serious mistakes. Either he made them or I made them together, and we handled it badly. And he sort of shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, you know, you can't win them all. There's going to be unfavorable things written." And it was that kind of lackadaisical attitude that caused me to decide that I ought to get rid of him and get somebody new. So I really acted in his case on the basis of not being satisfied with his performance.

MOSS: Other names that I ran into were Don Shearon [Donald Shearon], Phil Mullin [Philip J. Mullin], Edward Larson.

UDALL: Well, these were people that I really didn't get acquainted with. I think they were holdovers that were rather close to Seaton. We didn't act abruptly with these people. We usually gave them options to move other places in the department. But there are crucial jobs in the department where it's important that you have your own man. This is, I would say, generally the way we handled that.

MOSS: Another one that I ran across, Governor McNichols [Stephen L. McNichols] was upset that Grant, Bloodgood was retained for a while as the chief engineer of the Reclamation Bureau.

UDALL: Yeah, that comes back to me. Of course, Bloodgood was a professional. In fact, Floyd Dominy, of course, I held him over. He was an Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] appointee. He staunchly defended Bloodgood, said that he was a career engineer, highly professional person. We kept him the whole eight years in that instance, despite the fact that apparently the Colorado Democrats felt that he ought to be replaced. I think in that case Governor McNichols had some friend of his that he was pushing for that job. But I didn't think in the higher echelons of the Bureau of Reclamation that you should make appointments on the basis of political considerations.

MOSS: Another interesting thing that I ran across was a referral from the White House, I believe from Larry O'Brien, [Lawrence F. O'Brien] regarding the efforts of Jack Toole to become assistant secretary for mineral resources. On the referral was a handwritten note, I presume

O'Brien's, saying, "Advise Orren Beaty to ignore the above." Do you recall the circumstances at all on this?

UDALL: No, I don't. Orren probably would because he was my sort of political eyes and ears and he's very sensitive to these things. But this probably would have been an example where, you know, you were going through the motions. You know, a lot of people, when a new administration comes in, press themselves forward and their friends do, and they're not really qualified. You have to screen them out. But then you want to let them down easy. I mean, that's smart politics.

MOSS: Now, how much did you get involved in the appointments to the FPC, to the Federal Power Commission, after Morgan [Howard Morgan] and Kuykendall [Jerome K. Kuykendall] resigned?

UDALL: Well, I was involved probably peripherally on that. I think they did talk to me about Larry O'Connor [Lawrence J. O'Connor. Jr.] from my department, who headed one of the agencies. I think Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn] and Lyndon Johnson were pushing him. I told them that as far as I was concerned he seemed to be very capable and that we certainly would have no objections if they took him out of the department and put him on the FPC. Now, when it got later on to the Carver [John A. Carver, Jr.]-Dave Black [David S. Black] shift on the Federal Power Commission, I had a great deal to do with that.

MOSS: In the matter of appointments, when you get pressures from other places, what sort of signals do you respond to and what ones can you ignore? Is there a pattern of signals that you learn to identify?

UDALL: No, you simply have to play it by ear. You have to evaluate how intense the pressure is, whether it's from a senator, a group of senators; whether it's from the White House even, for that matter. Then it depends upon how strongly you feel about the qualifications of the person who's being put forward or about the person who already holds a position that maybe you don't want to move. The best thing, it seemed to me always, unless there were some kind of overriding political pressures like the White House really putting a strong press on, that you try to make your judgments on the basis of the merits and of qualifications and somehow fend off these pressures. As I said, there were some instances where the White House just called up and said this person is the one that has the job. There were a few of these. And I knew under those circumstances that this was coming because of, oh, the 1960 campaign; because of commitments; because the President

[John F. Kennedy], O'Brien, O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and these people had very strong feelings about something. I mean, they should be entitled to a few of these where they call the shots, it seemed to me.

MOSS: For instance, I've heard it said that if it's a paper referral, a memo, you play it on its own merits, but if you get a phone call

to support it you take a little more interest in it. Is this a rule of thumb?

UDALL: Well, that would be certainly a good indication. Oftentimes, you know, people will write letters for the record then, you know, you send copies to senators, to other people. But then the telephone call might be more revealing, like saying, you know, ignore this one but take this one seriously. So, there's this kind of finessing that goes on all the time, inevitably.

MOSS: Now, within the first few months, there were several ways in which you hit the headlines, not always happily, and I think we ought to have your story on each one of these, whatever you want to give us. The Jack Evans [John K. Evans] situation with the dinner and the oilmen….

UDALL: Well, this was one of these blundering things that the.... You know, with a new administration in office the out party is searching for mistakes that they can focus attention on and this was a beaut in a way, as they would say. I did not have when I came into office any important connections with the oil industry. You know, Arizona's not an oil state. I hadn't known any major oilmen. And Jack Evans, who was then with Shell Oil Company, had vacationed in Arizona, was a close friend of friends of mine in Tucson. You know, I had been to one or more political dinners with him back in the fifties, as a congressman. So I knew him personally. And I made the mistake of because the pressure was on – this was the first big dinner in the spring 1961 and they were putting heavy pressure on us from the National Committee [Democratic National Committee] and the White House to get out a big crowd and so on. So I said to Evans, who was the only one I knew, I said could he do a little something and help out with the oil industry. This was said orally and so on, and I assumed that he had a sophistication that he lacked.

Well, he went back to his office and he was thinking in an egotistical way. I mean it flattered his ego for me to even ask him to help. So he wrote letters, actually wrote letters, to oilmen in his circle in Washington – you know, he knew the people – and said that the secretary had asked him to be sure there was good representation from the oil industry and whatnot, and these letters went out. Well, this salved his ego but it was a very stupid thing to do. I hadn't told him to do it that way. In fact, I assumed that he would do it in the way that it's been done from time immemorial, you know, by word of mouth, and that there would be nothing to come back.

Well, I began getting a feedback on this and my Director of Information, I guess it was Schooley at that point – this was one of the things where I was unhappy with him – he

told me that he had been getting inquiries about this and I was shown a copy of this letter. Well, what we should have done at that time is taken the offensive, and I should have disavowed this.

Instead of that, we sort of thought we'd take our chances and maybe it would pass by, with the result that Scripps-Howard [Newspaper Alliance] newspapers picked it up, splashed a headline on it, and it was an unhappy business. But from the standpoint of….I mean, it made me look inept, of course, and this is one of the things you'd rather not have happened. But it wasn't of any consequence, really. It was sort of, it could have happened to somebody else. It was the sort of thing that was happening with an administration new in power, and you're overeager, and things of this kind are done.

President Kennedy himself, a person that nothing.... The White House guys never did say anything to me, never criticized me, but I knew that they understood the situation. Well, at the dinner, President Kennedy thanked the people who had done all the arrangements and the national chairman and so on, and he said, "We also thank Stu Udall for the free publicity," which was a nice wry piece of humor that brought the house down. So this was all that happened, and was one of those clumsy mistakes that you make.

MOSS: All right. Another situation was when Charlie Halleck [Charles A. Halleck] got his nose out of joint on the House Rules Committee business and accused you of not playing the game fairly, and you said that this *is* the game.

UDALL: Yeah.

MOSS: Now, what sort of pressures were you putting on Congress? What could you say to a Republican congressman from the West to make him vote your way on the fight?

UDALL: Well, the fight at that time was the fight on reforming the rules committee so that you get…

MOSS: Right. Increasing the membership.

UDALL: And it was a very crucial…

MOSS: Right.

UDALL: …was a very crucial fight. And of course, as a former House member, one who had been right in the middle of it, I had a lot of personal contact, and so on and so on. I asked the White House, probably O'Brien, whether they wanted me to get in this and make some discreet phone calls, which I did. And I guess, you know, when you're getting into this kind of a tough slugging match, you can't be exactly discreet. I called two or three Republican congressmen that I knew quite well, the ones that I

knew wouldn't immediately call up the press and say Udall threatened me or something. I tried to reason with them and point out how important it was.

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One person, for example, was Congressman Edgar Chenoweth, a Republican from southern Colorado. He'd formerly been on the rules committee, I knew him extremely well. He had pending at that time, before my department, before the Congress, the thing that was very vital to him, which was the Fryingpan-Arkansas reclamation project. And I tried to point out to him, in a subtle way, that because that very project had gotten held up – the rules committee had blocked it back in the 1950's and its whole progress had been impeded. And so I pointed out to him that this was important not simply for the reasons that any new administration would want it, it was perhaps important to him, and so on.

The result was that my activities, the word got back to Halleck and he said something snappish about me. And so at my press conference, because I knew Halleck well.... I thought then I was a bit more combative than I was later on in my career, because I had been through a lot of battles in 1960 and I just felt, you know, the old give and take. And so I was asked the question if I had any reply. Instead of ducking it, I said, "Well, Halleck has always been one who plays the game to the hilt, but he doesn't like it when other people play it." What I was trying to say is that this administration is tough and that we're going to use all the leverage we have just the way he always has. Well, it was probably a little too frank, but it was the truth in terms of my attitude at the time. And it was, I think, one way to respond to people like Halleck, because he was being very hypocritical and saying, "Why are these people trying to use cabinet officers or use all the influence they can bring to bear to change the House Rules Committee?" You know, as far as I was concerned the cause was a very important one, and even if I had to expose myself a little bit to criticism to help the President, I was willing to do so.

MOSS: And of course the President himself had to maintain the fiction of the separation of the branches, didn't he?

UDALL: Well, that's right. That's right. And the President....Of course, I never dealt with the President on this; I was dealing with his people, undoubtedly. In fact, I was a little bit unhappy, I remember, at the time because I felt this was so crucial, knowing the House, that the President didn't come out more openly and didn't throw more weight behind it. And yet he was new and didn't want to subject himself to that criticism, I think for good reasons. Except I felt, I could sense that his whole program might be stifled and that this was a very crucial decision. That's the reason, I don't think O'Brien called me, I called up and said, "Look, I've got a lot of these congressmen, my old colleagues who are friends of mine, and maybe I can help." And he said, "Go ahead." So, I mean, I volunteered on that one and I took a few lumps, but I had no regrets about it then or later.

MOSS: The example you used was one of reasoning with the congressmen. Did you ever threaten executive action to hold up a project or anything of this sort?

UDALL: No. No, I didn't. You know, you don't do that with congressmen. I knew congressmen that well, so I…. Like with Chenoweth, who was the one I think I applied the most pressure to, I didn't say, “Look, if you don’t vote right on this, we’re not going to support Fryingpan-Arkansas.” I knew this was the very sort of thing that might have sent him running to the press. But I said, “We're going to be trying to help you on this project. We'd like to get it through and so on, and I think the two are related. I think the way for you to help yourself, both with us and in terms of your project, is to go along on this vote.”

MOSS: After the Bay of Pigs thing blew open, you took some lumps on that, too, from the press at least and from the Republicans, by ostensibly blaming the whole thing on the Eisenhower Administration.

UDALL: Well, this was another one of those things that, again, could have happened to anybody under the circumstances. And again I say I was probably more combative in my attitudes towards protecting the President and the Administration. You know, I felt more of an emotional involvement than some others did. But this again was a matter of accident, in a way, of nothing that was planned that way. It was a very spontaneous thing. I was on the schedule for, I think, two or three weeks before to be on the Sunday program “Issues and Answers,” one of the national “Meet the Press” type programs. This was the weekend of the Bay of Pigs. And President Kennedy had taken the position at the outset, in order to not play politics with it once the news broke – the fact that it had failed and so on, and all the speculation about, you know, the C.I.A. [Central Intelligence Agency] was backing it…. President Kennedy on Saturday afternoon had issued some kind of statement saying that he took full responsibility on this, trying, I think, to keep his lines open and his relations good with Eisenhower and so on. Because, after all, Kennedy had approved and let it go forward. All of his people, as I'm sure they will all say, were regretting later that the decision was made without farther evaluation.

But I got up that Sunday morning, I hadn't even read the morning press. I was out in the woods splitting logs with my kids or something. I rushed in and got dressed, jumped in my car, went into this "Issues and Answers" program. It was a stupid thing to do when I look back on it. I went on this program without even having read the morning paper, and of course the very things they're going to be going after you on were what is happening and what the news of the day is.

Well, they quickly weighted in on me and were asking the questions. They began the questioning by saying, well, wasn't this going to be a heavy blow to the Administration, didn't this make the President look bad, and so on, wasn't this a very poor way to start off on foreign policy. This Administration stressed so much that we were going to have a new foreign policy and here we'd fallen flat on our face. One of them ended one of these questions. They were biting questions. They were moving in like reporters should, saying that this reflected very adversely on the Administration. And I said,

well, I didn't think so, as far as I was concerned, because, I said, it's very obvious that this particular thing had a very long lead time. There was a lot of preparation. It was a plan put together by one administration and carried out by another administration.

So these television programs, they have a way, you know, of wanting, they want to make news because it makes news for their network, and so somebody picked this out and this became a front-page story. And it had me, in effect, contradicting the President. Everett Dirksen the next day on the floor of the Senate denounced me as trying to slur Eisenhower and playing politics and so on and so on. So here was another embarrassing incident that occurred. And yet what I said was absolutely the truth. This is the interesting thing about it. And Dirksen was the one who was playing politics with the situation. Of course, once it happened, there was nothing I could say to defend myself. I'm sure…. I don't know whether Salinger [Pierre E. G. Salinger] called me. The President and his people were a little bit unhappy and they may have called and said, "Don't say anything further" – which I didn't – "just let it drop, let it die out." But when you look back even a few months later, when the facts began to come out, I had told the truth. But I had done it at the wrong time.

MOSS: Yeah, yeah. How were you kept informed of the developing situation in Cuba, you and other Cabinet members?

UDALL: On the Bay of Pigs?

MOSS: Right.

UDALL: Oh, we weren't told a thing.

MOSS: You weren't told a thing. When did you first hear of it?

UDALL: We first were told about it, I guess it was on a Friday morning. When it first began to break in the press, President Kennedy had a special quickie Cabinet meeting to just tell us. And it was, I think McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Rusk [Dean Rusk] made statements just reporting on what had happened, what the situation was. And he wasn't asking for discussion, he was just telling you.

MOSS: What did he want you to do then?

UDALL: Nothing.

MOSS: Nothing?

UDALL: Apparently, just so that we would know and we would be fully informed, so that we could govern ourselves accordingly.

MOSS: But it was simply information, there was no…

UDALL: That's right.

MOSS …policy position put out or guidance or anything of this sort?

UDALL: No. I think I said before in my oral history that one of the interesting things at that meeting – because the meeting didn't last longer than fifteen, twenty minutes – at the tail-end Arthur Goldberg spoke up and said, "As an old OSS [Office of Strategic Services] man," he said, "I think that if a great power plays its cards or gets into a game, it should go all the way. And I just want to say that's my opinion." And the President laughed rather nervously and smiled and he said, "Well at least, Arthur, we know where you stand." But it was too late, too late.

MOSS: Yeah, yeah. I think you said this last time.

UDALL: Yeah.

MOSS: Another less significant incident was the time that you and Justice Douglas [William O. Douglas] were refused admittance to the Angler's Inn down there on the canal. Do you recall the circumstances of that?

UDALL: Well, this was, I think, a kind of human interest happy story, because I did.... This was the first spring and the annual C& O [Chesapeake and Ohio] Canal hike. Senator Paul Douglas came along, and Justice Douglas and I were there. Turned out to be a miserable day, raining and cold all day, and people with ponchos trudging along. So, we were coming into Washington and people by then were very, very wet, and it was very unpleasant. We were tossed out actually. I don't think I maybe just got inside the door of this dining place. This was an emotional woman who literally didn't know who these people were, they just looked like a bunch of tramps, she said, to her, and tossed us out. There happened to be reporters there and there was a cute story written that appeared all over the country. But, you know, this was one that didn't reflect ill on anybody. It was just a matter of a human interest situation.

MOSS: Another situation that did not get nearly as much publicity was the business with the North Carolina desalination plant and Alton Lennon. What was the situation there? What was he upset about?

UDALL: Um, gee. You'd have to refresh my memory a little bit more. It seems to me, it's rather vague in my mind that we had several, Congress had put up money in the 1950's and there were several water desalting research programs. One was set up in North Carolina in Lennon's district. Lennon was one of these very conservative southern congressmen who, for example, on changing the rules committee and other things, was against the administration. And I think the issue was whether we should

go ahead with an enlargement of that research station or whether we should contract. There were a number of reasons, aside from evaluating him as a person – of course, I knew him as a person – there were a number of things that were brought into the picture that had to be discussed and evaluated. I think he chose to interpret what we did as discriminating against him in his district. My recollection is that that was not the main reason, that there were other reasons in terms of money available and what the evaluation was and where we should put our money.

MOSS: Okay. I think that's sufficient on that one. Let me ask you at this point if you would be willing to go down the list of jobs your fellow Cabinet officers and characterize them in your personal impressions of them as people and as Cabinet officers.

UDALL: I think so. I don't see why not.

MOSS: Okay. You've spoken a little bit about Dean Rusk already. Is there anything else that you want to add about him as a person and as a Secretary of State?

UDALL: Well…

MOSS: You mentioned, for instance, that he insisted upon the prerogatives of the senior cabinet officer in meetings and that sort of thing.

UDALL: Well, Dean, there was always a sort of aloofness about him, a man of real reserve, of great integrity and strength. And you always instinctively respected him because of his strong personal qualities, his dedication to the country and all that. I didn't really begin to see his limitations or to be rather critical in my judgments of him 'til the later years of the Johnson Administration, although I did always think that because of his kind of southern reserve and rigidity, that he didn't play the role of leader of the Cabinet, you know, nearly as strongly as he could. And I'm afraid that, at least in my own mind, Vietnam was the issue that brought out all of his weak points, and that in that instance his stubbornness, his lack of open mindedness, betrayed both him and the President.

But one hesitates to be…. I think I've made it plain that as a person I had and still have the very highest regard for him because he had very, very wonderful personal qualities. But I think a secretary of state in the 1960's, as we look back now.... Of course, part of this is hindsight; let's be honest about it. This was a period, unlike the 1950's, when the old anticommunism was being tested in a new way, when there were new and much more subtle issues that were being brought to bear. It wasn't just a matter of carrying out the Truman [Harry S. Truman]-Acheson [Dean Acheson]-Dulles [John Foster Dulles]-Eisenhower policies. There were new situations developing. And it was here that Rusk's rigidity and his adherence to the great truths

that he had learned in World War II and in the late forties and early fifties before he left the State Department, I think this is what betrayed him, was his rigidity.

MOSS: What sort of new things did you see developing that he didn't respond to?

UDALL: Well, he always seemed to me in all of his presentations to the Cabinet and in the private talks that I had with him – and I didn't have a great number, you know, I didn't probably know Dean nearly as well as a lot of the colleagues that he was working with at a high level in the State Department. But his general attitude towards most social questions.... I remember a discussion I had with him once, for example, we were just talking on the plane, I think coming back from Japan. I was telling him about my feelings – this was in '66, I think – that the United States ought to do what Japan had done and level off its population. And he said to me, "Well, that would be a bad thing, wouldn't it?" He said, "Isn't our whole economy and our whole system based on growth?" And of course, this was just a snap opinion perhaps, but it was again the traditionalist approach, the traditionalist type of thinking that he exhibited.

One other quality that Dean had that didn't serve him well under Johnson particularly was an essential kind of conservatism and timidity. Now, obviously, if a diplomat isn't cautious, he's not a good diplomat. But I don't think that he fully recognized some of the changes that were taking place, for example, in the Communist bloc countries. I'll tell you one little story, maybe I related it before, where I saw this up close and it bothered me very much at the time. This would have been in 1966 or early '67. This was a question of export policy to the Communist bloc countries. Romania, at that time, wanted some special oil refinery equipment and other advanced equipment. And of course, Romania was moving towards more independence from the Soviet Union, and the main thing that gave them independence was oil and the fact that they were selling oil in the West.

And so there had been, this became a major case. And I was brought into it only because my department handles oil and under the rules you were brought into these decisions. And it was a very curious thing because the Commerce Department, that normally would be favoring foreign trade, was against this very vigorously, and Secretary Connor [John T. Connor] was fighting it right down the line. And the Defense Department had been against it, but the State Department people contacted me – somebody rather high up – and said they considered this very crucial; it was very important; it was an opportunity to make a change in policy and Romania was the right place to do it, and they had gone into this. And my people at the staff level, all the staff level people were voting with Commerce against it, and would I at this meeting with the President reverse myself? I said I'd look into it, and I reported back that I thought they were right and I'd go with them. And Secretary of Defense had agreed to do the same thing. In fact, Cyrus Vance

came representing McNamara, prepared to do the same thing. And the President went around the table, with Connor making a strong argument on the one side, with the rest of us, as he asked all of us our opinions, saying that we on the balance he should go along with it. Rusk,

much to my surprise, although my information was that the State Department was going to take a position the way Interior and Defense did – and they had been the ones that called us – he didn't counter with vigorous argument.

The result was that the President sort of turned to Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], and Bundy as the staff man said, "Well, maybe there's further work to be done." And there was no decision. In fact, no decision was ever made. I assume this was the unwillingness of Rusk, he didn't like to get in the ring. He didn't consider himself the equal of other Cabinet members, and he didn't like to get in the ring with you and have an argument and then lose the argument. This, I think, was a characteristic of him, him wanting to be able to express his arguments in private to the President, so that he never lost an argument. And I just think under a democratic system that there ought to be very slam-bank exchanges and that the Secretary of State, even though he's the heavyweight, he shouldn't be embarrassed if on occasion he makes a vigorous argument to the President and the President goes along with another Cabinet officer.

MOSS: Yes. You talked last time a good deal about this sort of collegial view that the Cabinet men have. How about Secretary Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon]?

UDALL: Well, Secretary Dillon was, I thought, a very competent man. I was very fond of him, personally. I had a warm personal relationship with him. Because of his background under the Eisenhower Administration – he was a holdover and so on. He was one of these enlightened, eastern, liberal, Republican people – very well to do, of course – who had a very modern and up-to-date view of the world and was, therefore, in one sense, if President Kennedy was going to select Republicans, he was ideal. Because in terms of economic policy in particular, where the Secretary of the Treasury is very important, he worked very well with Walter Heller and these other people. He was very steady. Doug was not, I never thought of him as a brilliant man. You know, he spoke rather slowly and seemed to study everything very carefully and be very thorough about things. There was nothing very flashy about him. I always thought of him as a very solid person. And of course, his inherent liberal view of American society and its problems I think came out in a way with his tie in the later years with Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. He and Bob were quite close, closer than people knew, I think. Bobby used him as an adviser and talked with him and everything else. And I think, when it came to the blacks and the city problems and things like that, that Dillon, although he never gave outspoken speeches or anything, his heart was in the right place and he wanted to do the right thing.

So I thought of him always as a very, very competent, very solid, very straightforward person. But on the other hand, he was not one of the dominant people, the way George Humphrey had been under the Eisenhower administration. And I think, quite rightly, everybody considered Rusk and McNamara as the two big men of the cabinet and not Dillon.

MOSS: How did he fit in with the energetic spirit of the New Frontier that people talk about?

UDALL: Well, he sort of went along, I think. You know, if you were interviewing Walter Heller and asked him where the liberal spirit and impulse of the Administration was coming, he would say, you know, Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz], myself, Orville Freeman and others. Dillon, because the Secretary of Treasury is supposed to be a conservative balance wheel figure, I don't think was one that was churning out New Frontier ideas. But on the other hand, I don't think I ever heard him ask a lot of questions, but I don't think I ever heard him being negative about ideas. But he wasn't an originator of ideas.

MOSS: Secretary McNamara?

UDALL: Well, of course, Bob is one of the closest friends that I had and have in the Cabinet and I consider him a very fine human being, tremendous dedication, tremendous capacity. And I think his record, his public record, very clearly shows this strength of his character and his qualities and so on. I think, in a way, that of all the Cabinet officers – at least of the big three or big five, if you want to call it that way – that Bob probably was most ideally suited to Jack Kennedy in temperament, his outlook, in his tough mindedness, in his sort of open-eyed way of wanting to take a hard look at all alternatives, but of being willing to make judgments. I think the fact that Bob McNamara and Bobby Kennedy and the President on the Cuban missile crisis – I mean, that was the time when men were really tested – that they essentially came out at the same point and were the essential architects of that policy. I think this is an indication that bears out my saying that I think that he was perhaps the happiest choice. You know, Kennedy didn't know him and he was, on social questions, which isn't important normally for a defense secretary, liberal and concerned, a man of conscience and so on.

So those were things that, to me, always made McNamara.... I thought during the Kennedy years of him as the outstanding member of the Cabinet, both in the sense that he was best equipped to serve this particular president and he had great strength that he brought to the Defense Department. He really became in a way, in a sense, the first Defense Secretary. Of course, he was given powers in the '50 [Defense Production Act] and '59 [sic] [Defense Department Reorganization Act, 1958] that no other secretaries had, and could reform and revise and so on. I believe that Bob has, himself, a lot of regrets about the last part of his career under President Johnson. There were very few

things under the Kennedy years where I ever found myself critical of anything that he did. I do think that he has some regrets about the course that was followed in Vietnam, although I believe in the beginning that he was one who went along with the military recommendations and who strongly supported the policy in its initial stages. But he certainly deserved, I think, the reputation that he enjoyed at the time that he was in office and I will always think of him as the strongest Cabinet member that I served with.

MOSS: There's been some criticism, looking back on the whole defense business, that

McNamara and both of the Kennedys and General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] and so on became too quickly and uncritically entranced with the whole guerrilla warfare graduated response idea as a panacea for the small wars of liberation, so-called. Did you get any feel of this from them at the time, do you recall?

UDALL: Well, this, I mean, it was obvious to anyone. I never participated in those discussions and so I'd just be a sort of observer at a ringside seat. But the fact that Bobby and the President both were as high as they were on Max Taylor.... I mean Max was.... The book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, that he published, his general attitudes were that Dulles had foreclosed this graduated response and that we had to build it back in, which in a way prepared us to enter in Vietnam, that you should be ready to do this type of thing and to commit U.S. power to land wars of that kind. I personally think that history is going to show that this was one of the things that, in effect, set the stage for Vietnam. It was considered I think a corrective to Dulles's massive retaliation, to give the President more options and so on, and I think in that sense that it made sense and was sound in the beginning.

I have always thought – one will never know, and it's pure speculation – that President Kennedy, had he been reelected, would not have gone in with a large land army into Vietnam. My guess is, too, that he would have replaced Secretary Rusk early in 1965.

MOSS: All right. What gives you this feeling, now, because this is rather important in the light of things that are being said?

UDALL: Yeah. Well, I think Kennedy selected Rusk in the beginning because he wanted someone who was, you know, a respected figure, who knew all the high priests, as I call them now, in the foreign policy establishment – you know, the people from the Truman and the Eisenhower years – and someone who was an experienced, a professional in the field. You know, he didn't know Rusk either.

But Kennedy really, as is very plain with the operation he set up in the White House, wanted to make the major decisions, wanted to be his own Secretary of State to a substantial degree. And I think, for all of those reasons, that Rusk's rigidity as compared with McNamara's more creative and flexible

approach…. I just don't think that they were nearly as well suited to each other, and that Kennedy himself must have had – I'm just guessing – reservations about Rusk's own capacity to do the things that I feel he would have wanted to do in his second term. So, I'm just making a guess. I never overheard the President say anything that would have led me to believe this, but I think he had.... If you look at Kennedy, every time a crisis arose, or the two major crises that arose under him, the military were wrong. The whole military-CIA establishment, they were wrong on the Bay of Pigs; their recommendations were wrong on the Cuban Missile Crisis. They wanted to use force.

Another circumstance, I think the fact that Rusk didn't play the strong role that he should have played is near my reading of the whole Cuban missile crisis. He played an

important role but I don't think he emerged as the strong, decisive adviser who helped the President make the crucial decisions. He was just one of the people. I think Kennedy would have wanted someone that he had more rapport with. You know, it might have been Bundy, it might have been George Ball. You know, who knows who it would have been. But I think that he would have made that change.

MOSS: I'm going to skip over Robert Kennedy and leave him for a bit later. Ed Day [J. Edward Day] as Postmaster General.

UDALL: Well, Ed didn't stay too long. He was a very pleasant and seemed to be a very capable person. But I always thought of him as being one of the people that.... Well, the job in itself is probably the least important job in the Cabinet. You know, I liked him personally and all but I never felt that he tried to do anything other than do his job. I never felt him as an influence for liberal ideas in the Cabinet or anything of that kind. So my feeling about him historically would be that he was a man who was very pleasant and did his job, and apparently did it fairly well, and didn't stay around very long.

MOSS: And, let's see, Gronouski [John A. Gronouski]? Just to cover the ground.

UDALL: Well, let me discuss Gronouski and Celebrezze together [Anthony J. Celebrezze]…

MOSS: Okay.

UDALL: ...because I was, in a way, disappointed in both of them. I was disappointed in their appointments and I felt that neither of them showed much real strength in the performance of their jobs, at least they didn't seem to initiate things, to be very creative. Celebrezze, every time you talked with him, within a matter of minutes he'd be telling you about when he was mayor of Cleveland. And I felt very strongly at the time – you know, they were appointed just about the same time, within a matter of a few months – that this was essentially ethnic politics and that President Kennedy very shrewdly had picked them because one was a Pole, one was an Italian, and this gave a nice flavor to the Cabinet. And they were picked for this reason primarily, rather than for the reason that they were particularly

suited to the jobs that they were selected for. Now, anybody can be a reasonably good postmaster general, and I think Gronouski was. But he never struck me as a person of particular strength in terms of his ideas or in terms of his personality. A capable person, yes, but nothing out of the ordinary at all.

Whereas Celebrezze.... And I watched HEW [Department of Health, Education and Welfare] particularly closely and I watched it particularly after John Gardner came in. That should have been all along, and Gardner made it that – the kind of anchorman of the

domestic cabinet. It was the Cabinet office where there were more new things happening and that should have happened; where there was more.... It was more the cockpit to direct the fight on domestic ills and Gardner made it that. He gave the department a sense of mission. Celebrezze always seemed to be halfway lost. You know, he had that famous press conference to announce the first report of the doctors on cancer and smoking, and sat smoking cigarettes throughout it. It was that type of insensitivity, you know. I just never felt, although I liked him personally and still do.... He's a fine person and I suppose he made a reasonably good mayor, although he was kind of a conservative in his basic outlook, not one that was originating new ideas. You never got much ferment out of him at all. If you tried to throw a tough question at him, he'd always draw on his experience in Cleveland. Well, you know, there's always something took him back to Cleveland.

So, I didn't feel that either of these two added much to the Cabinet. I don't want to say that by indicating that you know, I don't think they did the best they could. They did reasonably well but I don't think they left much of a mark on their departments.

MOSS: You've mentioned Celebrezze, what about Ribicoff [Abraham R. Ribicoff]? You talked about him a little bit last time, saying that he was unhappy as a Cabinet officer.

UDALL: Well, Abe's a brilliant man and very adroit. I've always liked him as a person and still do, and I have quite good personal relations with him. But you know, he had been governor of Connecticut those six years, I guess it was; he had been close to President Kennedy; he had been an important factor in the '60 nomination and so on. I sensed – I don't know what Abe's telling the oral history people – that he came in with the idea that he was going to be one of the President's principal advisers and, you know, if there was a "kitchen cabinet" that he would be in it. He'd be called on frequently – you know, "What do you think, Abe?" – and that he would and I think he felt probably he was qualified to be what John Gardner sort of later became, as a central figure in the whole domestic side and strategy. I know from some things he said in cabinet meetings a couple of times that he felt himself as a shrewd politician that the President should have listened to.

And I think his complaint, although it was much more intensified than mine was – the thing that I expressed last time, that he felt President Kennedy

set himself up in the White House and surrounded himself with Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], O'Brien, O'Donnell, these people, this circle; and that that was his circle, and these were the people he talked to everyday and advised with; and that Abe was over there running a department. When it came time to draft the important legislation in his department, like education bills and other things, instead of him working as much and as directly with the President, he found himself working with the President's subordinates. And that's the reason that I heard him use the phrase – and I knew what he meant – that he was tired of being somebody's lackey, you know, that he wasn't.... In fact, I think they took a couple of things out of his hands that angered him. I think this was on education bills and education policy. I

think he had told them, “Well look, I used to be in Congress. Let me quarterback this, let me handle it.” And they didn't. They quarterbacked it out of the White House.

So Abe, within fifteen months or so, became, he was an unhappy Cabinet officer. I think he essentially decided in the winter of 1962, after a year, that he was going to leave and run for Senate. And I think he left unhappy.

Now, you could ask the question, whose fault was it? Did he expect too much? Could he have played it differently? And so on. I don't think Abe, although he probably made a good governor, I don't think temperamentally.... I never did feel, from all that I saw.... I don't think he had the kind of administrative skill and the kind of liking for that kind of Cabinet administrative job, so that even had Kennedy worked more with him I think he would have been frustrated to a great degree.

HEW, because it was a gathering together of some independent agencies, you know, they had a large holdover, more than almost any of the departments, of what were really still independent agencies headed by career people. And it was very difficult to make things move. Now, Gardner, later, President Johnson backed him in reorganizing the department, he replaced most of the people. You know, he did this rather early. And I always wondered why Abe didn't do some of the things John Gardner did, you know, be more vigorous as an administrator and really get the President to back him all the way.

So I think there was fault on both sides. I myself, as I've said earlier, I think President Kennedy tended too much to operate, because I think he felt comfortable that way, in too narrow a circle, with the Cabinet people generally being screened out too much and talking to his people too much. I'll always think of that as not a major weakness but a weakness of the White House, because I think the President – the Kennedy White House – could have, had he exposed himself more to direct opinion; had he welcomed more the kind of occasional, freewheeling, slam-bang meetings that I think might have been useful, with him just sitting listening, and looked to us a bit more and his own circle a bit less as advisers on what new policy should be, rather than every idea that we had having to go through the screening process over there, with the judgments, the final judgments being his own personal staff.

MOSS: All right. Goldberg and later Wirtz in labor.

UDALL: Well Andrew Goldberg I had not known. I became very fond of Arthur and still consider myself a very close friend of his today. You know, like I had, he’d worked with President Kennedy on the labor reform bill. We came into the Kennedy circle the same route. And Arthur, you could tell all along, he began with a kind of built-in confidence with the President. The President kind of respected his judgment. And Arthur was, I think, bolder about both demanding the time of the President and being assertive about what he really thought was important. And I think this was a good thing, as I say. I wished I had been a bit more that way myself. Therefore, Arthur with his liberal views, not only on labor matters, on social matters generally, I think was one of the most influential members of the Cabinet. I think Kennedy respected him, used him effectively, and my main regret was that he didn't stay on as long as he did.

MOSS: Excuse me. Let me reverse this.

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

MOSS: Okay. You were talking about Arthur Goldberg.

UDALL: Arthur's service later as ambassador to the UN [United Nations], of course, some of us had sporadic contacts with him. I know because of things he told me in confidence that he was very unhappy with the Vietnam policy in the last year or two he was in office. He was also very frustrated in the sense that he was not getting through to the President. Rusk had a way, for example, I've heard him do this several times, you know, of always downgrading the UN job – Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], Goldberg, the same way – you know, of talking about that hothouse atmosphere up there, and that they institutionally had to be people who were taking a soft line and a conciliatory line towards the communist world and were always for talk rather than confrontation and so on and so on. So I always felt that Arthur got a raw deal, and I think President Johnson should have put him back on the Supreme Court. I think he, I don't know if I'm sure that it wasn't discussed but it must have been sort of implicit that, you know, the President, who had seven years probably to serve when Arthur left the Supreme Court, that that was where his real rub was and that he should be returned.

As far as Bill Wirtz is concerned, Bill again is a person of great personal warmth. I think as a secretary – although he and Arthur I don't think got along nearly as well as people let on. I think there were some built-in frictions, partly because Arthur was such a domineering secretary himself. But Bill had a different style in a way. I think he was almost as successful as Arthur in gaining the confidence of the labor movement, which is, of course, the most vital thing there. Bill, the times that President Johnson didn't go around the table sampling opinion, Bill was always guttier than almost anybody. He was the one that was ready to tell the President what he didn't want to hear and what we all knew he didn't want to hear. I always

admired him for that. Of course he and Johnson had a bitter break, as you may know by now, in the latter years, again as a result of Wirtz's guts and his devotion to what he thought was right. So I think he compared very favorably with Goldberg. I doubt that he had as much influence with Kennedy in the brief year that he was there as Goldberg did, but I think he developed and became a strong Secretary of Labor. And as a man with a very highly developed sense of the public interest and kind of more the philosopher of life and government than most – a very deep person and one who, I think, was a great credit to President Kennedy, that he would select someone like that for that particular post.

MOSS: Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] in Commerce [Department of Commerce]?

UDALL: Well, Luther Hodges was sort of the best of the South. I always thought of Luther that way, a man of enormous personal charm, great sincerity and

warmth. I always warmed up to him and liked him as a person. He, in a time when the South was struggling with its soul and its conscience, was a sort of moderate voice, not as liberal as he should have been perhaps, but a voice for sanity and whatnot. I think some, of us were surprised that he – because he had a business background – had that initial falling out with the business advisory council. It always seemed to me that there must have been a better way to have handled that, but I didn't criticize him and I don't today for that I don't hold the view that our Secretary of Commerce ought to be somebody who's close to the business community and speaks their view. I think he's an adviser that ought to speak to the president on what he thinks the nation needs in the future in terms of its economic development and its growth, and that he ought to be a very broad-gauged person in that sense and not merely a spokesman for the business status quo, as it were. And therefore, in that I sensed, from conversations with him among other things, that Luther was critical of a lot of the business leadership – not in a harsh way, but that he was oftentimes disturbed and dismayed at some of the things, the attitudes expressed by the business community. The steel confrontation President Kennedy had, you know, he was very critical of business on it. So I think I regard Luther as a secretary who did a pretty good job. The President had to have a southerner in his Cabinet, and I think he did, I think he was a very good one at that point in history.

MOSS: Agriculture and Interior have a good deal of overlapping interests. How about Orville Freeman?

UDALL: Well, Orville and I probably had more dealings together, you know, on common problems than anybody in the Cabinet. We always had a very straightforward and friendly relationship. We're both the same age basically, same background, both New Deal type liberals. The thing that made us get along so well was that we both had the same ideas, basic

ideas, on conservation and resource development. You know, if we had clashed, if we'd had different views, I hope I would have been strong-minded enough, you know, to bring the clash out in the open. But we had many, many issues where our departments, our policies, bumped against each other, sometimes abrasively, and we developed a way and a kind of a friendship and a methodology, too, when these things developed, of saying, “Well, all right. Let's put some of our top people on this and not let the bureaucrats fight and see if we can resolve it.” And we almost always did resolve issues.

I think this was good in the larger sense, because it ended some of the stupid impasses between the departments. It meant that we were, Orville and I, in the sense that we were both involved with the evolution of resource and environmental policies, that we were singing the same tune. You know, it was a duet rather than somebody off chord. We worked together very well. We had I think in eight years only two or three times where we maybe weren't frank enough or where there were some clashes, you know, that left a few bruises or something.

I think Orville had probably the most miserable job in the Cabinet in the sense that he was essentially administering the old farm programs which were increasingly, as I saw then and we all see now, programs dedicated to a status quo and benefiting rich farmers. Yet he had very little leeway. There was nobody in the Congress in the country; there was no demand for new policy, so he couldn't evolve new farm policies. I think we're going to look back on this period of the fifties and sixties in terms of farm policies as a rather uncreative period in which we pretended that we were saving the family farm at a time when technology was forcing farming to move to larger units and that what the federal programs did was to harden and solidify the status quo. I'm sure Orville must have had times when he recognized this, but I think in terms of doing a job of administering the existing programs that he did it very well and he did it with political sensitivity. He was always a good political operator, because he'd been a very tough-minded, good governor of Minnesota. He was always good on the political infighting.

MOSS: You talked about an understanding between the two of you on jurisdictional matters and so on. Was there a "treaty of the Potomac" as such?

UDALL: Well, not in the sense, you know, that you sat down and laid out a lot of issues and carved them up or made any big decisions. But we did decide early on that we would identify, for example, all of the conflicts between our land management agencies, between the Forest Service, the [National] Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, we'd get all this out on the table. This, I think, is what they called the "treaty of the Potomac," that instead of.... We'd identify all the friction points, all the quarrels, all the disputes, and try to resolve them. And we did resolve most of them. I mean, that was our basic decision, that the government and the country were better off by having some give and take and having things resolved rather than just sit, locked in to the kind of emotional opposition

that you have had. You know, Seaton and Benson [Ezra T. Benson] clashed and were at times, I understand, hardly on speaking terms. And we inherited a lot of these disputes where nobody would give in.

One of the last things that Orville and I accomplished, for example, and I always will think of it in terms of national parks as one of the most significant things we did, was that he – and this took about five years of studies and moving the whole thing around. But they finally backed away – at least I'll say he didn't take the issue to the President as he once threatened he would – and they let this large area in the northern Cascades in Washington become a national park. This resolved one of the big, long term controversies that had existed.

So I always enjoyed working with him. We had a certain basic rapport on policy, on our view of the world. And certainly on matters of a liberal domestic policy, we were almost always in agreement.

MOSS: An article in *Harper's* [*Harper's Magazine*]. I believe it was, by Julius

Duscha, had you sitting down over a campfire riving this thing out. Did you actually go on camping trips and talk business, shoptalk?

UDALL: Well, what he was probably referring to, and this was a good thing. The first summer that we were in the Cabinet I had decided early on that one of the things you could do, you know, to dramatize an administration's concern and to help make policy was to, if somebody proposed an area as a wilderness or a national park or national seashore, go see it. Usually when I went of course the press people were with me, the local people were there, and you would actually see it on the ground.

Well, in the spring of 1961, I was flying I think from Glen Canyon Dam up to Denver or something in the Bureau of Reclamation plane with Commissioner Dominy and I saw this whole area there in southern Utah, below Moab, that was just fantastic as a scenic masterpiece. And I got maps out and looked at it, talked to the park service people. So I decided to take a trip in there. This would be sort of an official vacation, I took my family along with me. And I was talking with Orville and he decided to go along. He brought his son. We took about a week. This is the area that became the Canyon Lands National Park. We did, we camped together and slept in sleeping bags and saw the whole thing. This was, of course, a very good way of developing a rapport in terms of your reaction to each other and your mutual reactions to the land and to people and so on. We did this in the very beginning. This was rather unusual for two members of the Cabinet to go on a camping trip together, and we did it our first summer. We talked about doing others later but we never did. We did a couple of other things, but not a large trip, a vacation of that kind. I think that was a very good thing it happened then because we could see that we had the same reaction, that we felt the same about things generally.

MOSS: Did you try to get any other Cabinet members to go on trips like this?

UDALL: No. Oh, sometimes I recommended places for them to go, the national seashores among other places, and we helped some of them when they wanted to make such trips. But I didn't ever take any of the Cabinet people actually on a trip. Now, I made these trips with the presidents, which of course were much different; isn't where you're actually camping out, but you're going to see parks, and dedicate dams…

MOSS: Yeah. Conservation tour and that sort of thing.

UDALL: …and that sort of thing. Yeah.

MOSS: Right. Of course, later Robert Kennedy did a lot of this sort of thing, going down the Colorado [River], and climbing Mount Kennedy and so on. How do you remember Robert Kennedy in the Cabinet years?

UDALL: Well, Bob.... Incidentally, while we're on that subject.... Of course, President Kennedy, in the beginning I wasn't fully aware of his disability, you know,

just how bad his back was and so on, because he did apparently have pain and didn't have that kind of rugged physical vigor that Bob had. It was my hope in the beginning that I could get President Kennedy to do the kind of outdoor things that Bobby later did. It was never in the cards I think because of the President's health, and that was one of the reasons I was so delighted with Bobby later and the type of things that he did. We did some things together ourselves. In fact, just a year before his death, we took a trip on the upper Hudson [River] which was canoes and kayaks and everything, you know, a long weekend. He talked with me about some of the river trips that he made in the West and so on.

Bobby, I believe, with his family, with his love of the out-of-doors.... You know, he liked the rugged out-of-doors. For example, in 1967, the summer, when he went on a float trip down through the Grand Canyon, some of the people were helicoptered out, like Art Buchwald [Arthur Buchwald]. Bobby walked up with several of the older children, all the way from the floor of the canyon in about 110 degree heat. I mean, it takes real stamina to do that, just as it takes stamina to climb mountains. He had that stamina. He was really a marvelous physical specimen, and great determination.

So Bobby did the kind of Teddy Roosevelt [Theodore Roosevelt], you know, dramatizing of the vigorous life, which is what I had hopes for Jack. But as I say, I soon recognized – and there was one little incident I'll tell here because it nettled me a little bit. This was, I think, the President's last trip, second western trip, in the summer of 1963, or maybe it was the one in '62. In any event, we went to the Grand Teton National Park. We went into Billings, I believe, with a jet, then we took a smaller plane into Grand Teton and stayed in a big lodge there. There was this big press corps with the President. This was 1963. I suggested to O'Donnell, because I knew the Grand Tetons fairly well by then.... There are a lot of these little river areas

there where there are a lot of willows and moose hang out. I talked to the park service people and they said that we could just take a car and go back and take a walk back in for about a half-hour early in the morning and it would be very refreshing and you might see moose and deer and wildlife and so on. So I thought this was a very good thing and I wanted to get the President to just take this little walk. And I found out later that O'Donnell and these fellows laughed behind my back that I'd even suggested it. I went ahead and did it myself. A lot of the press corps went with me. It was a lot of fun. But, you know, the fact that I couldn't even get the President to take a little walk bothered me.

But in any event, Bobby, of course, I first really met him during the '60 campaign. I didn't deal with him as much as I did with Ted [Edward M. Kennedy]. And I originally, for some reason, I never – should explain this, because I formed this judgment not on the basis of knowing him, but on this reputation that he got in the press, you know, as the President's tough, mean little brother. And I sort of unwittingly bought this as his image, and then I slowly had to alter it as I got to know him. In fact, I was one who was very strongly against Bobby going into the Cabinet. Really, I couldn't believe they were going to do it. I didn't realize at that time, you know, just how indispensable he was at that point to the President and how important it would be. I mean, I think it turned out to be a very good thing to have done, but I thought it would be very bad politically. I thought Bobby was too young really

and needed more seasoning and that he'd be criticized very severely and also that they would tend to a degree to, all the barbs that people wouldn't dare throw against the President they'd throw against Bobby.

So as I got to know him and watch him develop, I respected him more. I respected his judgment even more than I did in the beginning. I think he showed the same thing that Jack did in a tremendous capacity for growth, perhaps even more so the last three years of his life as a senator than earlier. We were in the circle, rather large circle that he had socially. We were and are very fond of Ethel [Ethel S. Kennedy]. I always will think of Bob as a very magnificent human being in terms of his feeling for people, his courage, his character traits, I saw very few things that I disapproved in him. I never knew him to do anything that was mean or underhanded. He was always even patient with you when you had made mistakes.

So I came to admire Robert Kennedy so much that at the time of his assassination I think I admired him as much and still do as I did the President. And I think he had, you know, there were a lot of similarities, but they had differences in personality, character and everything else. And I think Bobby, standing on Jack's shoulders, had he become president, I always will feel would have been a stronger president, because he would have benefited from the experience of his brother and from having, in effect, been president to a degree, you see. So…

[-92-]

MOSS: How do you mean that?

UDALL: Well, I mean it in the sense that anyone who shared the powers of the presidency, you know, was at someone's, elbow to the extent that he was on the crucial, major decisions, I think one could honestly say would have the feel of having been president, would have the experience of having been president. And I think whereas Jack Kennedy, for example, arrived in 1961, having to grope his way, having to get acquainted with the job, having the whole thing be new.... And I think he was almost through this initial shake-out period and was ready to really do the things – as a matter of fact, the [Nuclear] Test Ban Treaty was probably one of his major monuments, two months before his death. And he just really had gone through the period of learning, of breaking in, of going through the missile crisis, going through the fires, and was ready for the mature years of his presidency when he was cut down. And in that sense I think had Bobby made it in 1968 and become president – which I believe, had he lived, he would have been nominated and would have been-elected – I think he would have been ready to be president in a way that his brother was not, due to his brother and due to the experience that he had. I think he also had, because of his passion, his lack of some of the reserve the President had, I think he had an involvement and a capacity perhaps to have brought the country together, to use the current phrase, in a way that perhaps no one else could have done at that time.

MOSS: Could he do it in light of the Wallace [George C. Wallace] sentiment that was being built up as a countercurrent?

UDALL: Oh, yes, I think so. I think he proved that in Indiana in a way. I think a lot of

the Wallace people would have gone with a Kennedy. That's one of the reasons I believe he would have been elected. He would have run a stronger, been a much stronger candidate than Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]. Whereas Humphrey barely lost, I think he would have had three or four million votes more. I think the country desperately needed him at that point in his life.

But my relations with him as a Cabinet officer, you know, just on our Cabinet departments, we dealt on several matters together. He was always very, very thorough. I mean, the way.... One thing Bobby had that was fantastic, and it was part of Jack's strength, he had a gift for friendship and a gift for identifying talented people and of drawing them to him with the bond of loyalty that built up. And that whole group that he had, these young lawyers in the Justice Department, was quite extraordinary – the loyalty that they gave to him; the teamwork; the way that they drove each other when they had a crisis; the way they handled things. I think he had a way of getting more loyalty and devotion out of people than almost anyone I've ever met.

MOSS: Well, we've been going for about an hour and a half. Shall we…

UDALL: I guess this is a good place to quit.

MOSS: …break off? All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Stewart L. Udall Oral History Transcript – JFK #4
Name List

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