

**John E. Fogarty Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 4/14/1965**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Fogarty, (1913 - 1967) Representative from Rhode Island (1945 - 1967), discusses working with John F. Kennedy [JFK] during his first term in Congress and collaborating with JFK on legislative issues, among other issues.

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## John E. Fogarty – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

JOHN E. FOGARTY

April 14, 1965  
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: You were beginning your fourth term in Congress when John Kennedy came down to Washington to begin his first term. Had you met him before he was elected to Congress?

FOGARTY: No, I never met John Kennedy before January, 1947, when he first arrived here in Washington, on the scene.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any dealings with him?

FOGARTY: Oh, he was a real young, bright fellow. I was much younger, myself, in those days. We got along very well together. We saw quite a bit of each other – we played golf and visited back and forth in the offices. I tried to be of whatever help I could, having had some experience at the Washington level.

MORRISSEY: Did you serve on any committees together?

FOGARTY: No, we never did serve on the same committees. When he came here in 1947, I was on the Appropriations Committee; and I've been on that committee since. He was on the Legislative Committees in the House.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any common legislative problems that you consulted with each other about?

FOGARTY: He had a great deal of interest in health, as I have had over the years. He used to talk to me about some

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of our health problems and how we could do a better job than we were doing at that time. Also, right around that time, there was an issue involving the unification of the country of Ireland. We worked together on that for four or five years. We never had any success, but we brought it to the attention of the world on two or three occasions, in the House of Representatives.

MORRISSEY: What did you think of his taking on Henry Cabot Lodge in '52? Did you talk about this before he came to the decision?

FOGARTY: Yes, I used to ride home with him to Providence because he used to go there many times and then take a car to Hyannisport. I flew up there with him many times. It was my recollection that he would have liked to have run for Governor. But there just wasn't a vacancy, and it didn't look as if any vacancy was going to occur. So, as he told me, he took on Mr. Lodge at that time. It was a very difficult decision to make. I think he would have been stronger as a candidate for Governor; but he went on, as you know, to earn one of the most impressive victories in either the House or the Senate that year, because it was a Republican year.

MORRISSEY: When he was a congressman what were your impressions of him? Many people who knew him then recall him as sickly, thin, boyish, informal. Is this the way he struck you?

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FOGARTY: He was pretty young at the time, and he was informal and boyish. But he handled himself very well on the floor. Whenever he'd get up to make a speech you wouldn't think that he was a boy; you'd think he was a man. He handled it as any man would.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any other recollections of any conversations on these trips to Providence, when you and he went together?

FOGARTY: We used to talk a great deal about sailing in the summertime. Two or three times I drove him to Hyannisport, and we'd stop along the Bourne Bridge. A couple of times he met people there he knew. He was always a great person for the water, as you know, and he did a great deal of sailing himself. He was a real good athlete.

MORRISSEY: Are you a sailor yourself?

FOGARTY: No, I'm not. I'm inland a little bit in Rhode Island, and I never had much to do with sailing.

MORRISSEY: The last time I was up talking to you, I said I was a little surprised by that picture up on the wall that shows yourself and John Kennedy with the map of Ireland in the background. That was taken, as I recall, for use in the 1952 campaign?

FOGARTY: Yes, that was taken sometime in 1952. He came over to my office and asked if he could have a picture taken with me, with the map of Ireland in the back, because

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at that time we had been working on this problem of the unification of Ireland. And I was sure it wouldn't do him any harm in Massachusetts, with all the Irish that were there at that time. Then, on top of that, he asked me if I'd make some speeches, which I did for him. I made about four radio speeches for him in the campaign, urging his election.

MORRISSEY: Were you at the convention in '56 when he and Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] had that contest for the Vice-Presidential nomination?

FOGARTY: Yes, I was one of his so-called "workers." I was on the stage most of the time, kept in daily contact with his forces, and met with his people every night. We really tried to do everything we could to get him the nomination for Vice-President at that time. But you know what happened. About a day before, he was thinking about pulling out because he didn't think he could get the nomination. We all told him that he ought to stay in. But as a result of the maneuvering in the other camp, Mr. Kefauver was selected. It's probably a good thing he didn't get the nomination for Vice-President because he might not have won at that time.

MORRISSEY: Did it look to you, during that hectic night, that he might actually pull it off and get the nomination?

FOGARTY: Oh, I thought he was in. I met the Speaker of the House, Mr. Rayburn [Sam Rayburn], about a half hour before the final

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vote, and he told me that Texas had endorsed Kennedy for Vice President. I thought that that was the end. I thought that was all over when the Speaker of the House, Mr. Rayburn, made that statement. It didn't happen that way.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever have any doubts in your own mind that Rhode Island would not be solidly for Kennedy in the '60 convention?

FOGARTY: Oh, no. We had a few people, I suppose, who would have liked to have seen someone else; but ninety-nine percent of the people are for Kennedy in Rhode Island. As you know, we gave him the biggest percentage vote of any state in the country in the 1960 election. The people in Rhode Island just adore the whole Kennedy family.

MORRISSEY: He was Senator for eight years while you were in the House during those eight years. Did you have any dealings on common legislative matters concerning your neighboring states?

FOGARTY: As far as New England was concerned, we were together and met together at various interludes for the good of all New England. Then, again, in the field of health and education, he was very much interested in these fields. He would offer an amendment sometimes, and have it carried in the Senate, to increase the appropriation in the field of health or education by a certain number

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of dollars. He'd then call me to see if I could prevail upon the House to accept and go along with his amendment. This happened several times, and I think we won every time.

MORRISSEY: Did you campaign for him outside the state of Rhode Island during the '60 campaign?

FOGARTY: No, I did not. It's very difficult for anyone to leave his own district and state. You generally stay home and try to get re-elected yourself. If he had asked me, I probably would have.

MORRISSEY: When I was in your office a week or two ago, you mentioned that you assisted John Kennedy in negotiating a rather complicated relationship between the different Irish societies in Boston?

FOGARTY: It was just the fact that we were trying to get them all together for him in 1952. And I think, by and large, they all were. Sometimes they don't always go that way in Boston, as you know, but for Kennedy they did because he just had everything. They just couldn't afford to be for anyone else, I don't think.

MORRISSEY: Did it take much pushing and hauling?

FOGARTY: No, I think that they were all persuaded that he could win. I don't think that anybody else could have won that election in 1952 but John Kennedy.

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MORRISSEY: When you were serving here in the House after he became President, your interest in health measures and, of course, the interest of the Kennedy family and the Kennedy Administration were extremely close. Did you and he, while he was President, have discussions about appropriations and other legislative measures in this field?

FOGARTY: He called me down two or three times. I think the most memorable one, and one of the most difficult decisions I had to make, was in 1962, when he was trying to get a very controversial piece of farm legislation through the House. It was said at the time that it was a matter of two or three votes, one way or the other. He called me down at five o'clock one afternoon, and for twenty minutes I sat there and said "no" to one of my best friends. I told him that I hadn't voted for a piece of farm legislation in twenty years and that I was just going along with the way he voted when he was in the House and in the Senate. He was the leader in this bloc in the Senate because he knew at the time that it wasn't good legislation. But his answer to me was, "Well, things are different now. I'm the President." I said, "Yes, things are different for you, but not for me. I'm running for election this fall." He took it good-naturedly. He never held it against me. It's one vote I'd like to have been able to change for him, but I just couldn't do it.

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MORRISSEY: I understand that you supported just about every other measure which he sent up.

FOGARTY: Just about everything but the farm legislation.

MORRISSEY: How about the trade expansion bill?

FOGARTY: I voted against that a few times because I thought that it would affect employment in Rhode Island and New England, and I still think so. I probably will vote against it next year, too.

MORRISSEY: In 1961 there was a budget slash in the budget for the National Institutes of Health. You gave out a public statement criticizing the slash, and the President commented on it in a news conference. Did you ever discuss this with him beforehand or did he ever comment on it afterwards to you?

FOGARTY: No, I didn't talk to him beforehand. This was at a meeting at the Statler Hotel in Washington. I've forgotten the exact group. I was asked this question in a question and answer period, and I just said what I thought. The President did release some of these funds a few months later, though; and I think he took some of our advice anyway.

MORRISSEY: Did you get involved in the St. Patrick Day celebrations at the White House?

FOGARTY: When he was President, I was asked to go down a couple of times. We always had a pretty good sized St. Patrick's

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party here for members of Congress. It was one of the best in the country, I think, run by Mike Kirwan [Michael J. Kirwan] of Ohio. The President was upstairs with the Speaker of the House, John McCormack [John William McCormack], myself, and about five of us at the head table. He said to me, "John, why don't you come over next Thursday, to the White House. The Irish Ambassador is going to be there, and why don't you come over." I said, "The reason that I'm not coming over is because you never asked me." He said, "I'm asking you now." So, I was invited that year and the following year, and I enjoyed it very much.

MORRISSEY: You were down at the White House for the signing of the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of October, 1963. There's a picture in the outer office that was taken on that occasion – am I right?

FOGARTY: Yes, I have a picture on the wall of my office here showing the signing of this bill. I think that it was one of the most forward-looking pieces of legislation in the field of retardation that had ever passed the Congress. It was sponsored by the President, himself, because he had a sincere interest in this field. It was a pleasure to work with him in trying to get the legislation through. Now we're trying to make sure that we give them every dime that they ask for under this

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authorization, and we're working on that right today.

MORRISSEY: Is there anything else in regard to health legislation, medicare, federal aid to education, which you were concerned with during the Kennedy Administration and which we ought to put on the record here?

FOGARTY: I can't think of anything special. We agreed on just about everything in legislation and the field of health and education. We both agreed that they were the two most important fields. They affect every human being in our country and have some effect in world policy. Sometimes I just didn't think that they went far enough. I've been saying that for many years, and I'll probably say the same thing this year.

MORRISSEY: How about the parochial school issue within the general area of federal aid to education? Did you and the President ever bat this one around?

FOGARTY: We didn't see eye to eye on this one. He was trying to be a little conservative on it. He was trying to get a bill through Congress, and he thought that his was the best way. But I differed with him on this approach and thought that if we're going to provide funds for education, we ought to provide funds for all children, regardless of their race, creed, or color. I still believe that way.

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MORRISSEY: Looking back on it, he was a young man who came down to Washington as a Congressman in 1947 and was elected President in 1960. When do you think he focused his eye on the possibility of running for the Presidency?

FOGARTY: I think it was right after he got elected United States Senator in 1952. He made such a terrific run against Mr. Lodge, a very popular man, and it was during the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] landslide, that I think it was then he started focusing his eyes on the Presidency of the United States.

MORRISSEY: Did he ever indicate to you in any specific way that he might be thinking along this line?

FOGARTY: I can't say in any specific way. He talked about the Presidency of the United States many times, but I never said that he was a candidate in those days.

MORRISSEY: Is there anything else that you think we ought to put on record?

FOGARTY: Not unless you have any more questions. I just feel that he was one of the great men of all times. If he had lived, he would have gone down in history as the greatest President this country has ever had. In fact, even on the basis of the short time that he was allowed to serve us, I still think that when the historians write the story about the great Presidents, he is going to be very high on the list. Among the Presidents I have known – Mr. Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt], Mr. Truman [Harry S. Truman], and Mr. Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] – in my

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opinion, he was way ahead of everyone.

MORRISSEY: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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