

James F. Haught Oral History Interview – 7/13/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Haught, a primary worker for John F. Kennedy (JFK) in West Virginia and former member of West Virginia State Legislature, discusses his role in the 1960 Kennedy for President campaign in West Virginia and personal interactions with JFK; the religious issue in the West Virginia primary; and New Frontier programs, among other issues.

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James F. Haught
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Oral History Interview

with

James F. Haught

July 13, 1964
Charleston, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: This is an interview being recorded on July 13, 1964, in the Daniel Boone Hotel, Charleston, West Virginia, with Mr. James F. Haught of Wood County, Parkersburg, West Virginia. During the 1960 campaign, Mr. Haught served in several capacities. He was himself a member of the state legislature and at that time a candidate for Sheriff for Wood County. In addition, he was Treasurer of the Young Democratic Club in West Virginia.

Mr. Haught, would you tell me how you first became interested in the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] candidacy?

HAUGHT: Well, Mr. Young, I've always been interested in government and most particularly the political aspects of government, I guess you would say. Being reared a Democrat, brought up in a home that was very active, I always followed the happenings as best I could of the political figures and those who were anticipating seeking office. I was attracted to the then Senator Kennedy because—one, he was young and seemed to exemplify all the things that we in the Young Democratic Club—the younger ones of us who were in state politics—had been trying to set forth here in West Virginia. I was attracted to him because I felt that he was a liberal, not only on the civil rights issue but liberal in respect to labor and I felt that with all these views, he was still a very—had a very keen personality and would be fair in whatever decision he had to make as President of the United States. I think that one would say that the glamour about him was that

and his beliefs were the things that really attracted me to this candidate.

YOUNG: When did you first really either meet Senator Kennedy or begin to take an active part in the primary campaign?

HAUGHT: The exact date I don't recall. I was then a member of the state legislature, having been elected from Wood County.

YOUNG: This, however, would have been sometime in 1959?

HAUGHT: It would have been early in '59 and I was called on after my views were expressed and some people knew how I felt, to assist Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough] at that time in doing some groundwork—I don't know that he had been officially asked to do any but he did it and I was fortunate in being one of the early ones requested by him to assist in finding people throughout West Virginia who felt as we did and who would be—stand up and be counted and take an active part in the campaign for Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: You mentioned in private conversation before this interview started that you were responsible for helping to set up the county organizations in all 55 counties. Would you tell me a little bit about your method of selecting and finding county people in each county to work in the Kennedy candidacy?

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HAUGHT: Well, of course, early it was agreed in Bob's office that we would seek out those, as I said, who felt as we did and try to get prominent people in the county to identify themselves. We sat down many hours and jotted down name after name in various counties and he would ask what I knew about them—many of them I had met by being in the state legislature, and also being state treasurer of the Young Democratic Club, so I had quite a little knowledge as to the personalities of these people to start with and could also help him in identifying their political associates and how they would feel towards the candidacy of John F. Kennedy.

I think one of the big things that occurred along about this time, particularly here in West Virginia—there was an awareness of the religious issue and one of the things, very frankly, that we looked for was to try to find someone we felt would not be prejudiced or biased in their thinking towards John F. Kennedy because of his being a Catholic, very frankly.

YOUNG: Did you make any attempt to include Catholics in your organization? Or did you let the chips fall where they may?

HAUGHT: I guess we let the chips fall where they may and we got them from all sides.

YOUNG: How did you go about identifying the different factions in each county so that

you made sure that you got a pretty good cross-section?

HAUGHT: Well, of course, naturally we went to the existing organization where we could—the county chairman, the various people who had been elected to office in these counties, and if there we couldn't find someone who would head up the organization, then we would go into the Young Democratic Club or to a man in private business, or whoever we could find who was willing to stand up and be counted and, believe me, this became quite a task along the way.

YOUNG: Was most of this work done in Parkersburg?

HAUGHT: Most of the work was done in Parkersburg. A lot of it was over the phone. I would go out at Bob's orders, more or less, and go into these communities and find out firsthand, where it was necessary, the thinking—and talk to these people and we lined up quite a sizable readymade organization before the Senator really ever decided to come into West Virginia.

YOUNG: Well, did you have any contacts personally with Senator Kennedy before he filed for the primary?

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HAUGHT: Yes, very fortunately, I did. Again, I don't recall the exact date but early in the campaign he came into Parkersburg, landed at the airport, and I went along with him and his party to Athens, Ohio, where he addressed the student body at Ohio University. We took the complete motel that day as I recall and, of course, there were various reporters and editors of magazines traveling with him. They asked questions at that time—he held a press conference that afternoon. He seemed to never wear out—just constantly on the go—and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and some of those boys were along, as I recall, at that particular time. Then it was the next day—we came on back to the Wood County Airport and he flew then to Columbus, Ohio—and I believe it was that day that Mike DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] agreed to go for Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: The Senator had not announced his candidacy in West Virginia at that time?

HAUGHT: No—he had not.

YOUNG: Do you remember anything about the trip to Ohio University that indicated the Senator's special appeal to college students or young people?

HAUGHT: I certainly do. Of course, they knew he was coming and we first went to the motel where we rested and had a—I rested, he had a press conference and had other telephoning to do—we then went along with him to the university and he spoke from the front steps—I believe it was in front of the administration building—to

several thousand cheering young people and the reception was overwhelming and I felt then as I feel now that certainly if this is any demonstration of what the American people will do, this man is the next president of the United States.

YOUNG: The student reaction then was generally pretty favorable?

HAUGHT: Very favorable—he was very impressed.

YOUNG: What then was your next contact with Senator Kennedy?

HAUGHT: I might say here—inject something that I'm very fond of—I have on my wall at the Federal Housing Administration in my office—a picture that was taken that day of the then Senator shaking my hand and personally autographed at a later meeting when I met him here in Charleston and this I'm very proud of. The next

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contact, I believe—Mr. McDonough and I drove to the Ohio County Airport, we met him there, we went with him to a rally over in Steubenville, Ohio. As I recall, Wayne Hayes [Wayne L. Hays], the then—or maybe still is—congressman from that district, introduced him, and again it was an overwhelming reception. I'll never forget that somebody mentioned that a fellow who was a local president of one of the unions was hospitalized and in the hospital across the river in Wheeling. We drove with him there and he went in and visited with this fellow at his bedside—I've heard the fellow talk about it many times—he was very impressed, of course. We went from there to the airport and we flew on back to Charleston where he spoke that night at a Democratic rally. He hadn't yet announced that he would enter officially the Presidency race here in West Virginia.

YOUNG: What generally was the reaction of the already well established county organizations—the county Democratic organizations? Did you meet resistance or did they generally go along with you?

HAUGHT: No—I would say that we met with great resistance in many of the counties. It was difficult many times then and after he announced and during his campaign to get local political figures to identify themselves or get on the platform. They backed off. Again, it was not the man or the things he believed in but the—being afraid of being identified with this religious question in West Virginia because that was the big thing that I felt and evidently he felt had to be tested here in West Virginia.

YOUNG: Let's save religion, as such, as a separate item until a little bit later. I think before we started the interview in private conversation, you mentioned that you had taken the Senator to the State Secretary of State's office to file as a West Virginia candidate. Would you tell me a little about that?

HAUGHT: Well, we had come in early that day—we knew he was coming in at the last

moment...

YOUNG: This was in Charleston?

HAUGHT: This was in Charleston. We drove down from Parkersburg Bob and I—McDonough. And we were to meet him at the airport and bring him in—as I recall, it was the last day—approximately 1:00 in the morning or shortly thereafter when we met him at the airport and I drove the automobile—more or less the chauffeur—and we came into the Secretary of State’s office—we had called him ahead of time and he agreed to open the office up at that hour...

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YOUNG: What time was this?

HAUGHT: It was sometime after 1:00...

YOUNG: In the afternoon?

HAUGHT: In the morning. And there were several people who had been notified—the press and the television—and we had already made him an appointment at one of the local TV stations to cut a tape immediately following his filing because he had to be, as I recall, someplace in the West, I think it might have been Iowa, to make a major address at a breakfast out there—along about 8:00 and here he was filing in West Virginia—and I thought “how time flies” and how fast one can get from one place to another—this man just seemingly never slept, was very tireless. It was a great occasion when he did file.

I do remember hearing a great deal about the polls—that they hadn’t been publicized—but we had some knowledge of them and, very frankly, the polls didn’t show up very favorable at that time for the—for Mr. Kennedy to enter the primary but there were things to indicate in the polls that should he enter this could be overcome with an organization....

YOUNG: Could you go into detail on that—what did the polls indicate that—what was the work cut out for you, in other words?

HAUGHT: Well—generally, it indicated a reluctance to vote for Senator Kennedy because of a number of reasons. As you remember, Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had done some work in West Virginia—had quite an organization and to the best of my knowledge, I believe had more of the political pros in the state than we had—we were a bunch of amateurs and enjoyed our role. I was in the state legislature and I recall one thing specifically that might be interesting, Professor Young, and that was Bob called me and asked if I would sponsor a cocktail party for Teddy Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy], who was coming here on his brother’s behalf to drum up some enthusiasm.

YOUNG: This was in Charleston while the legislature was in session?

HAUGHT: This was while the legislature was going on—it would have been early in January. I have a telegram that I would like to read to you if I can—I brought it along with me. After his visit

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and expressing the gratitude—but I do recall this very explicitly because I don't recall anyone in the state legislature—that is, the Senate and the House—who was wearing a PT boat except myself; if there were others, I didn't see them, and I am sure if they could have got someone of more notoriety and more prominence in the state to sponsor the cocktail party, they would have done so. But I agreed to and at that same time, I was a candidate back home for sheriff and I knew that this might mean a great many things but I felt very strongly about the candidacy and I'm happy today that I supported it and we had our cocktail party and 100%—they showed up.

YOUNG: This was a cocktail party for the Senator's brother?

HAUGHT: Right—here at the Daniel Boone Hotel and everyone came—the senators, the representatives, their wives—it was a very successful event. A couple of days later I received this telegram addressed to me in Brookside Circle, Parkersburg. It says—I quote: “My brother, Ted, told me you were a great help to him when he visited West Virginia on my behalf. Many thanks. Jack Kennedy.” I treasure this and I have it hanging on my wall, too, in my office.

YOUNG: Mr. Haught, how did you feel that your sponsorship of the cocktail party for the Senator's brother might react on your own candidacy in Wood County for sheriff?

HAUGHT: Well, Wood County is the third largest county, population-wise, in the state of West Virginia. It is a county that has traditionally voted along the conservative line. I was one of two Democrats elected in the past ten years in that county and it was a very difficult task. Wood County has many churches. It is the state headquarters for some of the churches which were identified as being opposed to Senator Kennedy because of his religion. So I knew there would be a reaction in my county to anyone who was willing to step forward and support this man with all this controversy going on.

But I didn't feel that it would really hurt me in the final analysis because I felt that here is a person who is going to get across the issues, who is going to somehow cause these people to believe that the religious issue should not be one—I'm not so sure this happened, by the way, in the final count because he lost Wood County by something like 7,000 votes—I lost too—not nearly so great but—I'm not at all saying this was a major reason for my losing—there were many reasons—but it was an issue and it was very prevalent in Wood County.

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YOUNG: What were your other personal contacts with Senator Kennedy during the primary—did you meet him at other times?

HAUGHT: Many times—when he would be in the state. I was also privileged to meet with his brothers—Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] and Teddy. I travelled with them to various sections of the state. We helped to set up various coffees, scheduled appearances at factories.

I remember one incident in particular and I don't want to labor this religious issue but it was there and it was a big thing. One evening late I had taken Bobby back to the Wood County Airport to catch a plane back to Virginia and he and I were having—I recall what he had—I don't remember what I had—he had ice cream with chocolate over the top which he preferred—they seemed to never eat really—they snacked. And we were talking and he said, "Well, you know, I'm reminded in talking to a lot of these people in West Virginia about my neighbor"—as I recall, he was living in Alexandria, maybe it was where he's living now, but I think he said Alexandria—who talked over the backyard fence and said to him one day that they weren't prejudiced—that she had a member of her family once who married a Catholic, and they understood everything.

YOUNG: Well, what role did you play particularly during the primary campaign then—were you assigned any special task?

HAUGHT: After the general work was done and after we had the various counties set up and the work had been done statewide as much as we could, I was assigned the task in Wood County of getting my people together—that's people who were for me for sheriff—my organization—and coordinating their activities and having them work on election day at the polls, driving cars, handing out cards for myself and John F. Kennedy. There was a volunteer group aside from this who also worked in the county. As you recall, the polls showed we couldn't win Wood County in the primary—we did. We beat Humphrey something like 1,000 votes at that time and I won by eight.

YOUNG: You did win the primary nomination?

HAUGHT: After two recounts, I won by eight so evidently he helped me in Wood County in the primary.

YOUNG: Let's go back to something else—did you specifically attempt to counteract the anti-Catholic feeling—was this part of your role?

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HAUGHT: No, it was not in my home county. We just let it fall where it would and I guess that's all that could be done. He had to do this himself and did very well

and I think the turning point in West Virginia was the speech he made to the ministerial association out in Houston, Texas, I believe. And, of course, that was telecast—we got the film of it and rebroadcast it at least once and maybe more in West Virginia and I know that that definitely made a difference on election day.

YOUNG: Would you say something about the nature of the anti-Catholic feeling in Wood County itself? In other words, what was the nature of the campaign against Senator Kennedy?

HAUGHT: Well—it not only was—did it have the elements of a secretive hush-hush campaign which was very well-directed but it was quite openly in some respects—I recall a—frankly—the elders and the officials in the Church of Christ and that is the state headquarters they identified themselves in the paper, ran a large ad—a half page ad—on several occasions denouncing Senator Kennedy, and I guess one would say that this was quite openly done.

YOUNG: Was the attack on the Catholic Church a general vague attack on Catholicism or did they mention specific issues that they were afraid...

HAUGHT: Well, they mentioned—it was general in nature—there were many issues mentioned and there were many issues that were hatched up. There were many absurd things that a great many people tend to believe. I recall some of them—they are rather humorous but they worked...

YOUNG: They worked for the opposition, you mean?

HAUGHT: They sure did—they sure did. I recall that—and I don't know who circulated them—but there were pamphlets circulated. You could get one on the street corner if you stood there long enough—attacking the beliefs of the Catholic Church, the fact that John F. Kennedy would have to call the Pope when a decision would be made.

I walked into a bar one evening with a friend of mine who was campaigning with me and I was handing out my cards, asking to vote for me for sheriff and one lady who had evidently been imbibing quite a bit said, “Well, how do you feel about Kennedy for President?” And I said, “I'm for him.” And she said, “Then I'm against you.” And

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I said, “Why?” And she said, “Why, he's going to have all the women's heads shaved if he is elected president of the United States.” Now, this really happened and a friend with me, who happens to be a Catholic, Jimmie Mansion, who played a vital role in this campaign and worked with me and Mr. McDonough almost from the beginning, said, “Well, I'm not a Catholic—I'll even denounce my religion for Jim Haught.” We told that many times—got quite a kick out of it.

I know one thing—when President Kennedy would see me, he would say, “Sheriff,

how are you doing?” He’d always call me “sheriff”—he got quite a kick out of it, I guess. We were coming to Charleston—the county chairman and I—after he was president of the United States, and I said to Bill, “The first thing he’ll say when he gets off the plane is ‘Sheriff, how’re you doing?’” And he did, but he said it to Bill. He looked at Bill and said “sheriff” so he knew he was saying it to one of us which was right and Bill said, “Well, I can tell you know him real well.”

YOUNG: Who was Bill?

HAUGHT: Bill Richardson—the then county chairman in Wood County and he did take a stand and work very hard for President Kennedy in the primary.

YOUNG: Well, had President Kennedy been a Protestant and the religious issue not raised, do you think he would have carried Wood County in the general election?

HAUGHT: In the general election? No—I don’t think so.

YOUNG: You mean the county is normally Republican anyhow and this would be hard to overcome?

HAUGHT: That is right.

YOUNG: Mr. Haught, in analyzing the campaign from four years ago, what do you think were the most effective campaign techniques that the Senator used in West Virginia?

HAUGHT: Well, I think that one would have to say that one of the most effective campaign techniques was his tireless ability just to go out and shake hands and meet thousands of people and I saw him do it and his brothers do it day after day and this, of course, I’ve always found to be the most effective technique—to personally meet someone, shake their hand, and this he could do. After they shook his hand, I have heard hundreds of them talk about that—“I shook his hand”—and I think this was the great thing. Of course, his

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campaign was well-planned. They had attractive television programs, their ads were well-written, but I think the big thing was the enthusiasm, too, in which the organization which we had worked on and built—the enthusiasm that they were willing to exert on this man’s behalf. When you were sold on him you were all the way sold—there wasn’t any question about it. The Senator himself every place he went—just seemed to draw people. One of the things I recall early about him that I liked—he had the most inquisitive mind and was constantly asking questions. As we would drive along or wherever we might be, he wanted to know who so and so was, what they did, how the people would feel about this particular

issue, how they felt about something else—always asking questions and willing to listen to almost anyone—if he would listen to me, he would listen to almost anyone I think who was along—but occasionally—I just recall this very much.

YOUNG: You would say then that he was good at picking other people's brains politically?

HAUGHT: He certainly was.

YOUNG: Well, you mentioned earlier religion, organization, and effective use of television. Do you think that the war record was of any particular value in your county? You mentioned the PT boat earlier....

HAUGHT: I think it was—definitely. I think when you would see someone with a PT boat, you automatically identified him with, of course, the Senator. You identified him with a man who had been in the service, who had seen action. We all were aware of the hardships he endured during his career and I think certainly that this attracted many people to him—his courage, the role he played in the war—his family's role—that they had played—the losing of another son and I think all these things helped build the image of the man that they voted for on election day.

YOUNG: Well, do you think that the Harvard accent was a liability or an asset in West Virginia?

HAUGHT: I think it was an asset. There might be others who disagree but I think that people liked to hear him talk and they seemed to understand him and they felt that here's someone who speaks with conviction—he's honest and he's dedicated and he's a well-educated man and I think it helped him.

YOUNG: Well, Wood County—that is your county—in 1960 would not have been considered a depressed area—is that correct?

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HAUGHT: No—I guess it would not as other counties were.

YOUNG: Well—what appeal then did the Senator direct to your county in particular? Did he take cognizance of this in his campaigning?

HAUGHT: Well, I think the people in Wood County, while there was a rather high rate of unemployment and so forth, they enjoyed a little better economy than many of the counties but they were still aware that this did exist in the neighboring counties and in West Virginia as a whole, that this affected them, and I recall that the things mentioned that he would do for West Virginia—how he would get us moving again, and bring industry into the state where possible, and put people to work—this appealed, because

they felt that even though it hadn't hit them yet, that it could hit.

YOUNG: You mentioned the superb Kennedy organization. What, in Wood County, was the nature of the opposition? In the primary, of course, there was only one other significant candidate, Senator Humphrey. What was the nature of the enemy fire directed to your group?

HAUGHT: Primarily—as I stated before, and this was true in Wood County as in most of the counties in West Virginia—the professional politician, the organization itself, were Humphrey people to start with. Of course, they used all the gimmicks possible in trying to get across to the people that the state would go Republican if he were the nominee, that we wouldn't elect county officials and so forth. This was effective. The local state chairman for the Kennedy group happened to also come from Wood County and...

YOUNG: That was Mr. McDonough?

HAUGHT: No—that was Mr. Bill Jacobs who was state chairman for the Humphrey group. Also keeping in mind—and we are speaking very frankly during this interview—many of us felt that this wasn't only Senator Humphrey running; it was Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] and Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and Symington [Stuart Symington II] and all the others and many people said—and I anticipate this question—that the amount of money spent in West Virginia and this type of thing—and, if I had to bet, I would bet that the opposition had as much to spend, if not more, than we spent and I happen to know in working not only in my county but in other counties where it was my job to go into and furnish some necessary funds for these people to work that it was surprisingly low—surprisingly low—and in some of the counties they didn't get a dime and they worked.

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YOUNG: You're talking about your group now?

HAUGHT: I'm talking about the group that set up the Kennedy organization in the primary and anyone knows that it does generally take money to hire workers and so forth and we just absolutely didn't spend it—we didn't have to spend it. We had an organization that went in—and I know that in Wood County that we combated probably seven or eight times as much financial help as we actually had to exert on election day and I know of other counties that people—I have heard them say “Oh—that must have cost \$10,000 or \$5,000”—well, this wasn't true—it was greatly exaggerated.

YOUNG: Could you say anything about the source of the volunteer labor? Did the volunteers come from any particular sex, age group, religious group, ethnic group and so forth?

HAUGHT: Of course, in any organization you have them from all groups. I think basically it was young people—not only young in age but young in heart. That's probably one of the things that you've heard many times and will hear many times in the future—that Senator Kennedy has this ability to attract the young and make the old feel young and they felt that they had a reason to be in politics—that this man stood for things that ought to be brought to the attention of Americans and that they were playing their part. It was a real dedicated group from the beginning. We had women's organizations, high school volunteers, college volunteers—the type of personnel.

YOUNG: Well, were you affected at all or was it your job to use the Young Democratic group?

HAUGHT: Well, I don't know as we used the Young Democratic group as such but it was part of the work that I did to contact the people that I had met while engaged in the Young Democratic organization in the state of West Virginia and, of course, I knew them personally and we didn't call them Young Democrat clubs as such but we went where we could to get the local presidents and so forth. I think it was just people more than organizations.

YOUNG: Your job wasn't to use that organization particularly?

HAUGHT: No—no.

YOUNG: This is just an interesting historical footnote and I suppose we could check this very easily, but do you remember when Senator Kennedy filed for the presidency, I believe that the filing fee in West Virginia is 10% of the annual salary, is this correct? Which would have made it \$1,000 for the presidency...

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HAUGHT: I think that's correct.

YOUNG: Did you pay by cash or check?

HAUGHT: I think it was check.

YOUNG: And it didn't bounce?

HAUGHT: No... [Laughter]

YOUNG: Then another question which goes back to something you said earlier. Did the Democrats who were supporting Humphrey or Humphrey-Johnson-Stevenson ever use the anti-Catholic line to your knowledge?

HAUGHT: Did they use it....

YOUNG: To attempt to defeat Kennedy?

HAUGHT: They certainly did.

YOUNG: In other words, Democrats were fighting Democrats with the weapon of religion?

HAUGHT: That's right—that's right.

YOUNG: Mr. Haught, on a statewide level how evenly matched do you think the Kennedy Humphrey forces were in terms of financing and terms of organization?

HAUGHT: I very frankly feel that there was—they were pretty evenly matched and if one had to say which one had the most money and more people in an organization, I would say the Humphrey people definitely had more money and spent more money in West Virginia and I would say that they had more of a paid-for organization and this was really more in the minority in the Kennedy organization because the largest part of the Kennedy organization were volunteers.

YOUNG: You are implying then that most of the Kennedy iceberg was above water and most of the Humphrey iceberg was below water—is that a fair analysis?

HAUGHT: I would say that's fair and I can speak for myself in it—I worked because I believed in the man and I believed in his principles and I knew everyone that was working in the organization and, believe me, most of them were there for that reason.

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YOUNG: Well, if we accept this theory then, how was the Humphrey iceberg hidden below the water—in other words, how was it not visible to the general public in the way that the Kennedy campaign was visible to the general public?

HAUGHT: Well, again I go back that here they were dealing with the professional politician and I think professional politicians have the unique ability of being able to hide better than we amateurs and I think we told about everything we knew and they kept it secret. Keeping in mind too that many of the people became ashamed of themselves really that had at first expressed an opposition to the President because of his religion and this thing progressed during the campaign to the point that a great number of people didn't want to talk about that particular part of it any more and it was rather difficult for them to pick on the man or to pick on the issues and the things he stood for—so that it was more of a hidden type of campaign and therefore the finances and the personalities involved would not be as readily recognizable as were the Kennedy people at the end of the

campaign.

YOUNG: You believe then that there was no real discernible difference in terms of platform or future programs between the two candidates?

HAUGHT: No—I don't think there was a whole lot of difference in terms of platform or future programs. I think we had a very liberal and very capable man in Hubert Humphrey and I think his program essentially was certainly not dislike that of Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: Well, did you continue then after the primary to work for the Senator in the general election?

HAUGHT: We certainly did.

YOUNG: What was the nature of your work then?

HAUGHT: Well, of course, then it became the arduous task of getting the candidates that had been nominated and the opposition organization to go all out and put forth their efforts on behalf of our nominee and some of them had gone out front to the extent that this was rather difficult—they had made some assertions and had done things that it was rather difficult for them to back up on and we had these problems. Also, we had yet to convince many of the candidates, not only on a local level but, I recall, on a statewide

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level, that Senator Kennedy's presence on the ticket would not hurt them. And, of course, when you have a—one organization then running the entire campaign—who was not yet convinced that this man could win, it became necessary for many of us in the original organization to keep right on working and the volunteers for Kennedy kept right on working.

YOUNG: In other words, you kept a separate organization going for all practical purposes?

HAUGHT: For all practical purposes. We did because we knew that in many of the counties the county chairman—I can recall a county or two—that definitely said they still would not support Senator Kennedy. When this was present we had to move in with other forces and use other techniques and as it turned out, of course, the statewide candidates weren't hurt by his presence on the ticket and in most of the counties, in fact, they were helped because this man had done such a terrific job in getting himself before the West Virginians.

YOUNG: Well—you feel then that the Democrats closed ranks but not completely for the general election?

HAUGHT: That's right.

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YOUNG: Let's turn now to the presidency itself—to the years of the New Frontier...

HAUGHT: I think—if I might interrupt—one very striking example that was present—were the billboards in West Virginia. I won't forget it because this really irked me. I was, after all, still a candidate for sheriff in my county when these billboards would appear and with the candidates for governor and senator and his picture wasn't on there. This was very obvious that they were still afraid—and the matches that were circulated without his picture—this was one of the few things that you could point to and say “This is what I mean.”

YOUNG: Was any attempt made to correct this in the latter days of the campaign?

HAUGHT: Well—certainly there were attempts constantly being made to correct this but when these things had been bought and paid for it was too late to do anything about it.

YOUNG: You couldn't go around and put up new billboards?

HAUGHT: That's right.

YOUNG: O.K.—do you have anything else with respect to the primary or the general election itself which might be of interest?

HAUGHT: Oh, I can't think of anything off-hand—I think we have fairly well covered it. It was quite a thing—we West Virginians felt like we were on stage, particularly during the primary because we'd read in the New York papers and Chicago papers that everyone was very anxious to know what West Virginians were going to do, particularly again on the religious issue since something like only 5% of the population was Catholic, as I recall, and I think that—and he has said it himself and I have heard him on more than one occasion—that had it not been for his victory in West Virginia he would not have been elected President of the United States.

YOUNG: Let's go on then to the years of the presidency. Do you feel West Virginians were pleased with President Kennedy's Administration and what criticism, if any, did you pick up in the years following the Inauguration?

HAUGHT: Well, I think that West Virginians generally were extremely pleased. Again, they suddenly recognized the important role they had played in placing this man in the White House. They identified themselves, every place I went and go yet today, with having played a major part in his election even, I recall, several politicians who opposed him and yet were very pleased after he was elected and felt had it not been for

them and their efforts—so the atmosphere was very good on Inauguration Day for the then President Kennedy to be accepted in West Virginia.

People continued to look to him almost personally for help in this depressed state and I feel that they felt they were getting this help, that he was exerting the—I recall that—I believe it might have been the first official act or one of the few first official acts—in putting into effect the Food Stamp Plan in southern West Virginia—McDow County—and the people accepted this as believing what the man had said—that he would help us when he got to Washington and he did and continued to do so and the people who were with him are still continuing to try to assist West Virginia.

YOUNG: Well, did you have any personal contacts with the President after the Inauguration?

HAUGHT: After that, of course, having lost my sheriff's race in Wood County, I was without employment. Through the efforts of a few and, I would like to think through the efforts of the then

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President, I was appointed Federal Housing Director for West Virginia, having been in the real estate business and having some knowledge in that field. I saw him and spoke with him briefly when he came into West Virginia—into Charleston—on the celebration of the Centennial and spoke in front of the State Capitol. It was raining that day—the crowds stood for hours in the rain and cheered and it was heartwarming to see how they responded to the President coming back into the State that he loved so much as he has said himself. He called it his second home actually.

YOUNG: Other than the Food Stamp Plan can you suggest any other Kennedy programs that were well received in West Virginia?

HAUGHT: Well, of course, there were numerous and many—the Area Redevelopment Administration—which was, I'm positive, through the efforts of the Kennedy Administration set up—has been very helpful, particularly to the small communities. As you know, West Virginia in itself is about sixty some percent rural—that is, towns of less than 2,500—and there was a great need for assistance from the national level in helping them to obtain sanitary and decent water supplies, sewage systems, and this type of thing. I feel that there was effort, as much as possible, to direct whatever defense contracts could be guided into West Virginia without too much interference but yet with the prestige of the office being used, so that the people here could have employment without leaving the Mountain State and I think this along with the thousands of jobs that did develop, and has developed since he was made President, has certainly been very helpful to the state.

YOUNG: What criticisms, if any, were made of the Kennedy Administration from your point of view?

HAUGHT: Well, sometimes I guess we have criticism regardless of what one does. I personally thought he was doing everything he could and maybe more than we were entitled to at times, but then there were those that felt he should do more and I don't know really how he could have done more—but this was in the minority. I think generally that people who have some knowledge of the working of government, realized that this man was making a sincere effort. I don't think there were really too many criticisms—at least I haven't found them. Maybe it's because a great number of people identified me with the Administration and wouldn't speak up but I just haven't found them.

YOUNG: Well, looking back now from the vantage point of four years—that is, back to the primary and the general election, what do you feel is the most significant legacy—overall—that the Kennedy campaign left West Virginia?

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HAUGHT: I think that one of the things certainly that it left in West Virginia was a feeling among the people that they, themselves, had a part to play in the government of our land. And I talked to many. My mother—many of the older people who felt young and who wanted to do something, just some little thing, because of the impression that the campaign and the candidate himself had made on these people, there was a sudden awareness of patriotism. And I see this every day yet—an awareness of patriotism and duty to this country and it was as a result of the impression that the President made, and his family made, and the people around him made while in West Virginia.

YOUNG: Have you then, Mr. Haught, any final comments on the 1960 primary before we conclude this discussion?

HAUGHT: Well, there is one thing, Professor Young, that I firmly believe. And that is that as the results turned out—that is, the fact that President Kennedy carried West Virginia as he did was not because of any monies that were spent or any organizations that were bought or because of really the things he stood for or the issues, but it was the fact that hundreds of people—and hundreds of them—who were volunteers. And the first question that comes to your mind is “why does a person volunteer?” and work hard—and I feel that it was because they felt that, not only for the Democratic Party, but they for the first time in eight years had a candidate that they could support, had a man who himself they could believe in and trust and that this enthusiasm resulted in the overwhelming victory for the Democratic Party in West Virginia.

YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. Haught. This has been an interview with Mr. James F. Haught, conducted in the Daniel Boone Hotel, Charleston, West Virginia, on July 13, 1964, by William L. Young.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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