

**John F. English Oral History Interview –RFK#1, 11/3/1969**  
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English, New York political figure; political aide to Robert F. Kennedy, discusses leadership in New York, RFK's 1964 senate campaign, and major issues during the campaign, among other issues.

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John F. English – RFK #1

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First Oral History Interview

with

JOHN ENGLISH

November 3, 1969  
Mineola, New York

By Roberta Greene

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

GREENE: Mr. English, why don't you begin by recalling your first meeting with the Senator, who was not yet a Senator, and take it from there as far as how your relationship developed.

ENGLISH: I believe that the first time I met the Senator was in 1958, and I was in the office of then Senator John F. Kennedy, and there were other people present. I don't recall exactly the circumstances, but we were discussing the presidential thing in 1960, and Robert Kennedy came into the room. And he was sort of in a hurry, and he looked rather disheveled, and he looked like a delivery boy for a newspaper. And he met us and was fast in and out. And then I didn't see him again until the 1960 campaign, which would be at the end of '59.

GREENE: Did you have much contact with him at the Convention in 1960, with Robert Kennedy?

ENGLISH: I would say that I did not have much contact with Robert Kennedy during the '60 Convention. No, I did not. It was minuscule, as a matter of fact.

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GREENE: Well, then how much did you see of him during the actual electoral campaign in '60? Did he come to Nassau at all?

ENGLISH: Well, I saw a lot of him because as soon as the Convention was over I got a call from him to meet him at what was then 277 Park. I remember it was very early in the morning. And I went up to see him. Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] was there, and he wasn't up yet, as a matter of fact. It was one of those things like, "Come up at 6 o'clock in the morning." And I went up and he said that he would like me to develop a campaign plan for New York State. And I remember he wanted a rundown on every county in the state and who all the people were and what the issues were in each of the counties and congressional districts and political subdivisions. And he wanted demographic material and so forth, and I said, "Well, how long do I have?" And he said, "Well, how long will it take you?" I said, "About two weeks." And he said, "Well, I'd like it in two days." Then we compromised, I think.

And from that point on during the campaign, I saw him frequently, and he himself did campaign out here. It was at that period that I really began to work very closely with him. I didn't even know why he wanted to see me, as a matter of fact, because I hadn't worked really with him. I had worked with other people on the Kennedy staff much more than I had – I'd worked with Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] a lot, for instance.

GREENE: Well, why do you think you were called in? Had someone suggested you?

ENGLISH: I suppose the people who had worked on his staff had suggested it. And, of course, I had spent a lot of time with John F. Kennedy. Every time he came into the state, I used to meet him or I used to go down to Washington in between '58 and '60, so I had a relationship with him. And we had discussed the delegate situation with John F. Kennedy and things that he should do and so forth. But Robert Kennedy was not a part of that kind of thing. Jack Kennedy did most of his things in New York himself.

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GREENE: Was there any dissatisfaction with Robert Kennedy in the New York political world at that point?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, I would say so. It's hard for me to recall when the resentment first built up. He wasn't really that well-known to too many New York politicians, but the reformers were very, very much annoyed with him and so forth. But I don't think it – it didn't reach any crescendo at that time because he didn't get to meet that many people. He was much too busy nationally.

GREENE: Do you think this dissatisfaction was one of the reasons that John F. Kennedy did so much himself, rather than sending in his brother?

ENGLISH: Oh, no. I think that was a different reason. The fact of the matter is that New York was, I think, a different kind of thing where, for instance, Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] handled the older politicians – Charlie Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] and Gene Keogh [Eugene James Keogh] and Dan O’Connell [Daniel P. O’Connell] and people like that; John F. Kennedy handled people like me. And then we discussed the media and things like that with him. For instance, I remember saying one time to John F. Kennedy, well, he ought to go out and see Alicia Patterson because this would be a big Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] county, and he never replied to me. The next thing I had known, within a week he had been out to see her. And eventually, although where she stood very much favored Stevenson, she said that was impractical and became a supporter of John F. Kennedy. But that was the kind of thing we used to discuss, how to get the people who were the old-line kind of people.

But Robert Kennedy was not really that much involved in the delegate selection in New York State because we put together an uncontested primary here. And whoever were the people who were elected in the congressional districts as delegates were chosen without contest, so it was just a matter of wearing down the people like DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio] and Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast] who would have liked to have gone somewhere else. And what Kennedy did was to get so many other people committed to him that they no longer had any room to operate.

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GREENE: How much was Robert Kennedy involved in that?

ENGLISH: He was not really much involved in that. He was working other states, I think basically because Steve Smith was here, and the President had done so much of that himself, had seen so many – and I would just say it was in pretty good shape.

GREENE: What about Robert Kennedy’s appearances here? Were these mainly to talk to delegates or also public appearances?

ENGLISH: He did public appearances in the end. We had arranged some of those around the state. And there were times – and I remember one time in particular where we had run something for all the political people in the state at one of the hotels. Afterwards we went up to the room and Robert Kennedy said to me – he was very chagrined and he was very taken back – and he said that he felt he had committed a blunder. What had happened was Gore Vidal was then running for Congress, and he met him and didn’t know who he was, and Vidal got very uptight about it. And Kennedy was embarrassed because he [Vidal] was related to Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy Onassis] and so forth, and he was really on himself for not having a better memory.

But then, well, I remember we set up a schedule for out here, out in Nassau County,

where he did twelve stops, and he didn't do much public campaigning during that kind of thing, but this is the....So he came in, and we went into the Waldorf and picked him up, and Byron White was with him and Chuck Roche [Charles D. Roche] and Paul Corbin and so we had to do all these stops out there. And as we hopped from one place to the other....It was one of those things where we spent a half an hour at each place. We had put in a stop at C.W. Post College because we were doing Hofstra and Adelphi. And we had great audiences all over the place and he was very good. He was in a good mood and things were coming on naturally.

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I had gotten a call the day before from the public relations fellow at C.W. Post that said that, you know, we really weren't very welcome because what had happened was a professor of law out there, of business law, had contacted us much earlier and they said they had wanted Jack Kennedy. So when we were doing the other things, I called this professor back up and I said, "Well, would you like to have Robert Kennedy?" And he was delighted, and he set the whole thing up. And I told Kennedy as we were driving, I said, "We may have some trouble at this next stop." And that was a great part of him, you know. He didn't bat an eye. Somebody else, I'm sure, would have said, "Let's dump that one and let's avoid any kind of controversy" or "Let's not get ourselves into any hot water."

As we drove up to the gates the then-dean, whose name was Dean Gordon Hoxie, who later became the president of the College and was recently removed as president because of his inability to get along with students....Anyway, Hoxie was at the gate with someone else, an assistant dean. And he said, "You can't come in here. This invitation wasn't by the College, and this professor can only extend it for his law class. And if you want to come in here, you can only go and speak to his law class," of course, which would have about twenty-five people. In the meantime, you could look through the gate and see that the whole school had emptied out and the bleachers were full, absolutely full of screaming students. So we busted right by him, and I started arguing with Hoxie and this other fellow. We got out onto the football....And we said we'd agree. I said, "We'll agree. We'll only talk about law." That was one of the....

But I was still arguing as Kennedy started out, and he said to the students, "I'm Robert Kennedy." And he said, "And I served on the McClellan Committee and that's my experience as a lawyer." And he said, "And I have a relative running for public office. Now are there any questions?" And I remember the first question: "Is your father really a Nazi?" And now Hoxie is really getting mad up there and I'm arguing with Hoxie. And he answered these questions for thirty minutes. And finally – I'm still arguing with Hoxie – I went over to him and I said, "Let's get the hell out of here." No sooner than he turned and we ran across the whole length of the football field, the three of us – White, Chuck Roche, and myself – ran the whole length of the football field, and

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the student body came pouring out of the stands, ran all over Hoxie and knocked him down, and we ran out. That's like it was. That was a....You know, so when people sometimes talk



about him being ruthless and so forth, he'd just love that kind of a confrontation. Somebody....It was a matter of academic freedom, and he wasn't going to be bullied out of that under any circumstances. And it was really a high point. You could tell. He just enjoyed it, you know.

GREENE: How was he as a public speaker at that point?

ENGLISH: I don't think he was that good as a public speaker, but when it got into the questions and answers, particularly at the colleges, he was great. They loved it. At Hofstra they had signs which were Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] signs, and there was a lot of booing and hissing in the beginning, but he won them all over, and he loved that kind of....The tougher the question, even at that time, the better he was. He wasn't so good, you know, if he were talking to like some labor leaders which we had to set up, or something like that, you know, where what he had to say was more formal. I think he was more halting and unsure of himself and probably not as relaxed.

There was a second time when he came out during the campaign and we were doing a tour, and it had to be – this was the second time in a week. That must have been the day after Martin Luther King had been jailed, and we had to break down the trip a number of times and went back to my house so he could make a lot of telephone calls. But he was calling because we were....One of us would get Governor Vandiver [S. Ernest Vandiver, Jr.] on the phone, I guess it was, and the other one would get Governor Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] because it was being handled that way. And that went on for hours and hours and hours while he's – you know, in between stops he was doing that.

GREENE: Do you remember the discussion about how it should be handled, how they finally came to the decision to call Mrs. King [Coretta Scott King]?

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ENGLISH: I was constantly getting calls, actually, for him rather than....And I think that was handled through Governor Lawrence, as I remember it, because I remember that the....You know, this three-way call, we just had to keep calling back and forth. And I really didn't even get to listen to that much of the conversation because every time he'd get upstairs on the phone I'd run downstairs and make another call.

GREENE: Would he discuss on these occasions how he felt things were going in general, or how things were going in New York particularly? Was he generally satisfied with the New York setup?

ENGLISH: Well, he never, as long as I knew him....He very seldom discussed what he thought. He was always more interested in what you thought, or what somebody else thought, or what the people thought or what labor thought, or what this thought, or what did you think about that speech, or did he get

hurt on Quemoy and Matsu, or whatever the particular thing was. He did not volunteer that much. That's not saying that he did not get into the discussion, but I would say that 90 percent of his stuff was always eliciting other people's thoughts and ideas.

GREENE: Well, what are your other recollections of the campaign and Robert Kennedy?

ENGLISH: Of the '60 campaign?

GREENE: Yes.

ENGLISH: I'm not sure that there were many more things from the '60 campaign in relation to him that would stand out. The rest of it was really, you know, Jack Kennedy campaigning because he did campaign a lot out here, and I traveled with him a lot. Robert Kennedy, I don't think that there was that much.

GREENE: Okay, then let's move on to the transition period between the election and the inauguration. Did you see much of him in that time?

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ENGLISH: Not a great deal.

GREENE: Did you get involved at all in the whole question of leadership in New York with the Prendergast and DeSapio?

ENGLISH: I was heavily involved, yes.

GREENE: What were Robert Kennedy's feelings on this? Did they hope to force Prendergast out?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. And we discussed that on many, many occasions because it took a long period of time to accomplish. I actually worked on the preparation of a lawsuit.

GREENE: What was their original idea as far as how it could be done? Did they hope to just embarrass him out of it?

ENGLISH: Well, I think they changed the way they were going to do it – and my chronology may not be right – but as I remember one of the things they did (and this was without me knowing about it), Buckley and Keogh were called down to the White House one day, as I remember it, or it may not – you know, this may even have been in transition – with President Kennedy and Senator Kennedy – and this is what they wanted to get rid of Prendergast, and they both agreed that that's what the President wanted. If that's what they wanted, that's what they would do. And I said,

“Well, who do you want to succeed him?” or something, and they said, me [English]. And I didn’t know anything about it and was not exactly champing at the bit to do that particular thing. I never thought much of that particular job. And from there on it got into a situation of lining up Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] to do it. There was really never too much of a problem with DeSapio since he was – you could deal in New York State without him. The thing to do was just to cut him off and make it known that he was persona non grata. Then it didn’t make any difference. He was a lame duck serving out his term. But you’d have to have some statutory office. That would be Prendergast. And, of course, we had to change our by-laws to accomplish that.

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GREENE: But in the interim there was almost a year, or even more than a year, where you were just going around Prendergast.

ENGLISH: That’s right.

GREENE: Had they expected him to resign much quicker?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. Oh, they thought absolutely that he would just see the handwriting on the wall. I remember we discussed that many times. I mean I myself thought that he would.

GREENE: Do you know of any posts that were offered to Prendergast to try to lure him away?

ENGLISH: There were some conversations. I think there were various ideas tried, but I don’t recall exactly what it was. But there were some, you know, concessions being made or accommodations, but I wasn’t privy to all of them.

GREENE: Do you remember how the idea to just change the by-laws and get around it that way came up? Was that your idea?

ENGLISH: That was my idea.

GREENE: And was Robert Kennedy in on this discussion?

ENGLISH: Yes. He was always willing. . . . At that point – I guess now we’re past transition period, we’re in the first year. I remember at that point. . . . You know, I used to go down and see him quite often when he was Attorney General on many matters concerning New York State, on leadership positions here and there. And I remember one time – I don’t remember the year, but it was early – and he’d never had much respect, and neither did I, for the leader who was then in Suffolk County. His name was Adrian Mason. Anyway, I suggested that, you know, I would

undertake to depose him. And it wasn't really all that easy. And Newsday did not like Mason at all. He was involved in all

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sorts of activities which were not helping the Party. He was just out to improve himself and was indicted subsequently. So we undertook that. This became a big furor out there and it was – he had been a leader for a number of years and it was an old-line organization. It was basically paper. It was very difficult to take over a paper organization. And we got a candidate for county leader, and we were in the middle of it. And I spent a lot of time.

He was always very, very interested in what was going on. So about a week before or a couple of days before, he said, “Well, are you sure you have it?” because John Bailey had told him, “You’re the Attorney General of the United States” or something and here you’re in some little county getting yourself messed up. And if you lose it’s going to be a terrible blow.” So I kept saying, “Well, you know, you’re in it this far and you’ll have to go ahead, and if you want to improve – that’s the big growing county in the state – and if you want to do something now, this is the kind of leader you have to clean out.” So, anyway, in about a week he asked how it was going and I said the only other thing that I thought could be done, he would have to make a personal appearance because there were rumors, you know, was he in it or wasn’t he in it, that kind of thing. So he said, “Well,” he said, “it happens that on Friday I’m going to be doing the ‘Today’ show.” And he said, “If you bring the candidate in,” (who he hadn’t met) “and he just happens to be there,” he said, “you know, maybe we can work something out.”

So we got up and I got Newsday and some other stuff. We went in with a photographer early in the morning – I forget when the “Today” show is – with this fellow, Larry Delaney [Lawrence Delaney], who subsequently became the county chairman. Newsday was there. And we had the pictures taken outside the studio and then out on the sidewalk, and Bobby had two of the kids there. I forget which ones. It was probably – you know, it was such a long time ago, I can’t remember who it was. They took the picture. And, of course, this was like the Saturday before, or the day before, or perhaps even the day of the convention when the paper appeared, and there was a big picture on the front page, Kennedy and Delaney, you know. It was an inside story or another story. And, of course, he [Delaney] won that night. Of course, he [RFK] was vehemently and viciously denounced at the convention as being a

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boss and so forth. He wasn’t denounced as much as I was. But I mean when he made up his mind that he was going to do something, he took risks.

GREENE:                    Were there other occasions like this where he’d get involved in a local political party?

ENGLISH: I think he was more careful. I think he was a lot more careful about how he did that. I mean he would not usually lend his presence to that kind of thing, such as he did. Everybody knew about the Prendergast thing. And that one, of course, became rather open. And, of course, he later did it in Utica. But I would...That's comparable to the Utica situation where he really injected himself. And, of course, by the time of the Utica situation he was then a United States Senator from New York, which was better – he should have had more interest in it.

GREENE: Was there any concern, at least in the beginning of the Prendergast thing, to try to keep it away from the White House, or at least so it didn't appear that the White House was trying to control the situation?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. In fact, this was now Robert Kennedy who was doing that. I mean there was no...After that period of time the President was really out of it. He may have been informed, but I mean I certainly never had any discussion at all with him.

GREENE: What was the origin, as far as you understand it, of this whole distaste for Prendergast and DeSapio? They worked fairly hard for him during the campaign. Was it that last day with Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman] and Mrs. Roosevelt [Anna Eleanor Roosevelt]? That's been the excuse that's been written about.

[-11-]

ENGLISH: Well, that was a thing that came to a head. That last day John Kennedy was out here, among other places we did. That was the first big tour. That has become a staple now in New York politics, on the Saturday before, how we did that. And it was a raining, pouring day and it was bitter cold. And he came in here from Queens, I guess it was, and then we traveled down Hempstead Turnpike and then out onto Sunrise Highway and all the way back into the city. And there were so many people out waiting in that train so long that he was delayed hours and hours and hours. And by the time we got back to the Queens line...The New York police, I guess, missed the pickup and he went the wrong way, and when he got back...You know, of course, he was so cold. And to get there and find out that Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt had been excluded, of course, he was very much annoyed. This was, of course, the President himself. I don't recall if Robert – Robert Kennedy wasn't with him at all. I don't think he was in the state at the time. But it had built up long before that.

The animus built up in the pre-Convention days when Kennedy – certainly this was one state where he had strong support. He had gathered it himself. And they had lined up Buckley on the one side and the Brooklyn people on the other, and they had Buffalo with Crotty [Peter J. Crotty] and almost every major political subdivision. And here we have the two major leaders in the state trying to make deals with Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] and Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], respectively. And, of course, they were keenly aware of it, and there had been a number of conversations, and they just knew that that wasn't the kind

of thing that they were interested in.

GREENE: Just one more question on that period which doesn't really deal with Robert Kennedy. I'd heard a story – and I don't know if you could confirm it or deny it – but I'd heard a story that Senator John Kennedy made a deal before the Convention with the New York leaders agreeing to push Bailey and Johnson – Bailey, of course, for chairman and Johnson for Vice President – in exchange for a guarantee that the New York delegation would go solid for him. Did you ever hear of that?

[-12-]

ENGLISH: No, never. I never heard of it and I seriously doubt the authenticity of it because he had the New York delegation lined up. I mean they were all committed – and there was nothing that we could... If any leader opposed Kennedy after they'd thumbed for a primary, they would have had a primary. You know, they could have changed their minds. But if DeSapio, for instance, in his own county had been for some other candidate, I am sure there would have been Kennedy delegates running then and the Kennedy delegates would have won. So that they weren't giving anything away. The sentiment in this state, contrary to other states, was pretty heavily Kennedy, and it was building.

GREENE: There was nobody that you know of in the top leadership who would have been pushing Johnson for Vice President at this point?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes, there was. Yes, that's DeSapio.

GREENE: But the story of even an attempted deal like this doesn't ring true?

ENGLISH: No. I mean, Kennedy was paying a lot more attention to Buckley and Keogh at that time than he was to DeSapio and Prendergast. They were going along. You know, the whole delegation was going one way. And he only lost – what did he lose? – five and a half delegates or something, one of which was out here. We had a delegate here for Stevenson.

GREENE: Well, back to this leadership question. How did they finally settle on McKeon [William H. McKeon]? Was Robert Kennedy pushing you to do it? Did you have to talk him out of it?

ENGLISH: [Inaudible]...and, of course, Wagner was the mayor, and as this thing was going on I had some conversations. And we had had mutual conversations to work it out. And Sam Silverman [Samuel J. Silverman] got in as the lawyer to do it, and I was working with Wagner. But then it became apparent to me during the long period that this took that Wagner was not interested in the state

chairman. And I really wasn't interested in it anyway unless it was going to be a state chairman, and in my conversations with Wagner, I mean, it was very, very evident to me what he wanted was a file clerk. And at that point, you know, I told Kennedy that I just wasn't going to do it because I'd have to have the support not only of the Kennedys, the President and so forth, but that was pretty remote, but also, you know, the Mayor of the City of New York was a very important factor. And although he was supporting me, I mean, he wanted to do an entirely different thing. He wanted a figurehead and I was not interested in doing that. We had had enough of those. Prendergast was one.

GREENE: Who were some of the other names that came up in these discussions, before McKeon?

ENGLISH: Well, there were other names discussed.

GREENE: Was Crotty one of them?

ENGLISH: He probably was, but I can't remember whether he would have done it or not. I'm sure that he....During that whole period of time we had spent a lot of time down talking to him. I'm not just sure about that. There were other names, definitely.

GREENE: Well, where did they finally come up with McKeon? Whose suggestion was he?

ENGLISH: Well, he had been a leader for quite a period of time, as compared to other people, and he was very acceptable to Wagner. He had no known enemies. He had no enemies in the party. He was an upstate – oh, tradition was that the chairman be upstate or outside of the city of New York. I think it was pretty much a consensus that....

GREENE: Were they reasonably satisfied with him once he took hold?

ENGLISH: The Kennedys?

GREENE: Yes.

ENGLISH: I think so. See, I must say that he was brought in more by Wagner than anybody else, but once he got in he was more faithful to the Kennedys. And then he immediately fell out, of course, with Wagner – not immediately, but he fell out.

GREENE: Just let me ask you a general question. In this whole period – the campaign and the transition and then into the early days of the Administration – what was your opinion of Robert Kennedy’s knowledge and understanding of New York politics and the machinations particularly of the city?

ENGLISH: Well, in the very beginning....He may have been dealing with other people now, but never dealt with me, so therefore I would say up until the Convention he really had very little to do in New York, and that was done by other people, Steve in particular. But Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] spent a lot of time in the state, and they had other staff members, Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] and people, but most of all the President himself. After the Convention he immediately got into it and got very interested in New York.

We did that profile for him which I gave him in whatever it took, a week and so forth, in which we did everything. And it was a dossier on every leader and who he was and whether he should come or go, and we put it in there just – Bob asked this fellow to do it, then appoint a citizens committee. We got in a lot of trouble with that kind of activity, as usual. Citizens committee....But in the places where we didn’t trust the leader or thought he was inept, we moved immediately to set up these citizens kind of things, and he took the rap for that because he was very strong about it. With Laura Davis, who was my research director, we drew up the plan about who to depend on and who not to. And, of course, Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith, II] and Paul Corbin were here, you know, full-time, and then besides that there was a Kennedy person from out of the state in each county.

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GREENE: So you think generally his understanding during the Administration was pretty good?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. I must think that he probably spent more time about New York. I mean, he was very, very interested in it and got to know the personalities very well.

GREENE: Well, I have some questions on the New York governor’s race. Is there anything prior to that in ’62 that you think we ought to discuss?

ENGLISH: I don’t think so, because I’m all so vague about – I never had a diary or anything. I never kept one.

GREENE: Well, did you have early discussions with him about the ’62 governor’s race?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. Back from ’60 on.

GREENE: What were his feelings on it?



ENGLISH: He was ambivalent at first, you know, no solid ideas in the beginning. Well, he wasn't until the end. I don't think he was ever quite sure.

GREENE: Did you have someone that you were favorable to?

ENGLISH: Well, in '62 what happened was that we're back – this is the period of time when my problems with Wagner began and he also was having his problems with the Kennedys, [Wagner] wanting to be the kingpin. And I don't remember exactly what stages they were at, but basically there was Sam Stratton [Samuel S. Stratton], who had been hostile to Kennedy and who, in addition to that, was unacceptable to the Liberal Party, mostly to Alex Rose. And Wagner always used to talk about that article he'd written. I got so tired of hearing that story about that article he wrote about the Nazis when he was going to college or something. But it was plain that that was out. We kept having meetings with Wagner and shifting from one candidate to another.

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But finally Crotty, Luddy [William F. Luddy] and myself met, at one period of time, almost constantly – two or three times a week – with Wagner because he had to break down some leader outside of the city of New York to make it look good. And we decided that we would be for O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor], you know, as a sort of a holding position anyway. And Kennedy never was very enthusiastic about O'Connor. And I had called Kennedy, and O'Connor went down to see him. And I said, when he came back, to O'Connor, "What did he say?" and he said, "He didn't say anything." So he was not, you know, enthusiastic about that.

He would have – oh, well, he would have been for Frank Hogan, but, you know, we just couldn't – there was no one to start that kind of thing off, and Wagner did not want Hogan. He was still bitter about '58. And Hogan would have been a candidate I think we could have all taken if we could have gotten – Wagner was against him. Then Wagner started flying these trial balloons about, first it was Judge Botein [Bernard Botein] and then it was something else. But, you know, that was done in Albany, the trial balloons. We had met about three times one week with Wagner. And we left the meeting, the three of us, Luddy, Crotty and I, and we went and we said we'd meet again with Wagner.

The next day I got a call from Leo Egan of the Times [New York Times] and he said, "What's Luddy having the press conference for?" And I said, "I don't know." So I called Luddy up on the phone and I said, "Are you having a press conference?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, I'm going to announce for Morgenthau [Robert M. Morgenthau]." So that was it. Then as soon as he said that to me, I immediately called my executive committee together and announced for O'Connor the same day, and Crotty did the same thing, and then we were in a fight. But it was a...

GREENE: Where did Morgenthau come from? You hadn't...

ENGLISH: Well, of course, Kennedy.... Well, he was pulled out of a hat in the end by Wagner and, of course, Kennedy liked him very much. I mean he was an excellent attorney general and he thought very, very highly of him. We had reservations about his ability. And nobody knew him at the time. Of course, this

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is different now. Of course, his name is quite well-known. Everybody thought he was Henry Morgenthau. And Alex Rose's idea, and Wagner's, was that we had to have a Jew. And, of course, he was the third or fourth trial balloon that went up. We thought it was just a trial balloon at first. But, of course, Kennedy, I think, had told me at the time.... Morgenthau had come down there to see him about it, and he asked me to come down. And he told me why Morgenthau had done this, and he said he [Kennedy] told him to wait awhile. You know, he had some good cases in the office, and he was just building his reputation, and he thought he'd have a better shot at it. But he said, "If you're going to do it, do it, I mean, but this is not what I would advise you to do."

GREENE: Did he try to discourage Luddy and the rest of you from...

ENGLISH: Oh, no. He didn't.... Well, he'd never talk to Luddy. No, I talked to him many times. I went down regularly to see him about the thing, and I just thought we were heading for a disaster because Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] was weak at the time, and I thought we could beat him. And Morgenthau had to just – you know, he was totally unknown, and he didn't have the winning kind of a personality that you could go around in the streets. You know, I could see the thing coming and I was very distraught about it, and I was very hard with Kennedy about letting it happen because I said, "Even permissively, letting it happen...." or that he was not for O'Connor, but Kennedy could not see O'Connor. So he didn't have a candidate.

GREENE: So he just let the situation...

ENGLISH: He let it slide. He let it happen, but knowing, of course, that it would be Morgenthau if he didn't do anything.

GREENE: Did that put a strain in your relations at all for a while?

ENGLISH: No. No, we used to laugh. You know, as he used to say – he used to laugh at me. He said one time – I was fighting very vehemently against Morgenthau down in his office – and he said to me.... And I said, "He's nothing but Mr. Peepers," which was the worst

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appellation I could think of. And he said, "Well, he's no Bob Hope." You know, and he was very disarming about the whole thing.

GREENE: I know on September 11<sup>th</sup>, though, you made a statement that Robert Kennedy had assured you that the administration would not interface in any way in the choice.

ENGLISH: Was that in 1962?

GREENE: Yes, September 11<sup>th</sup>. That was the only thing that actually got into the papers of all these meetings. But was that more or less accurate, that he had said they would stay out of it?

ENGLISH: Yes, he said they'd stay out. One of the members of his staff was working with me actively, even on the night of the convention.

GREENE: To try to stop it?

ENGLISH: Well, you know, he was just...I think what happened was when we got there, they just wanted to be...I was interested. I know that he had to be on the other end of the telephone as to what was going on, but at that point I was so mad that I wouldn't even return the calls. You know, it was very active, and it got very heated, as history records. But the fact of the matter is, see, Buckley always said...You know, that thing went right up to the end and Brooklyn and the Bronx were uncommitted and that's where the nomination was. And, of course, Buckley always insisted that Kennedy had instructed him or whatever it was, whatever the word he used, but indicated to him that he should go for Morgenthau. So we were looking at that from two different points of view.

GREENE: Who from Kennedy's office was at the convention? You mentioned somebody.

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ENGLISH: Well, there are a number of people, I think, at the convention. Well, for instance, I had some people who, like United States marshals, who were working for me who would not have done so, in violation of the Hatch Act, if they hadn't checked first. So it was whoever I could get, I was allowed to have. This is the way it was. But Corbin was the one who was involved with me at the time.

GREENE: What was your opinion of Corbin in this period?

ENGLISH: Well, Corbin was somewhat of a problem for Robert Kennedy in New York because a lot of the leaders, particularly during the campaign....He was the one who went up and threw out leaders and set up citizens committees where the leader was inept and did that kind of thing so it was a different kind of relationship with him than I had. I worked very closely with Corbin and I never had any problems. You know, I knew that he used to do certain things just to gather your reaction. He would say outrageous things just to test you and if you knew that, I mean, I had never had any problem.

I remember the day that I was talking about Alex when we were at Hofstra. The day before that Corbin had said to me, "Listen, Levitt [Arthur Levitt] is going to show up at Hofstra. He's going around with Kennedy." He said, "You know, he doesn't want that. He's running for governor." So rather than get in an argument, I said, "What the heck." So I called up Levitt and rescheduled him and said, "To save time, so you can get on before," because these were all big audiences, "you go here and we'll go here and we'll crisscross." So I set up the schedule, and when we got to Hofstra, just as we got there, he walked on at the same time we did. And I felt kind of bad about it.

Anyway, he got up and there were five thousand screaming students up there. And Kennedy got up to the microphone to speak, and Levitt was sitting in the first row, and I was sitting next to him, and Corbin took a chair behind me. And he could have leaned over and whispered right into my right ear. Instead of that, he leaned in between Levitt's head and my head and said, "What did you bring that son-of-a-bitch here for? You double-crossed me." So I got up, left my chair and walked – this is before a full audience – around the stage.

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And I said, "Stand up." He said, "Why?" I said, "I'm going to punch you right in the nose." So he laughed. And we never had....That's the kind of relationship I had with him after that.

GREENE: Was he a problem with some of the people who weren't as understanding as you were?

ENGLISH: Oh, sure. He used to raise hell.

GREENE: Did you see Robert Kennedy at all during that '62 campaign, to get an impression of how he felt about Morgenthau once he was a candidate?

ENGLISH: Oh, I saw him regularly.

GREENE: Did he have much to say on that?

ENGLISH: No. He just used to ask me how he was doing and so forth. And, you know, right after....As soon as Morgenthau got the nomination, his first appearance after he got the nomination was out in Nassau County. We put on a big rally for him and worked very actively for him.

GREENE: Well, do you have anything else from the Administration period that we should get down?

ENGLISH: Well, I think he was very, very helpful on a lot of administrative matters. We were having a lot of difficulty, for instance, on Mitchel Field, which is now Mitchel Field Air Force Base, which was then being declared surplus property, and which is now the John F. Kennedy Cultural and Education Center. And we had a lot of problems with the GSA [General Services Administration] in particular and some of the other departments. He was always very, very helpful in getting those kinds of things straightened out.

He used to call me a lot about, you know, what did I think of this fellow for a judge, federal judgeships, that kind of thing. You know, and he'd just have the lists of people – that is if Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] wasn't doing it. But he was always checking things like that out. He spent a

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lot of, it seemed to me, a disproportionate amount of time on New York. He was very, very interested in it.

GREENE: You found him pretty accessible? If you wanted to see him, there was no problem?

ENGLISH: I never had any problem seeing him at all.

GREENE: Do you think this was true of other New York leaders or did you have a particularly good relationship with him?

ENGLISH: Well, I think I probably had a better relationship with him. I didn't seek to see him that often. You know, that's the kind of fellow he was. He's something of... When we got into these things, gubernatorial races or something like that, I mean I never bothered him with the minutia.

He always did things very fast. One day I was down there and he said – this was very early and he said, "What do you want for the county?" And I really hadn't thought too much because patronage is not really something that was of great interest. In the first place, we have the county executive here. So I said, "Well, the United States marshal." He said, "Well, who have you got?" Well, I didn't have – you know, this is in his office. This is a conversation. And I said, "Well, I'll have to think about it and let you know." He said, "No, you tell me right now." So I called Tommy Dugan [Thomas M. Dugan], who was then an inspector general of the – a narcotics agent, I guess, at the time. I forget. And I thought, what do I say, "Do you want to be United States marshal?" This guy was outraged. This guy was absolutely outraged. You know, he had been a two-fisted narcotics agent all of his life, and U.S. marshal is like Matt Dillon or something like that. He was really – going to be a process server. And he said, "I couldn't do that. What are you talking about?" Anyway, I said Tommy Dugan. And he knew him. I guess he was already inspector general of the

Peace Corps. And he said, "Okay." And so we made Dugan become marshal against his will. But that's the way he was.

GREENE: Is there anything else in the Administration? Actually, if you think of something later, we can always stick it on out of order. It's no problem.

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Well, what do you remember about the months after the assassination? Did you see much of him in that period?

ENGLISH: In the months immediately after, I don't believe I saw him at all.

GREENE: Well, then when did you first discuss the subject of the Senate race?

ENGLISH: I didn't discuss it with him directly. The first time I discussed that with anyone was on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1964. And I remember it because my daughter was born on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1961, the night of the snowstorm, the day before the inauguration. And this was her birthday. And there was a John F. Kennedy High School being dedicated at Bethpage, and I had asked Steve Smith to come out and do it or Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith], I guess, to do it. She couldn't do it and Steve came out. So we went out and dedicated the school, and then we went back to my house for my daughter's birthday dinner. On the way, anyway, we started discussing, you know, Robert and what he should do and what his possibilities were. And then that was, for the first time, we discussed the possibility of his running for the Senate.

GREENE: What was Smith's initial reaction?

ENGLISH: Just one of "maybe we ought to look at it" kind of thing. And then we came back and we got a legal opinion about how it could be done.

GREENE: I was just looking at this. One of the books where I got this meeting from, at the John F. Kennedy High School, said it was early May.  
[Interruption] Well, what do you know about what Steve Smith did from that point to take this to the Senator?

ENGLISH: Well, then I didn't hear. I don't know the exact amount of time between January 19<sup>th</sup>. And I know I got an opinion back to him right away. And then I didn't hear for a while. And then we just discussed it, just Steve and I, on a number of occasions. Then it

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started to get hot. And then finally I talked to the Senator about it. The next day is when I

started to talk to other major political leaders about, “Maybe we could get Kennedy to run” kind of thing.

I remember we had a meeting....And they didn't believe it, that it would happen. So I remember we had it in – I think it was up in John Hagan's apartment – but anyway, I remember Buckley was there and Steingut [Stanley Steingut] was there and I was there. And I was saying, “You know, this is what we ought to do, get him and draft him.” And they said, “Well, he's not going to do that. What are we wasting our time on that?” And I remember calling Steve and getting Steve right away, and they could tell by that reaction, you know, that the possibility was there. And then we just continued to work on it. And then I discussed with Kennedy many times the options, or he would discuss the various things that he was thinking of.

GREENE:                   What kinds of things was that?

ENGLISH:                 Well, he was talking about the vice-presidency and whether that was really a possibility and how remote it was, or Ambassador to South Vietnam and some other possibilities – I forget what they were – sitting it out, going, you know, going back to Massachusetts. But I mean the vice-presidency was appalling.

GREENE:                 There's kind of been a discrepancy on this because, on the one hand, some people say that was what he really wanted and that's what he was sort of counting on; and there are other people who say he never would have considered it and he never would have...

ENGLISH:                 I think he....Well, I think probably both of those points of view are true because he never thought that there was the possibility. The fact of the matter is I would have to think, though, if he were asked to do it, and the other circumstances were right and he just wasn't going to be....I think it would be difficult, but I think he would have done it, if all of the circumstances were right.

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GREENE:                   When you say...

ENGLISH:                 But he made a judgment in his own mind that it was an impossibility. And he didn't know whether he'd want to do it anyway. He went through....I mean, he discussed with me what the vice-presidency is, you know, and how bad it is and how demeaning it is and so forth and whether that's the right thing to do. You know, he was ambivalent about the whole thing. But I really think that, you know, all the circumstances being right and so forth and he was asked to do it, I think he might have done it at a certain point. Now, you know, he got such bad treatment from the President, of course, he never would have done it at a certain point. And, of course, at one....

We were having trouble with Wagner, you know, who was now going around starting

to talk to leaders and start to say, “Well, how about this fellow and how about that fellow,” doing all this kind of thing once he found out what was up. And he started to make trips upstate and pull this kind of nonsense. And then when we...I remember we were working on the '64 campaign, and I was a statewide campaign manager when we were setting up the whole presidential thing in the beginning, which I had started on before the assassination. And I had hired the agency and so forth. And we just kept that going.

I was up at the state committee where I was operating when I got the call that he would not run. And I was just incredulous because I had a whole bunch of people in there, you know, the people who were running the campaign and the major political leaders. I never...You know, I was really so crestfallen because I just was absolutely sure that he was and I'd only been talking to him slightly before that. I remember that Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] had the plane crash. And it really hit me, you know. And, of course, he was going on a trip to Poland. As a matter of fact, he had a guy from Life following him around at the time. I remember when I discussed just a couple days – in the presence of this guy from Life – about doing this. And then that pullout was so sudden.

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GREENE: Now you're talking...I know that he made one disclaimer the day, May 20<sup>th</sup>, I think it was. He came in to speak for Buckley and afterwards he made a flat statement that he was not going to run. Are you talking about after that, before the plane crash? Or then after the plane crash...

ENGLISH: No, this is after the plane crash.

GREENE: ...he made another.

ENGLISH: This was like within a week after the plane – or four days or something like that. He wasn't here when he did it. I mean I just got the message, which he didn't call me...It was not...I forget, was it either Angie [Angela M. Novello] or – I forgot who told me that he...

GREENE: And he meant it at that point?

ENGLISH: He just wasn't going to do it. Oh, he meant it. He never would have told me. I mean it was “Cease and desist. I'm just not going to do it.”

GREENE: Well, what about the earlier statement at the time of the speech for Buckley? Was that just for...

ENGLISH: Well, I think that's just being political, because if he sought it at any time, if he himself were going out for that nomination, I don't think he could have gotten it. It would have been bad politics and, you know, he had the whole ruthless thing. He couldn't ever be in that position. Really, it had to be done on the basis of the people in New York wanted him to do. And, of course, at any time,



I think, if he was that there was any formidable kind of opposition from the people he respected, he wouldn't have done it. I mean he never made up his mind absolutely to do it, but he made it – all of a sudden he made up his mind absolutely not to do it.

GREENE: But the earlier one was not a disclaimer that he carried so far as to tell you?

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ENGLISH: No, I think that's just a...Everybody says they're not going to, you know, it's too early to tell or something.

GREENE: Now, I know that you and Crotty took a poll, I think in the spring. Was that done with Kennedy's approval or did you tell him after...

ENGLISH: Well, he knew about it. He knew about it, and I had the – what you're talking about, I think, is we had a meeting when Wagner was really trying to head us off, and we had gone to Syracuse, and McKeon was there. Now, McKeon and he started – this is when really McKeon was with us now, after the '62 thing, and he thought that Kennedy was by far the best candidate. And Wagner would then call a meeting, say in Syracuse – I remember he did it in Syracuse – and then invited McKeon along, you know, and then started talking to these upstate leaders about, "Well, we ought to consider this fellow. What do you think about that?"

And he did the same thing, called one for all leaders up the Hudson Valley and around from here, Suffolk, up in the Hudson Valley. And there were about sixteen leaders there, county leaders. But I went to that one, and Wagner got there kind of late. Now, I had the poll in my pocket. Then I saw where everybody was going to sit and as they went around the table, I went around to the last seat. And I knew he was uptight when he saw it happen. And when it got to me...You know, and he was in the poll and, of course, he didn't know what it said, but...You know, and I said, "We've taken all the major people who might be considered as candidates and Senator Kennedy, although he's not ahead, he's got the best chances of beating Keating [Kenneth B. Keating]. Of course, it's kind of close, but no one else has a chance." And I'm waving this poll, and I'm just hoping, of course – you know, I just wanted to read where he stood, you know, and he didn't want that done because, in my opinion, he was still toying with the idea. Then we went around and we got all of those leaders with I think two exceptions, to say they were for Kennedy. And he had set it up to do it the other way. So we were well on our way. Then we had a hard time.

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GREENE: Was the idea more or less to put Wagner in a position where he had no choice, but to at least...

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. Of course, he wasn't for Kennedy. He was dead set against it. But he didn't know how to do it. But we knew we'd find a way, because I had been in situations before and since where he would find a way, and he was desperately seeking a way. For instance, he even talked to Stevenson about doing it. [Interruption]

GREENE: Anyway, who were some – besides the Wagner opposition, who else was fighting you on this or at least unwilling to cooperate in the early spring period on trying to draft Kennedy?

ENGLISH: Well, you see, Wagner worked very closely with the Liberal Party and whatever he was doing, they were being hard to reach and, you know, playing the same role as Wagner was.

GREENE: Rose?

ENGLISH: Yes. And then, of course, you had the reformers. Some of them, my best friends, opposed him bitterly and some of them passively.

GREENE: They weren't very easy to bring around at all, were they?

ENGLISH: No. And some of them didn't come around until very, very late. I mean it was very difficult. Some of them never came around, of course. There was that "Democrats for Keating" which had a lot of big names on it.

GREENE: I understand that Steve Smith took a tour around New York, just an exploratory tour in the spring, to get a feel for things. Were you involved in that at all?

ENGLISH: Yes.

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GREENE: What was the general consensus afterwards?

ENGLISH: Well, I think that it could be done. My opinion was that it could be done. And I told Steve that because I spent a lot more time talking – I knew a lot more leaders than he did, so I spent a lot of time with them at it, and my feeling was that it could be done.

GREENE: And what impact did that have on Kennedy's decision-making process?

ENGLISH: Oh, he depended almost absolutely on Steve Smith, I think. I mean he had reservations about himself, you know, about carpetbagging; all the reservations the public had, he himself had, whether it could be done. We're talking about two different things. One, could we get the nomination. To me, I was sure we could get the nomination, and it was just a way of outmaneuvering Wagner. And I thought we could do it, just like John F. Kennedy had outmaneuvered DeSapio and Prendergast, because I knew that could be done.

Now, as far as beating Keating, we had great reservations, all of us. That was his reservation, you know, which I shared. What were the issues going to be, all that kind of thing. That was a different kind of a ball game, whether he could win it or not if he took the risk. We figured from the poll that at least we had a chance. He went down, of course, as soon as he announced, he went downhill for a long period of time. We were much better in the poll we took way back than we were after he got the nomination, which was his low point.

GREENE: Before the time that he said that he was not going to run, after Senator Ted's accident, what were you doing with Wagner? Had he come around by that time and agreed that he would go along with you?

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ENGLISH: Oh, no. No. This was much later. After we had regenerated the whole thing again is when Wagner did it. No.

GREENE: Well, then what was the impact of this announcement? Did you stop everything for a while...

ENGLISH: Yes.

GREENE: ...or did you go to see him?

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

ENGLISH: Well, he went to Europe immediately on a tour that he had set up.

GREENE: Poland.

ENGLISH: He went to Poland, right. No, then when he came back....There was a period of time in which I thought it was dead.

GREENE: And you didn't try to work through Steve Smith and...

ENGLISH: Oh, I saw him all the time, but I mean I had given up because I figured, you know, if we had gone that far and things started to look good that, you know, he was serious that he wasn't going to do it.

GREENE: Do you think it was primarily because of Senator Ted's accident?

ENGLISH: I think there were a number of things. I think that placed more responsibility on him and that he had more reservations about it. And, you know, I think he thought he had to make a decision at that time to do it, which wasn't true. As a matter of fact, as soon as he got out of it, made that announcement, then as usually happens in New York, there was a total vacuum created, which all of a sudden you said....Then, it really proved that he had to do it, I mean, that it was wide open for him. When you asked, "Should Kennedy do it?" people would be against him. "Well, he's a carpetbagger and

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a snotty son-of-a-bitch," and all this kind of stuff. But as soon as you put it in, "Well, now who are we going to run for the Senate?" then people started to get back, "Gee, it's too bad Kennedy wouldn't do it," you know.

GREENE: Okay. Then about less than a month after that – no, a little – no, just about a month after that, Johnson eliminated him from the vice-presidency. Is this the point at which he came back in actively?

ENGLISH: I can't remember the chronology of that.

GREENE: Well, what do you remember?

ENGLISH: He came back to it slowly. It was a slow process, you know, where things started to build up again. We had no candidate, then we started to talk to him again – I mean, I talked to him again and talked to more of the leaders – and it started to build up again.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with the White House – or did anyone you were working with on this at this time – to get an idea how Johnson felt about it?

ENGLISH: Yes, I did. They were very worried at the time – and this was when Johnson still was playing the game of trying to butter up so-called Kennedy people. He spent a lot of his time in the early months doing that, you know, things you couldn't care about. They'd call you about everything. Kennedy never called me about the things that Johnson called about. And I remember we had played football and I was in the hospital from this injury that I had received, and I got a call from Cliff Carter [Clifton C. Carter], and he said, "I'm calling for the President, and he wants you and Jesse Unruh to know that he's going to make an announcement eliminating these, Cabinet and so forth." And he read me what it was. I said, "Thank you very much." He called me – I never expected he was going to do it anyway, but they called to do that.

GREENE: This was even before he told Kennedy?

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ENGLISH: Oh, this is before he told Kennedy, yes. Well, I'm not sure of that now. This is before the, you know, the announcement and so forth.

GREENE: But before the meeting with Kennedy?

ENGLISH: It may have been – you know, the way they worked it was probably simultaneously because he had to make quite a few calls. I mean, I'll never forget it. I couldn't even sneeze. And I thought that was a crazy thing to tell me.

GREENE: But there was no contact with the White House as far as whether they approved of Kennedy running and would give him a hand or would do something to stop him?

ENGLISH: For the Senate?

GREENE: Yes.

ENGLISH: Never discussed that. They were more interested in, I think... They were worried, I think, that he was going to run for President then, you know.

GREENE: You know, that's something I wanted to ask you, not about President, but Vice President. Was there any group or individual who was pushing for him to kind of force himself on Johnson as the Vice President?

ENGLISH: Oh, sure. There were, sure.

GREENE: Do you remember the given...

ENGLISH: No, because I never paid much – to me it was very impractical and I just didn't see the merit of that.

GREENE: And Kennedy felt the same way?

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ENGLISH: Yes. I mean I think he was very practical about that. At that stage, which was the height of Johnson popularity, Johnson was never more popular than he was in March of 1964. So that wasn't... You know, we didn't have the situation that you had like in '68, you know, when everything was downhill and anybody was willing to do anything to screw Johnson, but that was not the situation in '64. Everybody took it for granted, including the Senator, that Johnson would make the pick. Johnson was the one who really saw that as a danger, that Kennedy would storm the Convention and rouse public opinion. But I mean I never saw that that was... Kennedy never gave it a thought. And nobody who was close to him would consider such a course of action because Kennedy wouldn't want it under those circumstances anyway because that would put him in the position of being a Vice President relegated to, I don't know, opening post offices.

GREENE: Anyway, in your own mind, what do you recall of how he finally came to his decision from this point on?

ENGLISH: On the way back it was a slow kind of thing, numbers of conversations and then going back and doing that groundwork. We lost a little bit in this because all of that stuff I told you about – the meeting in Syracuse and the meeting up in Westchester and so forth – that happened on the second time around.

GREENE: Well, at this point was Wagner... Were you able to get him to agree to come out at least quietly and support Kennedy?

ENGLISH: He was boxed in. After the Westchester meeting, which was a – I mean, he was really down in the dumps when he left that meeting because he did not expect that reaction. Then he was looking for a bomb, I think, some way of finding out if Kennedy raped somebody or “will I have to bring in Stevenson” or, you know, he had to go for the big one to head it off at that time. And we were always worried. Kennedy was not directly involved at that point in the maneuverings with Wagner himself. And Kennedy went to see Alex Rose himself. And, you know, and he did... I don't know who else, but I remember Rose and

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Wagner and Wagner sort of, you know, tried to dance around for a while, and you remember then finally Robert and Ethel came up and Wagner was two hours late and you know how.

GREENE: I know we discussed this off the tape, but I think we should get some on, too, about what Wagner's real interest was. He was trying to divert attention from Kennedy. Do you think it was mainly because he was still interested himself or he was just opposed to competition in the state?

ENGLISH: I think it was both of those. I think he was opposed to competition in the state. He never wanted another strong man. In '62 I think he was looking for a candidate like Morgenthau. I think further that he had ambitions, you know, to run for the United States Senate himself.

GREENE: I know later on he [Wagner] got assurances, public and I assume private also, from the White House that all the patronage would still go through him. Do you remember discussions of this when he finally was agreeing to come out in a halfhearted way for Kennedy? Was he very concerned about that?

ENGLISH: Well, Wagner did that privately. He had his arrangements with the White House, with Arthur Krim and so forth at that time.

GREENE: But that wasn't raised in your conversations?

ENGLISH: No, we couldn't really raise that. To me that didn't make any difference anyway. I mean I... There was never any federal patronage that meant anything. They were doing that. They had Bernie Ruggieri [Bernard J. Ruggieri], I guess, who was Wagner's assistant at the time; handle patronage in the state. It didn't make any difference to me in this county. It used to bother a lot of other leaders.

GREENE: Now, I'm not sure. This meeting that you...

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ENGLISH: See, that's when Wagner cut off – that's when McKeon really got cut off because McKeon had originally been acceptable to Wagner and so forth, and he was treated as the state chairman until he started to work with us for Kennedy. And then, of course, they cut him off. Patronage went through Wagner.

GREENE: This meeting in Westchester that you spoke of, I had read it was nine county leaders. You mentioned sixteen.

ENGLISH: Oh, well, I would... Well, I could probably reconstruct that. It would be Nassau and Suffolk and Westchester and McKeon and Putnam and Dutchess and Ulster and Columbia and Delaware. Did I say Rockland?

GREENE: No.

ENGLISH: And Rockland. Well, let me see. It was....Let's see, these two out here. And then it would be Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Columbia, Greene, Ulster, Rockland, Orange, Delaware. You're right.

GREENE: Actually, I think....Yes. Now, again I don't....This was August fifth, as I've been able to find out. Was Robert Kennedy aware of this meeting...

ENGLISH: Yes.

GREENE: ...and went along with it?

ENGLISH: Well, I told him that there was going to be....Wagner tried to do this fast and so forth, and I don't remember whether I talked to Robert or to Steve, but I mean I told him what he had done up at Syracuse, you know, because McKeon was completely embarrassed by this thing. You know, here's the mayor of the city of New York all of a sudden going up and having a meeting with county leaders up in Syracuse. We had – how many leaders he had up there – ten. He did that central region kind of thing, which

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was – he was successful at that, at blocking Kennedy. You know, these guys get all mixed up and, you know, “How about Sam Stratton? How about his....,” throw out enough names of people who were susceptible to them. I'm sure that he probably had another one planned, but we were able to undermine it at that time, but I anticipated that....

Wagner made a mistake. If he went back in there early, he would have been able to do something, but I was....Before this meeting started and we all had a lot of drinks and so forth and, you know, I was telling this – “I got this poll right here.” And he was completely, you know....And he was tired when he got there, and he was so suspicious of me on where I sat at the table. You know, he tried to move and then I'd move because I was going to be last. [Interruption]

GREENE: Well, now, after this, to your knowledge, when did he finally actually make up his mind? When did you find out that he decided to run, how soon after that?

ENGLISH: Well, it was at that stage I knew, you know, if we could pull – unless there was some impediment, that he was going to run. Now, it didn't ever come up, “Are you going to run or not?” I mean you assume that the fellow is going – you build up to it. So at that particular time, at that meeting, for instance, I was just so elated that I remember calling the next day. You know, and I said what a great coup we had and so forth. So, you know, at that point he was....Then, it was up to somebody to throw a roadblock, and if nobody tripped him, he was going to run.



GREENE: Do you know of anyone outside of the political leaders who was working hard on him? I know there's been talk of Averell Harriman. Were there others who...

ENGLISH: Oh, Averell Harriman was very, very interested in that, very interested.

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GREENE: Well, then he made up his mind sometime, maybe at the end of August, middle of August, would you say?

ENGLISH: I can't remember the... And when you say "made up his mind," of course, this was a matter of really getting the people here to make up their mind that they wanted him, and then he would accept it if that was so. So what we're doing was demonstrating support. Now, I think he had come to the conclusion if the support was shown, he would do it. Now, exactly when I don't know, because I think it was cumulative.

GREENE: Were there any individuals that he was particularly concerned about getting? Was he worried about the reformers or did he just decide that they were not going to be for him no matter what?

ENGLISH: Oh, no. He was worried about getting them and worried about how many – even if he couldn't get them all, that he had to get some of them. He couldn't run with all of the reformers against him because then again he's not in a draft situation.

GREENE: How did he feel about them in general?

ENGLISH: Oh, I think it depended on the people. You know, I don't think he would generalize. You know, there was the East Side and the West Side and the whole thing. By that time he was so heavily into it that he got to trust a lot of them, not to trust other ones. Some of them were with him very early in this period. Al Blumenthal [Albert H. Blumenthal] and people like that were with him.

GREENE: Justin Feldman?

ENGLISH: Like Justin Feldman.

GREENE: Okay, then, I think probably the next thing would be the National Convention in Atlantic City. You were there. Do you remember seeing much of him at that time?

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ENGLISH: Oh, I spent a lot of time with him down there. He'd drag me around to all those... We went out visiting all those delegations, Kentucky and Tennessee. And he used to say, "Now, don't say anything now. You'll give me away with that New York accent." And, you know, he did a lot of that kind of stuff. I spent a lot of time with him down there.

GREENE: What was his major interest at the Conventions?

ENGLISH: Well, we had a lot of... Jackie was there, and we had that big reception line and so forth for them. And then we had a party for him in the New York State delegation. Then he went around to most of the other delegations thanking them for what they had done for his brother. And I went into all those delegations with him.

GREENE: Was he doing much of consolidation of support in New York during...

ENGLISH: Well, yes, because it was one week before the convention.

GREENE: Yes.

ENGLISH: But, I mean, really the momentum was so great for him at that time, it was really meeting people and, you know, and getting the thing started. We had the delegates by then.

GREENE: And then your New York State convention was September first, which would have been the next week.

ENGLISH: It was the next week. It was exactly one week.

GREENE: You were at the meeting of the state committee?

ENGLISH: Yes.

GREENE: The day before.

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ENGLISH: Oh, was the state committee meeting the day before?

GREENE: The same day, I guess actually, the morning of the same day. And I know that's when they had to get around the fact that he was not a registered Democrat.

ENGLISH: Right. The Wilson-Pakula Law, yes.

GREENE: Was that any kind of real obstacle, or was it just a formality?

ENGLISH: I think it was a formality. I think the votes were there.

GREENE: Was there any effort made then or somewhat later to get Stratton to stand down and support Kennedy?

ENGLISH: Yes, there was, but it was done basically by Stratton people. There were. And he would not, and he was very vehement about the whole thing. And I think even George Palmer, who was his campaign manager, at the end tried to talk him out of that. A lot of people did, but he was not about to do it. He was rather bitter, as a matter of fact, at that convention.

GREENE: What was Kennedy's attitude towards him?

ENGLISH: Well, he wasn't there – oh, Kennedy was not in the convention hall.

GREENE: But towards Stratton in general?

ENGLISH: I don't think he thought he was a real problem. I mean, he didn't have any votes and Stratton couldn't win. He couldn't get the Liberal Party endorsement to begin with. Keating was going to be tough anyway. There was no chance of him being there, and I don't think Kennedy was particularly....His stature wasn't that great that Kennedy considered him a problem. I don't think he gave a lot of thought to it.

GREENE: Anyways, was there anything at the convention besides the noise and hoopla?

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ENGLISH: Oh, we had a lot of fun. We did a lot of things in setting it up, but it was in such a terrible....It was a terrible convention because it was in an armory, which was the only place that we could get, and it was at the armory on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, whatever it is, Second or Third Avenue. It must have been a hundred degrees inside the thing. It was terrible.

GREENE: It is in January at that place.

ENGLISH: It was terrible. How we could even live and breathe in there....Pike [Otis G. Pike] made a very impassioned speech for denunciation of Kennedy, and it was really a very negative....It didn't say anything about Stratton; it was just all anti-Kennedy. That was probably the high point of the convention.

GREENE: Okay, then going into the campaign itself, I'd just mostly like to get an overall view of what your role was today, and then next time we can talk in detail. Did you attend any planning sessions either before the campaign actually began or in the early days, strategy sessions?

ENGLISH: Yes, I guess I did.

GREENE: And what do you remember about the discussion?

ENGLISH: Well, it depends on how far we go back. Well, in the first place, we got this place out in Glen Cove, the house, and we spent a lot of time up in the house. And in the early days we used to discuss such things as school bussing which was a big – how you would handle that kind of thing. We had fellows like Burke Marshall, you know, in on that particular thing. I remember that. We spent a lot of time on that particular issue and then went through the issues at the time which we thought he would have problems with in particular. And I spent a lot of time at that, particularly at the beginning. Then after a while I never went into the city, didn't work out of his headquarters or anything. The only time I went to those sessions was when they were out here.

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GREENE: Did you anticipate most of the major issues that came up, like the carpetbagging issue?

ENGLISH: Well, yes, that was....I think everyone.... There were no new issues. There wasn't anything.

GREENE: Was there any discussion, overall plan of the campaign? They seemed to start off with kind of a soft sell and not go too rough on Keating. Was this something that just happened or had you discussed it?

ENGLISH: Oh, it was decided, and I think he, himself, felt very strongly that Keating could not be attacked, that his public image was as a nice, old man and that there was no way in which Keating could be attacked. And Kennedy came in with the image of being ruthless and a carpetbagger, and if he started right off kicking Keating in the groin, he would be in serious trouble, about which he had to be right. So it was planned that he would be very soft and that they would try to get into Keating's record and then try to make this distinction at the end when people would be getting more used to him and where he wouldn't be creating this sympathy thing for Keating, further sympathy.

GREENE: Then, you seem to think that this was a plan right from the beginning to switch into a more offensive campaign later on? It's been written that they kind of switched gears after the first week in October when

things were not going so well...

ENGLISH: Well, I think that's right.

GREENE: ...and came off the defensive.

ENGLISH: Well, I think that that's been written correctly, but I mean the beginning at any rate. I mean you have to go softly, I think, until you knew how people were accepting you, and then see what happens then. If going softly is going good, you stick with just being soft.

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GREENE: Was there anybody who opposed this right from the start, who felt that that was not the way to do it?

ENGLISH: No, I don't remember that. And as they get further and further in that campaign, then I didn't even go. And they were taping television shows and so forth. I mean I was out of it by then. We had problems here in this county. There was a big anti-Kennedy thing here, much greater than I thought.

GREENE: What was the major obstacle?

ENGLISH: Well, carpetbagger. And, of course, we kept using this as his address, and I had been much too active in promoting it. And there was the whole thing that we had with Jack Kennedy. The reform people out here were really very much annoyed, and our original polls were poor, and it was all backlash. It worked out all right, but it was.... We had a great problem with the Jews out here, very, very.... Well, the whole thing – and every time he ran, we had the same thing, but it was really bad. That was a lot worse than I.... A judgment that I made was very poor about how he would do here in the beginning. He came on all right. He did very.... In fact, he lost this county by less than Jack Kennedy. But at one point we had a poll and he was 28 percent. That was terrible.

GREENE: What about the whole issue of his being the bosses' candidate? Was that a big problem once he actually became a candidate? Was there enough other support so that you could kind of gloss over that?

ENGLISH: I think as time went on, because he was never surrounded by the bosses. I mean, his campaign immediately became a lot of young people and I think we had just as much trouble by all the people who were brought in from outside of the state...

GREENE: Another problem that always arises...

ENGLISH: ...and other things.

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GREENE: Did you try to keep the bosses under cover through the campaign, too?

ENGLISH: Well, I think they appreciated the problems. I don't think that that was difficult.

GREENE: Buckley was cooperative?

ENGLISH: Well, and Buckley was also, you know, he was in a bitter primary himself before that, and he was....I mean he would just as soon bury himself anyway, wasn't ordinarily accessible, except when somebody was running against him, attacking him. Then he had few kind words to say.

GREENE: What exactly were you doing during the campaign? Just organizing things in Nassau? Did you make many public appearances for him?

ENGLISH: I never make public appearances. I never leave the office during the campaign. When he comes out, I go with him or something like that or I'd go up on Sundays to Glen Cove or whatever, but, no, I never made any public – I never spoke for him once.

GREENE: But you had full and constant contacts with the campaign?

ENGLISH: Oh, yes. We had people speaking for him. We had the groups, and we got the people who....We had set up a special committee because of the ethnic problem of people just to make an appeal there on the liberal community. And then we spent a lot of time with Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] and the guy from – not Walinsky [Adam Walinsky] – Adam Yarmolinsky and people like that were constantly out here because we really had the problem in Great Neck and Roslyn and the five towns. So we would constantly get liberal kind of people out who had worked in the administration and talk to these people. These were Democrats who were defecting.

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[Interruption]

GREENE: ...really just wanted an idea for the next time of things that you feel are important in terms of the campaign that we ought to discuss. I know there was at least one major strategy session where they did shift gears and decide to get more aggressive.

ENGLISH: I wasn't there.

GREENE: Well, one of the books has you there.

ENGLISH: I'm.... Well, I don't remember that.

GREENE: Okay. Were there other things of significance that should be discussed that come to mind besides the general....

ENGLISH: I don't think so. You know, it started to go up. You could feel the resistance wearing down – the people who were against us slowly came around. But you could feel it because there were people who were really hostile to him, and then when you started to break into that....

GREENE: Was it largely the Jews and the Italians – these are also two things that have been written about extensively. Were they...

ENGLISH: Well, the thing that worried.... You know, of course, you'd feel it in a suburban county. The Jews are all Democrats. In fact, there's no Democratic vote really except for the Jews out in a place like this. And, you know, it's a real over-generalization, but when they are – that's the backbone of our party. They're the working people. I mean we had committeemen and leaders and former officeholders and substantive people who were opposed to him in the beginning and that.... We couldn't get people to say nice things about our campaign for him. Then, slowly we built up this committee who were working specially on what I'd call, you know, the reformers out here then, and it started to work very well. And we were doing that in the rest of the state and mostly in Manhattan, which is the only other place that's comparable.

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GREENE: Did that General Aniline [and Film Corporation] issue hurt you?

ENGLISH: Well, I think it probably helped.

GREENE: Helped? It gets a little dirty.

ENGLISH: I would think out here it helped. I mean, maybe up in Binghamton or something.... But, I think, yes, people figured what the hell, Keating is getting desperate. You know, I don't think people really thought he was a Nazi or would help Nazis. You know, it just was too incredible a charge. And it gave Kennedy, I think, the chance to.... Fact of the matter, since he was under attack, then he could get tougher on Keating, which was necessary.

GREENE: Okay. Then again, just for my own purposes for the future, once he was in the Senate, what are some of the major things that you worked closely on besides the elections, which are kind of obvious? Were there issues that...

ENGLISH: Well, we worked on the programs that he should be involved in in New York State, you know, kinds of things, Appalachia, Bedford-Stuyvesant, that kind of thing, people that he should become associated with and their causes, that kind of thing. I mean I never talked to him about his vote on any damn thing. This would be....You know, you know how he was going to vote. It was so easy. Well, I mean, there were a lot of local issues, but mostly I talked to his staff about that. There were different fellows that, you know, he had. I forget. Like, I guess, it was Wendell Pigman always had the pollution and the bridge. You know, and, of course, we had to be consulted about the bridge because it was strictly a local problem. And Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson] did a lot of that, though. And, then, you know, Adam and Peter [Peter B. Edelman]. They always had different areas that they would keep checking on.

GREENE: Okay, I think that's enough for today.



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