Peter B. Edelman Oral History Interview – RFK #8, 3/13/1974
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Biographical Note
Edelman, legislative assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) (1964-1968), discusses the 1967 New York constitutional convention, the 1960s US hunger crisis, and RFK's 1967 speeches and statements, among other issues.

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Peter B. Edelman—RFK #8

Table of Contents

Page	Topic
1	1967 New York State constitutional convention
10, 29	Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) 1966 Mississippi trip and the US hunger crisis
21	Orville L. Freeman's involvement in the US hunger crisis
24	US Senate's 1966 letter to Lyndon B. Johnson on the US hunger crisis
27	R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.'s role in the Mississippi hunger crisis
28	1964 RFK vs. 1968 RFK
30	1966 minimum wage bill's effect on Mississippi
31	Senate's Committee on Labor and Public Welfare's response to RFK's 1966 Mississippi trip
32	1966 Senate's Committee on Labor and Public welfare hunger hearings
33	John C. Stennis' 1966 food program bill
37	1968 creation of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs
38	Edward M. Kennedy's involvement in the US hunger crisis
39	RFK's last involvement in the US hunger crisis: Eastern Kentucky
42	RFK and his own staff's efforts on solving the US hunger crisis
43	RFK and Dr. Robert Coles relationship
46	Department of Agriculture's role in the US hunger crisis
48	Why Johnson was unresponsive to fixing the US hunger crisis
50	Drafting RFK's book *To Seek a Newer World*
56	RFK's speeches on Vietnam
58	RFK's 1967 National Farmers' Union speech
61	RFK's 1967 speech on criminal justice
64	RFK's speech on campaign funding: February 22, 1967
66	RFK's 1967 dispute with Nelson A. Rockefeller over New York State's electronic power
67, 80, 82, 88	Review of RFK's 1967 speeches and statements
69	RFK's Day Care Council speech: May 8, 1967
71	1967 Senate debate on the welfare system
79	Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)
80, 90	RFK as a legislator
81	Middle East War of 1967
87	New York state migratory labor hearings

Eighth of Eight Oral History Interviews

with

Peter B. Edelman

March 13, 1974

By Larry Hackman

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

EDELMAN: The first speech I think, really, that I can fine is this one on November 1 of '66, which might bring back some things.

HACKMAN: Maybe you could just start off by talking about what your role was and how it evolved in comparison to vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] or whoever else got involved.

EDELMAN: I was in the fall of 1966 involved in the campaign of Frank O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] for governor. Have we discussed that a couple of times?

HACKMAN: Yes.

EDELMAN: And so I suppose it was logical for me to also be involved in what was then the emerging question about the [New York] constitutional convention. Generally

speaking, my role would have been limited on the issue. People who were more up in the state were much more involved in it. And generally speaking if vanden Heuvel or—my memory isn't so good—whoever else was involved had something that they wanted the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] to do, they would call him and make the suggestion. And it would be much more that; if there was something to write, I might be involved in writing it. But I don't think I was at all involved, or only peripherally involved, in the making of tactics and, you know, kind of the issue part of it.

HACKMAN: You don't remember discussions of...

[Interruption]

EDELMAN: Where were we?

HACKMAN: You were just saying you weren't involved in strategy, and I was saying that one of the things he did propose is that the Democrats, Republicans and Liberals try to get together and have a combined slate, sort of a blue-ribbon slate, rather than running their own delegates. You don't remember being involved much in...

EDELMAN: No, I really don't. Now that you tell me, I remember that that was the case, but....

HACKMAN: Do you remember anyone being particularly helpful on issues? Weinstein [Jack M. Weinstein]?

EDELMAN: Jack Weinstein was. But no, you'd have to prompt me every time.

HACKMAN: Yeah, all right.

EDELMAN: Yes, I do remember drafting this November 1, '66, speech, but where I got my material, I don't know. You know, I see this rhetoric.... I remember last time we were talking about the year 2000 stuff. "In the next thirty-five years we must go in our state as many as...." So, I mean, that clearly came out of my.... He talks about having to reexamine all the local government structures, and how many there are, and then these points, very general in this speech: strengthening home rule, and reorganization, simplification of the executive branch, reapportionment, constitutional provisions setting up the state's judicial system, basic changes in the election laws. I would say looking back on it, it's not a terribly sophisticated speech.

HACKMAN: You don't recall any problems in the O'Connor campaign, on O'Connor wanting to take positions that were very different from Robert Kennedy?

EDELMAN: Well, there was a serious problem. The only serious problem I remember in the O'Connor campaign concerning the constitution was about the Blaine Amendment. And

I don't remember what position Kennedy had on the Blaine Amendment. It seems to me Kennedy had kind of gotten away with the position that—well, even then I'd be guessing—but I guess that he was for repeal on the idea that the first amendment was sufficient. And all I can recall is sitting in fairly long discussions—Peter Fishbein was involved, too—with O'Connor about what he should do. He didn't particularly have any views of his own about the subject.

You know, it was the question of, as usual, Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] had bought everything in sight, and among other things he'd bought all the Catholic newspapers, and he had already by then enacted legislation to provide aid to the parochial schools which, was fairly clearly unconstitutional, and adjudicated to be such. And the question was, politically whether there as any way of making inroads into that. And of course, the Blaine Amendment was always one of those very neat political matters where, it's the Newtonian third law of physics, that for every action you took that would placate or please the Catholic community you would make a considerable portion of the Jewish community, particularly the American Jewish Congress, but not the Lubovitcher. (And that's going to be nice when you type it up—Lubovitcher. It's

spelled the same way, but pronounced that way). In any case, a segment of the Jewish community would be unhappy from the civil libertarian point of view, so there was no way to win on the issue.

HACKMAN: You don't recall any discussions of whether Robert Kennedy should run as a delegate? That was one of the the things that was considered in respect of the Republicans... There were speculations the Republicans were hoping he'd run against Javits [Jacob K. Javits] and get beat and be embarrassed.

EDELMAN: I don't think he ever considered it seriously. I do recall the discussion. It was certainly suggested by people in the state. I don't think he had any interest. I think he understood that if he ran and won he'd have to go to the convention. He didn't spend much time thinking about whether he should do it.

HACKMAN: There was a time early on when he made a statement at one place that he planned to spend a very good portion of his time over the next three months involved in the constitutional convention. Someone has said, "Well, the Manchester [William R. Manchester] thing came up, and that took a lot of time." But what you're saying basically is that he really had no interest in getting involved that much.

[-5-]

EDELMAN: I doubt it very much, yeah. Unless there may be some person who recalls some specific thing to the contrary, but it certainly didn't take up a great deal of attention.

HACKMAN: Any recollection about how satisfied he was with vanden Heuvel's role in the convention, how satisfactorily that worked out?

EDELMAN: Well, I remember the general feeling that what the convention came up with was a pretty good document. The general insight that the document tried to do too much and, you know, that it had something in it that everybody could oppose was more or less a hindsight kind of view. The general feeling when the convention completed its work, my recollection is, was that it had been pretty good and, yes, that Bill played a constructive role.

HACKMAN: You don't recall any problem in terms of working for Robert Kennedy and coming together on what position he should take on any specific aspect of this, the convention, about its work, beforehand or afterwards?

EDELMAN: Certainly not, when you put the question that way. If you were to jog my memory on a particular issue, I might,

[-6-]

but I was...

HACKMAN: One of the things there was some consideration over at some point was whether the constitution should be offered to the voters as a whole or whether...

EDELMAN: Or in pieces.

HACKMAN: ...some of it should not be written, and offered in pieces.

EDELMAN: I recall discussion, but not details.

HACKMAN: One of the things he was particularly interested in was the community development grants which was, I think, a part of the constitution.

EDELMAN: Larry, if you've got any of the other later things that he said about the constitution, it might help a little bit.

HACKMAN: There's not.... There's one in there on, I believe it's April... [Interruption]

EDELMAN: I didn't write this April 4, '67, speech. I don't know whether this was Adam [Adam Walinsky] or whether Jack was on by then. I probably... Must have been... I don't think Jack would have been on by quite then.

HACKMAN: And I have another one listed on April 19.

EDELMAN: Well, this April 4 was a very general speech, quite eloquent, I would say, but doesn't raise any particular policy issues. April 19. Oh yes, statement, constitutional convention. No, no, that was a statement...

[-7-]

HACKMAN: Is that another one?

EDELMAN: Yes. Remember I said on the phone? That has to do with apportionment. That was when there was a movement in the states to call for a federal constitutional convention to repeal one man-one vote. So, I think I'm drawing pretty much of a blank on....

HACKMAN: This looks like a speech that I read to [Arthur Levitt] and then was primarily related to the constitution.

EDELMAN: Yeah.

HACKMAN: This is when he's supporting it. The constitution's been written, and he's....

EDELMAN: Yes. Is there a speech that was a text in the file, on something to do during the....

HACKMAN: No, I couldn't find it. During the convention itself?

EDELMAN: Or during the campaign?

HACKMAN: I looked before I came over and I couldn't find anything. It may just be that we've not been able to find a copy of the speech. I couldn't find it in your files or in our speech files. There have to be some.

EDELMAN: Yeah, this draft, certainly, gets to be much more issue oriented. Now, I take it this Arthur Levitt dinner was by the time the constitution had been adopted and was before the voters. It talks about the fact that the constitution was taking welfare from local to state, financing and the forever wild feature with reference to the forest preserves, and as you mentioned the idea of

[-8-]

community development grants. Either my memory is bad, or... On protections against invasions of privacy, greater right to jury trial, consumer protection—it really was a pretty good constitution, wasn't it?

HACKMAN: Still have the old one, though, don't they?

EDELMAN: Yes, yes, yes. I suppose it's understandable that some of the earlier speeches were quite general. There were so many issues to cover, it would have been hard to pick out the things that were going to be hobbyhorses, particularly for somebody who was in the United States Senate, and didn't carry state and local responsibilities directly.

This other document you handed me was apparently some kind of a fact sheet.

HACKMAN: You don't remember any New York political figures coming to you and arguing for Robert Kennedy to take certain positions on this, or against positions he was taking, do you?

EDELMAN: No, I really don't. I would doubt that I had much to do with it at all.

HACKMAN: All right, why don't we try the....

EDELMAN: The fact that you found so little in my files about it is indicative that I had probably very little to do....

HACKMAN: Why don't we try the hunger?

[-9-]

EDELMAN: Okay, I hope I'll do better on that. That's something that I remember better, and that was rather significant in my life.

HACKMAN: Right. Why don't you talk first, just—unless there's something before this related to it—about how the Mississippi trip and the hearings came to be set up. What's the origin of that?

EDELMAN: Sure. Okay. First let me say that this whole issue is a very interesting case in how something does become a problem, does turn into a political issue in American life. And especially in how people can make it turn into a political issue, as opposed to perhaps the energy crisis where it at least was made into an issue not by people who wanted to do something good about it, but the other way.

Congressman Joseph Resnick [Joseph Yale Resnick] of Ellenville, New York had been down in Mississippi in 1966. He was a member of the House [of Representatives] Agriculture Committee and had seen children, people, without enough food, and would come back and yell as loud as he could, and no one paid the slightest bit of attention. So, it's clear that it's not for just anybody to point out. There were a lot of factors, though, that lay behind Kennedy going there in the first place, and that came together to not get him there, but to in effect offer some assurance that when he saw the conditions and spoke out about them that

something might happen.

First of all, the problem was probably worse than it had been for some time. As poor a state as Mississippi was, you had in the middle to late 1960's some special incentive for the white power structure in the state to engage in reprisals against black people. They had suffered the results of the civil rights movement, after all. There had been underway a move toward mechanization of agriculture in any case, both toward the use of pesticides and herbicides which would make unnecessary the chopping of cotton, and then the development of automatic cotton picking machines that made unnecessary the picking of it. And the minimum wage had accelerated that.

The minimum wage in 1966—as we've discussed on other occasions—had for the first time been applied to farm workers, and many of the one percent of the nation's farms that it had applied to were the large farms, the large plantations, in Mississippi. Instead of having to pay workers three dollars a day, the farmers would now have to pay them eight, dollars a day or ten dollars a day, depending on the length of the day. And so the combination of being somewhat concerned about a substantial black minority, or in many counties even a majority,

taking political power, and the economic consequences of the minimum wage law, mechanization and the use of chemicals began to proceed much, much faster. And the black people were literally without income. Literally.

Now, as you know, the welfare system in Mississippi only supports—as it does in half the states in this country—families where the home is broken. So intact families had no source of aid whatsoever, except food stamps, or surplus food. And this was another aspect of the problem, because you would have the surplus food program in operation in most if not all counties in Mississippi, and even though it was a bad program, it was free. And people could go down once a month to a depot somewhere and pick up some sacks of wheat and flour and rice and bulgur—and whatever bulgur is, I've never known—and at least cook something with it.

The food stamp program was enacted in 1964 and counties in Mississippi began switching through '65, '66, on in '67. The food stamp program cost money. You had to go in and buy the stamps, and you got a multiply in return, and you could take them to a grocery store and have a choice of far better foods than surplus commodities offered. But it did cost

money. And indeed, the tables were absurd in the sense that if you had at that time no income at all,

[-12-]

it cost $2 a person. So a family of four would still have to pay $8 a month for the food stamps. Well, the result of this, plus the fact that it was administered—you had to go down and stand in line down at the welfare office to get eligible, and the local welfare of Mississippi was very good at closing up early and opening up late, and being closed altogether some days—participation in federal food programs dropped sharply. Indeed, by more than fifty percent in some counties of the state.

So, if you put all of these things together, the consequences of the civil rights movement, of mechanization, of the minimum wage, of the switch over in the federal food program, there was probably more extensive hunger in Mississippi in the spring of 1967 than there had been in some time. Now another factor, also the result of the civil rights movement and then the war on poverty, was that there was a real poverty infrastructure, political party infrastructure in Mississippi. And the Child Development Group of Mississippi [CDGM] had been begun essentially by local people who had been activated and politicized through the civil rights movement, and aided by outside activists who had stayed in Mississippi to make it their home, or at least to stay on after the freedom summer of 1964. So that these were people who had political sophistication, who knew how to yell all the way to

[-13-]

Washington when they had a problem, and who also were the kind of people that liberal Democrats would want to show off as exemplary of the success of the poverty program when they were starting a road show, to try to develop national support for the poverty program.

In 1967, as I've just implied, the poverty program needed reenactment. The authorization was running out, I suppose in the end of June of that year. And Senator Joseph Clark [Joseph S. Clark] of Pennsylvania, the chairman of the [United States] Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty decided to take the committee on a road show, not just to Mississippi, but all over the country, to try to generate national interest and support for the poverty program. But it was no accident that the first field visit chosen was Mississippi. Mississippi was symbolic of the worst poverty in the country. It was also, as I say, a good place to stop, because you knew you'd get good witnesses, you knew you had good contacts to set up hearings and so on.

Simultaneously—and it's another reason, wittingly or unwittingly from the point of view of the senators and their staff—when Mississippi was chosen, there were people outside the Senate who were already thinking about how to dramatize and make into a national issue the hunger that

I described a few minutes ago. People like Dick Boone [Richard W. Boone] then of the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty, who had been the Washington contact for the Child Development Group of Mississippi and its fights for refunding; Leslie Dunbar [Leslie W. Dunbar] at the Field Foundation [The Field Foundation, Inc.] in New York, a southerner, had been director of the Southern Regional Council; and others with whom they were in contact, such as Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther], people from the National Council of Churches, and so on. They were, in turn, in touch with the Senate subcommittee and had been urging a visit down there, and they were making their own plans. They were going to create a Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States. Those plans were underway before Kennedy went to Mississippi in April—not publically, but the discussions were underway. Leslie Dunbar was thinking about sending a team of doctors down. Dunbar and the Field Foundation were supporting a [Project] Head Start program in a group of counties that had been cut off from federal money—the so-called FCM, Friends of the Children of. Mississippi.

I didn't know about all this. Maybe I had some inkling. Well, I didn't really. It was no secret, but all I knew was that Kennedy decided to go to Mississippi. Indeed, at first Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] was going to go, and

for some reason or other at the last moment he decided not to and Bobby had decided to go. I don't know whether Joe Clark said, "Please come along," but he decided to go. I was sent on down a few days in advance to look at the issues for Kennedy. Not really advance the hearings—the committee had its own staff down there.

So I arrived on, perhaps, a Friday night with the hearings scheduled to start Monday morning, and senators scheduled to arrive on Sunday evening. And I had the names of various witnesses and so on. Indeed—I might as well go into it for posterity—that's how I met my wife [Marian Wright Edelman]. She was a lawyer with the Legal Defense [and Education Fund Inc.] in Mississippi, and I'd been given her name by none other than Dick Boone [Richard W. Boone], who had given me the names of a number of people: Ken Dean [Kenneth Dean], the executive director of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations; Ken Walker who was then—may still be—the director of the Mississippi, sort of state economic development arm, who was kind of an odd duck and sort of a secret liberal, I guess. And some others. So I called Marian and we had some long talks, and obviously liked each other.

Kennedy arrived on Sunday. There are no particular events there that are of any importance, other than just sort of personal.... Monday morning there was various testimony about CDGM, with allegations back and forth about whether it was wasting money. And then Marian testified that there

was hunger, indeed starvation, in Mississippi. And one can go back and look at the public record of that testimony. And senators were shocked, I should say Senator George Murphy

[George L. Murphy], immediately being partisan, said, “Well, we must take this to the president of the United States,” and everyone agreed that that was what should be done.

The next day Murphy and Javits went on back to Washington, and only Clark and Kennedy proceeded to a tour of some of the hunger situations in the Mississippi delta , in Bolivar Country. We began in Cleveland, Mississippi, and the tour guide was a man called Amzie Moore, who was a local civil rights leader, a man who worked in the post office, and he took us on what was just a terrible, shocking, eye-opening tour. And we went first to a home where there was a great deal of photography outside the house because the children were all lined up, barefoot, ragged clothes. But, whatever that might have been in terms of a skeptic, undeniable swollen bellies, and sores that wouldn't heal, and just clearly seriously malnourished. On the way, across a path from there to the next house, Kennedy remarked to me that these were the worst conditions that he’d ever seen in the United States.

HACKMAN: Did he make any references to earlier, similar experiences?

[-17-]

EDELMAN: Oh, he said he thought he’d seen serious conditions in West Virginia, but never like this. He’d seen worse conditions abroad, I think specifically recalled his trip to South America a couple of years earlier, but he said he’d never seen anything like this in the United States. I mean all of this was in the three-minute walk to the next house.

Then in the next house there was a small child which either because of a physical handicap, or maybe for a nutritionally related problem was perhaps two years old but unable to walk. He just sat on the floor. And Kennedy went into the house by himself. It happened that Marian and I were with him. For the whole day, Kennedy and a federal marshal, and Marian and I were the people in the car, just the four of us. I’ll come back to that. He went and just tried to get this child to respond, for maybe five minutes. It probably was not aware of our presence in the room. Television was outside interviewing Joe Clark. Nobody knew what was going on, but Marian always recalls this as the incident that proved to her that he was really something very special. And certainly, I mean, I suppose I didn’t need it to be proved to me, but it was a very special moment for me, too.

[-18-]

And then the rest of the day there were just—what can one say? It’s like Spiro Agnew [Spiro T. Agnew]. We just saw a lot more awful conditions. In a place called Winstonville, which was really nothing more than a few houses on the side of a road, but it was called Winstonville, we were taken in to see a man who had no income. The earlier families had not been all that articulate about their situation, but this man knew exactly what his problem was. He’d been on the land, and he now was off the land, and he didn’t have any income. And he, you know, “Oh yes, I had a job you know, three weeks ago, where I picked up ten bucks, and so on, but that’s few and far between. And the only reason I have food stamps this month is because there was a television newsman from ABC [American Broadcasting Company, Inc.]

through here who gave me the money." His name was Andrew Jackson. And there was a great moment at the beginning of their conversation where... Kennedy had been briefed, of course, and so he walked into the house and very heartily said, "Well, so you're Andrew Jackson." And the man looked at him and said, "So, you're Robert Kennedy." Which caused them both to laugh. But, Andrew Jackson became a figure in the hearings later on,

[-19-]

because of his easily recallable name. In a hearing in perhaps July or August Kennedy was challenging, I'm not sure whether John Stennis [John C. Stennis] was the witness, or was present in the room or just what it was...

HACKMAN: I think Stennis was a witness.

EDELMAN: ...but somehow the question about Andrew Jackson came up, and Joe Clark—I love Joe Clark—Joe Clark who was always a bit addled anyway, said that they had met Andrew Jackson in Cleveland, Mississippi, and he had no income. Well, in that typical, you know, sort of mindless way, they'd gone and checked and, of course, there was no Andrew Jackson in Cleveland, Mississippi because he lived in Winstonville, and later on it came up that Jackson didn't exist, they'd gone and checked in Cleveland, Mississippi. I was too far away and couldn't run over and say, "Hey, Winstonville," or whatever. But that was the kind of a small sidelight that ran through it.

In any case, all of that was on national television that night. Now, perhaps because of all of the things that I've mentioned were going on anyway—and I just said it briefly about the Citizen's Board of Inquiry—but there was really quite extensive interest in the sort of poverty advocacy world in these problems. It might have surfaced anyway, but

[-20-]

this certainly gave it a great boost in surfacing. And that fact that not just a senator, but Bob Kennedy, was interested was to play a major role in hunger becoming a national issue. Really until early 1968 when Kennedy got involved in the campaign and turned to other things.

The first thing that happened.... Am I going on too long about this?

HACKMAN: No, no. Go ahead.

EDELMAN: Okay. The first thing that happened was, the very next day, which would have been by now Wednesday of that week—this would be the first week in April of '67—Kennedy, Joe Clark, Bill Smith [William Smith] who was then Joe Clark's staff director of the subcommittee (and of course, has figured in conversations elsewhere) and I went to see Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman], and that was the conversation that Nick Kotz and Liz Drew [Elizabeth Drew] and others have reported where Kennedy said, "I just don't know, Orville. I don't know why you can't just get the food down there." Just nonplussed. I never knew whether Kennedy understood the perplexities of why

Orville couldn't just get the food down there. Not merely bureaucratic complexities, because for

[-21-]

those he had no patience, and did understand them and could sweep them aside in a way that I generally agreed with. But whether he ever understood how much control Jamie Whitten [Jamie L. Whitten] had over Orville Freeman, or whether he understood that as well and knew that in fact Orville Freeman could have been somewhat less controlled by Jamie Whitten if he had chosen to play it differently, or might have been. In any case he behaved as though there were no complexities, except that he had this lingering respect for Orville Freeman. We've talked about this in some of our other conversations. Orville Freeman was the one member of the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] cabinet who really had tried to be friendly to Bobby Kennedy, and it's ironic that the hunger thing just inexorably drove them apart.

In any case, the argument that day was, were there really any families down there with low income—with no income, sorry. You know, we were coming back, we had just learned about this issue and our demands were very.... We were starting on a very low rung on the ladder. Free food stamps for the very poor. The idea that we hadn't even begun to understand

[-22-]

the other end of the scale, which in effect assumed that, the lower your income, the less you would eat, because if you had perhaps thirty dollars a month of income.... No, let's say, if you had fifty-five dollars a month income, they would charge you twenty-two dollars for stamps, and you would get perhaps fifty or sixty dollars in stamps. Whereas if you had a hundred dollars in income they might charge you thirty-five or forty dollars a month for the stamps, but you would get perhaps ninety or a hundred dollars worth of stamps. So the stretch was much bigger, which was absurd. But, we weren't even talking about that. We were just saying, "There are some people down there who have no income at all. Let's start by making the program free for them"—as Freeman had the discretion to do. And then we developed some other demands very quickly, about trying to have surplus commodities and food stamps in the same county, that that would help.

Freeman said, "Bob, there aren't people with no income in this country. That couldn't be. How would they exist?" So it was ultimately agreed that he would send two agriculture department officials, William Seabron [William M. Seabron] who was a black man, and Howard Davis who was a very, very tired old white man. I mean, Bill Seabron was a nice man, but he was a proto typical Uncle Tom;

[-23-]

and Howard Davis who was a nice man, but who had turned gray in skin as well as hair. And they were sent down with me to Mississippi, and we retraced our steps. I don't know how much difference this made, but I certainly enjoyed it. And finally after we'd been through

somewhat past Andrew Jackson, literally taking the exactly the same route and seeing the exactly the same families and houses, they said, "All right, we believe there are people with no income." And indeed, the Agriculture Department reasonably shortly thereafter took the magnanimous step of lowering the price for the poorest families the no income up to thirty dollars a month, three hundred and sixty dollars a year income, from two dollars a person to fifty cents a person. That was their great step.

Then we proceeded to try to put pressure on. We got—and this is documented in Nick Kotz's book [*Let Them Eat Promises: The Politics of Hunger in America*], which is a marvelous book—the committee as a whole to send the letter to the President, and Kotz tells the story very well about how the President pretended it didn't exist, and sent it over to Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] and so on.

[-24-]

HACKMAN: It seems to me I can see in your files that you at least tried maybe the first draft of that letter?

EDELMAN: Probably.

HACKMAN: Is that your own action or Robert Kennedy's suggestion that a letter go to the President, or do you remember how the push for that particular action comes about?

EDELMAN: I don't remember whether that one was from me or from Bill Smith or from...

HACKMAN: Maybe that's not yours. I found a copy...

EDELMAN: No, no that's mine.

HACKMAN: ...on yellow paper.

EDELMAN: I typed that with my very own hands, Larry.

HACKMAN: Right. That's what I thought. It's on a yellow legal pad.

EDELMAN: And it seems that the....

HACKMAN: But the letter that goes to the President is much briefer, than this.

EDELMAN: This Mr. President is not Mr. President Lyndon Johnson, this is Mr. President...

HACKMAN: This is the Senate, in the document.

EDELMAN: Yeah, that’s right. And I think that a fair amount of this must have gone into... He must have put this in the record at some point.

[-25-]

HACKMAN: It’s in somewhere.

EDELMAN: Yeah, at least as a memo from me. Parts of it are in this compilation of materials that we brought along. So, yes, this was my effort at a Senate speech for him, based on what we’d seen. I don’t know exactly when I wrote this.

One thing I do remember, and I think Kotz tells it, but if not I’ll just mention it, is that when the word came to us that the White House.... See, the first thing they did was, they literally refused to accept delivery of the letter. They said, “Take it over to OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity].” And then later on, once it was delivered, they sent it over there anyway. But, Smith came into a hearing room, I think, where Kennedy and I were sitting, and whispered to me that the White House was refusing to accept the letter. And I whispered that to Kennedy and he just exploded. He said, “You tell them to take the letter. The United States Senate can send a letter to the President of the United States....” That sort of a thing would in general very likely have been an idea of his. We’ve talked at other times about staff initiative as opposed to his initiative, and something that was as pointed as that, both things in terms of the idea, in terms of what was in the letter, it was the kind of thing he often thought of himself.

[-26-]

HACKMAN: Had he talked at all with Shriver before going to Mississippi about the Mississippi situation, or in general about using this to be able to build support for the poverty legislation which was running out? Do you know?

EDELMAN: I don’t know whether he’d spoken to him specifically before that trip. He had stayed out of Mississippi poverty politics when the CDGM fight first came up in ‘66, I believe. You remember that what Shriver did in the very sneaky maneuver was, at the midnight hour he took the funds away from CDGM and created something called MAP, Mississippi Alliance for Progress [sic] [Mississippi Action for Progress]. And this is very interesting because what Shriver did was to put Charles Evers in there, and Aaron Henry [Aaron E. Henry], and the sort of safe Mississippi blacks—I don’t mean to castigate those men because they've contributed a lot—but the known, the Kennedy type Mississippi blacks, on a multiracial board of MAP.

I remember saying to Kennedy in 1966—I didn’t know very much about it, hadn’t been there—but people like Andy Kopkind [Andrew David Kopkind], who was then writing for the *New Republic*, were saying to me that this was an outrage. And I remember going to

him and saying, "Aren't you going to get into this?" Even though generally speaking we did not ask him to talk to Shriver about.... I don't know that he had ever told me, but it was at least an unwritten rule in the office, you did not ask him to put pressure on Shriver about anything. Whether it was that he felt uncomfortable because it was family, or that he didn't really like Sarge, as some people said—I don't have evidence of that, by the way—but you didn't ask him to do that. In any case, I did ask him. He said "Look, Sarge tells me that this was the right thing to do, and besides all of my black friends in Mississippi are on the board of the new entity. Now, who am I going to believe?" And so I went away.

It was interesting that after he met Marian and after he met, not having before known Unita Blackwell and I guess Fannie Lou Hamer and some of those who were on the more MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party] side, the more grass-roots side of the black movement in Mississippi, his position was very clear, and he was always in any fights on the side of CDGM and, you know, didn't have to be told. And this is just a very good example both of, you know, the earlier naiveté, of the contrast as he learned, as he broadened, as he deepened, as he got to know grass-roots people. You know, the Kennedy of 1964

could get into a big shouting match with James Baldwin, but the Kennedy of 1968 was a much, much different customer about those kinds of things. He had been, he had seen, he had felt and he had touched.

HACKMAN: Yeah. That's interesting, because people use that Baldwin meeting so much, still do. Did you talk about that with him later, as to whether he would have a different feeling about that particular meeting?

EDELMAN: We had a couple of conversations which I don't remember in detail, where.... He was, as you know, a pretty stubborn man, and my general recollection is that he wasn't very forgiving about that meeting, ever. And even though maybe in his heart of hearts he knew that he might have played it differently later in his life, he never gave any indication that there was a different way that he would have handled it.

HACKMAN: Right. On the Mississippi hearing, and on the trip the following day, was there anything that you did or he did particularly toward the press, toward making sure the TV cameras were there, or was that there anyway?

EDELMAN: It was there anyway. I'm sure that the committee had notified the press, but all you had to say in those days was, "Robert Kennedy is going to Mississippi," and you had national television.

HACKMAN: You said you were going to refer back to the day when you and he and Marian were riding around.

EDELMAN: Oh, yes. Just a personal note, that he kept asking her, if she worked so hard, what did she do besides working? And she kept telling him it was none of his business. It was very warm, just a very lovely day. The contrast between the conversation in the car, which was not irrelevant—I mean, it was not small talk, he was quizzing her quite steadily.... [Interruption]

HACKMAN: Did he have anything to say about minimum wage? You were talking about that, minimum wage had come up, and that was a factor. Did he ever play with that...

EDELMAN: I don't remember ever talking to him about that, no. I wasn't so aware at the time of the... [Interruption]... side effect of the minimum wage in Mississippi, myself. I don't know when I became aware of it, but I wasn't really right then.

HACKMAN: What do you recall about problems within the subcommittee, or the committee, on what to do then after the Mississippi trip, actions to take at the committee?

EDELMAN: There weren't many problems about it. The committee was very united. Even the conservative members were quite united. All of the communications were signed by everybody. Republicans were as eager to embarrass Lyndon Johnson as Robert Kennedy was; even though they might have been less interested in the merits, they went along. The subcommittee was very united through the whole process. As you know, the [Senate Committee] on Labor and Public Welfare is a liberal committee and that was an even more liberal subcommittee.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any conversations he had with Stennis or with Eastland [James O. Eastland] or with Whitten or with any Mississippi political figures?

EDELMAN: Well, I don't recall so much conversations that he had as.... He probably talked to Stennis later on. Let me fill in some events and come up to that. He, of course, now took a great personal interest in the issue starting in April of '67 and, for example, met, saw Hewitt [Don S. Hewitt], the head of CBS [Columbia Broadcasting Systems, Inc.] News, I guess,

or whatever (he was a CBS News producer) at some party and told him about it. And that's what resulted in the CBS documentary a year later, that conversation. Hewitt immediately set Martin Carr to work on that documentary.

HACKMAN: Was there a lot of follow-up of Robert Kennedy on it, or a lot that you did?

EDELMAN: No, they just went at it. And there was quite a bit of discussion what to do, sending the letter and so on. In early May, Robert Coles and five other doctors—Raymond Wheeler [Raymond M. Wheeler] of Charlotte, North Carolina, Dr. Joseph Brenner, and three other physicians—went down and examined a number of children for the Field Foundation, as I mentioned before,, and came back and essentially were greeted very perfunctorily at the Agriculture Department, came up and had lunch. The lunch to which the entire subcommittee was invited, was held. Only Kennedy and Clark showed up; perhaps Javits. Only Kennedy and Clark stayed for the whole thing. At the end Kennedy said, "Well, we'll arrange a hearing." I remember we stood around and kept getting on the phone back to offices to check calendars and dates, and finally settled on July 11. So that was the
sort of next significant event. Stennis and Eastland came and sat at the hearing. [Interruption]...

brought up the public health commissioner from Mississippi who denied that there was any hunger and so on. And the six doctors reported very eloquently, and there was national television. And as Kotz accounts, at the end of the day Dr. Wheeler who was a southerner, a native southerner, made the most eloquent speech of all, because he spoke to the other senators, to Stennis and Eastland as southerner to southerner saying that he thought that he believes in that part of the country, and that this was a disgrace. Now in nine days after that.... [Interruption]

Oh, yes. Well, I was saying that on July 20 we were sitting in a restaurant in East Harlem where we were having a field trip in connection with the same subcommittee. We got a phone call that Stennis had introduced a bill for a ten-million-dollar emergency food program. Ten million dollars, of course, was a joke. But the idea that he had done it was really quite something. And I think he had the idea that the committee would reject it as paltry, and that he would be able to say he tried, and so on. The committee schedule an executive

session for as quickly as possible, I think it was a week thereafter. They had upped it to twenty-five million and reported it to the full committee, which immediately reported it to the floor. This is all by way of saying that the time when I do remember Kennedy talking to Stennis was that Stennis then was willing, after Kennedy and Clark spoke to him, to go and talk to Poage, W. R. Poage of Texas, the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee to try to get him to move on it, and he did. He carried through, tried to, and Poage.... Here is Stennis, not a marvelously attractive man, but a courtly southern gentlemen, and Poage a real red-neck, has the image, dirt farmer—I don't know if he is or not—who treated Stennis very,

very roughly and rudely. But I do remember that that was at least one set of conversations that Kennedy had with Stennis.

HACKMAN: Do you remember anything particularly that you had to do in the subcommittee or the committee on treatment of the Stennis bill to get it up t o twenty-five?

EDELMAN: No, you. know, just the normal kind of thing. I would be talking to Bill Smith every day, and he

would tell me what Clark proposed to do. I would go to him with what Kennedy thought ought to be done, and then Kennedy and Clark would talk to each other. Just the normal day-to-day work of moving something along.

HACKMAN: Anything that Kennedy could do when it got to the House other than have Stennis talk to Poage?

EDELMAN: No, there really wasn't.

HACKMAN: There's a draft of a statement in there, I think that you wrote for him, on the irresponsible treatment that the House committee, I guess, gave the Stennis bill.

EDELMAN: Yeah. I don't know whether that was something we would have actually used because, as you know, there would be serious reservations about trying to influence the action of the other bodies. Not protocol. No. I remember that we followed the progress of the bill—and this is again recounted in the Kotz book—Poage was very evasive about it. He got the Agriculture Department to agree not to bother having hearings, and then once they agreed, he knew that he could sort of do it in secret, and he was able to delay it for while. Finally they got put out, there was pressure for hearings, and he was

very mean to, I guess it was Rod—what is Rod's last name?

HACKMAN: Leonard.

EDELMAN: Rod Leonard, right. And Leonard didn't do very well as a witness, and so on. But that was a minor skirmish, you know. The bill finally got tacked on as part of the OEO legislation for the year, and we finally put it on in the Senate as an amendment to the OEO legislation. In effect had the Senate pass it again, and it got on at the end of the year.

The thing that was important about the bill was not the twenty-five million, but that another thing had happened in the meantime, which is that Dr. Stewart [William H. Stewart], the surgeon-general of the United States, had come before a subcommittee hearing and in response to questioning had said that he simply didn't know, that no one knew, the extent of the hunger problem in the United States. And so we had put a provision in, authorizing a National Nutrition Survey to be carried out by the Public Health Service. And that became very important because of.... And, it's interesting. There are

[-36-]

time bombs in all of this. The Hewitt-CBS business starts in '67 to come out in April of '68. The Citizens' Board of Inquiry which I mentioned before starts its work in spring of '67 and comes out in April of '68. Those things, then, resulted at that time, not by any of our doing, in the creation of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, which McGovern [George S. McGovern] later in the year was finally picked to chair after Kennedy's death.

When he started his hearings in the beginning of 1969, his very first witness was Dr. Arnold Schaefer who had carried out that survey that we authorized back in late '67. And here—for the first time you see again with this sort of time bomb thing, you invest one year and then get the produce a year later—was a United States government agency saying that there was widespread hunger and malnutrition in the country. But that was the significant result, interestingly, of the 1967 skirmishing. And it's interesting to see how the issue built.

In '67 this kind of back and forth with the Agriculture Department which resulted in some minor reforms, and if you look at this letter you showed me, August, from Freeman to Kennedy

[-37-]

about the milk and so on. And by the way, that milk stuff was partly because some people in the dairy industry in New York suggested that, so we were killing two birds with one stone. But that was all very minor.

The key thing was that '67 produced the momentum which led to the reports, that led to the creation of the McGovern committee in '68, produced the National Nutrition Survey, and the McGovern committee ready to operate beginning in 1969. And so that by '69 you had enough of a dynamic going to create pressure on Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], and Nixon then came out with his message, all of which is reported in Kotz's book, and I suppose isn't relevant to our conversation.

HACKMAN: You mentioned earlier that Edward Kennedy had at one point planned to go to Mississippi. Do you remember any cooperation or role that his office played then subsequently in this whole thing?

EDELMAN: No, they never took much of a role in the hunger stuff. I don't even remember who in his office worked on the poverty legislation.

HACKMAN: I saw one memo in your file which seems to be from Dave Burke [David W. Burke]—I didn't make a

copy of it—to Edward Kennedy, and they must have sent you a copy, in which he called for OEO jurisdiction and a larger appropriation. There was no date on it. I don't really know.

EDELMAN: I don't remember it. The last involvement that Kennedy had in the hunger issue was, he gave me these materials about eastern Kentucky. Maybe I'll just spend a few minutes on that. In late 1967 I don't remember our doing terribly much except that we had talked about what steps we ought to take next. In late 1967 we were getting the Indian thing started, and we agreed, probably when I was with him in California over New Year's '67, the beginning of '68, that we would try to use that poverty subcommittee for some hunger hearings. We knew we were pushing things, because it had no real jurisdiction in the matter. But Joe Clark either had said that he would let Kennedy chair some hearings, let him use the subcommittee to chair some hearings, or we decided we would go and ask him. In any case, he did say that he would do that. And we, because of just things we had learned in the course of the year, focused on eastern Kentucky and South Carolina. Senator

Hollings [Ernest F. Hollings] asked him, "Please don't come into South Carolina. I'm running for reelection. You'll embarrass me, and I don't want you to." And so we put that off. We didn't say we wouldn't go, we just put it off, and then Kennedy ran for the presidency and never went. But I have no way of knowing whether that meant something to Fritz Hollings when Kennedy died, but I think it did. And you remember that Fritz Hollings' conversion on the hunger issue in February, 1969, was one of the key factors in changing the balance of power in the Senate about hunger. And I like to think that Hollings did that partly as a kind of a gesture of memorial to Bob Kennedy, who had been really his friend.

In any case, we did go to eastern Kentucky. I spent a week down there. Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston] and I advanced the hearings ourselves—the committee staff in that case didn't do it, we did it—and set them all up, and had two good days with some interesting comic moments in there, as well. Started out in a one-room schoolhouse in—I can't remember the name of the town—it was just a great setting with the

kind of a potbellied stove and everything. And then worked our way eastward. The one-room schoolhouse was fairly close to Lexington where the plane had landed, and made a number of

stops in hollows visiting people's homes and so on. Then we decided we would take him to see some strip-mining. And there was this long caravan.... [Interruption]

[BEGIN SIDE 2 TAPE 1]

EDELMAN: ... I think much more successful. We had a parade of local witnesses who came in, and then with the usual local officials trying to justify, making fools out of themselves, and Kennedy in his characteristic way taking them on and nailing them against the mall in their evasion of hypocrisy. And then the memo you gave me dated February 16, '68, where I wrote my recommendations to him, coming out of the eastern Kentucky trip, very specific to the kinds of problems that we had found and the things that he might do. You know what really happened was that we were just in the course of pushing those various things which after all were, each of them, kind of minor. They were just taking various

things, a step here and a step there. When he decided to run for president we just at that point had to stop the whole thing.

HACKMAN: Why had you and Johnston advanced that one, as opposed to the committee? Any significance in that at all?

EDELMAN: Just because they were letting us use the committee and the committee staff came along on the hearings, but they didn't give us the committee staff to go out and set the hearings up.

HACKMAN: Anything carrying over into the campaign? Now there's a speech at Notre Dame on April 4 in which he talks quite a bit about the hunger thing. Was there any....

EDELMAN: Just that, that in the course of the campaign when we suggested it, he was willing to talk about it. And I'm sure he talked about it from time to time in his stump speeches. But nothing, no new initiatives during the campaign certainly.

HACKMAN: Just looking back over the whole thing, is there any sort of behind the scenes things that you or he are involved in, working with the citizens' crusade, and Boone or whatever, that just aren't known about in engineering certain things?

EDELMAN: No, I think by now my recollections are pretty much cemented into the story that I've told, and anything else that went on I've forgotten. I remember

meeting perhaps once with Edgar Cahn and perhaps, Steve Rosenfeld who were staffing the Citizen's Board of Inquiry, but we didn't talk much to the outside groups about the various pressures that we were putting on Freeman, and on the White House. Those were pretty much initiatives that we were taking on our own. I talked to Bob Choate [Robert B. Choate, Jr.] from time to time who also was working as kind of staff to the Citizen's Board of Inquiry, and Choate supplied us with materials that he had developed about where there were federal food programs and where there weren't, and some of his own research on the extent of hunger.

HACKMAN: Is there a personal relationship with Robert Coles, Robert Kennedy and Robert Coles?

EDELMAN: Yes, oh absolutely. It begins in the Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] hearings. I don't think they met before that, or if they had it would have been merely casual. But Coles came and testified at the Ribicoff hearings, and I remember vividly, it was the late afternoon and the press had all gone.

Kennedy and Coles got into an absolutely marvelous discussion—this would have been I think in early 1966, in the fall; I may have the date wrong—in which they were talking about the faces of children, and the contrast between the very, very lively and inquisitive faces of black children and the sometimes rather bland, so they said, and characterless faces of children of the well-to-do. There was an explicit contrast between a child being pushed in a pram—I think he may have used that term, a pram on Fifth Avenue—and a black child. And then about how the black child's face begins to change in early adolescence at the age of twelve or thirteen when he or she begins to develop some consciousness of the cruelty of the world. They absolutely grooved on each other. It was just one of those very emotional kinds of happenings. And the conversation, it was as though—there were not that many people in the room—but for awhile it was just the two of them. The other people just became irrelevant to them. They went off in kind of an exchange in revery, really, of their own.

I'd given him before that Coles's first volume of *Children of Crisis* to read, just because I

knew a little about Coles and I knew that it was an important book. But so as far as I know that was the major, or perhaps the only contact, until Coles showed up, in '67. My wife knew Coles very well, and I had known her for less than a month when we were up here in Boston for a weekend around May 1 of '67, and we went out to see Coles at his house. And that's when I learned that he was going to be going down to Mississippi with the other doctors, and came back and reported that to Kennedy. And certainly the exchange between them and the whole events surrounding that hearing on July 11, '67, was another event in the evolution of their relationship.

I don't know that they saw each other that many times thereafter, but Coles was very active in helping him campaign, and you know, there was just clearly even though they.... It was that way with Kennedy, there were people that he might not see that much who just became quickly favorites of his. And so he had a very special feeling about Coles.

HACKMAN: Any contacts with the Civil Rights Commission on this whole thing? Were they at all helpful to

you? Was there any direct contact that you recall?

EDELMAN: None that I remember.

HACKMAN: Anyone in the Department of Agriculture, or elsewhere in the Administration, who was particularly helpful in terms of giving you information that you might not have expected to get from them on what they were doing or how they were responding?

EDELMAN: Well, I don't remember then having that much help out of the Department of Agriculture. The one man who gradually emerged as our friend there was John Schnittker [John A. Schnittker], the undersecretary. And indeed in 1968 he was the only secretary or undersecretary to endorse Kennedy. And it was after he did that that Johnson issued his ban on anybody at that level endorsing anybody. So John, really caused that.

But I remember the following. Bill Smith did some legal research and wrote a memorandum, which I believe is in the compilation of documents that you handed me, on two points. One was the legality of running a food stamp program and a surplus commodities program in the same county;

and the other I believe was on the use of so-called Section 32 funds (Section 32 of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1935, I believe) which says that 30 percent of all the customs receipts in the country can be used for food programs; very odd sort of provision. And it was clearly legal in terms of that to use it any way they wanted, and it was just that Jamie Whitten kind of kept control over those purse strings in a way that, if they did it, he would cut their appropriation on something else. And Smith had gotten somebody—I suspect Schnittker, I don't know—in the Agriculture Department, who admitted to him privately that the memorandum was absolutely right legally, but we could never get anybody to admit it publicly.

HACKMAN: Any contact with Ramsey Clark at all on any other issue that you recall?

EDELMAN: Not particularly on the hunger issues, no. We had a warm relationship—not a particularly extensive one, but a warm relationship—with Ramsey generally. I don't think we knew at the time just how good Ramsey was. Bob Kennedy had always liked him, had always thought he was a good guy, and Ramsey had always been, whenever

we had called him about anything very responsive. But I don't remember anything particularly on the hunger issue.

Schnittker by 1968, and particularly after Kennedy was killed, had become more and more open in his support of the liberal position on the hunger things, to the point where, I remember once going to have lunch with him with Marian in the Agriculture Department in perhaps July of 1968, and by that time everybody knew that he had come out into the open almost in his disagreement with Agriculture Department policy on the hunger programs.

HACKMAN: Anything else that you can think on that whole.

EDELMAN: No, I think that's basically it. I spent, I would say, on the order of twenty percent of my time from April of '67 until March of '68 on hunger. And it was all the things really that we've been talking about, some drafting things that didn't see the light of day, just memos and suggestions, and participating in the legislative activity, and in one way or another trying to keep Kennedy informed and suggesting new initiatives for him and so on. I would

say that I would agree with Nick Kotz that the one most explicable reason, the most understandable reason if there is any, why Lyndon Johnson was always so unresponsive about hunger, was that it was Robert Kennedy's issue. Robert Kennedy had surfaced it in the first place. Whether it would have become a national issue, as I said, without Kennedy I have no way of knowing. It's certainly clear that he played a major role in making it a national issue.

HACKMAN: You mentioned Resnick. How did you pick up the Resnick thing? Did he come to you?

EDELMAN: No.

HACKMAN: To you people?

EDELMAN: No, we had very bad relations with Resnick, and that was ironic.

HACKMAN: Right.

EDELMAN: No, I just...

HACKMAN: Knew that he'd been there.

EDELMAN: ... knew that he'd been there. That's right. Saw it buried in a paper or something, or maybe somebody called it to my attention later, or possibly both.

[-49-]

HACKMAN: Did Robert Kennedy get to know Kotz at all well?

EDELMAN: Yes. Kotz was at that time writing for the *Des Moines Register* and we used to have an exchange. He would tell us things that he found out from the Agriculture Department and we would tell him. He had become primarily because of this issue really a great fan of Kennedy's, and his memorial to Robert Kennedy was that book. He came to me very emotionally after Kennedy's death and said that what he was going to do to contribute to the perpetuation of the memory was to finish that book, and. he did it.

HACKMAN: *To Seek a Newer World*, do you want to talk about that?

EDELMAN: Sure.

HACKMAN: Do you think you've got time?

EDELMAN: Sure.

HACKMAN: I guess again just to start with your role and what you recall about how the book evolved. From what I understand, at first it was just going to be a collection of speeches, into something beyond that.

[-50-]

EDELMAN: Well, that issue was more Adam. I was thinking a minute ago, what were we doing in late 1967? That's what we were doing in late 1967 was working on that book. It was through that period that Allard Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] and others were putting pressure on Robert Kennedy to run. I can remember a number of times being out at the house and working on the book and being on the periphery of those kinds of conversations.

Adam did a lot of the initial drafting and pulling together and talking with Kennedy about the order in which things would be in the book and so on. I really only came into it when it became fairly clear that the task, in order to be done within the time span, just needed

another hand. And so we sat down with all the material and went over it and began to figure out who could work on what. I ended up essentially with the chapter on the cities, the chapter that had begun with sort of pieces of the urban speeches, the three speeches of early '66 primarily, and then some of the later Bedford-Stuyvesant stuff.

HACKMAN: Right.

EDELMAN: I couldn't tell you what the first draft was when I got it. I guess Adam had already put it into some kind of order, and it just was the kind of thing that really ended up with our making the thing into a real book. As it was a sort of disjointed pasting together of the speeches, it was that, it was disjointed. And the more we worked on it the more we began to see the possibilities for making it coherent and adding some new material and so on. So it was the usual process that you might imagine, of drafting. What was always important about Kennedy in relation to these things is that, even though he was not actually doing the writing, he was very involved with reading drafts and heavily criticizing them and giving quite explicit instructions about what should be done to go to a next draft, down to wording. And so it was one of among many reasons that I had great respect for him. One always walked away from a session like that knowing what to do. He could be very, very explicit, he could focus very well, and had a good sense of language, a good ability to say, "No, this doesn't say what I mean to say. I mean to say something like this." He might talk a little too fast, and you'd have

to write furiously to get it all down, but Adam and I were pretty good at that. I suppose that's one mark of a good speech writer, but one mark of a good speech giver is that it's his speech and not the speech writer's speech.

So we worked well together and we went through, I'm sure, on the order of ten drafts of that chapter, just over and over and over again. "No, it doesn't quite work. Maybe this should go earlier and that should go later." And, "It's missing something," and so on. And so what finally emerged was, I think, a pretty coherent statement of his position. Not so much really urban as inner city. But that "urban crisis" was a euphemism for "inner city."

HACKMAN: That's made quite explicit in that chapter.

EDELMAN: And then the rest of it, Adam and I drove up one day to the Doubleday [and Co., Inc.] plant in Pennsylvania, spent the day at a motel reading galleys. By the end of it we were both reading and rereading the whole book over and over again, and editing and editing each other, and working both of us with Kennedy on the galleys and so on.

The Doubleday people, Ken McCormick [Kenneth D. McCormick]

[-53-]

who was the senior editor on the project, a very nice man, would come around, clearly enjoyed being around, I never saw one contribution that he made. Then he had a copy editor who was a drunken homosexual, and Kennedy could absolutely could not deal with this. I mean, the Kennedys are male chauvinists and Robert Kennedy could not understand why anybody would want to be a homosexual, and it made him extremely uncomfortable. So, this guy would kind of flit in and out of things, and he was an excellent copy editor, had no substance but he played his little role in the whole project as well.

HACKMAN: Any substance on the cities chapter that comes back to you in terms of.

EDELMAN: No, I can't. I haven't read the book in a long time, and in any case my recollections of the process would have been submerged very, very early in, you know, my sense of the finished product. No particular recollection of the kinds of arguments that we had....

HACKMAN: Right. Two other minor things. One, how were the proceeds from that handled? It seems to me I read somewhere or heard somewhere that at least Adam received some.

[-54-]

EDELMAN: We both did, yeah.

HACKMAN: I didn't know that.

EDELMAN: Adam received more than I did, but he gave us both a substantial chunk of the funds, and I don't know what he did with the rest of it.

HACKMAN: Do you recall playing any hand in getting the paperback edition out during the '68 campaign, or was that something that was just automatic that Doubleday was going to do? I think it came out as a Bantam [Books, Inc.] paperback about April or so.

EDELMAN: I didn't have any role in that. I think there's some things in the paperback that were not in the hardcover, a few changes, and I think he had them worked on....

HACKMAN: Anything on the Vietnam chapter that comes to mind? Or the China chapter at all?

EDELMAN: No, just that I participated in all those discussions once the thing was in draft, and particularly on the Vietnam chapter. The Vietnam chapter was mostly

new. The China chapter was an adaptation of a speech that he had given in Chicago. But the Vietnam chapter, things were changing so fast that it was mostly new. And so we talked as we did, you know. That was a constant stream

in our discussion going all the way back to early 1966. Should we talk about Vietnam a little?

HACKMAN: Yeah,, Sure.

EDELMAN: I don't recall any particular discussions with Kennedy in 1965 about it. In May 1965 you will recall Kennedy gave a speech on the Senate floor that was about the Dominican Republic, ostensibly, after the invasion, but really most of it was about Vietnam and that was drafted by Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.]. And my only role in that, as was Adam's, was to critique the draft and to do some editing on it. Then I don't remember participating in any particular discussion until early 1966 when one day I became aware that there was a major speech in the offing. Have we talked about all of this?

HACKMAN: Yeah. I'm just thinking. I think we've gone through this probably when it was fresher, but we ought to check and maybe you can start going through those interviews.

EDELMAN: Yes. I'll at least do a quick version of it. So, again I participated in just the editing, really, and Adam had done more of the drafting. There was some outside drafting on that, too. What I

remember most about that speech is the aftermath, is sitting around in the sense of being very embattled, just Kennedy and Walinsky and I sitting around the office—and possibly Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] trying to figure out how to respond with Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] coming down about the fox in the hen house, and Johnson being able to get General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] to say something hostile about it, and everything else. But the speech of course was right, and he was the first person to call attention to the fact that if you wanted to settle the war you had to give up something. Constantly—by this time I was participating—pressure on Kennedy from Walinsky and me to say more and to do more, culminating finally in the stop-the-bombing speech in March of '67, where I came down with a strep throat, as the drafting
process.... And they were sending drafts over to my house, and I was sitting there only half alive going through these drafts and managed to pull myself together to get into the office the day of the speech. Dick Schaap [Richard J. Schaap] recounts this in his book [*Robert F. Kennedy*]. He was following Kennedy around at that point, and Kennedy came out of his office and

[-57-]

said, “Am I dumb enough for you?” And, I said no. That’s the kind of role that I had in the Vietnam thing, all the way through, was essentially to participate as a critic and observer and an editor in the development of drafts and helping to make tactics and frame replies in the inevitable aftermath of these major speeches.

HACKMAN: Maybe we could try some of those other ‘67 speeches that you marked on that list. You had mentioned last time, I know, the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] Youth [Caucus] speech in February.

EDELMAN: The ADA youth speech Adam wrote, so there isn’t much really that I would have to say about that. That of course became the first chapter of the book. I always thought it was a remarkably perceptive speech but I can't take any particular credit for it.

HACKMAN: It seemed to me that you mentioned last time the National Farmers Union speech.

EDELMAN: Yeah. Adam and I worked very hard on that one.

HACKMAN: There’s a copy.

EDELMAN: And that was one where Adam and I really sat down late into the night and worked on it together, and each wrote pieces of it, and went over it and

[-58-]

and argued back and forth about what ought to be in it, and were very proud of the fact—as we often were when we got into a subject that we hadn’t known much about—and thought that we nonetheless had produced a very brilliant set of insights. I don’t know, that’s just a long speech, isn’t it?

HACKMAN: Yes, it is a long speech.

EDELMAN: But it goes into international and.... Oh, I remember, that’s right. We condoned the existence of other surpluses, surpluses of industrial capacity. That was one of our great insights. We tried to get into the question, which has become a much more prevalent kind of problem with the rise in food prices in the last couple of years, of the cost-price squeeze and the middle man, and then we were telling the farmers union about the sense of community and so on. So it was a speech in rural community development where we pulled together a lot of themes that we had used in other contexts,

international, rural poverty and so on, and made them into what we thought was a coherent statement that would be of interest to farmers. That's really about all I can say about it.

[-59-]

HACKMAN: Does he have any feelings for this at all? I sort of get the feeling that this is one that the two of you did, but that he might not have had that much of a feeling for, or an interest in, other than maybe some of the rural poverty theme. But in terms of the surplus, and in terms of the family farm, and in terms of that sort of thing.

EDELMAN: I think that's right. I don't remember this as being something that became so much a part of him as other things did, that he would come back to it on his own. I don't think he did particularly. It's interesting, there's some populism in the speech, too. No. I think you're right, it was not particularly something that....

HACKMAN: Particularly the idea of the value of people staying on the farm, and the people leaving the farm as being a particular problem, I suspect it doesn't strike me as the kind of thing that he would have particular concern for.

EDELMAN: No, although I think that perhaps he would come back to that sometimes in the context of talking about urban problems.

HACKMAN: Right. Right.

EDELMAN: Having perhaps a little bit broader perspective than some politicians did about the causes

[-60-]

and the overall context in which urban problems occurred.

HACKMAN: All right. Had you gone through... You had mentioned the other day on the phone that you had found a number of other speeches that....

EDELMAN: Yeah. Let's just see. January 19, 1967. This should be a January folder. I just was making sure I don't have anything out of the file.

HACKMAN: That's all right.

EDELMAN: I can stick those back easily. Okay, yes. Crime and the cities. I just wanted to make mention of that. I had started working on that speech in early, early 1966. He said he wanted to give a crime speech, and I....

HACKMAN: That's the Columbia Law [School] Forum...

EDELMAN: Columbia law forum, yes. I didn't get anywhere in particular. Mike Curzan [Michael Curzan] came to work for us. He had graduated from Columbia [University] Law School and had spent a year working I believe for Justice Traynor [Roger Traynor] in California. So this speech is Mike Curzan's product. I liked it. It was a pretty extensive set of considerations of criminal justice. You know, it went over police, it went over corrections, it went over courts, it really was very, very

comprehensive. It to a large extent, you know, went over ground that the President's crime commission [President's Commission on Law Enforcement] had been over. But it was certainly the place where I learned the extent to which prisons were crime factories, and the extent to which we really were, as we still are, putting the money kind of into the wrong end of the criminal justice funnel, if you will. Or at least at the wrong end of the problem. Because spending all the money, as we were then, on strengthening police forces and so on, and doing absolutely nothing about people in prison. We did not have, as I recall, particularly any of the insights that had come later about keeping people out of prison and developing community-based corrections. But there was a great job orientation to the speech, which I think is still right. I think it was just a very good comprehensive kind of speech that showed real substance.

The other thing that's perhaps worth saying about it, as an example—it's in the files of the *Congressional Record* reprint—with important speeches what we would do, as any senator does, is that we would reprint them and we would send them around. What this did, and it's important

for people who decide to run for president, is that on March of 1968 we had a ready stack of Kennedy on this and that. And if anybody wanted to know about his views on criminal justice we didn't have to do a new position paper. We had, you know, this is probably something on the order of a six-or seven-thousand-word document on criminal justice. I don't know that we had in mind as we did these things that we were compiling a five-foot shelf that would be useful in a campaign, but anyone who tries to run for president as George McGovern's campaign showed us, without having basic positions not only developed but really expressed publicly is going to be in bad trouble. McGovern simply didn't know about a lot of things. Robert Kennedy did. He had an enormous breadth, an enormous set of rather mature consideration of many, many issues that he had already been through. And this crime speech is an example of that.

So, you get the immediate payoff that you can send it around to district attorneys and judges and people in law enforcement, police chiefs and citizens concerned and so on, all over the country; get lists and do that, which gets immediate points. And then later on, if there does come to be a presidential campaign, you've essentially done the spadework. The

materials in this speech would have essentially stood us in good stead through the entire presidential campaign, had it continued.

HACKMAN: Then I had marked this model cities speech. I was curious about it.

EDELMAN: Yeah, that was essentially a redo of earlier things that he had said.

HACKMAN: February, I marked a social security legislation, February 16, and the reason for that is I just wanted to highlight....

EDELMAN: Oh, yes, that was the reintroduction of the Social Security bill. We've talked about the Social Security bill before. The only point to be made in addition was that by reintroducing it in another Congress—and I did a considerable amount of work to improve it over the 1966 version—again, just as in the crime area we had the position on older people all set in a piece of really quite visionary legislation.

There is February 22, '67, campaign funding at Skidmore College. And that's just interesting to look back on because this was essentially an attack on the presidential check off which had been put in as a sort of sole recommended solution at the end of the previous congress. I think Kennedy's motivation was probably to prevent Lyndon Johnson from having a hugh kitty at his disposal if he were to run for reelection. But whatever his motivation, if you look at that, and then more, at his testimony which I think is in June, which I worked on, he was out ahead, considering what we've been through

more recently about campaign financing. He was out ahead on a lot of the issues about campaign financing. But it's an interesting merger of politics and substance because if he got into it for wanting to stick it to Lyndon Johnson, he certainly made a substantive contribution as well. And also interesting that one could do something like that, you know, with the sort of little finger.

I didn't spend a lot of time. A lot of the conversation was with Herb Alexander of the Citizens' Research Foundation in Princeton, testing ideas on him and getting ideas from him. But one was able to use the device of testimony and floor debate without having a major push on legislation of one's own—he never drafted a bill—and have some impact on what was happening and certainly stake out a position which could then be built upon later on. And you know, you often came back to things. You would say something one year and then you know it would come up and you'd go back and you could build on it. This was again an example of that. I think about the cigarettes is another example of that which we've talked about. Have we been all the way through the cigarettes?

HACKMAN: No. And next time I thought I'd check the file and do it.

EDELMAN: Okay, sometime we need to do that.
March 20 begins the fight with Rockefeller about electric power in New York State. That was something that Bill vanden Heuvel brought to our attention. And I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, you know with everything I've got to do, Bill vanden Heuvel's got another one of his ideas and we've got to respond to that." But it was good; he was right, and it was a good issue and I couldn't tell you now exactly what effect we had on the development of electric power in New York. But again, isn't it interesting that here we were talking about electric power and the need for it and so on, and now in 1974 these issues come back in a very, very real way. We were ahead of our time again. I mean, not, that it's a new issue, the issue of public vs. private power goes all the way back to the 1930s, and this dispute with Rockefeller was very much in that tradition. Rockefeller was very private-power-oriented, and public power had been not at all utilized, as it should have been in New York State. In the northern tier it was

utilized substantially, and power costs in Plattsburgh were phenomenally lower than power costs in New York City. And there was no reason for it, absolutely no reason for it except that through the accidents of history public power had come to be the predominant mode of delivering electric power in northern New York State.

It is interesting to note that there's no environmental discussion in all of this. It just shows you how recent the environmental issue is. This was strictly a public-private issue, and particularly about who would be given responsibility to develop nuclear power in New York State. A classic New Deal kind of issue, but again kind of in the sense that populism has come back, kind of a nascent populism on Kennedy's part as well.

Then I see constitution stuff, which we talked about. Another statement on the Senate floor in April. That was just before we went to Mississippi. So it shows you the way in which I would be hopping around among things. April 4 there's a short statement on the power issue again, and the same day he speaks to the constitutional convention which probably Adam had worked on.

And the same day there is—I don't see it in the file, but there is in the notes here—a statement about the presidential election campaign fund of 1966. So undoubtedly I was doing that at the same time. And I could remember sometimes going home at night and literally staying up all night and writing three statements about three different things. Not terribly often, but sometimes it would back up that way. You know sometimes, I suppose in retrospect, I wondered how I had the energy or the smarts to be able to handle.... I mean, I'm not praising myself, but to, you know, do all these things at once. April 19, the constitutional convention, which was the reapportionment. I worked on that. So that one would, go from, kind of, one thing to another, and of course by this time late April we're into the hunger thing

as well. At the same time that I'm doing the hunger I'm continuing on the public power, I'm doing the campaign funding, and I'm working on things like reapportionment. Reapportionment one had to do because, I think, there was a debate on the Senate floor at the time. And then

of course, this index of statements as a way to develop our discussions doesn't completely reflect the other things that were going on in the office. It doesn't reflect the amount of time I was spending setting up those poverty hearings, and that sort of thing, or all the other activities of the legislative staff.

May 8, 1967 is the speech that I'm particularly proud of, although it was really kind of accidental. It was an address to the Day Care Council of New York, and it was the kind of thing that previous to that Adam probably would have worked on. I was up in New York, I don't know why. Adam was busy working on something else, so I ended up writing that speech. Now, by this time I had met Marian a month earlier, we'd been in Mississippi and the speech got in it stuff that I learned in Mississippi and quotes from materials about Head Start in Mississippi that we'd gotten. But I remember talking to Adam on the phone, and talking to others, and I was sitting in the New York Office and it was getting later and later at night, and reading the draft to Kennedy over the phone—he was down in Washington—and clearing it with him

that way. The speech essentially says, it was things that he had said before about the failure of the New Deal. You know, "We've created a welfare system which aids only a fourth of those who are poor; built vast and impersonal high rise public housing projects, isolated from the outside world; cleared areas of slums in the name of urban renewal, with no sense of what would become of those whose homes had been leveled; provided health service in huge unpleasant municipal hospitals," and so on. "We must understand what we have done, we have said, 'Here. Here's what we're going to do for you.' And in our generosity we've created a system of handouts, a second-rate set of social services which damages and demeans its recipients and destroys any semblance of human dignity that they have managed to retain through their adversity."

This was the first time that we had put together—admittedly speech rhetoric, admittedly shorthand—a coherent critique of the New Deal. And he didn't sort of think about that he was saying anything new, but John Kifner [John William Kifner], who is now quite a well-known reporter for the *New York Times*, was a young

fellow, just on the *Times*, was sent to cover the thing. He saw in it—in effect, the way sometimes perhaps one sees in poetry something the poet didn't intend—more than we realized was there. And it was a front-page story in the *Times* the next day. And that was

awfully important. I mean, it was important personally for me in terms of my confidence, Kennedy's confidence in me. It was perhaps the best writing that I had done up until then, the best speech writing I had done up until then, and it began two or three things. It began a national debate about the welfare system, because then Mitch Ginsberg [Mitchell I. Ginsberg] came...

The reason I was in New York, now that I recall, was because we were having those same poverty hearings in New York, and the speech was scheduled, but the reason it was built around or fit together with the fact that there were poverty hearings in New York the same day. Ginsberg, then the commissioner of welfare for New York, came into the hearings and called the welfare system bankrupt, and that—back to back on the front page of the *Times* the next day with the speech the day before—really started waves in terms of public discussion of the welfare system.

[-71-]

Kennedy had never, other than an occasional reference in a speech here, taken a particular interest in welfare, never knew much about it other than just to say that it drives families apart and so on. Nor had I. But he saw that he had struck a chord, and somebody said to me, "You know, based on that speech you really ought to take an interest in the welfare legislation that's now wending its way through the House and Senate." And so I started to look into it, kind of on my own.

I think that probably in there Kennedy went off to South Africa, if I've got the dates right. And so I probably had some time, as I had with the minimum wage. Oh, no. He went to South Africa in '66. But something happened in the spring of '67 that had I must have had a little bit of time. I don't know how I did. Or in the summer.

HACKMAN: He went to Europe in the spring of '67.

EDELMAN: Did he?

HACKMAN: That's the peace feeler....

EDELMAN: No, that was, earlier. That was more winter, wasn't it?

HACKMAN: I always thought it was in March, but....

[-72-]

EDELMAN: But this speech was in May, and my work on the welfare issue was on into June, July, and August. In any case, I was able to convince him that if he was serious about a lot of things, about job creation as opposed to the continuance of welfare, that this was legislation that was really going to make welfare worse rather than better, and make it harder to do a lot of the other things that he wanted to do; that if he was serious about what he had said in that speech about what welfare has done, this was

legislation that would make welfare do more rather than less of that sort of punishing and demeaning. And working with Elizabeth Wickenden, and Bob Patricelli [Robert Patricelli], of Javits' staff, and Leonard Lesser who was, I think—well, yes, he was still probably the general counsel of the Industrial Union Department [of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations]. We began to follow that legislation. I remember saying to you that
I never understood how one was foolish enough to get involved in legislation that belonged to somebody else's committee, but this is an instance where we did, where it was right. And by the time

it came to the Senate floor in the fall Kennedy had made himself into quite an expert on welfare, and really just conducted himself very, very intelligently in the debates. Probably not worth going into all the amendments that we put on and so on, but it shows you how his personal involvement in an issue, and again back and forth with staff, would take place, and it really all stems from that speech on May 8, 1967.

I remember in the campaign in Oregon his going in Portland to meet with a group of black people somewhere—I mean, there weren't that many black people in Portland—and somebody asked him about the welfare system. I hadn't talked to him about it in months, at that point in '68, and he had retained it all from those debates on the floor of the previous fall, four or five months earlier. He gave, you know, a marvelous speech, going through all the things that were wrong and all the things that ought to be done. Again, an indication of how much real intellectual substance there was in Bobby.

I might just say a few more words about that welfare fight on the Senate floor as long as we're on it. It's indicative of a number of things. One is, the way in which one works with outside people. But also the importance of staff, because in welfare stuff that I've been involved in since then, the lack of anybody inside on the Senate, to really do sensitive drafting based on the politics, is always a terrible gap. And I remember Wickenden—Wicky, she's called—coming to me, and we'd been told to meet each other, and I'd already been working on this stuff for a couple of months. And I had already drafted a package of amendments, I drafted the specifications for a package of amendments and how astonished she was that there was someone who was that up on things, and you know I'm telling here we shouldn't be for this, we should be for that. Nobody had ever talked back to her before. So we got to be great pals.

It came up to, the Senate Finance Committee had handled the bill and had not improved it much over the House version. You remember there was a freeze on the AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent

Children] payments, that there couldn't be any greater number of AFDC people on the rolls than there had been after the fixed date, and then this forced work provisions which were being put in for the first time. We had a series of amendments on the floor. We won getting the moratorium out on the floor, we won getting some of the worst aspects of the forced work removed, and so on.

Before we went to the floor that day, whenever it was, in October, I guess, we'd gone to see Russell Long [Russell B. Long] to see if we could sell him any of the amendments—maybe just some of the just easier, more technical ones—and had gone into a room off the finance committee hearing room. There sitting with him was none other than Wilbur Cohen [Wilbur J. Cohen]. And I'd already had a considerable mistrust of Wilbur Cohen; Robert Kennedy had a great distrust of Wilbur Cohen, with which he had inculcated me. It confirmed all of our views about Wilbur Cohen's willingness to deal with the devil, to find him there and advising Russell Long and so on. So they gave us a number of minor amendments, and apparently thought that that would buy us off.

It was agreed that Kennedy would get up and say what he had to say, and Long would accept those amendments.

Then Kennedy got up and introduced his other amendments. And Wilbur Cohen in the gallery was furious, he was furious. He felt that he had gotten a bill that he could live with—which I thought was a very bad piece of legislation—and that somehow we were upsetting the applecart. Tactically, why he thought that, I don't know because the worst that would happen is they would go back to the House bill which he had already thought was acceptable by his lights. Although, as I say, it was certainly not acceptable. But when we won perhaps the first of the roll calls that we won, or maybe the second or so on, he stood up in the gallery and said audibly, for everyone to hear, "There goes the last chance for a humane welfare policy for the next five years." And that's always summed up Wilbur Cohen for me because he was wrong on the merits, he was wrong tactically, he was just wrong.

Then we did lose it all in conference, which if it was a question of, you know, having upset some

better compromise, I would understand his point. But, we didn't. And we decided we would oppose the conference report—this was in December by now—even though the conference report included a substantial social security increase for the old folks. And we had a group of senators, Metcalfe [Lee Metcalfe] and Gene McCarthy [Eugene G. McCarthy] even came, bestirred himself from his laziness or wherever he was, and parceled out a speaking schedule and started a mini filibuster. On about the third day at nine o'clock in the morning Joe Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings] was supposed to cover the floor, and was standing around the back. I was in the office, hadn't gotten over there. They got, I've forgotten who, in the chair. I don't know, but somebody friendly with him. Russell Long stood up and said very quietly, "I move the adoption of the conference report." Robert Byrd [Robert C. Byrd] stood up and

said, “I second it.” And the chair said, “Hearing no objection, the motion is granted,” and we were finished.

Kennedy went to the floor that afternoon and excoriated Robert Byrd. He took on Robert Byrd

[-78-]

much more than Russell Long, just excoriated him in terms that went far beyond what’s common in the Senate. I just always admired that, because he was willing to say what was the truth instead of playing by those kind of silly rules of decorum. Well, that’s about all, I guess, that comes from the May 8, 1967 speech.

May 14 and then May 17, there’s some stuff about rehabilitating convicted criminal offenders to get them into VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America]. The May 14 is endorsing something that Vera [Institute of Justice] was doing in New York about, also.... Actually, that was one of the first diversion programs, trying to develop effective rehabilitative measures at the beginnings of the criminal process. I didn’t recall that we were involved in that, so that was an early thing. That was Mike Curzan. Mike developed his own little projects, and this was one that he worked on that he did very well at. Again, I’d, forgotten that we even had this bill. But we got this enacted, as an amendment to the poverty legislation that year, and thereafter criminal offenders were eligible for VISTA.

[-79-]

That’s, of course, another subject that we’ve touched on before, is the effectiveness of Kennedy as a legislator. I think that part of his life is not given enough credit because he was doing so many things at once. In fact, there was a rather substantial legislative record built up, with amendments to, starting in ‘65, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Medicare; Partnership for Health [called formally, Comprehensive Health Planning and Public Health Services Amendments of 1966] later on, and this thing that I just mentioned, and Title IB of the poverty legislation [Economic Opportunity Act] the Puerto Rican amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

There really were quite a number of things that were achieved during that period of time. Then let’s just go on to June here, and see what... There’s the introduction of his amendments to the Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act of [of 1965] which we can talk about next time, so I won’t go into it now. That’s it for May.

[-80-]

In June, oh, awful introduction of the President in June ‘67—remember that?—which Adam wrote. That was something I really never quite forgave Adam for. “Webster defines greatness as largeness inside, as being much above the average in magnitude....” the height of his aim, the breadth of his achievements....” Terrible. I never knew why he did that. Well, why he did it was obvious. The problem is, it was too obvious, and it didn’t ring true and it hurt him. People remembered it later on.

Then we have the testimony in June before the finance committee on campaign financing that I mentioned, to you. It is a substantial statement, seven single-spaced legal-sized pages, where his major burden was to talk about tax incentives which, of course, is in the law now. You have through this whole period in late May and early June, of course, a series of statements about the Middle East because that's the time of the Middle East war.

HACKMAN: Any problems on that?

EDELMAN: Yeah. There was the sense in the Jewish community that he had been too little and too late on it. In fact, he had spoken in late May about it, and

warned that things were coming and tried to get our government to respond more. But he was a man who didn't like to posture, and he felt he had said enough, he had made a statement. But the conservative Jewish community particularly, they kept saying, "Where was your man during this period of time...."

HACKMAN: Within the office any problem, though? Between you and he on that?

EDELMAN: No. Oh. Now here's a statement to the commerce committee on some amendment to the Federal Power Act. I don't know who did that. It wasn't me, but again it shows you the breadth.... Here we have a statement on the floor, which I would have done, June 8, about congressional redistricting. I had worked on reapportionment throughout. And this has to do with, there was legislation to, in effect, preserve rotten boroughs. I mean it just wasn't strong enough legislation on reapportioning congressional districts....[Interruption]

Oh yes, now here's a constitutional convention one, where he did go much much deeper, and that was the appointive attorney general point in June '67, which I didn't work on. Here, in a speech I'd

forgotten, Community Council of Greater New York, June 19, very important in the development of the welfare stuff. I'd forgotten this. Because after the May 8 thing, he was concerned that he had made these criticisms without having any substance to offer. That was something that came up very often. He'd be worried that he'd made a general statement, gotten a lot of coverage on it, and then, you know, what was he going to do about it? And indeed this June 9 speech is a key part of the story that I told before. I mean, the building block part is obvious, because May 8 was the criticism, the unexpected coverage of it, the pressure on me to get something together for him in the way of a program. I then come and say, "Hey, you've got this speech that you've taken in early June. This is a good place to do it." He says, "Fine, go ahead." I gave him all this stuff. I remember quite well that he really didn't understand it all very well at that time. It talks about incentives for people on welfare

to work, and getting rid of the man-in-the-house rule, and making a lot of little payments more uniform all around the country.

You know, the usual welfare reform agenda at that time. And it's interesting, the contrast between his having gone and just sort of read this speech, and not really digging what was in it. I remember he didn't deliver it terrible well. And it's a much more complicated speech than the May 8 one. I mean, it was not terribly eloquent. It's got statistics in it and so on.

All of this stuff, that was in that gradually seeped into his consciousness. You know, you asked him about whether he had made any particular use of the farmers' union speech thereafter. In contrast, this June 9 speech to the community council became the basis for a lot of things he kept coming back to.... [Interruption]

July 12. I'm skipping a lot of other stuff, you know, water pollution and the commencement speech, things I didn't work on. Water pollution would have been generally Wendell Pigman. I think I probably said that before. Just rereading that welfare speech in June, it's not bad. I had learned, I guess, a fair amount fairly quickly. And of course, that learning for me, I've stayed

interested in the welfare issue really ever since then over the last.... [Interruption] July 12 and 13 he introduced these tax incentive bills for the ghettos. Have we ever talked about those?

HACKMAN: Yeah, we did.

EDELMAN: Okay, so I won't go into that. Then July 24 I guess he testifies on his housing bill. That's all Mike Curzan.

BEGIN SIDE 1 TAPE 2

Okay. The other thing in July is, I see he goes, again on the constitutional convention, this time on the public power issue. So that you do get these specific issues that begin to evolve on the constitutional convention. That testimony on the public power issue I think I did work on. I think somebody else drafted it, but I had some involvement in it.

Okay. August. Not much that I wanted to make any reference to. It just wanted to look at August 17. Oh. Here's an interesting thing I just happened to read. August 17, an amendment

of the floor on the Alliance for Progress. I had worked on that. I mean, it's nothing particularly important, but again just the breadth of the number of issues that one got involved in. [Interruption]

August 23, I might just mention for the record, is a speech to the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers [International Union]. That was one of Jeff Greenfield's first efforts, and really proved what a good speechwriter he was. [Interruption]

You know again, Larry, things that I've forgotten. Here on August 29 he goes and testifies before the finance committee on social security and welfare, and half of it is pushing his bill, you know, that we talked about many times, on social security; but then the other half is restating a lot of what was in that June 9 speech, and going on and attacking the House bill. And again, you know, when you came back to these things from what you build, it would build in his mind, and by then he was already getting to have a much more intuitive kind of mastery of the welfare issue.

Okay. September '67, early September we went up

to Rochester, New York to have our own in-state hearings on migratory labor. Pete Williams [Harrison A. Williams, Jr.], I think, went along. He was the chairman of the migratory labor subcommittee [Senate Subcommittee on Migrant Labor]. That's important in a couple of ways. It shows the continuity on the issue of farm labor, which had begun in '66 with Chavez [Cesar Chavez]. It was Kennedy's responsiveness to criticisms—it was mostly from the inside, from the staff—that he'd been willing to go and take on agribusiness in California but not in New York. And finally we went to have the hearings in New York, because after all there were serious migratory labor issues in New York as well.

That was the time that we went to the farm of a man named Jay DeBadt outside of Rochester, and he stood there with a shotgun keeping us off the property. Kennedy said to me, "Go around there and see if one of those people will invite us on the property." So I walked around the back and... "Sure." And Kennedy walked right past DeBadt and said, "I was invited onto this property." We spent, on and off not a lot of time, a very minute amount of time, but the next two years, DeBadt got

a lawyer and he was going to sue us for trespass. I don't think anything ever came of that.

Let's see what else we have here. I marked a number of things. Again we have a major speech on smoking and health in September of that year that we'll want to come back to.

HACKMAN: Right.

EDELMAN: Civil Service Employees Association. I wrote that. I don't remember what was in it. Oh, see, we were beginning to have a theme. "We must not build schools merely as we did in the past." And then there's a longer paragraph than in the May 8 speech: "... cannot, must not build new housing merely as we have in the past.... cannot, must not build hospitals...." So we were beginning to come back to this theme. And then that was the speech where he started going into tax reform, really. I think one of the first

times that he talked about it. And started issuing those statistics that have now become popular for politicians to issue about how many people above a certain income weren't paying any taxes. I think that was the first time that he did that. More water pollution.

[-88-]

Oh, September 18, letters that he wrote to Rockefeller and to a guy at the state health department following up on that migrant trip. Again, all this that the seriousness of... [Interruption]

Then we have law enforcement speech on tire Senate floor on the poverty program. You know, here's the year-long effort on that beginning to come to fruition.

HACKMAN: September 27?

EDELMAN: And we had made, with Joe Clark, a major initiative on job creation in that bill, $2.8 billion for an emergency employment program. I don't think there's much else. I think these files are.... He puts in a couple of amendments on Medicaid in October. That's the same bill in which we had the welfare fight. And then there's a press release, October 25, he puts in some social security and welfare amendments. I've forgotten, we had an amendment to have a twenty-percent, across-the-board increase in social security. I don't know whether we ever even brought that to...

[-89-]

HACKMAN: No.

EDELMAN: ... a vote. Another speech in Rochester on the constitutional convention in late October. These files seem to be a little bit... Then the military dental care program, which was...

HACKMAN: You mean they seem to be thin?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Yeah, they are. We just haven't found all of them. I don't know whether they're all there somewhere or not.

EDEBMAN: Okay. Well, that's really about all I had.

HACKMAN: Now, in terms of...

EDELMAN: One thing that's interesting, Larry, is that I think it's fair to say that what we've been through tonight would suggest that by 1967 he's hitting his stride

as a legislator. There is this breadth of coverage of a number of issues where he has programs, where he's pursuing it on the Senate floor. And where the reason for talking about is that it's coming up on the floor, and he's taking legislative initiatives. I think by this time, in comparison to the earlier years, there is in the domestic policy area much more substance, you know, all this process of building

on things in the past, so that it becomes easier to do things. You know what your position is, you have material built up and so on. So I would say, in retrospect, that he's a much more mature senator in 1967 than he was in the earlier years.

HACKMAN: In terms of the next time, we had talked about doing something in more detail on the New York Medicare-Medicaid thing. We could talk about doing something more in detail on cigarettes. Maybe I should go back and look at those welfare, social security files more closely, and maybe something of this will come out on. that, particularly the welfare side. Migratory labor, I'd forgotten whether there's more to do than we have.

[END OF INTERVIEW #8]

Peter B. Edelman Oral History Transcript – RFK #8
Name List

A

Agnew, Spiro T., 19
Alexander, Herbert Ephraim, 65

B

Baldwin, James, 29
Blackwell, Unita, 28
Boone, Richard W., 15, 16, 42
Brenner, Joseph, 32
Burke, David W., 38
Byrd, Robert C., 78

C

Cahn, Edgar, 43
Carr, Martin, 32
Chavez, Cesar, 87
Choate, Robert B., Jr., 43
Clark, Joseph S., 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 32, 34, 35, 39, 89
Clark, Ramsey, 47
Cohen, Wilbur J., 76, 77
Coles, Robert, 32, 43, 44, 45
Curzan, Michael, 61, 79, 85

D

Davis, Howard, 23, 24
Dean, Kenneth, 16
DeBadt, Jay, 87
Dolan, Joseph F., 57
Drew, Elizabeth, 21
Dunbar, Leslie W., 15

E

Eastland, James O., 31, 32, 33
Edelman, Marian Wright, 16, 18, 28, 30, 45, 48, 69
Evers, Charles, 27

F

Fishbein, Peter, 4
Freeman, Orville L., 21, 22, 23, 37, 43

G

Ginsberg, Mitchell I., 71
Greenfield, Jeff, 86

H

Hammer, Fannie Lou, 28
Henry, Aaron E., 27
Hewitt, Don S., 31, 32
Hollings, Ernest F., 40
Humphrey, Hubert H., 57

J

Jackson, Andrew, 19, 20, 24
Javits, Jacob K., 5, 17, 32, 73
Johnson, Lyndon B., 22, 24, 25, 46, 49, 57, 62, 64, 65, 81
Johnston, Thomas M.C., 40, 42

K

Kennedy, Edward M., 15, 38, 39
Kennedy, Robert F., 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 63, 64, 67, 69, 71, 72, 74, 76, 77, 78, 80, 87
Kifner, John William, 70
Kopkind, Andrew David, 27
Kotz, Nick, 24, 26, 33, 35, 38, 49, 50

L

Leonard, Rodney E., 36
Lesser, Leonard, 73
Levitt, Arthur, 8
Long, Russell B., 76, 77, 78, 79
Lowenstein, Allard K., 51

M

Manchester, William R., 5
McCarthy, Eugene G., 78
McCormick, Kenneth D., 53
McGovern, George S., 37, 38, 63
Metcalfe, Lee, 78
Moore, Amzie, 17

Murphy, George L., 17

N

Nixon, Richard M., 38

O

O'Connor, Frank D., 1, 3, 4

P

Patricelli, Robert, 73
Pigman, Wendell, 84
Poage, W.R., 34, 35

R

Resnick, Joseph Yale, 10, 49
Reuther, Walter P., 15
Ribicoff, Abraham A., 43
Rockefeller, Nelson A., 4, 66, 89
Rosenfeld, Steve, 43

S

Schaap, Richard J., 57
Schaefer, Alfred, 37
Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., 56
Schnittker, John A., 46, 47, 48
Seabron, William M., 23
Shriver, R. Sargent, Jr., 24, 27, 28
Smith, William, 21, 25, 26, 34, 46, 47
Stennis, John C., 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35
Stewart, William H., 36

T

Taylor, Maxwell D., 57
Traynor, Roger, 61
Tydings, Joseph D., 78

V

vanden Heuvel, William J., 1, 2, 6, 66

W

Walinsky, Adam, 7, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 67, 69, 81
Walker, Ken, 16
Weinstein, Jack M., 3, 7
Wheeler, Raymond M., 32, 33
Whitten, Jamie L., 22, 31, 47
Wickenden, Elizabeth, 73, 75
Williams, Harrison A., Jr., 87