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Oral History Interview

Of

Robert F. Wagner

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Robert F. Wagner

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT F. WAGNER

November 2, 1967
New York, New York

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Okay, why don't we just begin by my asking you if you recall when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], what the circumstances were and what your impressions of him were at the time?

WAGNER: Well, I may have met him one or two times very casually. But the first time I really can remember was when we had a Veterans Housing Conference -- I assume it was called that or something, I don't remember what the title was -- called by four of us. Jack Kennedy was a Congressman;

[-1-]

Frank Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.], who I guess had been a Congressman, maybe he was at that time too, I'm not sure -- it was a couple of years after the war -- and then Jack Javits [Jacob K. Javits] who was a Congressman. I remember we were representing various groups and veteran's groups. I think I was there as Catholic War Veterans or whatever it was. But it was under the heading. I suppose we were four young men who had prominent names, mine principally through my father who had been in Veterans and also had been interested in housing. I think at that time I'd already been here in the city, Commissioner of Housing and Buildings here, which was housing. And then in '48 I was chairman of the New York City

Planning Commission. So there was some knowledge of it. The first time I really remember being in the opportunity to meet Jack was when Frank Roosevelt and I went out to his house in Georgetown for lunch. We had a chance to chat. Some of it, of course, was about politics

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as young people. And he made a good impression, and I liked him immediately. I think we had a relatively successful conference there because we did organize it in such a way that in an orderly way the various groups, representing all sort of viewpoints on the position and the issues from the conservatives to the more liberal groups there, at least joined together on what they wanted for housing and were able in joining together to, I think, influence a good many of the congressional leaders and members of Congress to get something through. And they did pass some housing legislation at that time. After that we would meet principally socially. And a friendship of some kind existed. I mean we knew each other. Of course, his father knew my father too in New York here and in Washington.

STEWART: Had you known his father, Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy], before that?

WAGNER: Well, I had met him, I think with my father or with a group or people; read a good deal about him

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too. Then I remember, as I said, meeting him up at New Haven after a football game. His brother Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] had been a very good halfback there at Harvard. In 1956 we, of course, had met out at the Convention and spent a little time together. And I ran for the United States Senate that year. Well, never mind, get back to the other. Jack Kennedy was good enough to come up and make some TV shots and recordings to support me -- why he thought the mayor of New York would be helpful in problems that confronted the Senate. He was very, very nice about it. Around that time I think he did go into the hospital up here...

STEWART: Right, in October of...

WAGNER: I did keep in touch with him a bit during that period of time while he was here for a good stretch. Actually, I believe -- again I have to check back on my diary whether it was around that time or the year before. It was shortly after I

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was Mayor. He invited me to come up and speak at the Jackson-Jefferson Day dinner in Boston, the Democratic Party, which is their annual dinner in a hotel. I forget where it was --

the Copley, I believe. I do recall that there were an awful lot of speeches before they got to me. And we had bad weather. I know he had to get back to Washington, and I had to get back to New York by the morning. There weren't any planes flying out because of the weather. The speeches went so long -- they asked Jim Curley [James M. Curley] just to wave and say a few words, and he spoke a half an hour. And a classmate of mine at college named Foster Furcolo was Governor. I knew him fairly well at colleges, not too well. And I'd never heard the fellow speak before in my life, but I had followed the fact that he'd been in Congress and then had run for governor. But he was a real old time orator. He was giving everybody hell about something or other at that time. And Paul Dever spoke. Actually,

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it got so late that all Jack Kennedy could do was introduce me, and he had to leave to catch the sleeper back to Washington. I had to make my remarks brief for one very important reason I had to get the sleeper back, too. And at that stage the people didn't want to hear too much anyway. And he was always very appreciative at the fact that we did get up there because it took a lot of effort. We were supposed to fly and couldn't. We had to get a train and all sorts of connections. But I don't know whether that was before '56 or in '56. It was around that time. Naturally we did of course meet in '56 -- I'm skipping some incidents where in Washington I'm sure I visited his office and saw him at various hearings and functions and so forth. I'll hit some of the highlights.

In '56 we did talk a bit in Washington. He was interested in the vice presidency. Some people had mentioned my name. It was generally

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felt that Adlai Stevenson would be the nominee if he would take it. I thought it was dead, and I think most people felt that the custom would be followed that the presidential candidate would select whom he wanted for the vice president.

STEWART: Were you supporting Stevenson before the Convention?

WAGNER: Yes. Back here Harriman [W. Averell Harriman] was Governor at the time, a very good friend of mine, and he was a candidate. And Carmine DeSapio, at least to me, made a grievous error. Long before we -- DeSapio was then a political leader here and of course very close to the Governor. He was his Secretary of State. I was having some difficulties with him. But the thing that provoked me very much, and also Hebert Lehman, was that long before the delegates were even chosen to the Democratic Convention, DeSapio took it on himself to pledge all of the delegates to vote for Harriman for president. At that time I said that he couldn't speak for me if I was a delegate, and I assumed they had to let the Mayor of New

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York City be a delegate, that I was for Stevenson. And Lehman the same way. I think we arranged, when we knew that Harriman didn't have a chance, the understanding we gave him a vote on the first ballot. To get back to the vice president situation. Some people in New York were pushing my name. I talked to Adlai Stevenson when he was here in the city. I'm sure he talked to a lot of other people here as well. Well, anyway we got out there, and I had breakfast with him I think, with Stevenson. And he indicated that he was going to get the nomination, and he then said that he was going to leave this up to the Convention, let everybody get a chance at it, and wanted me to know that and that there was some feeling on the part of I think it was the Speaker at that time, Sam Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn], that a Catholic wouldn't be beneficial to the ticket and so on and so forth -- he was also presiding at the Convention, as I remember -- and that he was going to leave it wide open.

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Well, of course I hadn't had any organization of any kind. I think Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had had some, and Jack Kennedy had had some. Maybe some others had. But we got something going a little bit the night before the nominations were to be made. And Harriman was very good about it. I saw every reason in the world why he might be a little peeved with me, and he had so stated. But he was kind enough to, the first thing the next morning, call up and say could he put my name in nomination. And they had lined up New York, Jersey -- my mother was born in Jersey -- Delaware and a scattering of votes around. So I was nominated. Puerto Rico I think supported me. I think we had 160- some odd votes.

STEWART: 162 ½.

WAGNER: Yes, on the first ballot. Anyway, the night before that there were some sort of reception in the Blackstone Hotel. This was quite late. Stevenson was there and a lot

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of the other -- Humphrey and Jack Kennedy. And I know that at that time Jack Kennedy asked me to go into the next room with him, and we had a little chat. Of course, he was more serious about it than I was because I knew it was more of a gesture, and we hadn't done anything, and there was greater demand for a fellow like himself. Anyway we, in the course of the conversation, worked out that, actually, if I felt that I wasn't getting anywhere which would be very obvious even before it started, we would ask that the votes to go him on the second ballot. That was agreed upon.

STEWART: This then was the basic agreement? I've heard varying stories of how this switch came about, as to who arranged it and precisely how it was arranged.

WAGNER: Well, there may have been some others talked to too, as well. But I know as far as I was concerned that I would recommend that the votes be -- anybody

who voted for me, on the second

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ballot to vote for Kennedy. I'm sure that probably other people moved in on it. I don't know whether DeSapio and Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast] at that time felt that they talked to somebody too. Anyway, he was grateful that I wasn't going to try to make a big deal about it because I liked the man anyway. Actually, I thought he'd be the best one of any of the candidates. So the next day we were nominated. And after the first ballot, the word went out to the others to shift.. I think they had some difficulty with the Puerto Rico delegation. A fellow named Joe Benitez [Jose A. Benitez] was running it. I remember most of the Puerto Rican delegation were from Chicago. They had the Puerto Ricans out in Chicago. Not many of them had the price to come up from Puerto Rico. And he was peeved at some remark Jack Kennedy made or something or other. I think that was the reason.

STEWART: Was there any dispute over your dropping out after the first ballot? As far as you were

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concerned, did you feel that you had gotten as many on the first ballot as you could possibly get and that you would automatically drop out?

WAGNER: I'm trying to recall about something that took place, what, eleven years ago, or something like that. I suppose one always hopes, but it's quite obvious that we were going against something that there's a greater if you want to call it an understanding of friendship between a lot of these people who were in Washington at that time than with the Mayor of New York City. And I think they realized too that was in some ways quite an innovation to take somebody who hadn't actually been in national politics. The discussion I think lasted a little while. I don't quite recall whether there were any holding out. I know that finally the agreement, it came out that way. Now, maybe somebody else knows.

STEWART: No, I was referring to the day of the actual balloting.

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WAGNER: The day of the actual balloting. No, well, they always take the fellow up in a room. I wasn't on the floor, I was in a room. It was my understanding that they were going to shift on the second ballot and also that there was some hope, or there was some thought, as I remember, that that change could put him over, which would be a good thing for.... It wouldn't be bad for me, it wouldn't be bad for the New York delegation, and so on and so forth, if a switch of that many votes could put him over. Well, it fell short.

STEWART: But there was no reluctance on your part to release the people who had voted for you on the first ballot to Kennedy?

WAGNER: No, because I wasn't on the floor. I was upstairs, and either I had a telephone communication to say, "Release them." I don't remember any reluctance. I couldn't see why I would. I didn't figure on picking up any more votes. We got a number of them. For instance, Grace Kelly's father, whom

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I knew, John Kelly from Philadelphia and a number of -- Joe Lawler. But some of the Pennsylvania delegation gave me some votes, and I'm sure it was because they knew me or something like that. It was perfectly obvious that they weren't going to hold on until the bitter end I don't think. They knew that I didn't have a chance. I don't recall any.. I couldn't see why I would because it was quite obvious you couldn't. I do remember now very vividly that there was a hope -- and somewhat from a selfish point of view, too -- that the switch over could give him enough to win.

STEWART: Did you make any effort after you dropped out to pick up any additional people for Kennedy in any other states?

WAGNER: I know we tried to help. It was all sort of a confusing time, and people tried to help in some of them. He had the New Hampshire group. I'm talking about some of the groups that I did know.

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STEWART: The people in New Jersey, for example, there was no problem with them going over to Kennedy?

WAGNER: No, I don't remember any. They were pretty well disciplined. They had the problem in '60 with Bob Meyner [Robert B. Meyner]. And that was a different story. They were, you know, going to move after the first ballot there but somebody had moved to make it unanimous before the Jersey fellows in '60 could change their votes. And, boy, were they mad. A lot of them had to go back and face their Irish Catholic constituencies and say, "I didn't get a chance to vote for Jack Kennedy." But I don't remember any reluctance.

STEWART: You mentioned that Kennedy did campaign for you in...

WAGNER: He made some recordings, TV shorts and recordings in '56. I remember because we made them up here, Lexington Avenue. And I was at that studio with him. During that period of time I know he was in the hospital.

STEWART: Right, that's correct. He went in in.... He went in...

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STEWART: Let me ask you a slightly unrelated question. You mentioned that you were a classmate of Foster Furcolo's. Is there anything you know about the feud between...

WAGNER: I know that Kennedy didn't think much of him because he said that at the time, you know, to this fellow at the dinner. And I remember during the '60 campaign there was a primary fight on up there for senator, was it?

STEWART: Right. The mayor of Springfield ran against Governor Furcolo.

WAGNER: The mayor of Springfield versus Furcolo. And Jack Kennedy happened to be in New York that day or that night of the primary, and the next morning I was with him. We went down to, oh, somewhere, I forget where it was. And the first thing he said was, "It was a tough day yesterday for Furcolo and Yale, wasn't it, Bob?" And he kidded me. He certainly wasn't disappointed in the outcome. He said that on a number of occasions. He didn't think much of it, and I'm sure that's

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no secret.

STEWART: Do you recall what contact you may have had with him in the period 1957-1957 before the presidential campaign got underway?

WAGNER: Well, do you mean his campaign?

STEWART: Yes, which, of course, started in early 1959 for the nomination.

WAGNER: He was up here in New York at a number of functions, and I'd see him. I'd see him in Washington at various things. To pinpoint any particular time is difficult for me because I did see him, you know, quite a bit. And, actually, when he would come up here to speak in New York, it'd be something they'd have the Mayor there too. I remember on one of the occasions, too, a meeting in '59, he spoke at the Alfred E. Smith Dinner. And the Mayor and the Governor always speak there, and then they have a guest speaker. We'll have something on that later on because the '60 one he was not happy about.

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STEWART: Do you recall when it became apparent to you that he was going to run in 1960?

WAGNER: Well, I think we knew that before. I think we were conscious of the fact that he was going to run for a number of years. I think as soon as the.... The general feeling, as I remember that, that after the '56 election.... I got involved then because Lehman resigned, and Lehman and Stevenson particularly asked me to run. I wasn't particularly happy about doing it, but I did. I ran a million, one hundred thousand votes ahead of Adlai Stevenson in the state, but I still couldn't win. Javits won by four hundred thousand. I remember afterward, I think, commenting to Jack Kennedy. I said, "I think perhaps you've found out you're a very lucky fellow." Which was a common -- it wasn't something that I thought up. A lot of people who were his friends felt that it was fortunate that he didn't do it. I remember, too, that there were some people here who had been.... Was Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] a candidate in '56 for the presidency?

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STEWART: Yes.

WAGNER: Yes, I know he had some friends up here. I had met Kefauver with these friends, but nothing ever developed on it because I was for Stevenson. Anyway, I think that it was obvious that Jack Kennedy had some plan in mind because he was moving around -- upstate, and here in New York, he was meeting with the leaders and so on and so forth. And they liked him. I remember in the winter of '60, I guess it was, in Washington at one of these dinners they have -- Jackson-Jefferson Day dinners and something -- afterward Senator Warren Magnuson who was a Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] supporter asked me to come back to his apartment. There were a lot of people there, and later on Senator Johnson came in, whom I knew. We had a conversation there for a little while, and he asked me what I thought the situation was in New York. And I said I thought one of the problems that he had was that Jack Kennedy had

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been up there quite often, made speeches at various functions in Buffalo, Syracuse, as well as New York City, that he was popular, that they liked him, and that frankly.... Johnson said he had come up to a dinner or two. I said, "Very frankly, that doesn't excite the people in New York City that much. If the Majority Leader in the Senate goes to Kalamazoo or someplace like that, it's big news. But people of all kinds, great people throughout the world go to dinner here in New York every night. The average person doesn't even know about it and wouldn't care less." And too, I understand that Johnson was handicapped in that he had to be in Washington a great deal because he was Majority Leader and he had to be on the floor. But the average person, again, in New York doesn't know who the Majority Leader is and doesn't follow with baited breath everything he does. I mean this is a handicap I guess he had. In my opinion, if he would want

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to do anything in New York, he had to get up and meet a lot of the county chairman, potential delegates to the Convention and at least show that he was interested because Kennedy had an awful jump on him. I don't know whether he was very happy about that, but I had to be truthful.

STEWART: What were your earliest intentions as far as the New York delegation was concerned? There have been theories that there was an agreement that none of the leaders would make any open endorsement before the Convention or at least...

WAGNER: At one time, the early part of the summer as I recall, Mike Prendergast, who was the Democratic state chairman, announced that the New York delegation had a favorite son for vice president, myself. Of course, it was quite obvious you couldn't have two Catholics on the ticket. I assume it was to sort of keep them in some sort of bargaining position.

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But at the same time -- and these fellows were being approached by the Symington [Stuart Symington] people, the Johnson people and so on and so forth -- they did know that many of the county chairmen, particularly upstate county chairmen, wanted to come out for Kennedy. You know, they were chomping at the bit because, number one, he had been up there, he was popular, and they wanted to get on the bandwagon. They did have some understanding -- I remember talking a couple of times -- to hold back for a while so that it would come at a more useful time rather than a piece-meal operation.

STEWART: Were you included in this understanding or this agreement?

WAGNER: Well, I was to the extent that I, on a couple of tours upstate, I had met with some of the county chairmen around there who, as I say a lot of them chomping at the bit. There were

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some who weren't. I mean you had some areas, a few of them felt that a Catholic would not be helpful to them up there. Felt at the time that, and I had the impression that the Kennedy people felt the same way, was to maybe get some other people to come out first. You haven't got a primary here, and oftentimes, just to have some leaders be your support doesn't sit too well with some of the public. A lot of things were going on -- I knew some things were going on, but I never was sure. of course, I knew Charlie Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] was always for Jack Kennedy. Some of these other fellows were playing a few games, you know, let

everybody come to talk to them, make them feel important. What I did at the time was to have a cocktail party at Gracie Mansion for -- I had one for Symington, had one for Johnson, I had one for Kennedy. I don't know, was there somebody else in the field?

STEWART: Well, Adlai Stevenson, but you wouldn't have....

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WAGNER: Well, wasn't...

STEWART: No.

WAGNER: Adlai talked to me when I was in Chicago one time, and he didn't know whether to get back in or whether to support. The man was a great friend of mine, and I had great affection for him, but he always had that trouble of trying to decide what to do. He talked to me down here, and then I think he went down to South American and toured and wrote some articles. I don't think Adlai was a candidate. It seems there were three or four of them. And we all invited all of the prominent Democrats, some of the political fellows, the independents, the reform people. You know, we tried to get a cross section of them. And I think they were successful, at least from the point of view that a lot of people came. They had a lot of coverage. I must say Johnson was always very appreciative of it.

I had also kept in contact with the Kennedy group, with Jack Kennedy particularly, through

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Alex Rose who was sort of the fellow who runs the liberal party and was friendly to Jack Kennedy. Alex is a very able political maneuverer, for want of a better word, I'll say tactician. And I think it was the morning after we had the cocktail party for Jack Kennedy, the next morning, he came up to the Mansion for breakfast. At that time, we worked out a schedule, where in a matter of a week later or two weeks later, or something like that, I would announce my support. And that was done at City Hall. I remember he called and his father called to thank me.

STEWART: I was going to ask you, had you talked to him, Ambassador Kennedy, at all during this period?

WAGNER: No. No, I hadn't. I know he had talked to -- he had had meetings with DeSapio and Prendergast and Buckley. I think he was going through with Charlie Buckley. Charley Buckley was in some business with him, real estate

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business, some other business over the years, and they're very close from a business point of view. And I'm sure that operating through Charlie, who was a good friend of mine, but I didn't agree with him on a lot of things, he would not be particularly concerned with the elected officials. He was more concerned with the state chairmen and De Sapio and the fellows who he thought could control delegates. Actually they couldn't control the delegates. Prendergast I'm sure was for Kennedy, but DeSapio played little games. Supposedly -- I mean, again, this is something that I wouldn't want to have available at this time -- there was some talk from some people I knew in Texas that some money was being spent up here, given to a couple of these fellows supposed to deliver, and they couldn't deliver anything because the delegates here, the people here were for Kennedy. Anyway, I made the announcement.

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Jack Kennedy called. His father was way out West somewhere, and he called me, thanked me very much either that evening or the next morning I got a call too from the Majority Leader in the Senate. It wasn't a congratulatory conversation. He was very rough and very unhappy that I had come out. You know, he told in the future if he ever wanted anything, he knew where to go for it. And he can be very rough if he wants to be. But there wasn't anything I could do. "I'm sorry. I mean, this is it."

STEWART: Well, exactly why did you announce and why at that time? What were the major factors as far as the timing was concerned?

WAGNER: Well, one of the major factors is that this is what Jack Kennedy thought would be helpful.

STEWART: Did he try to get you to come out before that?

WAGNER: I think he felt that it would help to have elected officials, and I think he knew, and I had certainly sent word, that I wanted to come out.

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It was just a question of when he thought would be, or when both of us thought would be, the proper time, as I remember, I said I'd be guided by what he thought would be helpful to him. I remember we'd also had a discussion on this, I think prior to this time, at the Brook Club, is it, up here?

STEWART: I don't know.

WAGNER: It's a club that he belonged to, the Links Club, I think -- either the Brook or Links Club -- with some people whom I knew too, friendly with them. Lou

Harris and some others. I'm trying to think of a lot that were there too. I'm sure I've skipped a lot. We then had a meeting after the delegates were chosen, a meeting in Albany, and let everybody talk. The vast majority were for Kennedy. There was some question in Nassau, a few of them hoping that Stevenson would do something, a few for Johnson, a few for Symington.

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STEWART: Had the Johnson and Symington people talked to you definitely?

WAGNER: Yes.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

STEWART: I wanted to ask you if the Symington and Johnson people had talked to you in terms of the vice presidency, or suggested it?

WAGNER: Well, I don't know who was -- I forget who was doing anything for Symington. I liked Stuart Symington. I could never take that particularly seriously.

STEWART: Were the Johnson people?

WAGNER: There were a couple of people active with Johnson who had mentioned it. Of course, it's just one of the things that I suppose I could have said that I didn't want to go along with Kennedy, and hoped that lightning would strike. But I felt for a number of reasons that I liked Kennedy, I thought he was a good kind of person who had a good chance to win;

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I thought it was about time that we broke down this barrier for a Catholic, and he was the kind -- the Harvard Catholic was going to do it, not a Holy Cross Catholic or a Fordham Catholic -- and that this was a decision that I had to make, to either try to play coy and hope it could happen. I'm sure that even if I did hold out that maybe I had some votes I could have delivered the other way. But I knew the vast majority still were for Jack Kennedy. There was never any bold commitment, but there were indications to be considered. That was a decision I had to make. I felt it was the right decision, and I thought Kennedy was the best candidate. As it turned out, it was right.

STEWART: There were rumors or there were charges in the paper after you announced that you, in effect, had broken the agreement to hold off and to keep the delegation neutral and that, in effect, you had jumped on the bandwagon earlier than many people would have liked.

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WAGNER: That might be so. They used to say so many things about me that I can't recall all of them, when I was Mayor. I do remember there was some little concern. For instance, when I announced, Prendergast or DeSapio, none of the others had any prior knowledge that I was going to do it.

STEWART: None at all?

WAGNER: Not that I know of. I didn't tell them anything about it. I didn't feel that I had to. They would have lost its effectiveness. I think, as I remember, that Jack wanted to have elected people come out, rather than just have it look like the organization fellows.

STEWART: Yes. Again, there have been stories in print that one of your prime considerations was the possibility of a Cabinet post. Was this ever discussed?

WAGNER: I remember there was a lot of talk. I know there wasn't any commitment on it at all in any discussion. And later on after he was

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elected, you know, there was some talk whether I'd be interested in being an ambassador or something. Charlie Buckley and some others had pressed Secretary of Labor or something like that. But I didn't do anything about it. There was certainly no commitment or else I would remember it very well. The realization, I suppose, and you look at that too, was that it was good for New York to have a President that was friendly to the Mayor of New York. There wasn't any commitment.

STEWART: You recall there was a minor furer in making up the delegation because Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor Roosevelt] and Governor Lehman were left off the delegation originally.

WAGNER: Yes.

STEWART: Did this have any connection to the commitment of the organization of the delegation as far as the Convention was concerned?

WAGNER: I don't think so. I remember they had a big

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fuss about it when we got up to that first meeting in Albany, the organization meeting. I know that I spoke and a number of others spoke to say this was a bad thing. Well, this was sort of small time stuff on the part of a few of the people like Prendergast and DeSapio taking it out on Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt. I know Lehman became a delegate. I don't know whether Mrs. Roosevelt did or not, didn't want to or something like that. But I know that up there a change was made and a substitution was made and Lehman was finally a delegate at the Convention.

STEWART: Teddy White [Theodore H. White] in his book on the campaign says that at the reception you held for Senator Kennedy at Gracie Mansion, let's see, June 18th, I think it was, that Kennedy was quite angry at a number of people in New York primarily because of the Lehman thing and because of the non-support he was getting from DeSapio and Prendergast. Do

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you recall that this was a particular, that he was angry this day or, as White says, he was "distant and frosty?"

WAGNER: Well, I don't recall that he was distant, at least to me. And I do know that among the sort of people that we tried to get there were people who were the Stevenson crowd and thought at least they could meet him, they could get to know him a bit. But I think he felt that perhaps DeSapio and Prendergast were playing little games, you know, and that there were a lot of the so-called Stevensonians around here who hadn't warmed up. They didn't think he was liberal enough, they didn't feel he, I suppose, wasn't as much of a one-world man as Adlai. A lot of them didn't feel that he had been in the forefront of the civil rights fight at that time. Between ourselves and Stevenson, Adlai wasn't either, but he gave the impression he was to these people. They had

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some doubts as to his liberalism I think. Not very justified. As I remember, too, that was one of the Purposes of having the party there, was to get a lot of them up there. Now I don't know whether Lehman came or not.

STEWART: There was also a bit of a squabble over the chairmanship of the delegation. Do you recall this, between -- a matter of choosing either you or...

WAGNER: Harriman.

STEWART: Harriman.

WAGNER: Yes. I was the chairman of the delegation in '56 -- was I?

STEWART: I'm not sure. Probably.

WAGNER: I'm not sure, not sure. It was in '64 that I was. I don't know whether I was nor not. But anyway I had assumed that I would be the chairman of the delegation as the top elected official of the state, and Averell was no longer governor. They came up and said they wanted to give some sort

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of an honor to Averell and so on and so forth. And I just kicked up the traces and said it was outrageous, that I wanted to be the chairman of the delegation, and that was it. They could give Averell any other title he wanted. I think he had some other title. They backed down.

STEWART: Did this have any relationship to the still possibilities of you being a candidate for vice president in case Kennedy faltered?

WAGNER: No. Being head of the delegation?

STEWART: Yes.

WAGNER: No, I didn't see that at all except that I did feel it was sort of a slap at the Mayor of New York when then general feeling was that he would be head of it and suddenly he's not. And it was also -- the feud was going on at that time too a bit between myself, and not so much with Prendergast as with DeSapio, and there was some ill feeling. This was part of it. I am

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sure part of it was to give me a little downgrading, teach me that they still had the strength. I just said, "Nothing doing." But I don't think the head of the delegation means that much.

STEWART: This feud...

WAGNER: It began to be made a little more out at the Convention only because I asserted myself more. Where in the past they were going to all the meeting and they were saying what the delegation was going to do, I just said, "Look, I'm also the head of the delegation, and if you're going to have any meetings, I'll go there or we'll raise the devil about any decision that you make."

STEWART: That's what I was going to ask you, the situation did worsen, the relationship between you and DeSapio after the...

WAGNER: Oh yes, well we had it out. We had it out heavy there. I told him of course I was led to

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believe that they were doing

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

a little talking to some of the other groups. Also that not only the head of the delegation, but some of the other people in the delegation were not being talked to about the vice presidency -- who's going to get it; who they were going to be for. And we had a real blowup. Of course they then had selected rooms -- I was staying at another place. I was staying at the Beverly Hills with my family. But they had rooms for my staff right over there, rooms at the Biltmore, and I changed them and took them somewhere else because again, you know, they said, "These are the rooms you're going to have. We decided on that." Maybe we were just like a bunch of kids but.... Then, for instance, the day after President Kennedy was nominated there was a meeting in Dave Lawrence's [David L. Lawrence] suite downtown in Los Angeles, and DeSapio and Prendergast were invited, and they asked me to go because they

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knew I was kicking up some trouble. The discussion was about the vice presidency. While all these pros were talking about it, Jack Kennedy called up on the phone and said, "Johnson has accepted to run. Is it alright with everybody?" I turned around, my two fellows looked at me, and they said, "What do you think?" I said, "Well, what do you think I think. He wants Johnson. That's it. I'm sure it will be helpful in the South and Southwest." Well, then they said, "That's not our real concern. The national chairman, that's the one. We don't want any Paul Butlers or people like that. We want one of our own. And you (John Bailey was there) you set a time tomorrow that we can sit down with Kennedy and tell him who we want for national chairman." "You'd be a good candidate." "Oh, no, you would." Dave Lawrence said, "Yes, Jack, oh, you did?" He said, "Jack Kennedy just announced

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Scoop Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] as the national chairman." That was the end of the conference of the big powers. It was very amusing. He really stepped right in and took hold.

STEWART: Was there ever a possibility that these people would try to change the voting makeup of the delegation when they got to Los Angeles?

WAGNER: No, they couldn't. You just couldn't move them.

STEWART: It was impossible?

WAGNER: Impossible. Actually there were approaches made to see whether they could get some votes for Johnson. And I think they had to be told very frankly that they couldn't get any more than the few that they already had. And it's very difficult when the Kennedy campaign there at the Convention was well organized and the other one wasn't. For pros they had less idea really of what was going on than the amateurs did. And I think there were an awful lot of people, number one, who

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were for Kennedy and, number two, they thought he was going to win. They didn't want to be part of any operation -- what was the reason they would change a vote? They couldn't.

STEWART: Were you approached by the Johnson people at Los Angeles?

WAGNER: Yes, we were, only to see whether they could get some votes. They didn't think it was all over. And I say, the pros didn't know. We had to tell them what the situation was.

STEWART: You saw Kennedy the morning after the nomination, probably in his suite along with Harriman, Prendergast and DeSapio. Do you recall this?

WAGNER: I remember seeing him, but I don't know whether they were lal there. I remember I saw him myself.

STEWART: The morning after he was nominated?

WAGNER: Yes.

STEWART: Do you recall what was discussed at that time?

WAGNER: I would assume -- I don't recall. I know one thing

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I discussed with him. I assume part of it was trying to get the campaign organized in New York state. I do recall that I had a call from Cardinal Spellman [Cardinal Francis J. Spellman] out there to use whatever influence I had to get Kennedy to speak at the Al Smith Dinner again. He was reluctant, he said he did well last year, and I said, well, I thought it would be important and so on. I remember talking to him about that. He left it up in the air a bit. And I remember meeting him alone, too, and maybe with the others.

STEWART: You also saw him the night before just after he was nominated, I believe. You were part of the party who escorted him...

WAGNER: ... escorted him up. There was an awful battle, you know, everybody trying to get in the front. So I wasn't quite in the front. I was a little -- not as pushy as some of the others. But, boy, that was an awful fight to be up

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front. But he asked Harriman and myself. I think Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] called on the phone there at the Convention to have us join the group to bring him up.

STEWART: What had been your relationship with Robert Kennedy prior to the Convention? Had he been involved in any of the conversations as far as commitments?

WAGNER: With me, I hadn't. I don't believe I talked to him. I don't think I knew him. I had met him, I guess, but I didn't My relations were with Jack Kennedy.

STEWART: You saw Kennedy in Hyannis right after the Convention. This, I assume, was to talk about the organization of the campaign in New York. Were there ever any commitments made that there wouldn't be an independent citizens' group set up?

WAGNER: That there wouldn't?

STEWART: Yes.

WAGNER: There was.

STEWART: I know there was eventually, but...

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WAGNER: Not, certainly, as far as I was concerned because it was quite obvious that, number one, I think they're good things -- I always do one anyway. And I think we probably thought about that same point that something along that line had to be done to give an opportunity to a lot of people to get into this thing because they wouldn't do it through the organization, the state committee. They wouldn't make contributions to it, they wouldn't work with it, and they wouldn't organize with it.

STEWART: There was later a big problem which Robert Kennedy got involved in regarding the setting up of this independent committee. Do you recall this?

WAGNER: I recall that the state committee people were very unhappy about it. I think they got a fellow who was very devoted to the Roosevelt family and

Kennedy family, Harry Brandt to head up the state committee. He was not a politician, he was in the theater business. I know there was a good

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deal of resentment. And I think Prendergast or somebody told Kennedy or somebody -- I remember he was going to tell somebody about it -- they resented the other committee under Tony Akers [Anthony J. Akers] I think.

STEWART: Right.

WAGNER: At 277 Park.

STEWART: What precisely was your role during the campaign, what major part or what part did you have?

WAGNER: Well, I made speeches -- I made quite a number of speeches -- helped out in organizing some of the rallies and so on, accompanied the President on a trip through the state. There was always a little worry, you know, some of the reformers said that, you know.... Of course, later on the following year we had to beat the old guard, but some of them said, "Well, the Mayor isn't quite a real reformer." And all this sort of thing. But we were accompanying the President on the trips throughout the state.

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STEWART: Did these problems with the reformers have an impact on the ability of the people to raise funds for the campaign?

WAGNER: Well, I think it had an effect, as I remember, on the organization being able to do it. The Democratic state committee setup had a hard time. The others raised a good deal more money, they had a lot of volunteers, they had a lot of enthusiasm, as I remember. Well, could we take a break now?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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