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Biographical Note

Hoff served as the Chairman of the Citizens for Kennedy group in the Fourth Congressional District in West Virginia (1960) and as the West Virginia member of the Democratic National Finance Committee (1960). In this interview, he discusses his role in John F. Kennedy's campaign for presidency, the role of religion in the presidential campaign in West Virginia, and his work on the Democratic National Finance Committee, among other issues.

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William Bruce Hoff

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Oral History Interview

with

William Bruce Hoff

August, 6, 1964
Parkersburg, West Virginia

By William Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, would you tell me about your first meeting with Senator Kennedy?

HOFF: I first met Senator Kennedy at the Chancellor Hotel in Parkersburg, West Virginia, when he was here for the purpose of making a political speech during the 1958 congressional campaign. My son, who practices law in Chicago, and I were introduced to him by Mr. Robert McDonough [Robert P. McDonough] and I had to go back to court and didn't get to hear his speech.

YOUNG: When did you become interested in Senator Kennedy as a presidential possibility?

HOFF: My interest in him as a presidential possibility antedated this first personal meeting with him. I was tremendously impressed by his performance at the Democratic National Convention of 1956 when he and Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] were competitors for the vice presidential nomination when Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] was nominated for the second time.

YOUNG: Well, would you go back and then come forward from that and tell me how you first became involved in the Kennedy primary campaign in West

Virginia? And your reasons, I might add, for becoming involved, your reasons for feeling that Senator Kennedy was the ideal man for the candidacy.

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HOFF: The man who was the principal advocate in Senator Kennedy's behalf in West Virginia was, as everybody knows, Robert P. McDonough, who is also of Parkersburg, and long before I actually met Senator Kennedy in 1958, there had been discussions between Bob McDonough and myself along this line. But as time wore on and after meeting him in 1958, I became convinced that he could get the Democratic nomination for president in 1960 and that he was the man, and I had the feeling that he was perhaps the only man who could beat Dick Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] in 1960.

YOUNG: Well, would you say a little bit about your becoming personally involved in the campaign then—the very earliest contacts you had with the Senator as a presidential candidate? Or rather, as a candidate for the presidential nomination.

HOFF: My first activity designed to bring about Senator Kennedy's nomination for president was that on April 26, 1959, I gave a luncheon at the Blennerhassett Hotel in Parkersburg, at which I had as my invited guests, approximately 30 people from Wood County, in which Parkersburg is located, and two or more persons from ten nearby counties. The speaker at this luncheon was Ted Sorenson [Theodore C. Sorenson] and his very well-implemented effort was to convince the persons in attendance at that luncheon that Senator Kennedy was the logical Democratic candidate for president of the United States in 1960. Of course, I strongly seconded Ted Sorenson's argument but said very little at that meeting and did very little except to pay the tab and give all the women in attendance a corsage and each of the men a carnation. It was very effective. Mr. Sorenson's performance brought very good results because, in the May 10, 1960, primary, Mr. Kennedy carried every one of the ten

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counties represented at the luncheon, notwithstanding that it had been thought previously that this would be a difficult area for him on account of the circumstance that there are relatively few persons of his religious faith living in this area.

YOUNG: Were these ten counties a particular congressional district or just a general geographical area?

HOFF: A general geographical area rather than a congressional district.

YOUNG: These would be the counties north and to the east of Parkersburg in West Virginia—along the river?

HOFF: Yes, I think I could name the most of them—they included Roane, Wirt, Calhoun, Ritchie, Jackson, Mason, Gilmer, Tyler, Pleasants, and, I think, perhaps, Wetzel. Now, I may have left a county out but I think I have named the most of the counties represented at that luncheon.

YOUNG: Well, before Senator Kennedy announced his intention to file in the West Virginia primary, did you feel at that time that his religion might be a handicap in West Virginia?

HOFF: Well, of course, I had supported Alfred E. Smith in 1928, and he hadn't done well in West Virginia, apparently, to some degree, on account of his religion. But I was confident at the time that it would not defeat Senator Kennedy in West Virginia. Later, on May 22, 1959, at Senator Kennedy's invitation, I had lunch with him in his office in the Senate Office Building in Washington, and on that occasion we discussed this question as to whether or not his Catholic faith in religion would adversely affect him in West Virginia, and I, of course, told him that I thought it would be a factor but not a disqualifying or a defeating factor and not a decisive factor.

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YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, before we started this interview I think you told me a story about going to Senator Kennedy's office with the idea of briefing him on West Virginia politics. Was this luncheon meeting the meeting that you referred to earlier?

HOFF: Yes.

YOUNG: Would you say a word about your reaction to the Senator's knowledge of West Virginia at that time?

HOFF: Well, at the time of that interview, I was 59 years old, and had spent a lifetime in politics in West Virginia in my own behalf and in behalf of other candidates, and I felt that I was intensively familiar with all the political cross-currents in both major parties in West Virginia and particularly in the Democratic Party, and I went there partly with the idea of giving Senator Kennedy what I considered would be valuable and useful information to him. We hadn't gotten very far in our discussion when I became thoroughly convinced that Senator Kennedy knew a great deal more about West Virginia politics as of that date than I did, and I desisted.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, we might just lump the next few questions in this general category of personal contacts with Senator Kennedy up through the May 10, 1960, primary. Would you tell me about any other meetings you had with him, personal contacts, anecdotes?

HOFF: Well, I wouldn't classify this as an anecdote, but I think that the next most

interesting development in relation to Senator Kennedy was that at the organization of the Citizens for Kennedy group in Charleston, as you know, Senator Charlie Love [Charles M. Love Jr.] was designated as the head of that group, and I was asked to act as chairman for the Fourth Congressional District.

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My name appeared on the stationery of the Citizens for Kennedy group as being the Fourth Congressional District member of the group and on November 18, 1959, I received a letter from a strong former supporter of mine, living in the Bluefield, West Virginia, region, vigorously remonstrating with me for embracing the cause of a Roman Catholic for President of the United States, suggesting that my supposed Presbyterian ancestry would rebel against any such action on my part, making offensive references to supposed weaknesses and misconduct of the Catholic Church. I wrote a letter replying to Mr. G. M. Feamster, who was the Bluefield citizen who had written this letter, vigorously defending both Senator Kennedy and the Catholic Church, of which I am not a member, and, on December 2, 1959, I sent a copy of that letter to Ted Sorenson, suggesting to Ted that probably the matter was not of sufficient consequence to warrant annoying Senator Kennedy with it, but Mr. Sorenson, apparently, didn't follow my instructions in that regard, and, on December 8, 1959, I received a letter from Senator Kennedy, which I presently value most highly, which read:

“Mr. William Bruce Hoff
Citizens Bank Building
Parkersburg, West Virginia

Dear Bruce:

Ted Sorenson has shown me your exchange of correspondence with Mr. Feamster. I want you to know how deeply I appreciate your eloquent and stirring defense. It is heartening indeed to realize that I have a friend like you in West Virginia.

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy

JFK:jl”

[Copies of Feamster's letter to me and of my letter to Feamster are attached

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to this transcript as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.] That was the next important contact that I had with Senator Kennedy, and my next contact thereafter—

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff—may I interrupt a minute? I'd like to talk about this letter to Mr. Feamster a little bit more. You said that Mr. Feamster assumed you were a

Presbyterian, and you also mentioned that you are not a Roman Catholic. Would you mind indicating your religious preference or is this relevant?

HOFF: I don't mind mentioning it, and it is relevant. I happen to be a member of the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

YOUNG: Well, then, would you go ahead, and, if you could for me, summarize the main points that you made to Mr. Feamster and that you used then throughout the primary in your defense of the Catholic candidate for the presidency. If you could indicate in a specific way the points which you felt should not be used against Senator Kennedy in his campaign for the Democratic nomination.

HOFF: Of course, I will, if it is requested, make available to you, and anyone else that wants it, a copy of my letter to Mr. Feamster replying to his critical letter. The first position I made known to Mr. Feamster was that it was not a new departure for me, that is, supporting a Roman Catholic for president of the United States. I reminded him that I had, along with what I considered the hard-core of the Democratic Party, supported Alfred E. Smith for the presidency of the United States in 1928. I reminded him also that the Party and the country, in sack cloth and ashes, had, for four years, regretted the mistake that was then made in not electing Smith as president

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of the United States. And I told him that Smith had been put in nomination for president of the United States by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and that what was good enough for Franklin Roosevelt was good enough for me, and, very deferentially, good enough for Mr. Feamster. I went on to point out that Senator Kennedy's background, both his own and that of his family, was as distinguished as that of any man in the United States, making reference to the distinguished service which Joseph Kennedy had rendered to President Roosevelt and to the country during Roosevelt's terms in office. While I am a Protestant and expect to remain so, I took the position that there was no group in America more steadfastly opposed to Communism and more bitterly opposed by Communism than the Roman Catholic Church, both its clergy and its laity—this in response to the suggestion in Mr. Feamster's letter that Mr. Kennedy, because of his Catholicism, might be likened to a Communist or something of that nature. I told Mr. Feamster that I thought there might be some small remnant of the religious intolerance which contributed to Smith's defeat in 1928 but that I didn't think it would amount to much, and that turned out to be true in the showdown in West Virginia on May 10, 1960. The main point that I made, however, was that I felt that it was imperative that the executive leadership of this country be returned to the party which has watched over the destinies of this country from the beginning of this nation and that I thought that Jack Kennedy was the person best qualified, and most likely, to defeat Nixon in the 1960 campaign.

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YOUNG: Well, did you add anything to these arguments as religion developed as something of an issue in West Virginia or does this more or less summarize the position you took in the primary?

HOFF: I passed this letter on, not only to Ted Sorenson, but to Senator Love, who was the head of Citizens for Kennedy in West Virginia, and he, I'm sure, made use of it, or at least so he informed me.

YOUNG: Did you do a great amount of public speaking as part of the primary? In favor of the Senator, or was your work more of an administrative nature?

HOFF: I should go back and say that at a meeting with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] and Kennedy proponents from all over West Virginia, at the Blennerhassett Hotel in Parkersburg, on January 7, 1960, the question was raised as to whether Senator Kennedy should enter the West Virginia presidential preference primary, and I, along with the most of the other people present, vigorously argued that he should enter and that he could and would win, and we even got into the question of who would run for delegates and a number of the people present announced that they were going to run and did run and that included myself. I became a candidate for delegate at large to the Democratic National Convention and was elected in the May 10 primary. I did very little speaking. I attended a good many Democratic dinners around and about West Virginia, but they don't afford much of an opportunity for delegate candidates to speak. They are introduced but that's about the size of it. I did give and finance an ox roast for Senator Kennedy at the City Park in Parkersburg on the 1st day of May, 1960,

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about nine days before the primary and introduced Senator Kennedy to that gathering. Senator Kennedy, in his subsequent correspondence with me, invariably referred to that ox roast and said that he had not seen a better crowd anywhere in the nation during the primary campaign than was produced at the ox roast in Parkersburg.

YOUNG: I think you mentioned to me in conversation before we started this interview that some other sort activity had been suggested and it was your idea to have an ox roast. Would you go back over that?

HOFF: At the time of the planning of this ox roast, or, I should say, the circumstances leading up to this ox roast were something like this. Dave Hackett and Pamela Turnure were in Senator Kennedy's campaign headquarters in Parkersburg, in a building very close to where my office was then located, and I was frequently a visitor there, and they had discussed with me a plan to have a tea at which Senator Kennedy would be the guest of honor on May 1, 1960, which is the same day on which the ox roast was held. And I said: "Hell's Fire! This is the Democratic Party. Let the Republican Party have the teas. What we need is an ox roast." Mr. Hackett and Miss Turnure raised the question of the

expense of an ox roast and I at that time volunteered that I would take care of that and we went on and had the ox roast.

YOUNG: Well, you introduced Senator Kennedy at the ox roast, didn't you?

HOFF: Yes.

YOUNG: Do you remember the nature of your remarks or any of the events surrounding the day?

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HOFF: I very seldom speak off the cuff, except in arguments to juries. I had a prepared statement, a copy of which will be made available to you or to anyone else that wants it.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, are there any special sections of that introduction of Senator Kennedy that you would like to read to me now?

HOFF: After first reminding my audience that George Washington, a Virginian, had traveled to Massachusetts, and was there at Cambridge, on the Cambridge Commons, invested with the high command of the Continental Army, and pointed out that the men of Virginia and Massachusetts had resolutely joined hands in a noble but perilous cause, and arguing that nowhere on earth had the flame of freedom burned more brightly than in the Virginias and Massachusetts, I went on to say:

“In that early day, a Virginian traveled to Massachusetts and went on from there to become the Father of his Country and one of the great men of all time. Today, a Massachusetts man has traveled to West Virginia and is now in our midst. It should not be dismissed as a mere coincidence that the Virginian on the Cambridge Commons on July 3, 1775, was almost exactly the same age as the Massachusetts man I will present to you today.”

And, of course, I went on to strongly recommend Senator Kennedy as the Democratic presidential candidate in the 1960 campaign.

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YOUNG: Did you have any other contacts with Senator Kennedy then before the primary other than the ones which you have already described, the ox roast, and the meeting in the Senator's office?

HOFF: Senator Kennedy was in Parkersburg three times during the primary campaign. According to my belief, he opened his campaign with a breakfast

or a coffee at the Elks Club. Of course, I was there, and present with him and a picture was taken of the Senator and myself. He was in Parkersburg again on the day of the ox roast, May 1, 1960, and then he was in Parkersburg for a parade led by the Parkersburg High School Big Red Band on the day before the primary, May 9, 1960, and I, of course, saw him on all three of those occasions. There was correspondence between us in the interval before the primary and after the primary and up to the time of the Convention.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, I wonder if we might turn to something else. To give some evaluation of why you feel Senator Kennedy won in West Virginia. There is the old joke, of course, that the candidate won because he got the most votes, but this simply begs the question, of course, of why he got the most votes. What factors do you feel worked in favor of the Senator's victory in this particular primary?

HOFF: It would be difficult to enumerate, on the spur of the moment, all of the factors which contributed to Senator Kennedy's victory in West Virginia. He had a very large group of deeply dedicated supporters working for him. He visited frequently in this State and made himself tremendously

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popular here by his manner, and, I should say, in part, by the brevity of his speeches. This is something in the nature of an anecdote. My wife is a long-suffering individual. She is an apostate from the Republican faith in politics, having become a Democrat substantially contemporaneously with our marriage in 1929. She has attended numerous political banquets, and is exceedingly bored by long-winded speakers. She heard Senator Kennedy, for the first time, otherwise than on the radio, at a Democratic banquet in Charleston at which, as I recall, he, as the principal speaker, was introduced by former Attorney General John Fox, and Senator Kennedy spoke at that gathering...

YOUNG: This is the end of Tape #1 with Mr. William Bruce Hoff of Parkersburg. Tape #2 will follow.

HOFF: ...for not more than fifteen minutes. My wife was tremendously impressed, and also tremendously relieved to get out of that hot and crowded hall in such good time, and she remarked that this was the man that she was for for president of the United States. This was back about 1958, or possibly 1959. This was characteristic of all the Kennedys, and, in enumerating the factors which contributed to Senator Kennedy's success in West Virginia, I would be remiss if I did not give large credit to the highly efficient activities of his brother, Robert Kennedy, who had charge of the campaign in Southern West Virginia, and spent a vast deal of time in the State Capitol, Charleston, and the Southern West Virginia coal mining counties. I had an opportunity to observe the effectiveness of Robert Kennedy at a banquet which I attended at Pineville, in Wyoming

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County, West Virginia, which is in the heart of the coal mining section of West Virginia. Supposedly, this was a non-partisan testimonial dinner for an octogenarian distinguished member of the Democratic Party, Judge Bailey [John Moran Bailey]. The principal speaker at this banquet was James Roosevelt. While he talked mostly about his father, Franklin D. Roosevelt, his speech was, in the main, non-controversial, and it was of such a nature as to be palatable to several prominent Republicans who were present at the meeting. After Roosevelt had spoken for not to exceed twenty-five minutes, Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] who was present and was called upon to speak, spoke approximately forty minutes—frankly, to the great distress of many of his hearers. When Humphrey had finished speaking, Robert Kennedy, who was at the opposite end of the banquet table and there representing his brother, was called on to speak. Robert Kennedy spoke not more than four minutes. He made mention of the circumstance that he had spent a great deal of time in Southern West Virginia and had gotten to know the people well and went on to say that he thought one of their major attributes was that of courage. And he went on to say that, regardless of the outcome of the primary, and of the election, that he would always value what he had learned in West Virginia. Robert Kennedy illustrated his point about courage by telling the story of the paratroop general who encountered a red-haired, freckle-faced, young paratrooper and inquired of him if he liked to fly. To which the youngster replied that he did not. The general then asked him if he liked to jump. And the young man said: “No. I don’t.” His patience having become exhausted, the general said:

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“Well, what the Hell are you doing in the paratroopers?” To which the young paratrooper answered: “I like to be with people who like to jump.” This brought the house down, and I’m sure illustrates my point that the Kennedys were basically people who spoke briefly and to the point. This appealed to political audiences. This had a great deal to do with Senator Kennedy’s success in West Virginia. Senator Kennedy’s vast familiarity with everything that was important to West Virginia, and his wholly impersonal manner of dealing with almost any situation regardless of what it might be, carried great conviction to the minds of the people of West Virginia. And there was very little opposition to him except among very narrow-minded religious groups.

YOUNG: Well, was there much of this narrow-minded opposition in Wood County and in your own home town?

HOFF: Well, I had apprehended that Senator Kennedy would have his greatest trouble in the counties of Cabell, of which Huntington is the county seat, and Wood, of which Parkersburg is the county seat. I have long thought that in these two counties what I sometimes possibly disrespectfully refer to as the straight-laced Protestant clergy exercise a more rigid control over the parishioners than in any other sections of West Virginia, or at least in any other populous sections of West Virginia. I don’t know that either Huntington or Parkersburg are in what we sometimes refer to as the Bible Belt, but what I say is so. We did manage to carry Wood County for Senator Kennedy in the primary, but this

thing I'm talking about manifested itself in the fall campaign because, while Senator Kennedy

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carried West Virginia as a whole, handily, he lost Wood County by a considerable majority, and I'm sure he also lost Cabell County by a greater majority.

YOUNG: Are these counties that normally would go Republican anyhow, or do you feel that religion played a special role here?

HOFF: Wood County normally votes Republican, although we have a small and what I consider fictitious registered Democratic majority in Wood County. But, in the fall campaign, Senator Kennedy lost Wood County out of proportion to the normal Republican victory in this county. I am as sure as I am of anything that, once my straight-laced Protestant Democratic friends had learned that Senator Kennedy was not going to change our system of government because he was Roman Catholic, they would have voted for him very solidly in 1964 had he not been assassinated. In other words, I'm sure that Senator Kennedy's performance as president disabused the minds of the people of both Wood and Cabell in relation to the matter of the fitness of a Roman Catholic for president of the United States, or, at least, of this Roman Catholic for president of the United States.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, we have heard a great deal about Senator Kennedy's interest in West Virginia as a part of Appalachia, the use of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., in the campaign, yet Parkersburg normally would not be considered a part of depressed West Virginia; it is relatively prosperous in terms of the rest of the State. With this in mind, did Senator Kennedy make any special appeal to Wood County or the Ohio Valley area, of which Wood County is certainly a very important section, as opposed, for instance,

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to the kind of appeal he might have made in Welch or other sections of the coal fields?

HOFF: Of course, Wood County is not a depressed area and it has not been a depressed area. And Senator Kennedy in campaigning in West Virginia, and especially during the primary, commented on the high degree of development and the manifest industrial prosperity in the Ohio Valley. But I think that the reason that he was beaten in Wood County in the fall campaign was because of the religious problem. I think it was not because he lacked appeal on other scores. I feel that that was responsible for his failure to carry this county in the fall campaign, but, as I say, I am sure that it wasn't long after he became president that the people here changed their views, those of them who had voted for Nixon because of the religious issue.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, if we may go back to the primary for just a minute, what were the discernible differences between Senator Kennedy and Senator Humphrey? In

terms of their appeal to the people of West Virginia and in terms of platform or promises or any other way in which you might suggest differences between the two in the primary?

HOFF: I never regarded the 1960 primary as a contest between Senator Kennedy and Senator Humphrey. Rather, I regarded it as a contest between Senator Kennedy and the field of candidates including Senator Humphrey, Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], Senator Symington [Stuart Symington II,] Governor Stevenson, and Senator Kennedy's victory in West Virginia was not just a victory over Hubert Humphrey.

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It was a victory over all these candidates, because, well, illustratively, Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia vigorously opposed Senator Kennedy in the West Virginia primary with every means at his command, some of a dubious nature, in my judgment. And he, of course, was not speaking for Hubert Humphrey. He was advocating the cause of Lyndon Johnson. Many of my own strong personal friends were disappointed with me, and while possibly voting for me for delegate, were hopeful that I would return to what they considered my first love, and again, for the third time, support Governor Stevenson. And I'll say very frankly that I assured those friends of mine that, if Senator Kennedy failed and if he said that the jig was up, I would then have gone to Governor Stevenson and I think I would have taken with me the most of the West Virginia delegation, at least a numerical majority of the West Virginia delegation.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, before we started this interview you told me about meeting Senator Byrd on the floor of the convention and some placards and some signs that were involved in a little discussion you had with the Senator. Could you repeat that story?

HOFF: Not in its entirety.

YOUNG: The cause of history must be served. [Laughter]

HOFF: I can tell you the main line of the controversy. Senator Byrd is not, as I have already implied, one of my favorite people. There had been various clashes between Senator Byrd and myself during the primary

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campaign. Relations between us were very ragged, to say the least. However, when we both arrived at Los Angeles, I had a meeting with Senator Byrd in which I told him that, while we couldn't agree on who should head the ticket, I thought we ought to be able to agree that the Democratic Ticket ought to contain the names of both Kennedy and Johnson. I told him that I was sure that the presidential nominee would be Kennedy, and I urged him to use whatever

influence he might have with Senator Johnson to accept the vice presidential nomination in the event Senator Kennedy offered it to him. Frankly, I thought that he would. There had been some previous discussion between Senator Kennedy and myself along that line before anybody went to Los Angeles. Senator Byrd agreed with me about that, and that had a tendency to improve the relations between us. But, on the day when the nominating speeches were made at the Convention, Senator Byrd was sitting in the second seat from me. Frank Maxwell, a highly respected Democrat from Clarksburg, was sitting between us. Senator Johnson's name was being placed in nomination by Sam Rayburn. And, at that time, Senator Byrd produced on the convention floor about six or eight or possibly ten placards, blue on yellow, and about 16 x 28 inches, reading: "West Virginia pledged to Lyndon B." He had some of the placards underneath the seats, and was holding one of them up and waving it in the air while Senator Johnson's name was being put in nomination. I remonstrated with Senator Byrd about the use of this placard, calling his attention to the fact that the West Virginia delegation wasn't pledged to

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anybody; that our law does not make any provision for the pledging of delegates to any particular candidate; that, while a candidate for delegate may pledge himself and advertise that fact while campaigning, as I did to Senator Kennedy, he is not bound by any such pledge, and can change his mind and vote for whatever candidate might be the candidate of his choice at the time of balloting at the convention. Senator Byrd didn't appear to be impressed by this argument, and told me that I could use similar placards on behalf of Senator Kennedy when his name was put in nomination and when there was a demonstration on the floor on his behalf. I told him that I would not use any such placard on behalf of Senator Kennedy, nor would I countenance its use by any other members of the delegation who were, like myself, favorable to Senator Kennedy because the placard would not be stating the truth. One word led to another and we became quite vociferous, and Frank Maxwell entered the discussion, and suggested to Senator Byrd that his placard was probably in bad taste and ought to be shelved. Senator Byrd then put the placard, which he was waving in the air, underneath the seats along with the others that he had there, and didn't even participate in the demonstration that followed after Senator Johnson's name had been put in nomination.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, you mentioned in telling this story that you had discussed some time earlier the possibility of Senator Johnson running with Senator Kennedy. Is there any more about that discussion that you could say?

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HOFF: No, except that there was an exchange of correspondence between us (my letter to Senator Kennedy of 6-15-60, and his letter to me of 6-20-60) wherein the matter of his running mate was discussed, but without specific mention of Senator Johnson's name. Of course, we do know that Senator Kennedy did select Senator Johnson and we do know that Senator Johnson was nominated and, of course, was elected,

and, as a result of such selection and such election and the tragic circumstance of President Kennedy's assassination, is now president of the United States. There was an aftermath of this argument between Senator Byrd and myself which, as I say, I think probably ought not to be put on this record. This occurred there on the convention floor. You wouldn't have to get this from me. The story that I told you off the record about the occurrence is known all over West Virginia. The gist of it was that I told Senator Byrd that I didn't appreciate the letter he had written me after it was known that I had been elected delegate at large to the Convention, in which he assured me that he would be glad to be of whatever help he could to enable me to enjoy my stay in Los Angeles. I went on to tell him that I had traveled farther around a certain well-known bedroom object, in use in bygone days, looking for the handle than he had traveled outside of Sophia, West Virginia, before he started running around over the country and the world at government expense. This incident is a legend in West Virginia now.

YOUNG: I think Benjamin Franklin referred to the object as a well-known household vessel. [Laughter]

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HOFF: That's what I am talking about.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, how did your role change then following Senator Kennedy's nomination? I believe that specifically you served in the Kennedy campaign in the area of finances. Would you describe that accurately and exactly and better than I have done?

HOFF: Well, of course, as you know, there is a National Finance Committee composed of one member from each of the 50 states. I was designated by the political authorities in West Virginia, with the approval of Matthew McCloskey [Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr.], as the West Virginia member of the Democratic National Finance Committee and served in that capacity throughout the fall campaign and up to and a little bit beyond the election day.

YOUNG: You were helping to raise money both in West Virginia and nationally, is that correct?

HOFF: No. Each member of the Democratic National Finance Committee performs his services in his own state. For instance, the member from Virginia solicits for contributions for use on the national level in Virginia. The member from West Virginia solicits for contributions for use on the national level in West Virginia. Now, of course, I, as the West Virginia member of the Democratic National Finance Committee, invited other persons to serve with me and conduct solicitation on the local level in different areas and sections of West Virginia. This business of raising money for use on the national level in West Virginia is a tough assignment. We are not used to it. I don't think we have ever

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subscribed our assigned quota and I know, of course, that I did not achieve that result. We fell down. But I do feel that we probably raised more money for use on the national level in West Virginia in 1960 than in any other year. This may not be true as a matter of statistics, but I feel that that is so. I don't mean solely as a result of my efforts, but as the result of various efforts, Dollars for Democrats, and various things of that nature including my activities. I am sure that there was a greater number of West Virginia contributors contributing in the 1960 campaign than at any other time in the history of the Party in this state. We were working under adverse circumstances in West Virginia in raising money for use on the national level. We were not in control of the State Administration in West Virginia during the 1960 campaign. We had lost the State House to the Republicans in the 1956 campaign, and we were trying to regain the State House and there was great competition for money for political use. There was solicitation for use on the county level and vigorous solicitation for use on the state level. The people who were trying to raise money for use on the county level didn't look with too great favor on money going to the state and national level, and the people seeking to raise money for use on the state level didn't encourage the sending of money out of West Virginia for use on the national level. I don't think I gained any popularity by my activity in this regard. However, Harry Hoffman, political editor of the *Charleston Gazette*, was kind enough to write a very nice editorial, not only commending me for my efforts in that regard, but complimenting Senator Kennedy on his choice of leaders.

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And, in this editorial, Harry Hoffman also mentioned a number of other West Virginians in addition to myself as being unselfishly dedicated to Kennedy's cause. Before you make any comment about that editorial, I would like to go back and say that one of the strongest factors, or perhaps the strongest single factor contributing to Senator Kennedy's success in the West Virginia primary was the support of the *Charleston Gazette*, and, specifically, the support of Harry Hoffman, who is the political editor, or the chief political editor of the *Charleston Gazette*. Now, don't misunderstand me about that, the *Charleston Gazette* I think was for Adlai Stevenson; he was the *Gazette's* preference. But I think the *Charleston Gazette* was resigned to the belief that Stevenson was not going to get the nomination, and thought that the best candidate that the Democratic Party could field was Jack Kennedy, and, while the *Gazette* advocated the nomination of Stevenson, it said, consistently, that Senator Kennedy was acceptable and defended him right down the line. This was partly due to the circumstance that Senator Robert C. Byrd was opposing his nomination and the *Charleston Gazette* had very little use for Senator Byrd at that time, and, as far as I know, very little use for him now. I think the *Charleston Gazette's* fairness to Senator Kennedy had a vast deal to do with his success in West Virginia, and I know that such was President Kennedy's own personal view. I think that if I were going to name the two West Virginians for whom the President had the highest regard I would certainly put Harry Hoffman next to Robert McDonough and possibly on a par with Robert McDonough. Actually, I saw him single out

Harry Hoffman from a whole field of newspaper people and get out of his car to go over and shake hands with him at Los Angeles.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, I'd like to go back to this money-raising business. I think that two interesting questions are raised by this problem of raising money in West Virginia to be used nationally. What do you feel is the source of this reluctance other than the ones you have already mentioned, the simple competition for money at the county and state level. Why, historically, has West Virginia been reluctant to raise money for national campaigning? Is it a question of poverty, just simply not having the money, or are there other factors?

HOFF: That's a difficult question to answer. It may be that I have overstated the position when I said that West Virginians, generally speaking, are reluctant to contribute on the national level. I think that they are reluctant. And I think that this is a matter of history. And I think that it manifests itself in the circumstance that we have always been behind with our quota. But we're not the only state that has been behind. I think the matter of contribution on the national level, that is, lack of interest in contributing on the national level, is probably prevalent in a great many of the states, and particularly the smaller states.

YOUNG: You did mention that you thought more individuals contributed in 1960. Do you feel that Senator Kennedy at the head of the ticket had something to do with more people being interested, at least, in giving money for the national campaign?

HOFF: I'm sure that is true.

YOUNG: Well, do you have something more to say on this before we move on to something else?

HOFF: I'm through.

YOUNG: If you would describe, Mr. Hoff, the kind of advertising you did and then the results from it.

HOFF: Well, I used a number of approaches to the matter or business of attempting to interest West Virginia Democrats in contributing political funds for use on the national level. I wrote, I expect, 2,500 letters to organization Democrats and to Democratic lawyers. My response from Democratic lawyers was good. From organization Democrats, generally, it was not good, and I attribute the lack of success there to the circumstances that I have already mentioned of preoccupation in raising money for use on the

county level and on the state level. I resorted also to newspaper advertising, at my own expense. I ran three separate advertisements. The first one was entitled "To West Virginia Democrats," in which I reminded them that they had gone along with me in helping me to nominate Kennedy at Los Angeles, and I asked them to now go along with me to contribute funds to insure that Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson would have an opportunity to be heard and seen by the people. This advertisement was published in practically every Democratic newspaper in West Virginia. The second advertisement was in the form of an open letter designed to be cut out and mailed by the contributor to my office as the West Virginia member of the Democratic National Finance Committee. The third

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blanketing of the state was with a newspaper advertisement containing a quotation from Senator Kennedy's acceptance speech in which among other things, he said, and I quoted him as saying:

"It has been a long road from that first snowy day in New Hampshire to this crowded convention city. Now begins another long journey taking me into your cities and homes all over America. Give me your help, your hand, your voice, your vote. Recall with me the words of Isaiah—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. As we face the coming challenge, we too shall wait upon the Lord and ask that he renew our strength. Then shall we be equal to the test. Then we shall not be weary. And then we shall prevail."

And then the advertisement concluded with the suggestion that the people should "vote" their dollars now to ensure a Kennedy victory on November 8. These advertisements, I'm afraid, cost me more money than was realized from their publication. It might very well have been better for me to have sent the cost of the advertisements to the Democratic National Committee at Washington if the raising of money had been my sole objective. Frankly, I doubt that these advertisements and letters to organization Democrats and Democratic lawyers produced enough money to justify the expense of running the advertisements and sending the letters, but that was not my sole objective—I feel that the by-product result was good.

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I feel that the letters and the advertisements helped keep the name of Senator Kennedy before the people and contributed in some small way to his success in West Virginia.

YOUNG: Do you remember approximately how much West Virginia in the final analysis did contribute to the national campaign?

HOFF: I never did get a final report. I had a great many letters from Matthew McCloskey complimenting me on my efforts, and, at one time he made a

partial report, but I never did get a final report. There were many contributions of which I had no record. In the case of the larger contributors, I recommended, as a matter of policy, that it would be better for McCloskey himself to make the approach; that he was likely to get more money, a larger contribution, than if the contribution was made to my office. I'm sure that many of the larger contributions were made directly to Mr. McCloskey. I think that is characteristically true. The man who is going to make a large contribution to a political campaign prefers to deal with somebody higher up than just a member of the committee. He prefers to do business with the chairman or the treasurer at the national level. Most people who work or contribute want recognition. And they want the beneficiary to know how industrious or generous they have been. That's politics. And there's nothing wrong with it.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, I wonder if we could go on to some other subject then unless you have something more that you would like to say on this matter of finances.

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HOFF: Well, frankly, the business of attempting to raise money is a thankless job. I worked very hard at it. I'm not too proud of the results. All I can say is that I did my best under adverse circumstances. Frankly, I have a feeling that I may not have made myself particularly popular with a good many West Virginia Democrats because of the vigor of my solicitations. In some instances I was somewhat critical because of the lack of response from areas where I felt that there should have been more substantial contributions. Illustratively, from the Parkersburg area, we got fairly representative contributions. I think that was because of my personal influence with people nearby. We got very little from Wheeling, very little from Charleston, very little from Huntington, very little from such areas as Clarksburg, and the eastern Panhandle, with the exception that the lawyers resident in these towns and areas generally were fairly generous. The lawyers of this state, I think, supported Senator Kennedy very strongly.

YOUNG: Well, is it normal for lawyers to have more interest in the national ticket, or do you think there were special circumstances in this election that made the lawyers more generous?

HOFF: I think that lawyers, generally, are more interested on the national level. But I also think that lawyers, generally, have no religious bias or prejudice. I think that they are open-minded people but I think that they were doing what they felt was good for the country. And

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I'm sure that they gave more money, the lawyers as a professional group, gave more money to the Democratic campaign on the national level in 1960 than they ever did before.

YOUNG: The same statement could not be made, however, of West Virginia doctors?

HOFF: No, although I had a few contributions from members of the medical profession, but they were few and far between. And that would be true also of West Virginia dentists.

YOUNG: Well, did you notice any active opposition on their part because of any feeling that the Democrats might favor a program of federal assistance to medicine?

HOFF: Well, I think that is undoubtedly true. I can't say that I noticed it particularly in this connection. I was already aware of it and I might say, painfully aware of it.

YOUNG: Mr. Hoff, in bringing our interview to a close, would you comment on the reaction to Kennedy policies during the years of the presidency as you observed them in West Virginia?

HOFF: According to my own observation, the West Virginia reaction, both on the statewide level and as manifested in my own home area, was uniformly favorable. Even the people who had doubted whether or not Kennedy should be the nominee or should be the president became strong advocates of the president and his policies. He went to considerable trouble to befriend West Virginia. That, of course, manifested itself in the depressed areas of West Virginia. I don't happen to live in one of those areas, and that

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type of activity on his part was not under my direct personal observation. But the thing that gained him almost universal admiration and respect in West Virginia was his handling of national and international affairs. One thing I'd like to say here (not that it applies particularly or specifically to West Virginia and not that it is particularly responsive to your question) is that I feel that President Kennedy brought West Virginia and the United States out of the doldrums into which they had fallen during the lackadaisical Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] era and regained international prestige for this country. Now, I know that he assumed responsibility for the unfortunate fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, but, while I admired him and the people of West Virginia admired him for assuming the responsibility for that fiasco, I don't feel, and I think that the people of West Virginia don't feel, that the responsibility was his.

YOUNG: This is the end of Tape #2. Tape #3 will follow with Mr. William Bruce Hoff at Parkersburg, West Virginia.

HOFF: Of course, President Kennedy inherited the Eisenhower appointed CIA and that unfortunate occurrence stemmed from misinformation received from that source, and, while it was proper for President Kennedy as president of the United States to assume the responsibility as a matter of policy, he is not viewed as being

actually responsible for that incident. His subsequent handling of our international affairs met with the wholehearted approval of the people of West Virginia. His handling of political questions having religious aspects particularly impressed the people of West Virginia. Many of our people,

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particularly in areas such as Wood and Cabell counties, were doubtful of the wisdom of electing him, a Roman Catholic, president of the United States because of the deeply ingrained fear that he might favor the Catholic Church and that there might be a breakdown of our traditional separation of church and state resulting from his incumbency in the presidency, and our people were vastly impressed by his rugged determination to see that there was no semblance of a departure from that traditional position in this country.

YOUNG: I believe that you expressed a feeling that you wanted to make some comment on the President's death—the assassination.

HOFF: This is a subject that is still difficult for me to discuss. I had felt that, for me, at my age, the election of John F. Kennedy as president of the United States had assured the future of this country for my time. His leadership was intelligent. He possessed the necessary vision and was characterized by great courage, great resourcefulness, great ingenuity. And I felt that while he was, when elected, as capable as any man in the United States to fill the office of president, that he also had a vast capacity for growth. I felt that he demonstrated that in office. I felt that he would be reelected in 1964 by an overwhelming majority, and that, even after he served two terms as president of the United States, he would, in the many useful years that would remain for him, be of inestimable value to the people of this country and to the people of the world in various capacities, such as the one now occupied

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by Governor Stevenson or such as the head of the United Nations in time to come. I felt that his assassination constituted the greatest tragedy of all time. If you searched all history, you couldn't find a more tragic or more cataclysmic occurrence. I don't minimize the loss which this country suffered when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. And, of course, we are today, in my judgment, still suffering from the consequences of the untimely termination of Lincoln's control of this country in a crucial period in its history. But still the problems of that day were almost infinitesimal by comparison with the titanic problems that face men in government today. I feel that, while his successor, Lyndon Johnson, is the most capable man who could have been found to step into President Kennedy's place, still I doubt that he has the capacity and the vigor and the vision to lead the people of America and the people of the world for very long in the same direction which President Kennedy was capable of leading them for many years. This is not said in derogation of the present president of the United States but rather in tribute to President Kennedy. Then, too, there is something to be said for youth I, personally, although of about the same vintage as President Johnson, believe that

today's world is one in which young men, men in the prime of their life, are better qualified to control the destinies of this nation and of the world. In other words, we lost a young man, a man with his life before him, and I am apprehensive that we are now going back into a period in which the affairs of this country and the world may fall back into the hands of old men and I don't believe that this is a healthy development.

YOUNG: Thank you very much, Mr. Hoff. This is the third of three tapes of an interview with Mr. William Bruce Hoff of Parkersburg, West Virginia, on August 6, 1964. The interview conducted in Mr. Hoff's private law office at 1327 Market Street, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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William Bruce Hoff Oral History Transcript
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P. O. Box 272
Alderson, W. Va.
November 18, 1959

Mr. Bruce Hoff
Parkersburg, W. Va.

Dear Mr. Hoff:

Receiving my first propaganda for Kennedy this morning, I was indeed amazed to see your name listed prominently as a West Virginian who prefers and supports this little, inexperienced, immature, liquor-making family scion, Roman Catholic for PRESIDENT of this great, predominantly Protestant nation!!! Since when, Mr. Hoff, were you sucked in by this young whippersnapper of a boy almost wholly unschooled in what it takes to make a real President? Has he had any managerial experience? Has he the benefit of any executive experience? What, precisely, is his background? Ask yourself these and a horde of kindred questions and, then, I verily believe you will withdraw your fine old Presbyterian name from this Papish boy's list in this fine state!

What could you, a man of sound judgment, - I had always felt when I voted each time for you for high office - be thinking about to tout the Papal line, especially a liquor-rich one like this inexperienced boy's? I, frankly, would like to know. If you actually believe these Papes bode no ill to the nation, take one long, solemn look at Spain, Italy or Colombia where in these cultists are already really in the saddle; you will find it a real hazard to practice your good, tried and true old Presbyterianism publicly. IF you do not believe this, investigate and ascertain the actual facts for yourself. If you are going to be a Protestant, BE one: not just an imitation of the real thing.

You will recall that Mr. Al Smith, a man of really pronounced gifts and talents and experience in government, once tried to extend his reign to cover the nation but went down in bitter, party-rending defeat - and he was worth a hundred Kennedys. That election made me actually sick and I took my bed though I had planned and fully intended voting for the hated Hoover in preference! Thank God, though, we had enough patriots and bigots (if such be their nicknames) to squelch that attempt to take over in America and ram the Catholic Church down our throats! Like millions of Americans and Democrats, I shall surely vote for the detested Nixon in preference to this young Roman Catholic ninkapoop. I will NOT vote for any man whose first

allegiance is sworn to a foreign power and whose religion is inimical to American traditions of freedom, liberty and justice for and to all.

All one needs to do is to obtain and read the gory history of this semi-pagan faith for himself. I would cite that excellent book (I have a copy) by the honest old former Priest, Jerimiah J. Crowley, entitled "Twenty Years in Hell or From Darkness to Daylight", the same being a day by day recording of his life and experience as a Priest of the said Church. This book is at once most revealing and instructive. I would further suggest you read the materials of the converted priests in Converted Catholic Magazine. See, also, that magnificent picture, "Martin Luther", which gives us a factual picture of the basic rottenness of the church out of which this great soul led his followers and thereby did so much for Presbyterians and all Protestant faiths.

Like the Communists, these people (as a church) never cease boring in to achieve complete domination; and do not think they will not crack the whip over us all once they are firmly in the saddle — just like they have always before in like circumstances. I personally do not dislike an individual because of any faith he may hold: my roommate at college (USC) was a Roman Catholic and we are friends today.

I covet your full reply to the above.

Very sincerely,

G. M. Feamster

P. S. Indicate, please, who of the other 7 listed persons are Catholics?

APPENDIX 1

LAW OFFICES
HOFF, MOORE & RULEY
1327 MARKET STREET
PARKERSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA

WILLIAM BRUCE HÖFF
RICHARD C. MOORÉ
DANIEL AVERY RULEY, JR.

TELEPHONE 485-4578
AREA CODE 304

November 17, 1959

Mr. G. M. Feamster
Post Office Box 272
Alderson, W. Va.

Dear Mr. Feamster:

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of November 16, 1959, and am genuinely surprised to find that you entertain such dark forebodings respecting the consequences of the election of a Roman Catholic to the Presidency of the United States. I have no such premonitions and my present advocacy of Kennedy's cause and candidacy does not constitute a new departure for me, but squares exactly with my previous public action of almost 32 years ago—in 1928, I stayed with what I, at least, regard as the "hard core" of the Democratic Party and vigorously supported the candidacy for the Presidency of the United States of Alfred Emmanuel Smith of New York. The Party and the Country, "in sackcloth and ashes", paid a horrible toll for decades for the religious intolerance which foisted the curse of the Hoover Administration on this Nation. Most significantly, such relief as our people eventually obtained from this curse was through the gifted leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt—the man who placed the name of Alfred Emmanuel Smith in nomination for the Presidency of the United States at the 1928 Democratic National Convention. I thought then and I think now that what was good enough for Franklin Delano Roosevelt was good enough for me, and for you.

Passing now to Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, I believe his family background is as distinguished as that of any in the United States—his father was among President Roosevelt's closest friends and most trusted counsellors and was honored by the highest diplomatic post in his command barring only that of Secretary of State. Senator Kennedy served his country with great distinction in World War II and has had a total of more than 14 years service in the National Congress, about evenly divided between the House and the Senate. What comparable qualifying experience was had by Washington? By Jackson? By Lincoln? By Wilson? By Truman? And by Eisenhower?

APPENDIX 2

You may be assured that I am thoroughly familiar with the prior governmental experience of each of these men, and I say that none of them had the intensive seasoning in government that Kennedy has had. If Senator Kennedy is, as you say, a "ninkapoop", he must be so in your view solely because he happens to be of the Roman Catholic persuasion in religion and for no other reason--but more of this in the next paragraph.

I am, as you say, a Protestant, and expect to remain so, but, anent your comparison of the Roman Catholics to the Communists, I am constrained to say, and you will be constrained to admit, that there is no such dynamic force, not only in this country but anywhere on top of this earth, so vigorously, so single-mindedly, so intelligently directed and so effectively operating in opposition to the Communist threat of world-domination as that of the organized and militant Roman Catholic Church, both its laity and its clergy. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church is Communism's most uncompromising foe, and, judging organizations as we judge men by the enemies they have made, it is most significant that the most ruthless and determined foe of the Roman Catholic Church is Communism.

It may be that there is still in this country some small vestige of the religious intolerance which brought about the defeat of Smith and the election of Hoover in 1928, but I refuse to believe that it will amount to very much. Surely, with the injurious consequences to the Party and to the Country of Smith's defeat and Hoover's election so fresh in the minds of millions of people living today, we will not invite a similar or vastly more cataclysmic catastrophe by the election of the nefarious Nixon to the Presidency of the United States. What I conceive to be vastly more likely is that Senator Kennedy will be the beneficiary of a near violent revulsion of public feeling against any attempt to rekindle the flame of religious intolerance which, along with other well known contributing factors, defeated Smith in 1928.

Like most Democrats and many Republicans of my acquaintance, I consider that it is imperative that the executive leadership of this country be returned to the Party which has watched over its destinies from the beginning--and that this be done while there

is still time to save this Country and the World in general from being destroyed or dominated by Communism. In order to regain the Presidency, we must have a candidate who can and will win. Aside from that of Stevenson, Kennedy's name is the best known name in America today. All other potential Presidential Candidates lag far behind him in every test of public and popular opinion. His qualifications are at least equal to that of any other candidate of either party.

I appreciate your manifestations of confidence in me when, on three former occasions, I sought high office, and, at the same time, I know that it may be difficult for you to disabuse your mind of the superstitious fear of the Roman Catholic Church, but I venture to hope that you will accept my assurance—the same assurance which Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave the American people when he nominated Smith for President—that honest men of the Roman Catholic persuasion in religion, who, like Kennedy, seek high public office, will do exactly as all other honest God-fearing men in like situation, that is:

"Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

Matthew, 22:21

Respectfully yours,

Wm Bruce Hoff

WBH:asd