

Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Oral History Interview – JFK1, 05/18/1966
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Biographical Note

O'Neill, United States Congressman, Massachusetts, 1963 – 1986, Speaker of the House, 1977 – 1986, discusses his work for the Democratic Party, his personal friendship with the President, among other issues.

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Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. – JFK#1

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Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS P. O'NEILL, JR.

May 18, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'NEILL: Well, interestingly, I had dinner at Joe Healey's [Joseph P. Healey] house in February of 1952. I was Speaker of the Massachusetts Legislature at the time. Jack Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], Tom Mullen [Thomas H. Mullen], who is my administrative assistant now in the Congress here, and Joe and his wife Irene—the five of us had dinner at Joe's house in Belmont. And the Senator said to me that he would definitely not be a candidate for reelection to Congress and that he didn't intend for some time to make

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the announcement, but that it was clear for me to start moving in the way of Congress, in which I was interested. But, of course, I would not have been a candidate had he been a candidate for reelection. As time went along in that contest....He hadn't made up his mind at that particular time, definitely, whether he was a candidate for Senate. I think he had made up his mind definitely, but he hadn't decided, whether he was going to be a candidate for United States Senator or whether he was going to be a candidate for governor.

Now, the interesting thing that took place at that time—Paul Dever [Paul A. Dever] was governor, and Paul was fed up with public life, and he was going to be a reluctant candidate for whatever he was going to be. He didn't want to run again for reelection for governor. He wasn't interested in running for the United

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States Senate. He had had it as far as politics were concerned. He had lost the desire, and he had lost the interest. And I know that Paul Dever and Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]—Joe Kennedy, Jack's dad—sat down and Paul had explained to the elder Kennedy his feelings about politics, that he had had it. But he had had so many people who were surrounding him and who were pressuring him and insisting that he stay in public life. So it was at a much later date than this night in February that Kennedy was actually to make up his mind. Dever did say to Joe Kennedy that he would run, that he would be on the ticket with Jack, and that Jack could have his choice: If Jack wanted to run for governor, he'd run for senator; if Jack wanted to run for the United States Senate, he would run for governor,

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but if they could get somebody else, that Dever would be willing and happy to step out. That was Dever's feeling. Anyway, it was decided along the line that Jack Kennedy would be the candidate for the United States Senate and that Paul Dever would go along, and Paul would be the candidate for governor.

Now, in the course of that campaign....The traditional system of campaigning had always been that the entire state ticket go into areas—that would be the candidate to the United States Senate and all the constitutional offices—and they'd hit Lowell and Lawrence in the same night, and Haverhill in the same night. They'd all campaign together. Jack Kennedy brought in a new and novel campaign. He was running up and down stairs, going into buildings,

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walking up and down the main street of towns, shaking hands with everybody, addressing high school auditoriums—the crowds in auditoriums—walking through playgrounds. He left the path in which the conventional system of campaigning....And a fellow like Dever who had no interest any more, or who had apparently lost the interest, had no desire to follow whatsoever. And Jack went out pretty well on his own. In the major cities Jack Kennedy showed up to be a speaker. His remarks would be few. He would take one issue, talk on it for four or five minutes, then wander through the crowd shaking as many hands as he possibly could, and with that magnetic personality that he had, he was really selling himself. Now, he put on quite a television campaign at that particular time.

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I do know this, that all the speeches that Jack Kennedy made during that particular campaign—that's the '52 campaign—were written by three people. The three people that wrote the speeches were John Harriman, who was the financial editor of the *Boston Globe* in those days—he's since deceased—Jim Landis [James M. Landis], who had been Dean of the Harvard Law School and been an old friend of the Kennedy family, and Joe Healey, who's been long associated with Jack Kennedy ever since his first fight in 1946 when he took over

North Cambridge area and ran it for Jack. Those three put together the talks that Kennedy made on both radio and television.

Now, Harriman told me the story himself that he was sent for by John Dowd [John F. Dowd], and John Dowd said, “Who are you going to vote for:

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Kennedy or Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge]?” And he said, “Well, I don’t like Lodge for the following reasons,” and he enumerated the reasons who he didn’t care for Lodge. It was particularly, as I recall it, because of his absenteeism on some special legislation that had been pending when he went out to Chicago to the aid of Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] when Harriman felt that he should have been representing the people of Massachusetts in the Senate on that particular day. And he said while in his opinion Jack Kennedy didn’t have too much of a record, that he had definitely decided that he’d vote for John Kennedy for Senate. Well, according to Harriman, Dowd picked up the telephone and called Joe Kennedy on the telephone, and he said, “Joe, Harriman’s going to vote for your son.” He said,

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“Alright, see if you can get him to work for us.” So he said to Harriman, “The Ambassador would like to have you do some research work and some writing for Jack in the campaign.” And he said, “I’d be happy to accept it strictly on a basis of employer-employee. And,” he said, “I want a thousand dollars a speech.”

Now, he did all of the research in the speeches that were to be made in the campaign. Most of it was turned over to Landis, who was an idea man. But the actual putting of the words down on paper were written by Joe Healey whose background was Harvard and Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School and who through the years had done more writing for Jack Kennedy than anybody else. For example, Jack’s real first bloom into international space in the

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newspapers was his minority report of the Taft-Hartley Act [Labor Management Relations Act of 1947], which actually was written and put together by Healey, Mark Dalton [Mark J. Dalton], with some assistance from Walter Cenerazzo who was labor leader. And so Healey, I would say, during Jack’s early life in politics had written the great majority of his speeches. And he did write all of his speeches in this particular campaign. He put them all into effect.

There’s an instance that happened on the final day of the campaign. The Friday night before the election...Now, they met down in a room on Beacon Street. All their work was done in this room, apartment, which Mr. Kennedy had down on Beacon Street. And they met daily—that’s Harriman, Healey, and Landis. On Friday night the Ambassador came in and

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showed them the results of the poll and that Jack Kennedy was going to be elected for

Senator by about seventy-five thousand votes. So all they wanted from now on was a holding action, and they would have to change and gear the tempo of the talks. And they decided that they would cancel out Saturday, and they would cancel out—I believe they were going to cancel out Monday. But on Sunday they had prepared a major address for all the television stations in Massachusetts. And the Ambassador said, “Now I have this speech. It’s the finest speech that I’ve ever read in my life. You fellows don’t have to write this. So don’t worry about it.” Saturday afternoon he came into the room, and he gave each one of them a copy of the speech and said, “What do you think of it?” And

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Harriman said, well, he was just an employee and he had no comments. And Landis sat there, and he had a puzzled look. And Healey spoke up and said, “Ambassador, it’s the worst speech that I’ve ever read in my life. I think it’s shades of a speech that Curley [James Michael Curley] would have given twenty-five years ago—archaic, long gone by. It will ruin and destroy the image of Jack Kennedy that we have tried to put forth to the people and that we have successfully brought forth. I don’t know what you’re thinking of.” And the Ambassador was greatly displeased. He thought it was still terrific. And he mulled around the room and walked around, walked into the next room. About twenty minutes later he came back, and he said, “Alright, gentlemen, forget about the speech. You’ve got to

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have a speech for tomorrow. You fellows do the job you’ve done up to now.” And Healey and Harriman and Landis wrote the final speech. Apparently the survey was correct because it was a holding action coming down to the wire, and Kennedy carried Massachusetts by the same margin that the polls that the Ambassador had on Friday night portrayed.

One of the interesting things that happened along the line: The night before, there was a giant rally and parade in Boston for Eisenhower who was running for president against Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. And he was on television for, I believe, a half an hour, and he was to be on say from 6:30 to 7 o’clock, or 7 to 7:30, with Herter [Christian A. Herter] and Lodge. And something went wrong along the line, and Eisenhower was

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on for about twenty-five or twenty-six minutes with Herter, and Lodge got tied up in traffic and couldn’t get in and didn’t get in until about the final three minutes. But, of course, there were many things. Dever lost the election that year by about fourteen thousand votes. There were many factors. But one of the factors that helped Herter was that Herter had twenty-five minutes of television with a man who was going to sweep the Commonwealth the next day for the presidency. And Lodge, whom the program was originally set up for, through some inadvertence was shut out of all but about three minutes of the television program.

There are so many things in the life of Jack Kennedy that I knew so well, some intimate stories. As a matter of fact, one

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of the stories that has been publicized a bit in the Boston papers is the story that I tell about on the final day that Eisenhower, in 1960....It was January seventh. Eisenhower made his last State of the Union address. And immediately following his address, Jack Kennedy, when we were on the floor of Congress, came over to me and he said, "Tip, I'll be over in your office about 1:30. Will you be there?" So I agreed. I was in the old Cannon building in those days. Jack came in about 1:30 or a quarter to 2. Of course, immediately when he came up the corridor and walked in, the girls from all the offices flocked down. So you spent ten minutes introducing him to everybody around. What a colorful individual. There'll never be another more colorful in the history of this country.

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No matter where you went it was exactly the same way. This is almost from the first time that he ever ran for Congress back in '46. But, anyway, we sat down, he said, "I've got two assignments for you. These assignments I'm going to give you personally, and I want you to follow through on them. First of all, I want you to do what you can for me with Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence]," who was then the governor of Pennsylvania and the former mayor of Pittsburgh. "And," he said, "I want you to work on Bill Green [William J. Green, Jr.]," a member of Congress and the Democratic leader of the city of Philadelphia. It was Jack's thought at that time that both of them were bitterly opposed to him, principally because of the fact that he was a Roman Catholic. Now, of course, they were both Roman Catholics themselves.

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The Governor was the first Catholic ever elected as governor in the state of Pennsylvania. He felt with Kennedy on the ticket that the entire Democratic slate would go down in the state of Pennsylvania in the next election, and he felt it was going to be a great Democratic year anyway and that the Democrats could win with anybody, or with practically anybody. And Green had the same views. And Jack said to me, "This is your personal assignment. Do what you can do with Lawrence; and do what you can do with Bill Green." Well, I don't know why he said, particularly to me, Lawrence. I had met Lawrence along the line a few times with Art Rooney [Arthur Joseph Rooney] who was the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and being a football enthusiast and a friend of Rooney's, I used to sit in the same box with Dave Lawrence

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and go out to eat with him a few times. But I was never any really political pal of his. But Jack knew that I was friendly with him through Rooney, and he knew that Rooney was a great rooter of his also—and to see if I could work on Lawrence. Well, Bill Green and I, as members of Congress, were very close friends. Now Kennedy said to me at this particular meeting, Jack said, "I have a hard time talking with those city bosses. And," he said, "you

have the happy faculty of being able to talk their language, knowing them and understanding them, free and easy with them. You get along with them very well, and they've got great respect for you. So go to work on Bill Green." And believe me when I said I spent many an hour and many a night in Bill Green's company. "Now the second

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thing," he said, "I want you to do what you can for me with the Speaker." He had reference to Sam Rayburn. "Sam Rayburn dislikes me. He'll no doubt be the chairman of the committee." That is, the Democratic Convention which was going to be held in Los Angeles. Time proved that he wasn't the chairman, but at this time Senator Kennedy had figured he was going to be the chairman because he had been the chairman at the previous conventions. And he felt that though Rayburn had really hurt him in the '56 Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] struggle for vice presidency, he had a feeling deep in his heart that Rayburn had pulled the rug on him. Which, if he did, it was a great break for Jack. I think everybody admits that. Jack said to me, and I remember it so well, "You know, while I was in Congress, I'd been a bit of a

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maverick, and Rayburn had a personal dislike for me. I want you to butter him up; win him if you can; tell him I'm a decent fellow; tell him I'm a Democrat at heart; tell him that I'll follow the same philosophies in government that he follows, and that I believe in the same philosophies that he believes in, and that I'm a fellow that can be trusted, and I'm a real good, decent fellow. Now," he said, "those are your personal assignments regardless of whether Robert [Robert F. Kennedy] or Ted [Theodore C. Sorenson] or anybody else wants you to have a special assignment to go here. There are the two things I want you to do: I want you to follow the Governor and Green—and work on Sam Rayburn."

Well, Sam Rayburn lived like a clockworks. At 8:30 every morning he would be

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in the Speaker's lobby to read the newspapers from Texas. And every morning at 8:30 I'd be in the Speaker's lobby to read the Boston papers. And there'd be only the two of us there morning after morning. And having been a trusted member of the Rules Committee and having had the confidence of Rayburn, we were very friendly, and we'd have long conversations and long talks. Occasionally, I would turn them to....Kennedy. At first he used to pass them off with a gruff "humph" or something like that. But eventually I got to him about the point that....Kennedy was a great fellow....Kennedy was a wonderful fellow, what a good Democrat he was, and so on and so forth along like that. Always working to try to soften Rayburn up because of the fact that we had anticipated that he was

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going to be the chairman of the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. So this

particular morning I said to Sam Rayburn, “Mr. Speaker, supposing a candidate throws his hat into the ring and he can’t win the nomination, but the Convention wants him for the second spot. What do you think?” He said, “You mean a man who’s a candidate for President of the United States, and the Convention doesn’t want him—they take another man—but they do want him for a second spot? Well,” he said, “to me, once a man puts his hat in the ring—he’s a candidate at that Convention—then he’s obligated to the Convention. If they don’t want him for presidency, but the fact that he got into the contest, he has no other obligation than to follow through with the wishes and the desires of the Convention.

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And if they want him for a second spot, he must take the second spot.” And he said, “There’s no question about that in my mind whatsoever.”

So the particular day that I said that to Sam Rayburn, I met Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was coming over to the Capitol that day. We were having a meeting in Dominick Daniels’ [Dominick V. Daniels] room. Stu Udall [Stewart L. Udall] was there, Congressman Gallagher [Cornelius Edward Gallagher] from New Jersey, Frank Thompson [Frank Thompson, Jr.], and there were probably six or seven young members of Congress at that time who were interested in Jack Kennedy’s campaign. And I told the story to Jack. We had met in Dominick’s room, and I had arranged that afternoon for a meeting for Jack Kennedy with Bill Green. We met in Dominick’s room first. Walking from Dominick’s room to Bill Green’s office, I told the President the story—

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I mean I told the President-to-be the story,...Kennedy. Jack said, “You know, that’s interesting. He thinks that Johnson’s [Lyndon B. Johnson] going to win and he wants me for vice president.” And I said, “Yes, I know that he thinks that Johnson’s going to win, but the interesting thing about it is this: We know you’re going to win.” And I said, “It’s nice to know that Rayburn’s got that type of feeling because the time may come when you’re going to need him.” Well, at that particular time we were walking along, just the two of us, and Jack said to me, “Well, I’ll let you know right now that if I were ever to lose this nomination, I’d have no interest whatsoever in the second spot.” So I left him, and we went over to Green’s. And, gee, here’s a fellow who within six months is going to be the President

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of the United States; and here’s Bill Green who’s a powerful city leader, and who later proved what a powerful city leader he was by the tremendous vote that Kennedy got in Philadelphia. But it was actually with trepidation that I left Jack at the door of Bill Green’s office to go in and talk to Bill Green. And I think of all the nights that I had gone out and wined and dined until 2 and 3 o’clock in the morning listening to Bill’s stories and swapped stories back and forth, trying to build him up. And we used to have a saying between us; I used to say to Bill, “Bill, now listen, you’d better get aboard this bus. We’re saving two seats

for you and Dave Lawrence, and, by jingo, if you don't watch out, the bus door will be closed on you. So anyway, to make a long story short, I got out to

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the Convention, and the second day I was out there, I ran into Bill Green, and Bill said, "Hey, listen, you can get off my back. I want you to know not only am I on the bus, but," he said, "I'm driving the bus. We just had a caucus and we have eighty-five out of ninety delegates." Or something like that, I mean a tremendous percentage. And he and the Governor were going along.

Now an interesting thing happened out at the Convention. The Massachusetts delegating had a room. And as one of the workers in the ranks of the Kennedys, having worked on, oh, delegates from here and there, assignments to work on Pennsylvania and to do a little work with New Jersey and to do some work with the Virgin Islands, assignments that I'd picked up to try to work along... We used to meet in the Biltmore Hotel at 7:30 in the morning, and you would

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rehash what was going on from the day before. Now the night before John F. Kennedy was to be nominated as President of the United States, I went that morning over to the Biltmore. Afterwards I came back to the Massachusetts Democratic suite over at the Statler Hotel, and before I got back to the suite I met Jack, and Jack asked me if I'd do some work on the Dakota delegation because he had heard that there was a possibility of a split there. Usher Burdick's [Usher Lloyd Burdick] boy was the Senator [Quentin N. Burdick]. Usher had been in Congress with me, and I was very friendly with Usher, the Senator's father. So I went with Jack over to see the Dakota delegation.

After we met with the delegation, Jack went along somewhere else, and I went back to the Massachusetts delegation room. There

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were four people in the back room. There was Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House; there was John McCormack [John William McCormack], the majority floor leader; and there was Wright Patman [John William Wright Patman], the chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee; and the fourth person was myself. I came into the room, and McCormack said to me, "How does it look and what do you think?" And I said, "Well, I was to the Kennedy meeting this morning, and knowing the thoroughness with which they do things, it's over nine hundred votes for Jack Kennedy and five hundred votes for Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy will win on the first ballot." McCormack, also knowing the power and the strength and the long arm and the thoroughness of the Kennedys—and he knew when they came up with a report like that, he knew the accuracy of the report—he turned

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to the Speaker, Sam Rayburn, and he said, “Sam, as far as Lyndon’s concerned, it’s all over. Kennedy has nine hundred votes.” Sam leaned back in his chair, and he said, “Yes, I believe it is. Lyndon didn’t get started early enough. You know, they underestimated this young fellow. Apparently they put a terrific organization together. Well, I wonder what happens from now on.” Well, the talk got around to the vice presidency, and I believe it was Mr. McCormack who said, “Would Lyndon take the vice presidency?” Sam said—that is, the Speaker, Sam Rayburn—“Once Lyndon goes into the Convention and he throws his hat into the ring, he has an obligation. If that Convention and the presidential nominee wants him, he has nothing to say about it. In the South he must abide by the wishes of the Convention.” Now this was exactly the

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same thing that Sam Rayburn had said to me weeks earlier in the Speaker’s lobby in the United States Capitol in Washington. The question then came as to whether Lyndon would accept it or not, and Rayburn repeated, “There’s no question in my mind that Lyndon will accept it. But,” he said, “he’ll run into trouble because there are those who are going to say that he shouldn’t take it.”

And one of the things that strikes my mind is Wright Patman spoke up at the particular time. Wright Patman said that never in the history of the Democratic Party has the mantle or the cloak of the vice presidency been placed upon the shoulders of a person and that person refused it. A lot of people through history have said that they’ve been offered the vice presidency and turned it down. They may have thought they’d been offered it, but, actually, as

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far as history in the Democratic Party is concerned, no man ever actually had the offer from the president-to-be, or the nominee-to-be, and turned it down. And Wright Patman is a pretty interesting historian in his own right.

Then the conversation continued on, and Sam Rayburn said, “If John Kennedy wins the nomination—and you fellows say that he has it all wrapped up,” meaning John McCormack and myself....And actually I was reporting what I had seen and what I had known from being at the various meetings, and there was no question in my mind that it was all over and the Kennedys had the votes all wrapped up. He said, “In view of that, I’ll do everything in my power to make Lyndon Johnson take the nomination—if Kennedy wants Johnson.” And he turned to the Speaker, and he said

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to the Speaker, “If Kennedy wants Johnson for the vice presidency, get in touch with me.” The Speaker turned to me and he said, “Tom, there’s a chore for you. You find...Kennedy. Tell...Kennedy that if he’s interested in Lyndon Johnson, then Speaker Rayburn will arrange it.” And the Speaker [Rayburn] said, “That’s right.” He gave me the room number in the

hotel in which he was staying and the telephone number where Jack could locate him. Then he said offhandedly, "Jack won't have any difficulty in locating me anyway."

Well, that night I tried to locate Jack Kennedy. I had with me Bob Morey [Robert F. Morey]. Bob is at present time the United States Marshal in Boston. Bob Morey had been a real confidant of Jack Kennedy and had been his personal chauffeur for fourteen years, every time that Jack Kennedy came to Boston

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either as Congressman or the United States Senator. And with him was Eddie Ford. Eddie's a successful businessman, a close friend to Jack Kennedy's who was in West Virginia and in Wisconsin and showed up in Kennedy's behalf in many different places doing some very mysterious things for the Kennedy campaign which would be interesting if they were put on tape.

MORRISSEY: Is that Eunice Ford's father?

O'NEILL: No. No, this is Eddie Ford who is a fellow from Boston who has always been very active in Democratic politics, never held any office but a successful business fellow and a great admirer and a great friend of the President when he was alive.

Well, we tried to find Jack Kennedy. We went from place to place, and finally at 12 o'clock in Chasen's Restaurant, we

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ran into Jack Kennedy. There was a reception being run by McDonald [David J. McDonald] of the steel workers. And I recall it so well because the fellow who was actually running the affair that night was Phil Regan, the old Irish thrush movie actor of a few years back; and Wilbur Clark, who ran the Desert Inn, was there; and Audrey [Audrey Meadows] and Jayne Meadows [Jayne Cotter Meadows]. I can remember sitting at the table with this group waiting for Jack Kennedy to arrive. And when he came in, I stepped up to him and I said, "Jack, I've got to talk to you for a minute." Then I told him of the conversation that happened in the Massachusetts delegation room that day, and that Sam said if you're really interested in Johnson, he can arrange it without a doubt, and he wants you to get in touch with him. Jack immediately became enthused, and he said to me, "Lookit, go out and stand by my automobile, I want to

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hear this conversation from start to finish." Well, he mingled around, shook hands with people, and met delegates and things because this was the night before—nobody's even nominated. And we went out by the car. There were thousands there. We got a cordon of police. Now they made a big semi-circle, and Jack and I stood in the middle of the semi-circle. And they pushed the crowd away, and I related to Jack exactly what transpired in the

entire conversation: how I had predicted it; that I had heard in the Kennedy headquarters—how he'd get over the nine hundred votes and Johnson would only get the five hundred; and there was no question in my mind that the figures were authentic and so on and so forth—the whole conversation. And Jack said to me, "I want him badly," meaning Johnson. "I want him badly. With him we

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can carry Texas. We may be able to break the South." And then with a hesitation and a thought, he said, "There's only one thing. I don't want to be placed in the position of asking him and having him refuse me." I said, "Jack, all I can tell you is this: You've got Speaker Rayburn's word. The Speaker wants you to contact him. Do you want me to deliver the message to the Speaker?"

The following afternoon, the Speaker was sitting with the Texas delegation before the balloting had started—now, this is before the first ballot in which Kennedy was going to be nominated. I walked up to the Speaker and told the Speaker that I had talked with Jack the night before; that I had delivered the message to him; that Kennedy was vitally interested in Johnson being his running mate; and that Jack

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Kennedy would personally call him. And Sam Rayburn thanked me. And from then on it's history. All I know is two things: I know that Jack Kennedy called Sam Rayburn. And all I can say after is that Sam Rayburn said to me, "Tip, we did a good job on that entire thing." I never questioned him any further as to the meetings that were held in the past or whether there was any truth to Phil Graham's [Philip L. Graham] story or to Schlesinger's [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] story or to Ted White's [Theodore H. White] story or anything else. I do know this. There was the feeling of the Speaker of the House that once Johnson threw his hat in the ring, once he announced he was a candidate and allowed his name to be balloted on by that Convention, he was the same as any other man, that he must follow the will and the dictates of the nominee and the desire of the Convention. I think

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that's a pretty interesting story, and I suppose there are....I don't know how many others will tell the story of the vice presidency, but I do know the part that I had to do with it.

MORRISSEY: That's interesting.

O'NEILL: So, of course, one of my favorite stories is the day that the President was sworn in as President of the United States. The night before the President was sworn in, it was a brutal night. Oh, we had eleven or twelve inches of snow here in Washington, and it was bitterly cold. As a matter of fact, the morning of the inaugural the temperature was about 8 degrees. But despite the weather, more than a quarter of a million Americans braved the elements to be out there to see the youngest

man ever elected president in the history of this country be sworn in. I arrived about five minutes

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to 12. As I looked down from the stairs to the area where the President was going to be sworn in, there was surrounded by his personal friends and the members of his family, directly behind him were his Cabinet members-to-be, and there were the out-going members of the Cabinet and President Eisenhower and Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. Directly behind these boxes were boxes for ambassadors and dignitaries from foreign countries. To the right and the left of the spot where the President was to be inaugurated were the four hundred and thirty-five members of the Congress and the hundred members of the Senate.

Well, I arrived about five minutes to 12, and I looked down and I knew that the seats were first come, first served basis. And about this time I would have been in at least the sixtieth row. And as I started

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to walk down the stairs or the aisle, I ran into Frank McDermott [Francis McDermott]. Now Frank was a Secret Service agent from Boston, and during this particular time he was assigned to cover Joe Kennedy, the Ambassador, the President's father. But he had charge of this particular section, this day of where the ambassadors were sitting. He said to me, "Where are you sitting?" I said, "About sixty rows down either to the right or the left." And he said, "Push right in here beside this ambassador." So I moved in, and as I moved in, who do I find I was sitting next to but a good friend of mine by the name of George Kara from Boston. Now George is sort of a mystery man. We used to call him the "Ambassador." He's been friendly with everybody in public life in Massachusetts since the days that Mayor Nichols [Malcolm E. Nichols] was mayor of Boston. And he was friendly with Curley

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and Tobin [Maurice J. Tobin], and he was a real confidant of David I. Walsh's and a confidant of so many governors. He always seemed to have the knack of being close to those who were elected to public office—an exceptionally erudite and learned man, but yet a real mystery. People never knew his business. I often wondered how he was so successful and how he knew so many powerful people. I said to him when I moved in next to him, "How are you Mr. Ambassador?" And he said, "Quiet, quiet. Be quiet or they'll move us out of here." Well, we joked and laughed a bit. At 12 o'clock on the dot, John Kennedy, President-elect of the United States, appeared at the top of the stairs, and actually he was at my right elbow. I looked at him, and I said, "Good luck, Mr. President. May God be with you." And the President looked at me and said,

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“Thanks, Tip.” And with that George Kara said, “Good luck, Mr. President.” The President looked at him in astonishment and wonderment, and all of a sudden the band started to play the presidential march, and he walked down the stairs, down the aisle, to where he was going to be sworn in. And Kara turned to me, and he said, “There goes Jack, gone to be sworn in to the most important job in the world, and he’s wondering how Kara got the seat.”

Now the interesting thing about this is that on Shrove Tuesday my wife Milly [Mildred A. O’Neill] and myself were at the White House at the ball. We were dancing around, and the President said, “Tip, I’d like to talk to you for a minute.” So Milly and I danced by and we stopped, and he said, “I haven’t seen you since the day I was sworn in.” He said, “Something has been on my mind.

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I’ve got a question. Was that George Kara standing by you the day I walked down the aisle to be sworn in as President of the United States?” I said, “Yes, Mr. President, it was. You know, as you were walking down, Kara said, ‘There goes Jack to be sworn in to the most important job in the world, and he’s wondering how Kara got the seat.’” And the President said, “You know, that’s absolutely true.”

Well, now history shows that he made one of the greatest acceptance speeches of all times. It will go down in the annals of American history as one of the outstanding talks ever given. And yet historians will wonder: “As he walked down the aisle, what was on his mind?” And you know what was on his mind was “how did Kara get the seat?” [Laughter] And with that, we could go on and keep talking like this indefinitely.

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The more I talk, the more are the stories that I think of. And yet everything I think has been more or less on the light side although I did give you my version with regards to the vice presidency.

An interesting story is late in October of the year the President was assassinated, I got off the plane, and my secretary met me and she said, “The President wants you over at the White House at 6 o’clock tonight. You’re to come in through the back door.” So I came in through the back door. I went upstairs and was directed to a room. There were six or seven men there, members of Congress. There was Delaney [James J. Delaney] from New York, Madden [Ray John Madden] from Indiana, Bolling [Richard W. Bolling] from Kansas City—I name these fellows; they were on the Rules Committee—and three or four others. We had a few hors d’oeuvres with the drinks,

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and the President said, “The reason I brought you boys over here is that you’re all good personal friends of mine. You’re all loyal Democrats. You all believe in my philosophy of government. And I wouldn’t want anybody to think that I was moving behind the back of the leadership, but what’s going on in the House? Why can’t we get our program through?” Well, we talked from 6 to 7 about the program, about the timing of the program, what he

definitely had in mind. Actually, what he had in mind at that time was Medicare and a tax reduction and an increase for federal employees. Most of the program that was put through by the Johnson Administration in the next six months after the death of the President was legislation that was going to go through had Kennedy still been the President of the United States. But on the dot of 7—

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we were there from 6 to 7—he said, “My dad is upstairs, and I’m going to have supper with him tonight.” And with that he bid us all good-night. I walked out the back door, and when I got out the back door, I forgot—I didn’t have my car. And my secretary had gone along. So I walked back up through the stairs, and I ran up to the President. He said, “What’s the matter?” I said, “I haven’t got a car, Mr. President.” And he said, “Well, I’ll get you a car.” And he called one of the Secret Service men. He said, “Come on in. I want to talk about old times.” Well, you know, we went in and we talked about old times. It was interesting. He talked about fellows in his political life that he was no longer friendly with. He talked about Mark Dalton, Jimmy Kelly, Peter Cloherty [Peter J. Cloherty], Billy Sutton [William J. Sutton],

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Patsy—oh, what was Patsy’s last name?

MORRISSEY: Mulkern?

O’NEILL: Patsy Mulkern [Patrick J. Mulkern], Joe Healey, who had more or less drifted away. And I said, “Gee, this is interesting. You asked me about all the fellows that you’ve broken with.” He wanted to know how each one of them was doing, and how their personal health was, and their personal wealth, and were they getting by. He asked me about each and every one of them. So despite the fact that he had had a falling out with these different people who had actually started with him in political life—and seventeen years had gone by in many instances—it seemed to me as though he still had a feeling in his heart for those old friends that started with him that had strayed along the line. So he got a Secret Service fellow and the fellow got a car, and he walked out to the back door with

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me. And sitting up on the veranda where little Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] used to wave to everybody, you know, was his dad sitting in a wheel chair. He said to me, “Wave to my dad.” So I waved up at Joe. And he said, “Well, Tip, when I go up there, he’ll want to know who it was—Tip O’Neill—what was he down here for. I’ll have to give him the whole conversation of everything that transpired.” He said, “Got a story that you can tell me that I can tell my father?” And I said, “Jack, I can remember the campaign of 1958 when you were running for reelection to the United States Senate, and I was campaign manager for Foster

Furcolo [John Foster Furcolo].” Well, Jack and Furcolo didn’t get along at all. And I think actually it was, I used to say, that Furcolo used to try to cause incitement to get Jack upset. So during the course of this campaign, oh, there was terrific

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infighting and there was constant argument. At the outset of the campaign Jack had agreed that he would go on television three times with Foster and that they’d have joint signs in certain areas. But every time we got together, there always seemed to be an argument. So it was agreed that, in the best interest of the Democratic Party the caravan system that we had used so many years in campaigns of the top of the ticket, of the slate, hitting into various areas, we would send Jack Kennedy into Lowell one day, and instead of Foster, the candidate for governor, going to Lowell the same day or Lawrence, he would be in New Bedford and Fall River. And if Jack went to New Bedford and Fall River, then to make sure that Furcolo was in Springfield. So I used to get the Kennedy schedule from Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith]. And Steve would give me the

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schedule, say, ten days in advance. And then I would prearrange the Furcolo to make sure that they’d be a hundred miles apart so they wouldn’t be running into each other and having these different arguments. This particular day I called Steve Smith, and I said, “Steve, have you got the schedule?” And he said, “Yes, on Tuesday Jack will be in War’ses ter (meaning Worcester), Na tick’ (meaning Natick), and Stoff’ ton (meaning Stoughton).” Jack got the biggest kick out of it. He later told me that he was telling his father how Steve pronounced the various communities in Massachusetts. Interestingly, later on, when Steve was managing Bobby’s campaign for United States Senator from New York, Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] said to me, “I said to my father, Tip, ‘Well, at least Steve will be able to pronounce the names of the towns of New York. He

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won’t have the same troubles that he had with Tip O’Neill in Boston.” [Laughter]

That’s about it, I guess,

MORRISSEY: Were you in the TV studio that night when Senator Kennedy and Furcolo had that....

O’NEILL: No, but I know the story from top to bottom. There’s no question about what happened. I suppose you’ve had a hundred different views of what happened. My view would be Joe Healey’s view. Joe is my close personal friend. Let me say this to you about the situation: There was never any love lost between Furcolo and Kennedy. And these are my opinions, and surely I don’t want these to ever be printed until many, many years from now. But what happened was, when Jack was a member of Congress, the Massachusetts delegation was very much upset over the fact that

they weren't getting a fair shake of the patronage, and they were

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accusing McCormack of dispersing the patronage as he felt like dispersing it. After all, we had no United States Senator in the Democratic Party. Lodge and Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] were the senators; Truman [Harry S. Truman] was President. Philbin [Philip Joseph Philbin] and Donohue [Harold Daniel Donohue] and those fellows weren't particularly interested in patronage. But Jack, being the young fellow, had a real yen for patronage. He wanted to take care of this one; he wanted to take care of that one. So they had a meeting, and it was arranged that they would go to the White House to see Truman and complain about the patronage. When they got to the White House, Truman knew the purpose of their visit. He had talked to McCormack earlier that morning about it because McCormack had been over at a leaders' meeting. When they went to the White

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House, all the Democratic members showed up but Furcolo. And Furcolo was one of the prime instigators, with Jack. They had come into Congress together, I guess, in '46. Well, I don't know whether they had come into Congress together or not, but they were both young members of Congress. And after the meeting—the President gave them no satisfaction whatsoever—Jack was furious at Foster because he felt that the President was well prepared and had his answers ready for them when they had arrived and that he had already talked to McCormack about it. There could only be one leak, and the leak had to be Foster. And he accused Foster of leaking it to McCormack and not showing up himself after having helped instigate it. That was Jack's viewpoint of the thing. That was part of his ill feeling towards Furcolo.

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Now Furcolo's ill feelings toward Kennedy was a strange thing—stranger. Furcolo's feeling was....And I can remember after I had been nominated, Furcolo said to me, "Wait till you get down to Washington. Boy," he said, "you don't know Kennedy until you get down there. Your wife is over at the Democratic Club and one of the women say, 'I see the Kennedys had a big cocktail party the other night. How was it, Mrs. O'Neill?' And your wife said, 'Well I wasn't invited to it.' 'What! You weren't invited to it! Why, it's the custom when a member runs a party from the state to invite every member from the state of his party.' But, no, he thinks he's too good for you. He wouldn't invite you. And, you know, every ambassador and every general and every admiral will be there and every big shot in the town. But

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you'll not be invited. And, boy, will your wife suffer embarrassment." Well, I can remember well I said to Foster, "Foster, listen, if Jack Kennedy didn't want me to go to his home, I

wouldn't want to go to his home. And if you don't want me, I don't want you. That's the way I feel about it." I said, "I certainly could never let it upset me if I didn't get invited to somebody's home for a cocktail party." Well, anyway, to make a long story short, every party that he ever ran while I was here I always was invited to. But, nevertheless, it really bothered Furcolo. Oh, it bothered Furcolo extremely. And I think that it seethed Kay [Kay Furcolo], Furcolo's wife. It used to get under her skin. She felt as though that she had been snubbed along the line by the Kennedys.

This particular night we were up in

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Pittsfield, sitting in a hotel room. I was doing some work for Dever for governor. I had been nominated as the congressman from the area. We all of a sudden realized—it was the closing day of the campaign—that Dever was in trouble, particularly in the western part of the state. Furcolo came into the room, and Furcolo pulled out a telegram. "How do you like this," he said. "I got a telegram from Jack Kennedy wanting me to endorse him. I'll endorse him," he said. "I'll endorse him 12 o'clock midnight the night before the election when it's too late for him to use it." So you can see that there was a terrific feeling between the two of them. Now I don't want that used until I'm dead and Furcolo's dead, and then all parties will....

MORRISSEY: Okay. That must have been a touchy job in '58 when you were...

O'NEILL: Oh, gee, it was an interesting job. It was an interesting time. I'll never forget the

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Sunday night before, we had a....Oh, I started to talk to you about the Joe Healey in '54 when Jack walked out of the studio. As a matter of fact, it was Healey who got him back into the studio. But, anyway, in '58 when Furcolo was running for reelection, we got out on the platform at Symphony Hall—and after Symphony Hall we were to have a large broadcast with Kennedy and Furcolo—and Furcolo made some kind of a wise remark to Kennedy which was absolutely uncalled for.

[BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

O'NEILL: This was in 1958. As I said, it was the Sunday night before the election. Kennedy was running against Celeste [Vincent J. Celeste]. He had no fight at all, of course. And Gibbons [Charles E. Gibbons] was running against Furcolo. Furcolo was later to win by a quarter of a million votes. But an

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interesting thing happened in that campaign about two weeks before the election. We took a poll in which Gibbons was breathing down the neck of Furcolo, and we had to change the

whole complex of the Furcolo campaign. We had to dig back into the records of Gibbons, and we came out with a card, "The Black Record of Gibbons." We showed votes that Gibbons had made in the legislature in 1940 or 1938 where he had voted against the increase in the annuity for the loss of a hand or the loss of an eye or something like that, and we came out with "The Black Record of Charlie Gibbons." But, anyway, this particular night on the stage, Jack just decided that they had had a few words—over nothing, I don't even recall what it was.... Finally I said to John McCormack, "Holy..." John said, "What are we going to do? They're not

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going to go on." I said, "John, you've got to go on with them." And so Jack said, "I won't go on alone with him." "Well," I said, "John McCormack will go on with you." John said, "What do I want to get into it for?" "Alright, you'll go on, too, John." So we had Foster on one side, John McCormack in the middle, and Kennedy on the other side. And I often wondered if people ever realized it. "Yes, John. That's right, John." And they'd be both answering John. Neither one of them would be answering each other. But that was something, that the two of them never really got along in politics. I always believed that it was because the Furcolos thought that the Kennedys had socially snubbed them in Washington—or that Kay, his wife, believed that. (Lord have mercy on her soul, she's dead.) But that's what I really

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think happened there on the break that they had.

MORRISSEY: Were you out at the '56 Convention when the Kennedy-Kefauver race shaped up?

O'NEILL: No, I wasn't out there. A very interesting thing happened why I didn't make it. The night before I was to leave, my house burned down. We had about a fifteen thousand dollar fire in the house, and so I was busy around trying to make arrangements for the family to move into the Commander Hotel and see if we could get temporary quarters. Although we were down at the beach when it happened, we were uptown. The day of the fire it was one of those things. The house had blistered, and we were having it painted. I said to the fellow, "Can't you use a torch to get those blisters off there?" "Oh, no, I can't use a torch," he said. "A torch is against the law." "Oh," I said, "is

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that so? Well, can't you get a plane or something and plane it down?" "Well," he said, "I'll get a plane and plane it down." What had happened—on the front side of the house he had a plane planning it down; on the back side of the house where nobody could see anything, he was using a torch. Well, the torch got in under the eaves and he had gone home, and about 8

o'clock at night the smoke came out the other side, and the whole roof of the house came down. So, as I say, we were around trying to get a builder and trying to buy new equipment and new furniture and everything else, trying to make temporary room so we could move the family when they came back from the beach to the hotel for a month until the house got straightened away. So I never did get to that Convention. But it was really an interesting one.

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MORRISSEY: You want to tell that story about how Robert Kennedy got to be a delegate?

O'NEILL: Well, that was in 1956. That was the '56 Convention. We have a system in Massachusetts in which the United States Senator and the State Committee name the delegates at large. They also name the delegates in the areas where there is a Republican congressman. But where there is a Democrat congressman, the Democratic congressman names the delegates to the National Convention from the district which he represents. In 1956, I was the congressman from the Eleventh Congressional District, and consequently, I was to name the delegate. Well, my close personal friend Charlie Artesani [Charles J. Artesani], Judge Artesani of Brighton—I named him. Mike Porrazzo was the state representative from East Boston, and he was close to John Hynes [John B. Hynes], and John Hynes asked me if I would appoint

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him. And I did. Pat Lynch [John M. Lynch] was the state chairman, and it was a question as to whom I would appoint from Somerville, and we agreed on Senator Corbett [James J. Corbett]. Jim Corbett who had a good Democratic following over there. So I named Jim Corbett, and then from the city of Cambridge, I named myself; I named myself the fourth man. I got a telephone call from Jack Kennedy. Jack said to me, "Tip, I'd like to have you name Bobby as a delegate." Bobby was registered in those days from 108 Bowdoin Street where half the family at one time or other, or all the family at one time or other, I guess, were registered from. I said, "Gee, Jack, you're a delegate at large yourself. I shouldn't think you'd want two on from the family." We kind of looked at Bobby as a kid in those days. And he said, "Well, Tip, gee, I really would like to get Bob on." And I said,

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"Well, I've already named the delegates." "Well," he said, "Tip, listen, the reason I want Bob there, in my opinion he's the smartest politician I've ever met in my life. And," he said "if lightning strikes, I'd like to have him on the floor with the credentials so he can be a real worker for me." And I agreed with him—that if lightning struck, he had the right to have his brother on the floor. I withdrew as a delegate myself, and I substituted Bob Kennedy as a delegate. And that's how Bob became a delegate at the '56 Convention. He doesn't know himself to this day how he happened to be chosen as a delegate, but he was chosen as a

delegate because his brother thought he was the smartest politician that ever lived. Maybe he is, I don't know. He certainly proved pretty

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well. He was the campaign manager for his brother as president and then went in and got elected as United States Senator in a new state, and he seems to be doing pretty well. But, anyway, he didn't engineer his brother's election in '56, fortunately for the President and for Bobby and for all of us who loved him so dearly along the line. We were fortunate to have lost that cliff-hanger. But that's how Bobby got to the Convention. It was because of Jack's insistence—not so much Jack's insistence but the fact that Jack had so much confidence in his brother Bobby's ability as a political campaigner. Anything else we have to say today?

MORRISSEY: Well, I don't want to ruin your afternoon.

O'NEILL: Well, what else can we talk about?

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MORRISSEY: Do you want to tell the Virgin Islands story?

O'NEILL: Oh, yes, that's one of my favorite stories. When we went out to the Convention in '60...I don't want anybody to think that I was anything but a worker in the vineyard or a soldier in the line of the ranks—that's about what I was. And sometimes, with all the young rush organization of Kennedy's, I felt as though I was an unwanted soldier. He had so many workers around. But on the Sunday afternoon before the convention actually had opened—the Kennedy operations were using a small room off the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel—I was assigned to work that afternoon with Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]. Ted had been Jack Kennedy's administrative assistant or secretary while he was a member of Congress and while he was United States Senator, and later was

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to become secretary to the President's Cabinet. We were assigned to scout up the Virgin Island delegates and to see if we could convince them to vote for John Kennedy for President. Well, finally, we located them in the lobby of the Biltmore, and we talked to them about John Kennedy and how we thought that Jack was going to win; what a progressive forceful person he'd be; how it would be in the best interests of all the people back home in the Virgin Islands if they had a young man of the type of Jack Kennedy who would definitely come up with a program that would aid the islands. And they listened to us without too much comment. Finally, I turned to the first fellow, and I said to the delegate, "Who are you going to vote for?" He said, "I'm going to vote for John Kennedy." And

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I put a kind of smile on my face' I thought perhaps we had sold them a real bill of goods. I asked the second delegate who he was going to vote for, and he said he was going to vote for Lyndon Johnson. I asked the third fellow who he was going to vote for, and he was going to vote for Adlai Stevenson. I asked the fourth fellow whom he was going to vote for, and the fourth one was going to vote for Stu Symington [Stuart Symington, II]. So there were four delegates from the Virgin Islands, each one of them had a different candidate, and they were there to make sure that between them they had a winner. Now this struck me funny. I knew that Mike Kirwan [Michael J. Kirwan], who had been a member of Congress for well over twenty years and who idolized Jack Kennedy—had an affection for him like a father had

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for a son—and he was chairman of the Appropriations Committee of the subcommittee of the interior which handled all the money for the Virgin Islands. He was responsible for the sewerage system, for the water system, for the schools, and for the hospitals and for whatever they needed down there. Mike was their strong man in the Congress; without him it was impossible for them to get any money for any projects that they needed. So I went over, and I got a hold of Mike. I told him about the assignment that Ted Reardon and myself had of working on the delegates. So Mike came over, and we again met with the Virgin Island delegates. Mike said, “You fellows know who I am?” “Oh, Mr. Kirwan, we know who you are. You’re a grand man, you’ve been wonderful to us. We appreciate everything you’ve done for

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us.” “Well,” he said, “got some ideas down there you may need a new school or a new hospital or something. Is that right?” “Yes.” “Well, you know that the only fellow that can give you that school or hospital is Mike Kirwan, don’t you?” “That’s right.” “Well,” he said, “boys, I want you to know I’m with Jack Kennedy for President of the United States.” Now he turned to the first delegate, and he said, “Who are you with?” And he said, “Mr. Kirwan, I’m with Jack Kennedy.” He turned to the second delegate, and he said, “Who are you with?” He said, “Mr. Kirwan, I’m with Jack Kennedy.” Then to the third delegate he said, “Who are you with?” “Mr. Kirwan,” he said, “I’m with Jack Kennedy.” He turned to the fourth delegate, and he said, “Who are you with?” He said, “I’m with Jack Kennedy all the way.” “Well,” he said, “that means

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four votes from the Virgin Islands for Jack Kennedy.” “Positively,” they said, “Mr. Kirwan, absolutely!” Mike said, “Gentlemen, that’s the greatest advocacy and talk that I’ve ever heard in behalf of the appropriations bill that you people want for the Virgin Islands.” And he said, “You can be sure I’ll go the distance for you. Gentlemen,” he said, “I’ll be watching you at the Convention.” Well, of course, as history showed up, before the Virgin Islands were ever called, Kennedy had been nominated. But the Virgin Island boys, they were there

with their four votes strong. But I believe they'd have been there with their four votes strong anyway because they had their eye on Mike, and they knew that Mike Kirwan had his eye on them, and their eye on the Virgin Islands appropriations bill. Well, those are little interesting things that happened at the

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Convention.

MORRISSEY: I think there's only one other story you told me before we started the tape, and that had to do with the Kennedy-McCormack troubles over "Onions" Burke [William H. Burke, Jr.].

O'NEILL: Well, much has been said about the feuds of the Kennedys and the McCormacks. This actually started when Jack Kennedy was a member of Congress. He was a maverick, didn't follow the leadership of Rayburn and McCormack, and they resented him very much. But the real argument comes over two instances: first, when John McCormack asked Jack Kennedy to sign a petition to release Jim Curley, the former mayor, from prison and Kennedy refused to sign it; and secondly, the argument over the patronage which the Massachusetts delegation later had a meeting about in which Kennedy was

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the spokesman. I mentioned this along the line. And so, because of those two incidents, they hardly spoke to each other. Now an interesting thing happened in 1952 when Jack Kennedy was a candidate for the United States Senate against Henry Cabot Lodge. Cabot Lodge was all wrapped up in the Eisenhower campaign for president. He was the top man in the Eisenhower campaign, and he actually spent little time in Massachusetts campaigning. And it was in the closing weeks of the campaign that he realized that Jack Kennedy was really breathing down his neck and that he was in serious trouble. It seems as though one of the votes that Jack Kennedy had made on the floor of Congress that was later to come back to haunt him was that he offered an amendment to the foreign aid bill to cut down the appropriation that was going to go to Israel. Lodge had a rally over on Blue Hill Avenue in which

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Jake Javits [Jacob K. Javits], who was then a member of the Congress and later to become a senior United States Senator when Bobby was to become junior United States Senator from New York, came to Boston. He spoke at a gathering at a theater on Blue Hill Avenue where he condemned Jack Kennedy and said he was the true son of his dad, and he inferred that he was an anti-Semitic in offering proof that Kennedy had made an amendment on the floor of trying to cut the appropriation to Israel. Well, Ambassador Kennedy got awfully upset, and realizing from his polls how close the campaign was, he called John W. McCormack. Now

McCormack represented wards twelve and fourteen, the two Jewish wards in the city of Boston, for years, and McCormack was so popular in these two Jewish wards that his enemies used to call him the Rabbi and said that he catered to

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these wards too much. But no man ever had the ability to get the vote in that particular area that John McCormack could get. They had great confidence in him then, and they still do today. So going out to Blue Hill Avenue, they had a rally for Jack Kennedy. John McCormack got up, and he made the following speech: "Two nights ago Jake Javits was here, and he told you about Jack Kennedy. I want you to know that the story he told is not true. I want you to know there was a movement on foot in the Congress of the United States to strike out of the foreign aid bill all the money for Israel. And I looked around the Congress for a man with courage and fortitude and stamina who would stand up. And I found young Jack Kennedy, and I gave him this amendment and I said, 'Jack offer

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this amendment. It will cut the budget some, but we will save the remainder of the money for Israel.' And by offering the amendment, he saved the remainder of the appropriations for Israel." Well, the people of ward twelve and ward fourteen bought the McCormack theory and the story in toto. Of course, it was a figment of McCormack's imagination; it never happened that way whatsoever. Kennedy carried the state by about seventy-five thousand. And so it can be said that John W. McCormack helped save the bacon for John F. Kennedy in that crucial fight against Henry Cabot Lodge.

You know, the day that I was sworn in as a Congressman, I was on the third floor of the Cannon building. I had drawn room 317, and Jack had a room across the hall. He was moving his equipment from the House

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side to the Senate side, and I walked by his office. He was arguing with Mary Davis. Mary was telling him that she's not coming with him, she's through. Now he couldn't believe that Mary was leaving him. "Mary, you've got to come over. You've got to take charge." "No, I'm not interested. I'm going to stay on the House side." So anyway, we got talking, and he told me that story that I just related to you. "And you know, Tip," he said, "he's the greatest Democratic"—meaning John McCormack—"that I've ever met in my life." He said, "He had no reason in the world to do that for me because the truth of the matter was I was a maverick. I never followed the ball; I never followed his leadership. I voted the way I felt like." But he said, "When the chips were

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down, because I was a Democrat he was up in the fire lines for me." And he said, "You know, I took some bad advice when I first came down here. If I had my life to live over, you

know, I wouldn't have been a maverick. I wouldn't have taken the position. I think I would have followed along and far more friendly." He said, "He did for me something that I never could have done for him. Which shows to me he's a real big man." He said, "Don't ever get into the position that I got myself into with the leadership." And that was Jack Kennedy talking to me on my first day in Washington when I got elected a member of Congress.

MORRISSEY: It says a lot. Did you have a primary on your hands when you ran for Congress in '52?

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O'NEILL: I had the hardest primary I ever had in my life. I was Speaker of the House and ran against Mike LoPresti [Michael LoPresti] who was State Senator from the area. His senate district comprised one half of my district; my state representative area, though I was Speaker, comprised about one sixth of the district. And I won in a very close fight.

MORRISSEY: Did John Kennedy involve himself in that?

O'NEILL: He didn't involve himself to my knowledge one iota. I wouldn't have ever expected him to. The only thing that I think I probably obtained from him—I wouldn't have put him in any position like that; it would have been very unfair of me—he did give me an opportunity of knowing, I think probably six or eight weeks before anybody else, that he definitely under no consideration was going to be a candidate

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for Congress, and it was alright for me to move.

MORRISSEY: You know you mentioned that dinner in Belmont. Was there much talk that night about Lodge supposedly being unbeatable? Remember a lot of people were saying that back in '52.

O'NEILL: I can remember we talked. . . . Well, as we talked at that dinner that night, I would say that he definitely had his mind made up that he was going to be a candidate for the United States Senate. But there was still high speculation that he could possibly be a candidate for governor—although there was no question in my mind. His attitude was that night that he had had six years in Congress; he had all of Congress that he had wanted; if he couldn't move, if he couldn't advance, then he wanted to move out. It was either now or never—

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either move now or never. Oh, I remember what we were talking about that night so particular well was the Democratic Party was about at its lowest ebb. Harry Truman was getting hit from all sides. And he knew exactly what he was going into. He knew that he was fighting a fellow who was very articulate, very smooth, a prodigious worker himself, but also who had some enemies within his own party. We used to think that Henry Cabot Lodge was one of the real great campaigners. Of course, when it came to campaigning, the Kennedys just lost everybody. There's never been anybody in the history of this nation to campaign like the Kennedys, up until that period anyway. They set a new type of campaign. They turned it from the old school of street corner rallies and neighborhood rallies and things of

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that to get in and meet, meet, meet, shake as many hands as you possibly can, have a winning smile, answer a few questions, and move on to the next area. Previous to that there was a theory of debates and long political talks and things of that nature. But, of course, the advent of radio and television, television particularly, I think changed the mode of campaigning.

MORRISSEY: When you were here on the Hill and he was President, did you get many calls from him about legislation, say, the expansion of the Rules Committee—issues like that?

O'NEILL: I would say I probably had, of, a half a dozen different telephone calls from him on different things. Some of them were extremely interesting. Here he was the President of the United States and could I help him get a vote in the Governor's Council in Massachusetts.

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And "Tip, you know so and so. Would you speak to him with regard to such and such a problem?" that he was interested in. Here he was the President of the United States. Plus the fact we talked about personal issues with regard to his brother Ted and Eddie McCormack [Edward J. McCormack, Jr.] which probably we could talk about at some later date. He was always extremely easy to talk to. I think probably only once was he disappointed. He called me on legislation with regard to higher education, and he said to me, "Dick Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] tells me you're off." I said, "What do you mean I'm off, Mr. President?" "Well," he said, "I understand that you're not going to vote for the bill." I said, "Well, Mr. President, I'm voting exactly the same way I would think that if you were a member of the committee you

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would vote." He said, "That's enough for me." I knew that had he been a member of the committee he would have been voting exactly the same way I did, which wasn't in agreement with him that particular day. We straightened the matter out as time went along. I was playing a position to hold in the legislation in the Rules Committee until the Committee on

Education also acted upon another education bill and sent it over to the Committee so we could act on both.

But Jack and I, the late President and myself, we got along tremendously. I could tell an awful lot of things that will never be told, interesting stories along the line. He always had a faculty of when he was criticized in the newspaper when he was a United States Senator....I can remember one particular column where

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The *Boston Post* went after him because he was going to vote the way he ultimately voted on the St. Lawrence Seaway. Bill Smith, who was my secretary at the time, came in, and he said, "Did you see the *Post* this morning? Oh, they kicked the brains out of Jack Kennedy. He'll be in about 10 o'clock this morning." Sure enough, at 10 o'clock, "Hi, Tip, I was just going by and thought I'd come in and say hello. Did you read the *Post*? What did you think of what Colbert [James G. Colbert] had to say? Now how would you answer him? What do you think? What's your appraisal of a story like that?" And anytime there was ever any kind of criticism of some action that he had done in the Senate, we used to wait, and about 11 o'clock, sure enough, he'd come in. "I just happened to be passing by

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and thought I'd come in and say hello. Did you see what so-and-so had to say about me? What did you think of it? What's your appraisal? Would you answer it?" And we'd go through the same routine all the time.

Jack was a strange sort of fellow in a way. He hated criticism. If there were four of us sitting together, and you happened to be a close particular friend of mine and your comment was, "Oh, Jack Kennedy, well, he hasn't got much of a record" or "Why do they build him up the way they do?"—something of that nature—and a third party went back and told Jack, Jack would be over in the office the next day. "You know Joe Jones—he's a good friend of yours. You know he said this about me the other day. Why should he be talking about me that way?" He'd be wanting to get to the bottom. "Will

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you check it out? What's his feeling?" He wanted everybody to love him. That's an amazing thing. He wanted everybody to love him. And, oh, it used to bother him so, you know, when he ran into adversaries along the line.

Eddie Boland [Edward P. Boland] and myself one night in 19....Well, I forget when it was. I guess it was about '58, and now he's really running for President of the United States. There were seventy-seven new members of Congress in the Democratic Party that had arrived in Washington in between the time that I took Jack's place in the House, and that particular time, say 1958. Jack came to us, and he asked us if we'd run a New England clambake for the seventy-seven members for the sole purpose that he could get to meet them. We ran it out at Dan Hanlon's home. Dan's a Washington

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attorney who was a friend of ours, a friend of the Speaker's, a friend of Jack Kennedy's, an old line Democratic pol from Boston who practiced law down here. We sent up to Boston, and got the lobsters and the clams. Unbeknownst to the seventy-seven members—they didn't realize that they were being invited for the purpose of meeting Jack Kennedy. Some of those fellows had never seen or tasted lobster before in their life. What a spread we had. We had the thing arranged perfectly. Eddie was at one table; Gene Keogh [Eugene J. Keogh] was at another table; John Fogarty [John E. Fogarty] was at another table; Torbert MacDonald [Torbert H. MacDonald] was at another table so that whatever table Jack went to, you could say, "Bob Jones, you know Jack Kennedy," or "Jack, you know Bob Jones." So he wouldn't be put in the embarrassing position of not

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knowing a member of Congress.

And the interesting thing, this all came about because Eddie Edmondson [Edward A. Edmondson] from Oklahoma was talking to Eddie Boland and myself one day, and he said, "Gee, a terrifically embarrassing thing just happened to me." And I said, "What was that?" He said, "I had about forty school kids from Oklahoma. Jack Kennedy came along, and you should have seen them go for Kennedy. They all knew Kennedy. Kennedy walked by, and he didn't know who I was. Oh, boy," he said, "if he could have only called me 'Hi, Eddie,' and said a word in front of those kids, it would have made me look like a million dollars." And he said, "Gee, wouldn't you think he would have known me." Well, we sat down, we said to Jack, "Jack, listen, you've got to know these fellows. You know what

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I mean? You could have had this fellow for life." Actually, he had Edmonson and his brother, who became the governor of Oklahoma later on. But we drilled into Jack, "Jack, you've got to get the book; you've got to look at those pictures; you've got to get over to the House side more; you've got to meet these fellows so when they're walking by through with twenty-five or thirty possibly leaders from their state, you can call them by their first name." And that was the object behind the New England dinner that we had, although the fellows that we were inviting never realized that Eddie and I had them there for the sole purpose of meeting Jack Kennedy that night.

MORRISSEY: You know you mentioned Billy Green, and you said that John Kennedy thought that

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Green was bitterly against him. Was that so?

O'NEILL: Yes, sure.

MORRISSEY: It was? I'm surprised.

O'NEILL: Green and Governor Lawrence were both opposed to Kennedy early in 1960. The reason they were both opposed to him in early 1960, they felt that any Democrat was going to win. Lawrence had been the first Democrat [Catholic?] ever elected governor in the history of Pennsylvania. He saw a big anticipated margin dwindle, dwindle, and dwindle until he won by a squeak. The religious issue had really taken hold. Now they were anxious. They would rather win the state of Pennsylvania and lose the nation, I think, than win the nation and lose Pennsylvania. Plus the fact, as I said, they thought they could win with any Democrat. And they thought that

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Kennedy couldn't win, that there would be too much of an anti-Catholic feeling in Pennsylvania. So, consequently, both Lawrence and Green were opposed, at the early stages, to Jack Kennedy. Now the interesting thing about that is this: When Jack Kennedy....I don't know whether we went through this on the tape or not.

MORRISSEY: Yes, some of it. But the point that surprised me was that Green, oh, was at heart really for Kennedy even though he realized that Kennedy might be a liability in Pennsylvania because of that religious issue. I always thought the relationship was pretty good.

O'NEILL: It turned out to be pretty good, but at the outset it was anything but. The interesting thing about it is that when Jack Kennedy

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came to me and he gave me an assignment—I don't think we went through this on the tape at all—to see what I could do with Lawrence, whom I had just met a few times along the line, and Bill Green, who was my close personal friend. That was number one assignment. Number two assignment was to break down Sam Rayburn. On the Lawrence-Green issue I said to Jack Kennedy, "Jack, you know, Bill Green's the leader of Pennsylvania. He's highly regarded and highly respected. But," I said, "there's a fellow in back of Bill Green up there, and it's a very interesting thing. The fellow that made Bill Green is the fellow that's actually the real boss up there." I'm trying to think of what his name was now. The fellow's name was Joe Clark. That was the fellow's name. Not the United States Senator. This

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Joe Clark was a wealthy contractor who retired, and he got into politics as a hobby. He took a fondness for Bill Green, and he developed Bill Green into the leader of the machine. He later became city treasurer of the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia was a corrupt Republican city,

and he drove the Republicans out and he put in the most powerful Democratic organization in America, or at least on an equal with the Chicago machine. And the fellow's name was Joe Clark. I told Jack Kennedy of the power that Clark had behind the scenes. He'd never heard of him. He reported it to his father, and old Joe found out that it was so. Old Joe didn't let any water go under the bridge before he was in touch with Joe Clark. A lot of people can say that they helped play a part in moving Pennsylvania,

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but old Joe with his long arm reached into the proper circles when he won Joe Clark, who since has died, too. And since the death of Clark and Green, in Philadelphia the organization is _____.

Well, this has been very interesting.

MORRISSEY: I'm glad you enjoyed it. I think it's great.

O'NEILL: You know, I'll tell you, when Jack Kennedy first ran for office in 1946, I was candidate for reelection to the House, the State Legislature. Mike Neville [Michael J. Neville] was running against Jack Kennedy for Congress. Johnny Cotter was running. Oh, there were a dozen candidates in the fight. And I can remember as a member of the legislature at that time—Tobin was governor—Paul Dever was very friendly with Mike Neville, and he was trying to work on Joe Kennedy to

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get young Jack Kennedy to run for lieutenant governor. Now Maurice Tobin was governor. David I. Walsh was running for reelection to the United States Senate; Tobin was running for reelection as governor; and Tobin wanted Dever on the ticket as lieutenant governor. Dever, who had no desire to run, gave him his word and then tried to back out, and he said, "If I can get young Kennedy on the ticket, will you be satisfied with him?" And Maurice Tobin said, "Yes, I'll be satisfied if you can get me young Jack Kennedy on the ticket." So they sat down and tried to talk the old man, the Ambassador, into getting Jack to run for lieutenant governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Dever was trying to arrange it for two reasons: Number one, he doesn't want to be the candidate for lieutenant governor himself; number two

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Mike Neville's his close personal friend—although he doesn't really himself think at that time that Jack Kennedy is such a serious candidate. But he would like to get him out of the fight for Mike Neville. So when Jack Kennedy started to run, I can remember it was about....Oh, it had to be, let's see, it was a June primary that year, and it seemed to me that probably it was in April when a statement was issued from the Bellevue and said, "Kennedy will be a candidate for Congress. The old man just decided that the boy's going to run for

Congress. He's not going to run for lieutenant governor." Even though we had cleared the field for him and everything else.

Now in that particular contest I supported Mike Neville. I had been in the legislature with Mike for eight years,

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and we both came from the city of Cambridge. I think probably the first time I met Jack Kennedy, I think I was introduced to him by Judge Artesani, Chuck Artesani, or Peter Cloherty out in front of the hotel. He was an anemic looking kid—you know, just back from the services and thin as a rail—and we couldn't conceive of him as being the candidate that he was going to be. He must have called my house ten times asking me if I'd support him and be with him. And I said, "Jack, I'm sorry. I served in the legislature with Mike Neville for eight years. I feel as though I have an obligation to him. I just can't be with you."

Well, one of my closest friends all through the years of politics had been the Healeys—and Joe Healey who was so active with Jack Kennedy. Their house

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was right directly behind ours. We had a very strong bond of friendship between us. We'd grown up together. And I can remember the Healeys, who were great supporters of mine, asking me if I'd be with Kennedy. "No." "Well, we'll carry the ward over you." "Well, you'll never carry this ward, but you can try what you want." Well, Jack Kennedy called a second time, "Can I come out to the house to see you?" "Jack, please, don't. You'll embarrass me, you'll embarrass yourself. There's no sense in it. I've given the fellow my word." Well, at least half a dozen times he called me. "Would you be with me sub rosa?" "No, I can't be with you." "Some of the fellows that live in the city of Cambridge, they're with me sub rosa." "I don't care if they're with you sub rosa. You're talking to the

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wrong guy. I'm not with you sub rosa. I'm with Mike Neville all the way to sign his ads, do anything I can."

Well, anyway, when the campaign was over....Or before the campaign was over, I didn't realize that Kennedy was catching on the way he was catching on. And I had, oh, very slight and moderate opposition that amounted to nothing. But back when I was in the legislature I always had a system that I used to ring every doorbell in my own precinct. I was much younger then in those days, of course. I used to go in and "I'm Tom O'Neill. I'm your neighbor. I'm a candidate for reelection to the legislature. Just thought I'd come in to say hello. I don't have any opposition—or I do, and as your neighbor, I'd appreciate your giving me any assistance or help." And the reason

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I used to do that was people would move in and out of the neighborhood and say, “Gee, O’Neill lives down the street. He’s the state rep. He walks by me. He doesn’t say hello or anything else.” And so I always had the feeling that go in and ask your neighbor for the votes. So I can remember going to Nelly Murphy who was always a good rooter of mine. “Nelly, Tom O’Neill. I’m a candidate for reelection. Just thought I’d say hello, how are you. You know, don’t forget election day. I’d appreciate your vote.” “Tom, are you running against Jack Kennedy?” “No, I’m running for the state legislature, Nelly. He’s running for Congress in Washington.” “Oh, thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. I thought he was running against you. Oh, isn’t he a wonderful man? I’ve been reading the

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books on him. Isn’t he wonderful?” Three houses down the door, Nora Sweeny, “Hi, Nora, how are you? Tom O’Neill, making my call that I always do around election time. How’s everything?” “Fine.” “How’s Pat?” “Fine. Tom, is this young Kennedy boy running against you?” “No, he’s running for Congress in Washington. I’m running for the state legislature.” “Oh, thanks be to God. I thought he was running against you. Isn’t he the most marvelous man you’ve ever seen?” Well, I must have got that ten places along the line, and I said to myself, “Thanks be to God I’m not running against Jack Kennedy.” [Laughter] That afternoon I knew that Mike Neville was dead. I knew that Mike didn’t have a chance.

I called Mike on the telephone and I can remember my Milly was with me and we were....

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Oh, Mike called us on the telephone, and he said, “Tip, have you got an automobile available?” He said, “We’ve got some stuff in town we’re printing, a rush job, and I’d like to have you pick it up.” Milly and I drove in town, and we picked the stuff up for Mike, and we brought it back to Mike’s house. Dorothy was there. Dorothy said, “What do you think?” I said, “Gee, I only can speak for Cambridge, and we’ll carry Cambridge. But it’s a tough fight. It’s just amazing how this campaign is going.” Then I got Mike aside, and I said, “Mike, how are you doing?” He says, “I’ve spent eighteen thousand dollars of my own money, and,” he says, “I’m in debt up to my ears.” And I said, “Mike, don’t spend another quarter. You haven’t got a chance against this guy.” I said, “Please, I don’t want

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to dishearten you or anything else, but, for God’s sake, I’m trying to advise you as a friend.” He started to talk about getting another mortgage on his home, and I said, “Don’t put any mortgages on your home. You’re in debt enough.” And I told him about making my bi-annual—you know, the trip that I’d made around every two years to the district to say hello to these people. I said, “You’re going to get clobbered.” And sure enough, he did. But I was with Mike all the way through in the campaign.

After the election was over, I met Jack Kennedy and I said, “Jack, congratulations!” He said, “Tip, I want you to know I’ve got every respect and admiration for you in the world.

The amount of people we broke down through pressure,” he said, “would amaze you—the amount of fellows that

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said absolutely that they’d go sub rosa, or they’d be neutral, or they’d sit it out. But,” he said, “never once did you falter for your friend.” He said, “That’s the type of friend I want to have. Anything I can ever do for you, I want you to know you’re my friend.” We shook hands. Now that was shortly after the election that I had just opposed him. And we’ve been friends from that day till the day he died. I had great respect and admiration for him.

MORRISSEY: Did he and Mike Neville get along okay after the election?

O’NEILL: Oh, yes, sure. He and Mike got along fine after the election. That’s the way the ball bounces in politics, of course. Oftentimes there are those who are with the different candidates don’t speak to each other for

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a lifetime, and the candidate and the defeated candidate are fast buddies within a matter of hours.

MORRISSEY: I didn’t realize that Neville had run up that tremendous debt.

O’NEILL: Well, he said eighteen thousand dollars that he had gone in.

MORRISSEY: That was a lot of money in those days.

O’NEILL: Yes. Mike became a tremendously successful practicing attorney in the city and later became mayor and left the bar—a wonderful family heritage for his family, for the kids.

MORRISSEY: Didn’t the Ambassador have a job in Tobin’s administration in the late forties?

O’NEILL: Yes, he did. As a matter of fact, he was chairman of the commission that set up the Department of Commerce for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As a matter of fact,

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I can well remember being in New York with him and being, I believe, in Baltimore with him. I wasn’t part of the committee, but I was a member of the State Administration Committee which they reported to. The Kennedy Commission reported to the Committee on State Administration of which I was a member. That’s what my dealings with Joe Kennedy

was, and Maurice Tobin was the governor, and he had made him the chairman of the committee. And he did a magnificent job on it, a magnificent job.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever meet Joe Kennedy, Jr. [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.]?

O'NEILL: I can remember meeting Joe Kennedy, Jr., and it must have been in 1940. I would never say that I was an intimate of his at all. I met him at the race track. Joe Timilty [Joseph P. Timilty] was police commissioner of the city of Boston, and he was Joe Kennedy's

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very close personal friend. Young Joe used to go to Harvard, and he loved the races. Timilty had a box in which he used to sit. There used to be Austy O'Connor and Joe Timilty, and I used to go with Mike Neville and Johnny Yaskall, Eddie Boland, the congressman, and we would sit in Timilty's box. And young Joe Kennedy, I used to wonder how much time he spent at Harvard between his football and athletics, and, as I said, he loved the horses. So I can remember meeting him there, and then I can remember meeting him in 1940. He was appointed as a delegate from my congressional district to the Democratic National Convention. And he went out to that Convention, and voted for Farley [James A. Farley].

MORRISSEY: Yes, against some strong opposition, as I recall.

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O'NEILL: Well, they had given their word. Dever and them had given their word to Farley. Farley had seemed to think that he had gotten a complete agreement with Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] that Roosevelt would definitely not run for the third term, and he was actively campaigning and they had given their word. Once they gave their word, they stayed with him. So I remember meeting him one particular day I was with Paul Dever in '40, at the Bellevue when we were talking about Joe Kennedy being named as a delegate that particular day. Onions Burke was the chairman of the Democratic State Committee at that time, and I guess Flaherty [Thomas A. Flaherty] was the congressman from the area. I would say it was probably Flaherty. My memory's a little hazy on it. But I remember there was much consternation in the legislature

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because young Joe Kennedy had been named as a delegate. "Who is this kid?" I think he was still in Harvard, or something like that, and "Why should he be named a delegate?" And the talk around was that he was being groomed, that he was going to go into public life. And I don't think there's any question at all that he was being groomed. Now whether he had the talent of Jack, I don't know. I would say that he was a much more gregarious individual and a difference type of a fellow as a boy than Jack was. From what I understood about Jack, Jack would never have had any enjoyment at being at the races; he never would have any

enjoyment at being around with the pols in Harvard Square. Joe enjoyed that life. He enjoyed being at the race track, being with Mel McBride and Joe Clarey and Paul Dever and Charlie

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Cavanaugh who were men in public life who were old enough to be his father. But he was delighted being with them, something that I think Jack never would have, at their particular ages.

MORRISSEY: I'm running out of tape, so why don't we call it a day.

O'NEILL: Alright.

MORRISSEY: It's been a lot of fun.

O'NEILL: Well, I've enjoyed it. I hope you have.

MORRISSEY: Very much. I wish they all were this enjoyable.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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