

**Thomas M. Rees Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 3/05/1969**  
**Administrative Information**

**Creator:** Thomas M. Rees

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**Biographical Note**

Thomas M. Rees (1925-2003) was a member of the California State Assembly from 1954 to 1962, a California state senator from 1962 to 1965, a delegate for the Democratic National Convention in 1956, 1960, 1964, and 1968, and a representative from California from 1965 to 1977. This interview focuses on the 1956 and 1960 Democratic National Conventions, John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, and Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign.

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By Thomas M. Rees

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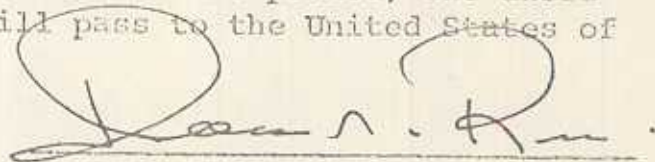
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Thomas M. Rees– JFK #1  
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	First time meeting John F. Kennedy [JFK]
2	1956 Democratic National Convention
3	California delegation's vote for Estes Kefauver for vice president
4	Adlai Stevenson supporters' views on JFK
5	Democratic Party in California
7	Possibility of JFK running for president
8	Recruiting meetings for JFK's campaign
9	Hollywood's support for JFK
11	Delegates' commitment to candidates at the 1960 Democratic National Convention
12	Pressure from Stevenson supporters
13	Tension between Stevenson and JFK supporters
15	JFK bringing people into politics
16	JFK's campaign's expectations of the California delegation
17	Criticism of Governor Pat Brown
18	Mistakes while campaigning for JFK
19	Tension between the Democratic organizers and Citizens for Kennedy
20	JFK's trips to Los Angeles, California
21	Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] 1968 campaign
23	Campaigning for RFK
24	Organizational problems in RFK's campaign
26	RFK's staff's effectiveness in California

Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS M. REES

March 5, 1969  
Washington, D.C.

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: I guess the logical place to begin is, when did you first come into contact with John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

REES: 1956. I was the assemblyman for the Beverly Hills-West Los Angeles area, and he spoke at the Women's Democratic Club of Beverly Hills. This was in the spring. He was then a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. I had his book Profiles in Courage, and we discussed it at some length. He impressed me as a very shy person then. He looked a lot younger than he did when he was running for president. I was very much impressed with him. I was part of a youth movement in our own state legislature, and it was good to see that something similar was happening in Congress.

O'BRIEN: Did you sense at this point that he was interested in the nomination for vice president?

REES: No, I didn't. He wasn't nearly as effective a public speaker as he turned out to be. He was very shy and kind of halting. He had a good style about him, a good manner, but I didn't really think of him as vice president.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact with any of the people in Kennedy's office at that point?

REES: No, I didn't. I didn't give any thought to his possible candidacy for vice president until later that year at the Democratic convention in Chicago. I was a California delegate, and the nomination of Adlai Stevenson for president was somewhat pro forma. If you remember, at that time Adlai announced that he was going to throw the vice presidential nomination open to the convention. Various people came before our California delegation and spoke for the various vice presidential candidates. I don't remember who I met from the Kennedy group. The Massachusetts delegation sat behind us, so I spoke with some of the Massachusetts people. Estes Kefauver had a lot of support in California because he had been the choice for president four years before. There was also some support, I think, for Hubert Humphrey. A few of us--Joe Houghteling from northern California, myself, maybe Ellie Heller, and two or three others--got together and started the Kennedy operation for California.

And we had a good time. . .well, if you remember the convention, it was chaotic because the counter was not keeping up with the change of votes, and it was impossible to get [Sam] Rayburn to recognize delegations. And we were practically beating [Edmund G.] Pat Brown to death--he was our delegation leader. He wanted to give a fragmented count; you know, "California goes 33 1/3 votes for this person, 18 1/8 votes for that person." Some of us were saying, "Look, you can feel the old Kennedy bandwagon going. Let's go. Let's get recognized. We'll try to get Rayburn to recognize you and throw the whole thing to Kennedy."



I remember Jim Roosevelt was pushing for Kefauver-- Jim's about the same size I am, about 6'4" or 6'5"--and we were fighting him. We finally got recognized. I remember I ran up to the rostrum and waved my arms and said, "Recognize California!" Rayburn didn't know who I was for and recognized California, but Pat reverted back to what had been our previous vote. So that was it, and Kefauver just barely won. But it was dramatic, and it fired a lot of us up.

O'BRIEN: There was a story that Roosevelt physically restrained Brown at one point there. Is there any truth to that?

REES: There might have been, because I think Pat's sympathies were with Kennedy. I think for a while he was ready to go--if Rayburn had recognized us at one point, I'm pretty sure that he would have gone for Kennedy. And then, Jim got control again, and we reverted back to our previous count.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned Joe Houghteling, yourself, and Mrs. Heller in the delegation who were supporting Kennedy. Can you remember anyone else?

REES: No.

O'BRIEN: Was Thomas Lynch. . . .

REES: I don't recall. It was more the enthusiastic younger delegates who were looking for a new and vital face. But we all had been impressed by Kennedy's speech at the convention.

O'BRIEN: Basically young people.



REES: Well, Ellie Heller was in her sixties, but young in terms of mental attitudes.

O'BRIEN: Was there any one person from the Kennedy organization who attached himself to the California group?

REES: I don't think so. I think it was very much a spontaneous thing. There were some of us who wanted to go for Kennedy, and we started lining up as many votes as we could find. We would wander back to the Massachusetts people and say, "Look, we're doing something in California." I didn't really have the impression then that I had four years later of a tightly organized organization. It was very loose and just "bam," like that.

O'BRIEN: How did the hard-core Stevenson people view this movement for Kennedy?

REES: Well, all of us were hard-core Stevenson--we were a delegation that was pledged to Adlai Stevenson, and we were all very enthusiastic about the Governor. And, really, Adlai Stevenson was kind of the father of our new Democratic upsurge in California because we had almost nothing going in '52 when he came through with his fantastic speeches and concepts. This really helped build the Party in terms of the CDC [California Democratic Council]. The delegation was very much a Stevenson group. I think that if Stevenson had recommended someone else for the vice presidency, California would have gone along without much of a protest.

O'BRIEN: You've really touched on, I think, probably an interesting point here in regard to California, and that is there is a rather, Californians at least feel there is a rather unique quality in California politics, Democratic politics, and the CDC, of course, is an important part of that. Could you perhaps briefly go into some of the groups and the alignments of these groups in the late fifties and perhaps even continue this right on into the 1960's?

REES: Well, California is a new state. It doesn't have the old voting patterns that the East has. It doesn't have the tied-down ethnic communities that the East has. I mean, California has Mexican-American communities and Jewish communities, but they're not there with the political rigidity that they are in the East. People come to California and have a tendency to leave their party. They might register as Democratic but vote Republican because California's a melting pot. We have a lot of Southerners and a lot of people from Texas and Oklahoma living there.

We also have nonpartisan government for all local offices, and in the state at that time we had cross-filing where a candidate could file on both Republican and Democratic tickets. There'd been a great effort in California to have nonpartisan politics. Now some of the younger ones, like myself, wanted to have partisan politics instead because we felt it would lead to greater responsibility and better government. We were fighting for that in the legislature. We'd just gotten through a bill to put party designation on the ballot, which we hadn't had for partisan offices.

Also, California is a civil service state, so we don't have any patronage. All jobs are covered by civil service and the merit system, so we don't have any machine politics. You run a California campaign with a volunteer organization. And at that time volunteers tended to be younger people, say under 30 or 35. They tended to be people who were definite liberals. They certainly weren't conservatives. And when Stevenson ran in '52, it was kind of the beginning of the California Democratic Council, which was a volunteer group. In my first election in 1954, for example, the basis of my election was that strong CDC support. I was able to build a precinct organization because I had good volunteers. I've never paid for anyone's services in a campaign in terms of precinct operation. The volunteer groups were just tremendous.

The clubs were very issue oriented; that's all they talked about. And at that time we held few major offices in the state. Our only statewide officer was Pat Brown. So at that time, in 1956-57, the CDC was really the Democratic Party in the state of California, and those people who were anti-CDC really weren't anything. And volunteer politics was very effective; we started picking up seats in the legislature. In a period of about three or four years we gained strong control of both houses of the legislature and all of the statewide offices. This was because we had a good volunteer effort and a slate operation--sending a Democratic mailing piece to every Democratic voter, re-educating him in terms of party responsibility.

So this was the kind of state that would like an Adlai Stevenson and would like a Kennedy.

O'BRIEN: How about officeholders? Did officeholders within California--well, of course, with the exception of CDC people--did they offer some kind of conservative influence in Democratic politics in those years?

REES: Well, they really weren't with it. If they didn't go with us, we just ignored them or in some cases put up a candidate against them. We were doing very well. Now Jesse Unruh, for example, was CDC. He and I were elected the same year. And most of those Democrats elected in 1954 and 1956 were younger CDC types. We varied in terms of our allegiance: some were allied with CDC; others were active participants in CDC. But we really kind of rolled over the old guard. In the 1956 election we held our seats, we elected a few more, and we took over the Democratic leadership in the Assembly. So the Democratic orientation in the State Assembly was strictly toward what then was the new concept of volunteer politics.

O'BRIEN: When did you first sense that Senator Kennedy was becoming a very serious nominee for the presidency?

REES: I started sensing it. . . it's hard to think because there were so many dramatic things going on in California. In 1959 people were talking about Kennedy. I'd kept my basic loyalty because I thought he'd be a good candidate and I liked him as a person. I met [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien in 1959. He was traveling around the country contacting the few of the Kennedy people he knew from the convention and others who were friends one way or another. So I spoke a lot with Larry about developing support at the legislative level. Legislators are all key because they do represent leadership in their districts, and, also, there is a strong tendency, of course, in every delegation that you put together for there to be a large representation of public officeholders. Just about any person in the state legislature or Congress who wants to be on a delegation is going to be on the delegation.

We started to build a broad base of support in California for Kennedy. Now it was difficult because Pat Brown was governor. Pat was elected in 1958 by a good majority; he was a popular governor. And Pat, of necessity, wanted to be the favorite son. Every governor wants to be the favorite son; he wants to be the kingmaker. And he always resents it when there's another group floating around that says, "Let's have John Kennedy or let's have Adlai Stevenson for president," because a governor wants to feel that he can go to that convention and be able to say, "All right, I'm going to deliver for this or that person." We found this in 1960 in the winter and spring when we were moving into the convention time. There was internecine warfare going on in the Party in terms of what were we going to do: Would we come in with a favorite son? What about people such as Stevenson and the others? Should we file a separate Kennedy slate? All these were questions that came up.

O'BRIEN:        There were a series of meetings that took place in '59, going on into 1960, at the [Peter] Lawfords' and [Bart] Lyttons'. Were you at those?

REES:            Yes, I was at some of them. I can remember going to meetings at the Lawfords'; Frank Sinatra was there and quite a few other show business people. Also, [Clarence D., Jr.] Dan Martin was active and had a few meetings.

O'BRIEN:        Were these serious recruiting meetings or were they. . . .

REES: They were serious recruiting members, but during the early time the type of organization that came through later really wasn't evident. There were just groups trying to start something. In fact, we got into trouble later, as we came up to the convention, because we had quite a few self-starting groups, and trying to get these people in the right place was very difficult. You would have individuals going around declaring that they were the leaders of the Kennedy campaign, and some of them were an embarrassment.

O'BRIEN: Who were the people in Hollywood who evolved into the leadership of, let's say, the Kennedy supporters in Southern California?

REES: Well, let me see. There was Dan Martin. Then Jerome Burns and Dick Huff, I think--they were both attorneys. O'Brien was trying to do two things: He was trying to develop citizens' groups with people such as these, but he was also spending a lot of time in the political arena. He was working over Pat Brown and [Frederick G.] Fred Dutton, then Brown's executive secretary, and they were both playing hard to get. People like Paul Ziffren were important, and Stanley Mosk. Jesse Unruh was important. [William A.] Bill Munnell, who was the state chairman at that time and majority floor leader, was important. Each of them was playing an odd game. Brown had broken with Ziffren because Paul was upstaging the Governor somewhat in California, and elected officials don't like to have appointed officials upstage them.

O'BRIEN: You mean upstaging in the sense that he was moving . . .



REES: Well, he was getting all the national publicity, and the press was playing him up as the man who was responsible for California's Democratic revival.

O'BRIEN: But had he made any movement or commitment to the Kennedys at this time?

REES: No. Paul was from Chicago. He had been associated with [Jacob M.] Arvey. He's a very shrewd person, who doesn't really commit himself very early. So we had quite a bloody national committeeman fight. Paul had the support of a lot of the CDC, but the Democratic delegation was chosen by the Sacramento people, by the Governor, by the legislators. And it was supposed to be a balanced delegation to bring in all factions within the Party, but it was pretty heavily loaded with incumbents. Many of them were antagonistic to Ziffren, and so we had a real fight to elect our national committeeman. We elected our national committeeman before the convention; Stanley Mosk was selected by the Governor.

I'd say Jess and myself were the strongest pro-Kennedy people on the delegation among officeholders.

O'BRIEN: Munnell is a rather interesting case. I understand that Kennedy people thought that he had made a commitment to them, and, of course, the next thing they knew he was supporting--was it Stevenson or Johnson?

REES: Stevenson. Well, as far as we were concerned Bill made a commitment.



O'BRIEN: Well, on this whole idea of commitment, do you think that California Democrats really understood commitment in the same terms that . . .

REES: Well, a lot of them didn't, but Bill Munnell should have. I've never had such a time in my life in a delegation. There was a CDC convention, and at that time . . . Well, Kennedy had come out to California a couple of times, and I'd had a chance to talk to him and get to know him better. At the CDC Convention, I flew with him over to Fresno, and they were seriously thinking of putting their own slate in. I looked at our delegation, and I felt that if Brown went with us, and Brown had to--really it was about the only way he could go--there would be the power of the governorship and so many legislators on that delegation that we could come out very strongly with Kennedy. At that time Stevenson was not that much of a factor. Stevenson had told people like the Edward Hellers that he certainly was not a candidate for the presidency again--you know, he told people. And, you know, there weren't many other people--there were Stuart Symington, Lyndon Johnson, and some favorite sons.

I was on the Caroline; I walked to the cabin in the back and talked to Kennedy and said, "Look, I don't think it'd be wise to put in a delegation because we have a gubernatorial election in two years, and it could split the whole state up, and it might . . . We have been pretty strong lately, and I just think it would be bad. And I'm pretty sure that we can get you a good majority of the delegates because of the composition of the delegation." He gave a great speech in Fresno, and everyone loved him. By then he was getting into his stride, and he agreed that he wouldn't come in with another delegation.

There were a few of us--I know Jess and myself, especially, in the south--who were going out and trying to firm up delegates. But when we got to the convention in Los Angeles, things were in an uproar. For instance, the Congressmen were mad. A lot of them were pushing for Johnson because he was the head of the Senate.

O'BRIEN: Did this water resources program that the Governor was pushing have anything to do with this, because of the federal aspects of the legislation?

REES: No. But I can remember the delegation meeting. Chet Holisfield was just blistering the Governor, and all the Governor was going to do was say, "I'm for Kennedy and I'd like all of you to come along, but if you don't want to, you can go for whomever you want." And they blistered poor old Pat and chewed him out for this action.

A couple of weeks before the convention, incidentally, the Stevenson people came out of the woodwork. I started getting tons of telegrams calling me a fink for supporting Kennedy and saying I was being paid off. I was a volunteer all this while. They were the toughest things I'd ever gotten. People started calling me names and "How could you do this to Adlai Stevenson" and "Remember Joseph R. McCarthy" and all the muck they could bring up about Kennedy. These people were amazing. You should have seen what they said about Robert F. Kennedy when I was back there supporting him.

So, all these people were picketing around the Sports Arena, and then--I think Paul Ziffren was playing games then. And, since he was the outgoing national committeeman he had jurisdiction over the tickets, and it seemed like half the Stevenson people in California were on the floor of that Convention. They really stacked that place for Stevenson. He didn't have any votes--the only votes he had were from California--but we sure got cut up in the process.

And then, the time when we were supposed to take a vote to find out what California was going to do, Jess--unfortunately, those were in the days when he was fat and tough--made a couple of tough motions like tabling something, and people got mad at him. So we took a vote and Stevenson came out ahead of Kennedy by about three votes, which . . . You can imagine how some of us felt who had told the President, "Don't worry about California; we have it for you." And in terms of everything that should have happened we had it for him, but these incumbents, they said, "Oh, I've got to

vote for Stevenson because of my district," or "I have to go for Stevenson. You know, I have a lot of people"--one guy who became a federal judge, Thomas J. MacBride said; "Oh, I have to go for Stevenson." We said, "Tom, you're not running again!" "Why do you have to go for Stevenson?" You know, they seemed to be mesmerized. I'd see someone across the lobby, and I'd start walking across to talk to them and they'd say, "Look, Rees, I'm sick of your strong-arm tactics." You know, I hadn't seen this guy for five months.

These people made up their minds that this was the great crusade, and that those of us who were for Kennedy were the boss types. From what was happening before to what happened then, I was kind of walking around in a daze.

I had to tell Larry O'Brien, you know. I had to tell him that California had just given Stevenson three more votes than Kennedy.

O'BRIEN: Well, it goes back then to the composition of that delegation. Were you at that so-called "smoke-filled sanctuary" in Carmel when they put that together?

REES: No, Munnell and Unruh were the assembly people.

O'BRIEN: By this time had Hyman B. Raskin come to California?

REES: Yes, I think Hy had come to California.

O'BRIEN: Was he very effective, though, in . . .

REES: I don't know. I never really worked with him. I was working delegates and trying to build a volunteer operation and get some parades going and things.

O'BRIEN: In lining up delegates and certainly after the delegates had been selected, were there any promises of jobs or threats or, you know, things in the way of . . .

REES: Oh God! No! You can't do that with these people. If you talk to them, they consider that you're muscling them. If you say, "How do you do," they fly off the handle. The Governor would call up people and say, "Gee, I've done all of this for you, and I've done all of that for you. Can't you help me in this thing? You know darn well that Stevenson isn't a serious candidate." And then they'd blow up, "You're trying to pressure me!"

O'BRIEN: Did people like Kenneth P. O'Donnell and O'Brien really understand that?

REES: I don't think they did, and this is part of their problem, and it came out later in the campaign. I think they assumed that there was an organization and that there were strong people in the state who could deliver something. They thought there might have been a David L. Lawrence or a Daley or, you know, whoever it might be that you talk to, and this guy says, "Okay," he makes the deal, and that's it. I think that they were always terribly skittish of California politics because it is erratic, because it's a pure volunteer operation. And people operate on their emotions. They can get swept up in something and all of a sudden some poor guy who had five-hundred votes ends up with five. I don't think the Kennedy people understood that. In the campaign, too, we didn't have the broad base that we should have had. We should have won California. There was no reason we shouldn't have won California.

O'BRIEN: Did people like yourself or Jess Unruh or Governor Brown ever try to reason with people like O'Brien or O'Donnell or . . .

REES: Well, I did. I talked a lot with Edward M. Kennedy about it, the necessity of broadening the base and bringing other people in, and as a result, we set up a citizens group with Thomas W. Braden and Mort Hall, and my job was to try to coordinate the two. I was a vice-chairman for southern California. And it was a miserable job because really there wasn't much coordination. We were able to bring in some good volunteers, but it wasn't a broad enough base. But it was a great campaign, really. I thought it was the greatest thing I've ever been in because it was a fun campaign. Kennedy campaigns are that way. You know, you just can't wait to get up in the morning to get on the trail with these people.

O'BRIEN: Do you feel he attracted a lot of good people into Democratic politics?

REES: Oh, yes. I think that if we had had another week to ten days we would have taken California easily because, well, from the time of the debates on, you could really feel it. You could really feel that surge you get with a Kennedy campaign.

O'BRIEN: Going back to '60, going into the Democratic Convention, did Governor Brown have a clear idea of what he was trying to do, first of all in the selection of that delegation, the apportionment of the delegates, and also carrying it down to the wire as a favorite son candidate?

REES: Well, I don't think he did.

O'BRIEN: Did he enjoy the give and take, the infighting of politics?

REES: No. He enjoyed being the Governor and giving the speeches and things like that.

I don't really think that Pat was a very good infighter. Pat got to where he was because he was there at the right time, which is the story of a lot of us.

O'BRIEN: Right. Do you really think that Kennedy people expected too much out of that delegation at the National Convention?

REES: Well, I think they expected more than what they got. You know, I could see their disappointment, say, if Lyndon Johnson polled a fair amount of votes, but they could understand the congressional delegation going for Johnson. But all of the sudden, in a one week period, here comes this holy crusade and these people howling around the Sports Arena. This is something that just doesn't happen. And here is a delegation that was supposedly put together by all the pros, and it went the way it did.

O'BRIEN: How did Clair Engle fit into all this?

REES: I'm not quite sure. Clair was kind of an enigma, and he wasn't really. . . . I think Clair was just trying to stay out of the cross fire, because he served in the United States Senate with Lyndon Johnson, and he knew that Lyndon Johnson meant more to him in the Senate than Jack Kennedy. He might have been for Johnson; I'm not sure. But I just don't recall Clair being a factor.



O'BRIEN: There was a confrontation between Robert Kennedy and Governor Brown during the convention. You didn't happen to get in on that did you?

REES: No, I saw a lot of other confrontations with Brown, but not that one.

O'BRIEN: Well, what were some? Between Brown and some of the Kennedy family?

REES: Oh, there's a . . . . No, no, just some of the delegates. Congressmen especially. No, the Kennedy people. . . . I told Larry O'Brien, I said, "Larry, we just took a poll. I didn't want it taken because the vote isn't until tomorrow, but we took a poll and this is the way it came out." I read the figures, and he kind of turned white at the gills. And he says, "Well, Tom, I understand how disappointed you are, but just see if you can switch about three or four of these votes so we get more than Stevenson does." And we were working half votes. We had a huge, unmanageable delegation because we had half votes.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, they were counting about thirty-five votes I think, weren't they?

REES: Yeah, we were able to turn some. And we got more votes than Stevenson did, but I never worked so hard in my life.

O'BRIEN: Do you think after Pat Brown got through this, do you think he really deserved the criticism he got from the press?



REES: Well, some of it. I don't know. If you're going to pretend to be the delegation leader, you better line up your soldiers a little better than he did.

I think that the Governor should have gotten stronger commitments. There's no reason that people who are legislators, depending on the Governor, should double cross him.

O'BRIEN: Then he didn't get them, mainly just because he isn't that kind of a person.

REES: Oh, yeah, because he just isn't that kind of a person. In a way, I prefer a guy like Jess Unruh, because Jess is a very tough, pragmatic guy, and he doesn't forget. In a situation like that . . . I mean, Jess today wouldn't have made the mistakes that he made in 1960. At least, he knows how to count, and he knows how to get commitments.

O'BRIEN: What mistakes--well, we went through some of that, but what mistakes would you say were major in 1960 on the part of Unruh?

REES: Well, one mistake--I think he muscled too much during the convention, especially on the tabling motion that caused that vote to come out. We were trying to delay the vote. It was done in such a way that some undecided people got mad and voted for Stevenson just to show us. Then, I think he centralized the campaign too much in his hands and didn't broaden the base that has to be broadened. But I was more CDC-oriented than Jess because I had a very CDC district, and my feeling is that you have to spread your base as fast as you can spread it because this is really where you're going to get your generation of support.

O'BRIEN: Does this separation or at least the alienation from CDC begin about this time?

REES: I would think so. After Kennedy won, of course, everyone decided they really loved him and he was great. But then, I think, Jess moved up very fast, and this is when he started muscling quite a bit. His alienation started there. We're all sweetness and light now, but it was about that time that we started fragmenting. The CDC became more anti-incumbent.

O'BRIEN: Were there any tensions between state and national tickets that year in California in the general elections?

REES: Well, we didn't have a state ticket; we just had . . . Let me see; that was . . . We didn't have a state ticket; we just had congressional and legislative races.

O'BRIEN: How about the regular Democratic organizations and the Citizens for Kennedy movements? Were there any real tensions in those, between those?

REES: There was tension between the two. The citizens group wasn't competent, really, to do much with the field operation, and Jess didn't understand the field operation. It wasn't set up very well, and too much of the time had ended up in some dissident group. This is the beginning, I think, when Jess started to try and develop his own field operation called the Democratic Volunteers Committee. It never did work out, and it was kind of a divisive thing. I did everything to keep it out of my district because I want everything to be settled in one organization. The minute you have two organizations, all your people who don't agree go into another organization, and you no longer have any control.

O'BRIEN: How did you approach. . . . Did you get cooperation from some of the ethnic and religious groups in California, thinking in terms of perhaps blacks, Mexican-Americans . . .

REES: We had a joint operation on registration. We had weekly meetings, and much of our registration effort was directed toward the ethnic minority groups. We did very well there, because Kennedy had a natural appeal to the black groups, and he had a natural appeal to the Mexican-American groups.

O'BRIEN: Was your registration effort one of these things that was jointly with COPE [Committee on Political Education]?

REES: It was mostly financed by the Kennedy campaign.

O'BRIEN: Who did the fund raising for the Kennedy movement in southern California?

REES: I'm not sure who was in charge.

O'BRIEN: Were you with Senator Kennedy in any of his campaign swings through California that fall?

RESS: I was with him on two or three trips in the Los Angeles area.

O'BRIEN: After the election, when did you see him again?

REES: I saw him, oh, about May of the next year. I was on the reelections committee, reapportionment, and that was the year of reapportionment. There were, I think, six or seven new seats coming to California. And we were able to draw the lines so that we could guarantee a pickup of ten to twelve Democratic seats. This then was his problem. And as soon as we voted the bill out of the Assembly, I flew to Washington the next day and met with Larry O'Brien. I showed him the maps and showed him the districts we thought we'd pick up and who I thought some of the candidates might be. And then he asked me if I wanted

to go downstairs for a cup of coffee. We went downstairs and saw the President in his office.

O'BRIEN: In the matter of patronage matters, after the election, did you get in on any of these?

REES: No.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, there were some patronage problems there in California. Did Governor Brown really assert himself on this, do you know, on dispensing patronage?

REES: Well, I don't know.

O'BRIEN: Apparently Jesse Unruh had the inside on most patronage matters, then.

REES: Yes, he did. I don't know how many patronage matters there were. With a U.S. senator there, you certainly don't have the inside on all of them. I mean, the postmaster thing usually went local, and the judgeship things are . . . The senator, you know, has more to say, because he's there and they're not.

O'BRIEN: Was Jess Unruh interested in being Postmaster General in 1963?

REES: I don't know.

O'BRIEN: What did you do in the election of '68? Were you involved in the RFK campaign? You mentioned a little earlier that you were.

REES: Oh yes. I was the first member of Congress to come out for Bob Kennedy, I remember. Three of us were the incorporators: Jess Unruh, then Phillip Burton and myself. Jess was the chairman; there wasn't really that much time--I did a computer programming operation on voting analysis for the county. I've done a

fair amount of this type of work. I consider it extremely important. We use that as really our basis for running the precinct organization. I traveled a lot with the Senator, but in a way I kind of prefer the nuts and bolts stuff, because that's what gets people elected.

O'BRIEN: Did you reestablish any contact with Jess Unruh?

REES: We're good friends. I'd say basically political allies.

O'BRIEN: How do you look at Unruh's running the RFK campaign in '68?

REES: Well, it's kind of hard to assess it because the RFK campaign was put together in such a short time. I thought there were a lot of excesses in the campaign in terms of spending, but, you know, I think like an accountant. We won and that's the important thing. It's really impossible to criticize, or to second-guess a campaign that you put together in about ten weeks. The ten week campaign is an extremely difficult thing. You have to put your press in; you have to get your media there. We had this McCarthy thing that was very hard to assess. We had these primaries coming up; they were hard to assess. It was just extremely difficult to . . . You didn't have the time to think; you just reacted. And you tried to do everything you could--and hoped to God that you would peak when you were supposed to peak. So it was a tough campaign, because we really didn't have any time for in-depth polling; we didn't have any time to really think out a lot of the issues. It was a difficult thing, and the Kennedys, understandably I think, were pretty nervous about California. By then you also had a lot of back-biting on Unruh because he was a controversial person. It was an odd campaign; it really was.

O'BRIEN: Was there any effort on the part of Jess Unruh to broaden this campaign out, to take in as many divergent groups . . .

REES: He did a far better job this time than he did last time. I think that we could have won if he had done as well--I felt it was pretty broad. He did make an effort to bring in more factions of the Party. But by then, you know, we didn't have a Party. In 1956, 1960, we had a Party; we had a precinct organization; we had a CDC; we had headquarters in every district; we had clubs that generated money. I was able to beat McCarthy in my district. Why, all my clubs were for McCarthy, but we murdered them in the precincts. Of course I knew the precincts to go to, but we beat them because they did not generate what they would have generated a few years ago.

O'BRIEN: How much time did you spend out there prior to the primary campaign, away from Congress?

REES: I spent about four weeks. I was with him on the first trip, most of that time, until he got out of the state. I was with him when he came back from Oregon for those two days.

O'BRIEN: Did you have any contact with Fred Dutton or Stephen E. Smith or . . .

REES: Yes, I saw Fred from time to time, Dick Tuck and Smith and the whole group. I saw a fair amount of Frank Mankiewicz, who I probably know a little better.

O'BRIEN: What were some of the major organizational problems that you had? Any personalities involved?

REES: Well, you had the McCarthy people, most of the CDC--and the CDC did endorse McCarthy. Fortunately, the CDC was a very weak organization by then.

O'BRIEN: Right.

REES: So they weren't really doing the job. We were working on youth for Kennedy. But on the campuses I found the students were still basically for McCarthy, because McCarthy had been there first. I thought that Kennedy would do best--and everyone agreed on this--in the Negro areas and the Mexican-American areas. These were the areas that I spent most of my time in. We also did well in my own district in the Jewish areas, especially in Fairfax, which is middle and lower middle income. We started losing a few when we got into upper middle and upper income areas. In my district we only hit those precincts where we knew every single vote would go for Kennedy. And we delivered about 85 percent--this is in the primary. Eighty-five percent of the Negroes voted consistently.

O'BRIEN: 85?

REES: 85. And they went nine to one. I mean, it was great.

O'BRIEN: Did Jess Unruh and some of the people around Jess Unruh feel that there was a possibility of getting at the suburban vote as well as the ethnic-group votes?



REES: Yes. We had defined the vote. . . . The program that I put together with our computer was taking the Kennedy '60 vote, the Proposition 14 (the open housing vote), and the Brown-Yorty Democratic primary vote--that gives you an internal check, as against two general checks--and then programming that in with the registration of a precinct and also the percentage that voted in the last election. And this gave us a keyed print-out.

O'BRIEN: Right.

REES: We used basically this keyed print-out, and if we found some suburban areas where there was a chance, we'd try to do something there. But in a short campaign, you have to hit your strength; you don't have time to go out and convince anybody.

O'BRIEN: In this program that you ran'through--that was for your own congressional district.

REES: No, it was for the county.

O'BRIEN: Oh, for the whole Los Angeles County.

REES: Yes. I've been working with computer programming for about the last four or five years.

O'BRIEN: And this was made available to the Kennedy organization?

REES: Yes.

O'BRIEN: And they followed that pretty well in campaign techniques?

REES: Yes. Incidentally, I'm trying to set some classes up now for the Democratic members, just to show them how to analyze districts and figure out their strengths and their weaknesses. If we had had a year for the Kennedy campaign, we would have run a different campaign. But we just had a couple of months. There's only one thing to do; that's head where you're going to get it.

O'BRIEN: Anyone in the Kennedy organization become intrigued with this and, at this point, become interested in perhaps applying it elsewhere?

REES: I don't know. I haven't really talked to too many people.

O'BRIEN: As you look back at people like Jerry Bruno and many of the people who came into the state from outside, which of those people do you think were most effective?

REES: Well, I don't know. I was completely mesmerized by Bruno because he's such a sweet looking guy, and he's the roughest, toughest son-of-a-gun I've ever met. I think he's just great. Of course, I think Mankiewicz is tremendous. He's damn good under fire. As for the others, there were always these Kennedy people wandering in, and really you don't know what to do with most of them. I mean, they say, "Well, look, I'm his second cousin from Hyannis Port," and, you know, what do you do? This is a problem in campaigns--what the hell do you do with volunteers because a lot of things you used to use them for are now done by machine.

God, I'll tell you, I was glad to be in the Bob Kennedy campaign because I'll never be in anything like it again, I don't think. I mean just the electricity and the charge and everyone feeling--I mean, God, you're just a band of brothers, you know.

O'BRIEN: It was a little bit like 1960, then.

REES: Yes. And, in some respects, I thought it was even better than 1960.