Wesley Barthelmes Oral History Interview – RFK #1, 5/20/1969
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note
Barthelmes, press secretary to Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) from 1965 to 1966, discusses relations between RFK's senate office and different news outlets and reporters, RFK's personality and eccentricities, and his rapport with different groups that he spoke to, among other issues.

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By Wes Barthelmes

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Wes Barthelmes

Wes Barthelmes

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Wesley Barthelmes – RFK #1

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First of Three Oral History Interviews

With

Wesley Barthelmes

Washington, D.C.
May 20, 1969

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Would you begin by explaining just how you got to the Senator's [Robert F. Kennedy] office?

BARTHELMES: Sure, I'd be glad to. I was then in my third year of employment with Mrs. Green [Edith S. Green], Democrat from Oregon, and I had had some relation with both, then the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy and David Hackett [David L. Hackett] in connection with the National Juvenile Prevention Program [National Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Program], Mrs. Green felt that the legislation had originated with her but that in its unfolding and development by the executive agencies downtown that it had not quite worked out to her satisfaction. As a result, in her usual way, she sent out a flare and up came Dave Hackett. She felt basically it was more comprehensive than she had intended. She wanted individual specific small projects and not city-wide or country-wide projects.

This was a matter of legitimate and sincere misinterpretation, I think. Anyway, as a result, I got sent down to the Justice Department building to see Dave Hackett and Don Ellinger [W. Don Ellinger], Barney Ross [George Barney Ross], and on one occasion, the Attorney General. It was out of that experience, I would imagine, that I received a call in February, 1965 from Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] asking if I'd be interested in coming to work for the Senator, having come from the same state, Massachusetts.

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I was more than pleased to be asked, and we talked about it. And then a week or so had passed, and I was asked if I'd come over and talk to the Senator in his office in the New Senate Office Building.

I'd been interviewed for positions before, but I thought it was like many other things that he did--it was a departure from the conventional pattern. It was a most unconventional interview. In the first place it reflected what subsequent events bore out--my impression that he was most interested in some of the physical qualities of people, particularly courage. There seemed less interest in the conventional business of my background as in two things: A) was that I had been in the paratroops, at which point there developed a great fascinating inquiry, almost an interrogation, as to how one was recruited and what one got paid and how it felt to jump. And I expected anytime to be asked to go out on Sunday to Clinton, Maryland, which is here the free-fall jumping is done, and asked to take him up and go out with him. So the job interview was sort of diverted in conventional terms into a discussion of what it was like and where I'd jumped and how many times--just a really great, intense interest in that.

Another part of the interview was simply taken up by a repetitive sort of breaking into my chronology, of saying, "So you have any ideas?" as if I'd been retained or had been hired already." Not, "Do you have any ideas about this or that?" or, "I want to be President. How do I get there?" but, "Do you have any ideas?" He had that great unrelenting and, as I learned later, unquenchable thirst and great openness for ideas and for knowledge, for picking up, scrounging pieces of information from any possible source or person, regardless of where it might be.

So that interview lasted half, three-quarters of an hour. And subsequently, Ed Guthman called over and said, you know, "It was fine." Ed had been wanting to go with the *L.A. Times* [Los Angeles Times], but he didn't want to leave without a replacement. He'd been with the Senator for a long time. So I went on with Ed at a time he was still there, which was in about mid-March, I would date it, early March or mid-March of '65.

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It was just very different from any other place I had worked. First of all, there were more people than I had ever seen, outside of being in the IBM office on one occasion. It was a matter of plunging. I began without instructions; "what I want, what I expect, what hours." The usual things that employers say. It was, "Well", just, "here you are, and let's go to work". It was very free form, very free flow. And at that point in time, his having been in the Senate less than three months, it was still somewhat disorganized and there was a large accumulation of unanswered mail. Everyone was sort of dashing about "doing his own thing", I guess, before that phrase became popular.

The main problem as I saw it.... Now this was another thing about free association which I think I might have done if positions had been reversed—"You're the press fellow, and this is how I see my problem." But nothing was said along those lines. I think the problem that I saw--and I don't think it was ever resolved even at Kennedy's death--was the whole problem of what I felt was a terrible sense of mistaken identity that particularly the

press perpetrated on its readers. Television and radio, too. Also, the terrible hang-up that the liberals had about Kennedy. He was sort of the Peck's Bad Boy of liberalism, I guess. And he was unconventional, and he wasn't about to be some sort of custodial politician for the New Deal program. He was always looking for different avenues and different fields to explore.

My recollection is that there were probably thirty-one, thirty-two persons in the office at that time, some of whom I'm not sure the Senator himself really knew because once in a while he'd end up shaking hands with one of the girls in the office who had been there for two or three weeks. But there was a great change--the receptionist was never the same one and the secretaries were never the same, and there was a great sort of turnabout. But I think probably it focused on the "professional staff", including, of course, Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan], who had been with the Senator when he was Attorney General, and Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman], Adam Walinsky and Wendell Pigman. Within the office each of them had free access to him without having to go through someone else. I think these were sort of the cadre as far as the office was concerned. Angie Novello [Angela M. Novello] was very relevant to him but in a different sense, which we can discuss or not discuss later.

Joe Dolan, I'd always thought, was an underrated person because, first of all, he's sort of a well-disguised intellectual to my way of thinking. And newspapermen were always curious as to what he did. Well, the fact of the matter is he didn't have the flash and he didn't

have the exposure of others of us who accompanied the Senator to Syracuse or Pittsburgh or Weirton, West Virginia or who walked him over to the Senate. So Adam Walinsky or Edelman or I tended to be associated with him, and Joe was back in that cubbyhole of his with forty-five phone calls backed up and messages piling up and talking to Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] and trying to set up the Syracuse office, which was not set up at the time. Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno], who became the upstate representative and the Senator's advance man, was then at the Agriculture Department, had not then come on.

I thought Joe had a touch for detail and a touch for people that I think, generally, was lacking in the office. I think the others in the office were extremely bright people, but were extremely abrasive with their colleagues, and I think Joe had a settling influence. I think the women in particular had a warm and responsive feeling toward him because they had a feeling that he was really interested. And he also had a sense, which I think is uncommon, that the women particularly had a life outside the confines of the office. He felt that there were such things as weekends, and there were other things that they were interested in, and it shouldn't be such an all consuming thing that it left no time for anything else. I always admired Joe very much for that. I always thought that in the long recitation of people who were regarded as visible or invisible advisors that, from my own personal experience of advice, that the Senator would ask Dolan. He relied on him a great deal. Particularly, Joe had a very good sense of what could be troublesome or the troublesome aspects of a position, whether it be water pollution or the Vietnam speech in May of '65 which was given on the floor of the Senate, coupled with a warning and an admonition about our course in the Dominican Republic. Joe had a real good sense for that, and Joe was very closed-mouthed, which is another thing that he had in common, I think, with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P.

O'Donnell]. And I think one of the things that Joe was valued for was the sense that he was closed-mouthed.

He told a story about himself on two occasions, one of which did not relate to Robert Kennedy but to John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. He told about the time in 1960 when he was living in Denver and he had a call from Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] saying that a writer, a reporter for *Time* magazine was coming out and beating the bushes around the country to see how strong support is within the state party organizations of the fifty states for John Kennedy. And the word was, "When he arrives,

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don't tell him anything." So surely enough, subsequently a telephone call did come to Joe Dolan. And I don't remember the *Time* reporter's name, but he identified himself and Joe had lunch with him. And as Dolan relates the story, the fellow said, "You're in the legislature here, but I understand you're the key Kennedy man in Colorado." Joe said, "I know who Kennedy is, but I don't know anything about him." He said, "Well, do you think there's any support among the county chairmen in the state for Kennedy?" Dolan said, "Don't know anything, beats me." He said, "Do you think there's any indication of Kennedy effort in Colorado?" Joe said, "Not that I'm aware of; I'm not the one to ask." So Joe is as helpful as a deaf mute in all this.

Well, as the story goes, again, subsequently, he received a wire from John Kennedy saying that he was coming to Denver, please meet him at the airport. So Joe went out to the airport to meet Senator John Kennedy, and on the way in, as he tells it, John Kennedy says, "Joe, did a fellow from *Time* magazine ever come out here and talk to you?" And Joe said, Yeah, but, Senator, I didn't tell him a thing." At which point John Kennedy said, "Well, you sure can prove it by Henry Luce [Henry R. Luce]." Joe said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Well, I just came out on the plane with Henry Luce who's going on to Los Angeles. I got off at Denver. He was telling me that I was doing pretty great around the country except in Colorado, where some dumb son-of-a-bitch who didn't know anything about what was going on--you ought to get another man out there." Joe respected confidence of others.

I talked about this free flow, this free form of not having instruction, just you were on your own, thrown-into-the-pool type thing, and I think this was reflected in another story that Joe Dolan told about Robert Kennedy at the time he was Attorney General. Joe, among others, but less publicized, had been down in Oxford, Mississippi, at the time Meredith [James Howard Meredith] was put on the campus. And after the lights were out and the newspapermen had gone away, Joe stayed down there to do some of the dirty work. He was down there for two or three weeks and he was, as he tells it, really alone. But he was known in Oxford, Mississippi, and people would come up to him and try to pick a fight with him, and it was very unpleasant for him down there.

He did return to Washington, and the first day he was at his desk at the Justice Department there had accumulated a whole pile of recommendations for judicial appointments.

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This was Joe's major chore at the time, as I understand it. So these had accumulated, no action; so he asked to go in and see the Attorney General, and he went in and he had all this pile. And he tells the story, the Attorney General barely looked up. He took the pile from Joe's hand. Joe stood by, and he just thought somebody might say hello. Nothing happened. The Attorney General made notations on the various application slips, buck slips, handed them back and that was it. And as Joe said, "I was a little hurt by it frankly. I thought he might say, "Gee Joe, I appreciate the nice job".

A couple of months later, it probably was, there was a Christmas party in the Attorney General's office or at least on the same floor as his office, and Walter Sheridan [Walter J. Sheridan] and the close ones were there. It wasn't a general department one, and Joe said he went to the party when he got through with work. My recollection is it was Christmas Eve, Christmas afternoon, the day before Christmas in the afternoon. He got himself a drink and was looking around for someone to find to strike up a conversation with. And the next thing he knew he felt a squeeze from behind and the Attorney General came by and said, "Thanks, Joe. Joe said to himself, "Thanks for what? I haven't seen him in a month." But within a couple of seconds he put it together--what he was thanking him for was what he had done in Oxford, Mississippi, as Joe tells it. He says no doubt this is what he's been thanked for. So the blinds did sort of open and shut. They opened and they shut.

I think Ed Guthman, who was my predecessor, the only guide he ever gave me (or anyone else for that matter) was, "You've got to learn to read the pauses, these long silences." I asked Joe about that once, and he said, "Well, yeah, Ed and Kenny O'Donnell were both very good at that"--what the silences meant. The silence could be affirmation or it could be a negation of whatever was being sought.

GREENE: Did you learn this?

BARTHELMES: Not too successfully, no. I don't think I was really very good at it. I learned, but I didn't get to have the expertise, obviously, Guthman and, as I understand, Kenny O'Donnell had and also, I understand, Burke Marshall, who was also somewhat diffident or shy. I don't know what the word is--but not garrulous.

GREENE: Was this idea of a sense of lack of appreciation or lack of recognition a problem among the staff members that you could see--people feeling that their work wasn't being recognized?

BARTHELMES: I think it would have in a normal situation, but I think that somehow by osmosis the Senator conveyed to each of the staff a continuing—gave each of the staff a sense of an added dimension that he or she did not have before as to his or her own potentiality; a sense of feeling that you do have this dimension you didn't know about, and you can try harder and you can do better, as well as a sense of feeling that things that had been done could have been done better. But it wasn't a

locker room Frank Leahy type pep talk. But there was just something about the way he carried himself that compensated, I guess is the word, for his immediate lack of appreciation. And also, I think those who were there were mature enough to feel that they were just working for someone who felt everyone was responsible and grown up. And you made mistakes and you didn't make mistakes, and you did superior work or competent work or inadequate work and you just weren't going to be hand carried through the office. So I don't think there was a resentment or a grousing at all because there was a great deal of--there was no time for it, anyway--there was a great deal of excitement and a great deal of anticipation. I think the Senator, even within the office, uncommunicative as he was sometimes, always carried a sense of sort of having a hidden agenda with him. There were always many, many, many, many, many things to be done, and you were part of it. This was a great compensation, and this was a great, great, great reward, so I don't think people…. A normal office, I think yes--you know—"nobody ever says anything nice to me," but I don't think in that office that it really did.

GREENE: This whole sense of freedom that you mentioned, the lack of specific assignments, how far down the line did this go? Would that have been true of the entire staff or just the professional people?

BARTHELMES: Well, I don't think, frankly, I don't think that the Senator really paid any great attention or any real attention to the details of the staff. He depended on Joe Dolan, for example, to tell him about the volume of mail, where the complaints were…

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GREENE: Outside complaints you mean.

BARTHELMES: Complaints from the constituents, but mostly complaints from party leaders. He was regarded as somewhat of an interloper, somewhat unfairly, but an interloper and a newcomer in town, which was paradoxical in New York City where so much is mobile and all the bright people got to New York "to make it". And to have that put on him, I thought, was ironic in New York State and New York City of all places. But he did have that and he did generate some resentment, for the most part in the county political organizations in New York State with the exception of Peter Crotty [Peter J. Crotty] and Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle] in Erie County and probably Dan O'Connell [Daniel P. O'Connell] in Albany County and Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] in the Bronx County and one or two others. It was very hard going. He had to establish himself, the new kid on the block, the new man in town. I think he did have to stake out a position, and he wanted to be informed and know what the complaints were. Well, John English [John F. English] out in Long Island County was obviously an ally, too. In Nassau County--he was in good shape there with Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson], the County Exec…. But there were an awful lot of weak spots elsewhere throughout the state. But Kennedy depended on Joe Dolan, "What are they saying about me", the volume of mail,

"What are they writing about me?" Joe would get the gripe mail and also the general purpose mail.

Now Adam Walinsky and Edelman were expected to keep the Senator up-to-date on legislation that might be useful for him to identify himself with, so that over the course of his first term, perhaps his name would be on one or two major pieces of legislation--what were the fruitful areas, and what Federal programs that existed needed remedying, based on the legislative mail that was routed from the mail room to Walinsky and to Peter Edelman. Joe didn't see the legislative mail. And he expected from me, again without saying, representative press clippings, representative editorials. I think we probably subscribed to 90 percent of the weeklies and the dailies in New York State. And in the mail room, which was then across the hall and subsequently was moved to the third floor, there were probably forty or fifty weeklies and dailies that would come, although the primary emphasis was on the New York City newspapers and the Washington papers. And then in addition, we also took the papers from other cities, Chicago, Los Angeles and Saint Louis. And he wanted to be informed about what sort of an

impression he was making, particularly in New York State. So he depended on me for that.

But I think generally in terms of staff command, Joe was supposed to take care of compensation, hours and wages, and working conditions and hiring and all that goes with it. I don't think the Senator concerned himself with it. He would concern himself obviously with who was going to be his upstate man, and I don't remember who, but I think there were two or three that were under consideration. Jerry Bruno, who had a long history of association with the Kennedys, was the one who was eventually hired for the position, and as I said, I think Bruno was then at the Agriculture Department temporarily. And also, he was very concerned as to who was in his New York office, who was doing what.

Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston] was the person in the New York City office, East 45th Street, that he was particularly appreciative of and relied on a great deal. There was a fellow in there by the name of Phil Ryan [Philip J. Ryan, Jr.] who had been on the staff, I believe, of Morgenthau's [Henry Morgenthau, Jr.] offices and I think eventually may have gone back there. He was sort of the New York City advance man, scheduling. But I think that the Senator in this respect, in respect to the minutiae of the staff, evidenced the same impatience that he did with other details. There may have been broad suggestions or broad commandments, but the details were really left to others. And if it developed into a house of cards, well, you knew it was the staff's person's responsibility, which is fair enough. I don't think there were any complaints on the part of the staff against such a setup.

GREENE: You mentioned that among receptionists and, I think, secretaries and people at this level, there was a tremendous turnover. What would account for that? If it was such an honor to get to work in his office, why were people leaving at such a fast…

BARTHELMES: First, I think there were rather substantial demands, in spite of what I said about Joe Dolan and his concern for each member of the staff. I

think, nevertheless, the concern was evidenced generally within the framework of an inordinate staff load. And that the six-day week was customary, and it was not unknown that certainly Walinsky, and Edelman particularly, would be in on Sunday afternoons when it was quiet, simply to finish a draft of a speech or just to catch up on reading through the *Congressional Record* or the *Congressional Quarterly* or something else that in the blur of the

previous six days they simply hadn't been able to keep on top of. There were occasions when secretarial members of the staff were called in unexpectedly on Sunday. Now for Jean Main and certain others who were on the staff, this was fine, but I think that the psychic income or the "glamour", that went with it on the part of some of the other girls was just too much to handle. Plus it was a very harassing experience, a very onerous experience to be on that front desk. The lights were always going. I had a PBX box on my desk, and there were five buttons, and they never were unlighted. And it was just a tremendous job of answering the phone, people coming through the door, curiosity seekers, those with remedies for the world's ills. It was a magnet. It captured all sorts of people. People would stick their heads in the door and giggle. People stepped in who were from another state but wanted a gallery pass with the Senator's signature, actually those gallery passes are stamped with the name of the member (Kennedy) in almost all cases rather than individually signed. So it was sort of all roads led there. Really, after a while it was like battle fatigue. You had to be rotated into the relatively quiet sanctuary of Joe's room across the hall or perhaps up in the mail room upstairs. I think the toll was great. Now there were one or two, three conspicuous cases I can think of where members of the staff were taken off the reception desk simply because they grossly misinterpreted their role.

GREENE: In what way?

BARTHELMES: Well, I think their attitude was, obviously, "I work for a Kennedy and the Kennedys are sort of a royal family, and we're just sort of passing through the Senate. And you know that and I know that and I don't really have much time for you." Some of the treatment in the earlier weeks was not of the best. As a matter of fact, it was rather short shift and rather snippy, I thought, and I would bring this to Joe's attention on occasions, and Joe himself would catch it. And my desk and Wendell Pigman's desk were such that--just a temporary partition separated us from the reception desk. There was a little bit of unfounded arrogance, far more than the Senator ever had towards his constituents, because once in a while--not once in a while, fairly regularly in the course of a week he'd come through the front office, through the reception room, just to shake hands with people and to meet people. There was a little bit of that. I thought it was very troublesome. I had worked in a congressional office previously for Mrs. Green, who was a woman of rather decided left of center views at the time, but who also insisted on a great deal of propriety and a great deal of courtesy towards constituents. And I think this was lacking and

I know--whether it's ill-founded or not--I think there's no doubt that the staffs of other Senators who were also Democrats were very resentful and felt that they had been treated cavalierly by members of the Kennedy staff. Now I think part of it was simply there was staff jealously of somebody else's member getting the play and getting the prominence. But I think, without doubt, that there was some abrasiveness.

GREENE: You also mentioned abrasiveness among the professional staff and that Joe Dolan was the exception in this respect. How did this affect relations? Was it a strain? Was there a strain among the different staff members, let's say between Walinsky and Edelman or Walinsky and Edelman and somebody else? How were the feelings in general?

BARTHELMES: I'll talk about that. I think the thing that tended to have a cosmetic effect on it was that probably, unlike any other office, there's so much to do that there really wasn't time to mope or sit over coffee and brood or engage in recriminations. It was sort of once in a while there'd be a flare-up and then it would be over. But there were occasions that Adam had to be reminded. I remember two occasions in my presence that the Senator had to remind him that, you know, "There's only two senators from New York, not a third senator." But this is really a defect of Walinsky's demonstrable talent. He's an extremely talented person and probably far more capable than some of the elected members of the Congress. But he didn't have a sense of staff sometimes; his talent got out of hand and he had to be reminded. And there tended to be a--he did tend occasionally to dabble in other people's business, which he had no real competence in, particularly in the press section. I think he particularly had a minimum high regard for newspaper people, and by this I mean radio and television as well as newspaper people.

I think he had an attitude that those who were newspapermen or had been newspapermen or were dealing with the press, really, were of somewhat inferior quality to lawyers and (quote) "professional people", masquerading their--semi-skilled or para-professionals or something like that. And once or twice he was very tactless with reporters who covered the office--Warren Weaver [Warren Weaver, Jr.], the *New York Times* man, and various others--simply in terms of saying…. "I don't know that that's quite right" is a better way of handling something, say, than, "That's a stupid way to write." It's a matter of emphasis, and I think there were a good many newspapermen that were really put off by it.

And the Senator's press problems were difficult enough without aggravating them further, because I think that most of the members of the press who went in to see him were pleasantly surprised. It was a very old thing. The Senator had been a public figure, although non-elected, for eight years, nine years, ten years before he came to the Senate. And he was obviously a Cabinet officer, one of the highest offices in the United States government. But he got a very narrow press coverage from a certain number of those for whom the Justice Department was a "beat". But when he came to the Senate, suddenly the fellow who covered

the Syracuse news for the Newhouse paper in Syracuse wanted to see him about a problem the urban renewal people were having there and what was he doing to get that application released from the Urban Renewal Administration or something like that--meeting a whole new group of newspaper people. But when they got in to see him, I think most of them were almost universally surprised, both at his courtesy and particularly his grasp of politics. I think Joe Kraft [Joseph Kraft] once said after the Senator was murdered that Robert Kennedy was the only public official he ever knew who had never told him a lie. I think that's rather high praise in a town that is noted for its deviousness, not only for lies of omission, but lies of commission. I think he enjoyed for the most part a rather good rapport with the press, those that would come not to be particularly--that were really unfriendly to him, Roger Mudd [Roger H. Mudd] of CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] was a conspicuous example in '65--not later, however--and Jules Witcover [Jules Joseph Witcover] of Newhouse. But gradually this washed away, eroded away.

GREENE: How accessible was he to the press?

BARTHELMES: I think he was as accessible as he could be, but again in very unconventional ways. It may have been that a reporter such as Warren Weaver for the *New York Times* or Andy Glass [Andrew J. Glass] for the *Herald Tribune* might have to go to National Airport with Jim Boyd his chauffeur and interview him on the way back--between National Airport and the New Senate Office Building. It may be that Warren Weaver one Friday afternoon when he had a rush piece to do for the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the only time he'd get to see the Senator was to ride up on the shuttle with him to New York City. That happened many times unsuccessfully when Weaver waited three hours at Washington National Airport, which is how badly he wanted the interview, and the Senator missed one shuttle after the other for unavoidable reasons. Finally, the Senator showed up, got on the shuttle. Weaver went to interview him. It was an Eastern Airlines plane. They sat in the back in a model plane where there's sort of

a curved seat in the rear of the plane, sat down, and who came in and sat down along side them but Jake Javits [Jacob K. Javits]. Well, that killed the whole trip up to New York because Weaver didn't want to interview Kennedy in front of Javits. So he waited for three hours, then he got on the plane, and what did he get? At which point he gets to LaGuardia, and the Senator very kindly said, "Oh Jake, do you want a ride in?" Jake said yes, he'd like a ride in. It was really a very bad show.

But I think the mature newspaper people, although they were a little annoyed from time to time by this type of thing, really were very--grew to understand it. The problem, which was unlike any other office that I've dealt with, and I've worked in four, is that there were a good number of newspaper reporters from out of town who would come in, either on a spot assignment from their newspaper or on a vacation with their families, and they'd want to make a quick, one shot pass at the office without realizing the extreme busyness. They'd call up and "I'm John Jones from the *Chicago Sun Times*, and I happen to find myself in town; I'd like to see the Senator. I'd like to do a feature story on him". It just can't be done,

so what you would find is great resentment. It was almost as if it was a personas affront to their professional standing not to be able to get in to interview Robert Kennedy because obviously an interview with Robert Kennedy was in the nature of a trophy that you carried to your office. He had a great deal of appeal, and those that got it had some standing. You know, you go home at night, and you say, "Well, I told Bobby today..." I know how these things go on. If you didn't get it, they got very resentful.

The greatest resentment in town in the Washington press corps was in respect to television. It was just a firm decision that there was to be no television appearances for a while. Channel 2 in New York, on New York issues, was an exception. But not the Sunday panel shows, "Issues and Answers", "Face the Nation", "Meet the Press". Time in and time out, at least once or twice a week…. Spivak [Lawrence E. Spivak] of "Meet the Press" was sort of a surly, arrogant chap, born of having been in this town and having an established show. ABC [American Broadcasting Corporation] ("Issues and Answers") was less unpleasant about the TV embargo. Being the weakest of the networks, ABC had almost a pleading note. A Kennedy appearance was a trophy for the program director, too. He never accepted any program invitations until very late in his first year of his first term.

GREENE: Why was that?

BARTHELMES. Well, I think it was a decision--it was in the context of the decision to identify with New York State quickly. Do the Channel 2, CBS, the CBS outlet in New York City. They had a Sunday show for a half hour that Norman Kramer did, and you would talk about the Hudson River. You know, "If you fell into it, you wouldn't drown, you'd decay"--this type of thing. The proposed Long Island Sound bridge which isn't built yet. So there was almost no TV except spot news TV. When he gave a speech on the Senate floor in May, early May of '65, on the Dominican Republic and Vietnam, he would go upstairs to the recording studio and give a one minute, two minute capsule summary of what he had said, yes, but not to the panel shows until much later.

There is one anecdote in connection with this Channel 2 show, which was the first panel show, interview type show, that he did. Channel 2 wanted a show that included not only Robert Kennedy but Jake Javits. And after a lot of hemming and hawing each agreed. The show was produced down at 2020 M Street N.W., the CBS studios here. And after it was over, we rode back to Capitol Hill in an open convertible. Walinsky drove; the Senator was in the front seat where he always sat; I was in the back. The Senator kept telling me, he said "I never want to do that again" which was about the nearest one ever got, I think, to a reprimand. It was never, "Jesus, don't ever put me on with Javits again." It was simply, "I don't think I ever want to do that again." Why? "Javits is so facile. He's computerized for knowledge. He's very garrulous. He dresses himself up on camera; he has the motions; and he's not phlegmatic." You heard all these things about—"I imagine it's going to be a terrible show. It's my first show, and I wish I hadn't gone on with him. I don't ever want to do that again."

Back to the New Senate Office Building. About ten minutes later Bill Duke [William Duke], who was then Javits' Press Secretary, telephoned me. He says, "How are you?" I said,

"I'm fine." He said, "Oh Javits just bitched and bitched at me all the way back I said, "What's the matter?" "He said, 'Don't ever put me on with Kennedy again.' He said, 'He's glamorous. He's got the name. All the people'll do is turn it on to see him. They won't remember what I said.'" So it just depends who's ox is being gored, I guess. This was a case where each one looked at it from a different angle of vision, and the show was nothing sensational, but it was a perfectly acceptable show.

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GREENE: While you were with him, did he start to do more of the panel shows?

BARTHELMES: Not until toward the end of the year (1965). The newspaper people were fine. He saw a good many of them. The TV and radio, of course, were more rigid in their format, radio less so--a radio reporter can bring a recorder with him to Kennedy's office. But television you need cameras; you couldn't take them on the planes. The television people, I think, had a sense of grievance, and some magazine people, I think. A most aggravated case of that, I think, was probably *Playboy Magazine*. *Playboy* wanted him to do a piece. It has sort of a neo-Hearstian [William Randolph Hearst] formula of sex and seriousness. So they do have--each issue they have a--you know, they have Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings] on gun control or Javits on something. They wanted Kennedy. They didn't care what it was. It could have been on unsafe toys. It just didn't matter. I never consulted Kennedy on that; I just said no. I just thought that--first of all, I was sure he wouldn't want to do it, being somewhat of a Puritan about it. Secondly, I thought, wrong though it may be, that when the ultimate time came, that there's just a lot of people--it just wasn't very "good" to have a story in *Playboy*. All they would do is say, Well, here's a Presidential candidate that writes articles for sex magazines." There's an irrational quality about it so we always fended it off. And Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz], my successor, fended them off, and it just never appeared.

The other group that felt left out, but it wasn't of any particular consequence, really, were the correspondents for the foreign press, the British and the French and the German newspapers in particular. And once again, it was a trophy for them to have an interview. I think the chagrining thing about that is that maybe perhaps distance was a factor in their favor. But there were occasions when the correspondents stationed here, if they weren't able to have an interview with the Senator--and they usually weren't--would make one up. And what they would simply do as did a correspondent for a large and "reputable" Sunday newspaper in London was simply to take a Senator's copy, the text of the Senator's speech on Vietnam, and take quotes from it and just say, "Senator Kennedy relaxing in his office over a long cigar told me…." And I think I always had a great deal of wariness about them (foreign press). And this happened two or three times, not regularly, but it happened two or three times. And I think it just wasn't very good news papering. It was dishonest news papering. But who was to know when your desk gets the copy in London.

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The other thing, which I never quite proved, but I had a hunch of my own on, plus one or two very soft remarks that the Senator had given which I don't remember, is that foreign newspapermen here very often tend to be conduits to their country's foreign ministry; particularly I think this was true in the case of Italian newspapermen and French newspapermen. They tend to not be directly paid by the foreign office but they certainly are willing accomplices to picking up political information and then passing it on "back home". So there was a great deal of sort of stiff-legged wariness about talking to newspapermen working for foreign papers. I had it, I think Mankiewicz had it, and I'm pretty confident that the Senator had it.

GREENE: What would you do in the case of something like that London paper? Would you follow through on it at all with a reprimand or…

BARTHELMES: I would call the reporter, call the "correspondent", as he likes to be called, and tell him. And the only answer I got in the case of one was simply, "I just had to have a story." He had a. story. And the only thing, short of denouncing him in the *Congressional Record*, you know, the only course is simply to -tell him he has to live with himself and that it certainly is to be taken into consideration when he asks for an interview the next time. Kennedy could literally have spent all his waking hours just being talked to by the press, and I think he soon sorted out the press, newspapermen out. I did too, as to those that came in, and their first question was, "Are you going to run against Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] in 1968?" He used to automatically pigeonhole a reporter asking that question. It's not only unsophisticated, but it's really an unintelligent question. First of all, it's self-defeating--it's certainly no way to get an interview. Those interviews would be rather short and brief, not necessarily curt, but short and brief.

I'm jumping, but there have been reporters that have gone to Hickory Hill--we're talking about how occupied the Senator was. Dave Kraslow [David Kraslow], who is now the bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, on one occasion interviewed the Senator at Hickory Hil1while the Senator was dressing for an evening affair. That's the only time he could get time to see the Senator, but the Senator was perfectly willing to do it. He didn't say, "It's an invasion of my privacy; leave me alone." He said, "Sure, come on out if, you want to do it while I'm putting my cufflinks on."

And this is what happened. But it was generally his candor--as a reference to the Kraft remark--that newspaper people value, even if they may think that you're wrong headed or what have you. And as in the case of when obvious mistakes are made, he always had sort of a disarming way of acknowledging them.

There was a rather casual remark that was made on the West Coast about encouraging the shipment of blood to either North Vietnam or the South Vietnamese if an international organization wanted to assume the responsibility for it. But it came out in the newspapers sort of, "Kennedy urges blood plasma be sent to North Vietnam." When he would be asked

by the press about that, he'd just say that this wasn't his finest hour, and everyone would laugh, and in that way it would defuse the question, and they wouldn't hound him further.

GREENE: Was there a general policy, either spoken or just assumed, of treating most issues--this extends to the staff--honestly, even if the facts were painful or embarrassing? Was that generally the guideline?

BARTHELMES: I think for the most part, yes, I think frankly that was expected. I don't know of a public figure who was never permitted to grow or was kept a prisoner of the past as he was. He never seemed to be allowed by the press to shake himself loose from the time he was in on the McClellan [John L. McClellan] Committee. He never seemed to shake himself loose from his purported association with Joe McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]. You did get a recurrent number of questions about--sort of, "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" And there were problems with his being on the Government Operations Committee at the time Joe McCarthy was there. But I think it was agreed just simply to admit that he was there, and at the time he thought that there was really a problem with communist subversion and communist infiltration, and it was not realized at the time the potential hazard of virulent anti-communism.

I think this was a trouble spot, but this whole thing of the press having a double standard in respect to Robert Kennedy was always a major characteristic. Their method was to attempt to hold him to one or two past actions and never to talk in terms of, "You're now a Senator, and what's your legislative program?" or "How do you feel about Vietnam?"

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They say boxing is dead, but boxing isn't dead in this town. The biggest bunch of fight promoters in the world are here--the press corps. I don't think the press on the whole made a very impressive performance in my experience with him because if they weren't talking about McCarthy and the McClellan period they were trying to engage him in a fight with Lyndon Johnson downtown. Did he agree with Johnson's statement on this? Did he agree that Communists were coming through the windows on our embassy in the Dominican Republic? It got to the point if he gave a speech on water pollution it would end up being juxtaposed with, "But the Administration's; bill was this…. "It was a very narrow way, I thought, of reporting and of covering.

GREENE: Were you able to get through this stereotype reporting by . . .

BARTHELMES: Well, I don't think this was anything you could wave away overnight. I think it was just a question of just day by day chipping away, of talking to the press people in terms of what he was trying to do legislatively, whenever possible letting press people interview him directly so they would have a sense of person, and just hopefully by accretion this would be overcome.

GREENE: Were you in charge of screening the requests for interviews?

BARTHELMES: Yes.

GREENE: What was your criteria? How did you decide who got through?

BARTHELMES : Well, there were four or five who had pretty, for the most part, had immediate entrée to the Senator. And in those cases, they really simply had to come through the door and knock on the door and into the office for the most part. I would think that Joe Kraft would be in that category--no doubt Joe Kraft was in that category. Andy Glass was in that category. Peter Lisagor [Peter I. Lisagor] of the *Chicago Daily News* was in that category. A reporter on the city side of the *New York Times* by the name of Marty Arnold, Martin Arnold, was in that category.

GREENE: What about Rowley Evans [Rowland Evans, Jr.]?

BARTHELMES: Yeah, Rowley Evans would be in that category. I might have left one or two out. There were some that it was no sense in letting them in because they weren't about to give him a fair shake, and it wasn't productive. The most conspicuous example of that would be Sarah McClendon. And, with one exception, the *U.S. News and World Report*, although he once lent himself to a Q and A, which was a regular feature of *U.S. News and World Report*, at its building down in Foggy Bottom. I was trying to think who else--oh, Paul Scott…

GREENE: Paul Scott would fall into the category of people that were kind of hopeless?

BARTHELMES: Really very hopeless.

GREENE: What about *Time*?

BARTHELMES: Well, Lansing Lamont, I believe, was covering the Senate for *Time* magazine and he seemed to be the Kennedy watcher. And I think the decision there was simply you just couldn't ignore *Time* magazine. You'd always get whacked, but you just really had to take your chances on that. The other one who was very difficult was Ted Knap of the *New York World Telegram*, and he was the only reporter that in my experience the Senator complained against. His reporting was absolutely atrocious. He wrote a water pollution story once that got Vietnam in the lead as well, and it was just a very bad job. He was a transfer from the *Indianapolis News*. He's now covering the White House for the--*World Telegram* is no longer in existence--now covering the White House for NEA, the Newspaper Enterprise Alliance [Association], I believe it's called. He was the only one I know of that the Senator complained on. He would complain about coverage. The thing I think that constantly mystified him, but it also mystified me and it still mystifies press secretaries, is the capriciousness of the coverage, which doesn't necessarily mean the coverage is incorrect, but it was always very erratic. It was a difficulty

with the *New York Times* that existed primarily because of the editorial board chairman, John Oakes [John B. Oakes]. At the city desk level, both the desk itself and the reporter sent to cover him; I think coverage was rather good--not asking that everything you say be accepted, but simply be open-minded about it.

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GREENE: I was going to ask you that about the *U.S. News* and *Time*. Was the problem with the reporters or with the editorial staff, because I know with the President his complaint was never really that the reporters were unfair but that what was done with their copy was unfair.

BARTHELMES: I'm not sure I belong to the view that says the reporters are "haloed" folks and the editors are the mean ones. I think that generally speaking the reporters tend to reflect the magazine, particularly I think in Washington bureaus. I think this is how they get transferred to Washington--someone who's in tune. It's not a corruptibility; it's not a corrupt thing.

[BEGIN TAPE I, SIDE II]

BARTHELMES: It's just that a reporter for *Time* magazine or for the *Washington Post* doesn't have to be told to cover it this way or put in this or leave out that. I think it's simply that they're drawn to the Post by certain sets of political values or outlook and that they're drawn to *U.S. News and World Report* or to *Time* magazine or to *Ramparts*. I mean, I think there's a consistency there, and I don't think it's the honest reporter whose copy is being cooked on the desk for the most part.

GREENE: What about some of the New Left publications like *Ramparts* and *Evergreen*, was he cooperative…

BARTHELMES: I wasn't there long enough to really say. My recollection is that in '65, *Ramparts*, in one or two of their opinion pieces, was rather open-minded toward Kennedy. This was not true in the *Village Voice*, as I recall it, although the *Voice* doesn't have an editorial policy as such. But my recollection is that one or two of the signed articles that I read during that period were not favorable. Again, you know, dragging in the business of the purported sins of the father visited on the son, this is still another one--Joseph Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] during his term as Ambassador to Great Britain. Particularly I think this is reflected in the *Voice*.

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GREENE: Well, wasn't he good friends with Jack Newfield? That has always been my impression, or hadn't he come...

BARTHELMES: No, well, I don't think it was Newfield at the time, I think it was

Hentoff. I think Nat Hentoff [Nathan I. Hentoff] was rather unfriendly toward him, and they're all signed opinion pieces, and I think generally this is the impression I got. *Evergreen* I have no recollection of, whether that was--it may have been in existence then, but I don't remember that. In '65, what brought him into the favorable consideration with such magazines as *Ramparts* was the May '65 speech which was an admonition of a foreign policy that was getting us in an increasing degree of trouble, and certainly the February '66 speech. Then what began to happen was in late--the trip to Latin America and the announcement of the acceptance of the invitation to go to South Africa, which was really against the wishes of the government. The student group there had invited him, and the Senator had accepted. Well, then what happened is what's now called the New Left began to court him. That's when I believe that Newfield came around. The CDC [California Democratic Committee] in California began to send messages, and one of the leaders of it, whose name I forget now, came into the office.

GREENE: Oh, I know who you mean. It begins with an "L." The parents are very well known. They wrote that book…. It's where the fellow [Staughton Lynd] that was then at Yale who went to North Vietnam along with [Benjamin] Spock and others...

BARTHELMES: Came in unannounced to the office one day and asked to see the Senator. It was a day when the Senator was in New York, but he was interested.

GREENE: Just to chat and...

BARTHELMES: Yeah. They began to want to play with him, and this attraction increased. It was really a one-sided piece of business because I don't think that the Senator was really cultivating this. I think he was staking out his position, and this brought individuals or groups into the orbit, but I don't think it was done with an eye to.... I'm not sure if he ever saw *Ramparts*.

GREENE: When you say it was one sided, was he stimulated by them, but not particularly interested as far as courting them…

BARTHELMES: Winston Churchill once said that he (Churchill) felt at home on the "firm ground of fact and action", and I think that this was also applicable to Kennedy. Robert Kennedy was not a conceptualizer. He was not at home or at ease with liberal theoreticians. But he was at home on, "How do you make the necessary institutional rearrangements so that the blacks and the Spanish-Americans and the rest are brought into the society. What do we do about Bedford-Stuyvesant? "He was less interested in a general ideology of how Bedford-Stuyvesant got to be the way it is. He would accept it--Beford-Stuyvesant exists and we have to do something about it; now how are we going to do it? But he had an impatience, I think, and probably I

think and impatience with just simply sitting around discussing the theory of it. So those who wanted to bring their world to him, I don't think it was really a very--he just wasn't very communicative with them, and I don't think very receptive to them.

GREENE: What about the Negro press, anything particular come to mind on that? Any special cooperation that you game them?

BARTHELMES: No. We sought them out simply in the sense of making certain that Jim Booker at the *Amsterdam New*s, for example, or Hicks [James L. Hicks], who was then the publisher, was aware that the Senator was having a press conference on this or that, or that he would be in New York on such an such a day and would be available for interviews. But there wasn't any special currying of it because the same would apply—the only other consideration that was given would be to *El Diario* which was a Chalk [O. Roy Chalk] paper. It was always made known to them when the Senator would be in New York, what his schedule was, if he was available for interviews or if anyone was glad to get on the press bus of in the press car and for with him for the day. Both are sectarian newspapers, and there are things they're interested in, and there are other things they're not interested in.

Booker once in a while would throw in a line about the fact that the Senator had no Negroes in a professional capacity on his staff. Then there would have to be a call to explain to him that this is so, although there are other Negroes on his staff, and that we were even now interviewing people with a view to doing this. So then Booker would be quiet. But I don't think there was any currying around of "special interest" newspapers. Once there was a suggestion that there be a press conference with the ethnic press in New York, the Greek language newspapers and the Polish language newspapers and the German and the Irish and the rest. And this was accepted, but it didn't have a very high priority and just never really got done in my time. Whether it got done with Mankiewicz, I don't know.

And the real problem with the *Amsterdam News* is the fact that I think there was an effort to bully him into positions that were simply unacceptable. There was some problem of corruption with the *Amsterdam News*. There was one occasion when Hicks, who was then the publisher--I don't believe he is anymore--and one other came down to say that they were coming out with a special fiftieth anniversary issue of the *Amsterdam News* and that they wanted the Senator to buy some space in the special section. Governor Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] had authorized an expenditure of $18,000 for this and they said what was Senator Kennedy going to do. Well, the answer to that is Senator Kennedy wasn't going to do anything about it. I doubt that Governor Rockefeller had either, but let's assume that he had. It was this type of black-jack operation.

GREENE: Would a request like that come to you?

BARTHELMES: Yeah, it came to me. Hicks sat in my office-cubicle, five by five--and said this straight out. I think Jim Booker may have been with him at

the time, and of course, what happened? Nothing happened.

GREENE: The anniversary issue didn't even exist?

BARTHELMES: Oh no. I think the anniversary issue…. No, the anniversary issue existed, but this is such a flagrant, notorious type of thing. But there was a tendency, I think, and there is elsewhere--I mean if you work for a House member, the newspapers erupt every campaign year purportedly to represent Negroes or veterans or what have you, and they come around and they want to dun for you an ad. With a House member it may only be a, lousy fifty dollar ad, but in this case, this was a real hijack. And to try to hijack Robert Kennedy is about as useful as

taking the Pope to the Unitarian Church; it's just not going to work.

But there wasn't a great deal of cultivation of "ethnic press" other than just to make himself available, but they never took. advantage of it. They never took advantage of it, and I couldn't really say they were fair or unfair. They very seldom mentioned him. They did give him credit, and deservedly so, for a role in having Motley [Constance B. Motley] appointed to the Federal District Court. It was a Negro woman, Constance, is it?

GREENE: That sounds right.

BARTHELMES: Yeah, I think Constance Motley. But for the most part there wasn't a great deal of communication, I didn't think, one way or another. Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves] might have something to say about that at a later period. I just don't know.

GREENE: What was his role?

BARTHELMES: I don't really know. He wasn't there when I was there. I just second-handed, simply heard that he was in the New York office in some press capacity, and what he did, I just don't know. I've never even met him.

GREENE: Well, let's backtrack a little bit and try to get at the scope of your job. How much you were involved beyond the press area? How defined were the assignments? What was your relationship, let's say, to what Walinsky and Edelman were doing?

BARTHELMES: The procedure which I inherited from Guthman (and I don't know whether it was Guthman's doing or whether it was something the Senator wanted) was that the draft speeches by Edelman and Walinsky, who were the principal speech writers--Edelman, a little bit; I did a little but not a great deal; Joe, to my knowledge, did none--their drafts should be completed in time for me

to review. Walinsky particularly is a bit of a hotspur and you just might find a sentence or a paragraph that could be interpreted as the Senator's plea for unilateral disarmament. And, as a matter of fact, on one occasion at a newspaper editor's meeting in Utica, New York, just such a press release got out and into the press, and we had a devil of a time, couldn't recall the release, really. We simply had

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to say, "Well, it was a secondary draft and inadvertently it was issued as a final version." And the Senator just couldn't stand by it. He just couldn't afford to stand by it. Not only couldn't he afford to politically, he didn't believe it. It wasn't his position, and this was the reason. And this is fine.

This again is simply the other side of a person's strength. He wrote a good, vigorous, innovative speech, Walinsky and Edelman both did, particularly Walinsky. But sometimes he got carried away by his own thoughts. So this was subject to review. And if there were time, and if Joe Dolan could get the phone out of his ear, why, he was asked to look at it because Joe always looked at it, "How will it get the Senator in trouble?" Now maybe the Senator is looking for--he should get in trouble; it's some issue that's worth getting into controversy. But Joe spotted the unnecessary controversy, the controversy that detracts from the main issue, the subsidiary or the peripheral kind of thing. Joe, if possible, would have an opportunity to review the draft. This didn't happen very often simply because Joe was very busy, and sometimes these drafts were done in New York or somewhere else, and he didn't get the time. And most of the time this was done, but some of the time, because I was in one location, in one town, and Walinsky and Edelman were in another, it just wasn't possible to do. We just sort of went with it, and after a while I think each of them kept this in mind, to make it a speech that fully reflected the Senator's views but didn't push the Senator into a position that had not been discussed and that he had not explicitly approved, and not to put in a speech something that may flow logically from a position, but in fact has not been subject to discussion.

Not very often on the draft, the Senator, on matters he felt very keenly about, Vietnam, the arms race, the Senator himself would call Edelman or Walinsky in--particularly Walinsky, whom I think he felt, after Guthman sort-of represented his style and his cadence in speaking more than Edelman or more than anyone else--and hand drafted an outline of what he wanted to say in that little, tight, squeegy writing of his on a legal pad, twirling his hair as he did it, and present it to Walinsky and discuss it with him.

And of course, this brings us to the question of what I thought was the Senator's admirable characteristic of sucking up information from as many places as he possible could, even though they be adversary positions. His speech (Vietnam) in February '66, he talked to McNamara [Robert S. McNamara]

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about it on the phone from his office. He talked to Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] who was then still at the White House, in residence there, about it, told him what he was going to say, sent Bill Moyers [William D. Moyers] down a copy in advance. Parenthetically, Moyers, I think,

was the one staff member during the Johnson Administration, after Sorensen and the Kennedy staff people had left, that he felt somewhat of a rapport and an identity with.

GREENE: Would you include McNamara…

BARTHELMES: I'm talking about the staff at the White House, I meant by that. No, no, McNamara would have certainly qualified. I think Bundy got rather indistinct in this period. And the interesting thing about it, I thought—and it applied when he asked me about Oregon a couple of years later--but one characteristic of his which I also thought was admirable is that those who were outlining a position that probably would be his position, he was far more exciting and demanding of in terms of making them justify and re-justify their position than he was of those who were opposed to it. He was very suspicious, and I think probably it may have been a carryover, perhaps, from John Kennedy's Administration, that he wanted to make sure it was a true position and not a position that was adopted by a staff member or someone else in Washington or someone at a university who adopted the position simply to score points or to identify himself with the Kennedy position. I think this is the probing. This is why he went through this probing. "You're telling me what you think I want to hear," and he was rather exacting in that.

GREENE: How much of a concern was it during this period, particularly for Walinsky and Edelman, to avoid in speeches anything that could be interpreted as criticism of Johnson or disagreement with Johnson? Was this something that was uppermost in their minds because he was so vulnerable to the vendetta charge?

BARTHELMES: Yes, I think, no doubt, there was a primary consideration not to engage the President directly except when it was truly unavoidable, to attempt to address to the issue. Rather than say, "I disagree with my President", instead say, "I disagree with the Administration." And there was an effort to keep that

very much in bounds. And this was a problem because I think there was generally a shared feeling--on the staff level certainly--(and I don't think it was inculcated by the Senator)--but I think it was obvious that the staff was marked by a great, strong degree of lack of warmth toward the President. So he was aware of that and attempted to sort of extricate himself from that. And they would attempt to maintain a superficial relationship. Johnson, for example, sent a note on Kennedy's birthday, Ethel Kennedy's [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] birthday, called up on that weekend when it looked as if three of the Kennedy children had gotten themselves in very serious accidents.

It was a weekend in late '65 or '66, I think. Katharine [Kathleen Hartington Kennedy] fell off a horse down here somewhere, and one of the boys fell off a boat off the Cape, and the third one was playing parachute by jumping off a roof and he fell through a greenhouse at Hyannisport. The President called up and wanted to make sure that things were all right--was

there anything that could be done? There was a helicopter at our disposal. So there was an effort to go through the formalities of a relationship. And one time--when I guess it was Kathleen was injured in the fall from the horse, when the horse rolled on her on a jump--the President sent her a bowl of tight yellow roses in the shape of a horse. These are things that you don't run to the press gallery with, nor is anything really done. But there was sort of a contrast because there was obviously a deep and fundamental split about it.

And the Senator, I think very seldom--I don't ever recall the Senator talking in personal terms of the President. He may not have to me. The nearest I ever heard him say to that is about how he just hates the term "Great Society". "It's such a terrible term, an awful term," he said, but that's the closest. He would discourage--Adam is one for being rather outspoken, and I heard him rebuke Walinsky for saying something about "Lyndon" rather uncomplimentary. You know, it was just simply, "Okay, Adam, that's enough. That'll be enough of that." So he didn't tolerate it. He had his own views, but he certainly wasn't about to circulate them in a memo around the staff. I think he thought it was unnecessary.

GREENE: Did you have a feeling, especially towards the end of your time there in '66, that he was kind of bound in by this caution and this reluctance to get into conflict with the Administration?

BARTHELMES: Oh, certainly. It was a case where he knew he was so vulnerable to this criticism that I think on issues where he had every legitimate right to criticize the Administration or the President or his programs or his people, that he held back from it, and then it became misinterpreted as a man who isn't being candid or a man that holds back from the ultimate battle or the man of excessive caution. And I think, ironically was a bind that he felt himself in. It's like I know Senator Hart [Philip A. Hart] from Michigan--this is on a lower level the other way--bends over backward not to be accused of being the surrogate for the automobile industry. He does something the other way. He takes, sometimes, more aggressive positions in respect to the automobile industry than he would normally just to show that he doesn't have those kinds of ties. But I think this was true with Kennedy. It was undoubtedly a problem with him, and I don't know whether it was ever really resolved. I guess it wasn't. And I think the culmination of this was in those first three months of '68.

GREENE: Who was in charge of screening the invitations, speaking invitations?

BARTHELMES: That became my job. It wasn't when I first went on. Ed had stayed from them. He said that from time to time they'd almost been thrust upon him, but he had avoided them. But within, oh, I think a month or so, they became mine simply because there was some capricious or probably unthinking declines of invitations that either should have been declined with more tact or should have been answered on the basis of, "I can't do it in May, but I'd like to do it in December" type thing, or else should have been accepted because the man was really a Lone Ranger in a particular section of New York State who really went to bat for the Senator during the

Senatorial campaign of ‘64. And this was his reward—“Dear Mr._____; Sorry.” So I took them on, and I guess after that, I guess Mankiewicz did. They would arrive forty, forty-five a day. Some of them were really impossible acceptances because they were from overseas like from Sussex, “Please attend the graduation of our grammar school”. And once again, there were forty, forty-five, and I suppose after that day’s quotient was screened, you’d probably be down to three or four.

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GREENE: Who made the ultimate decision?

BARTHELMES: Well, I think I did in the sense that I’d go into the Senator and say, “There have been X number of invitations, and here are three or four that I think are useful.” And his answer might be simply to wrinkle up his nose at one and say, “Okay” to the other or “See Angie”. Angie was part of this three-cornered decision process. But they were overlapping or ill-defined jurisdictions in a way. Once again, Joe Dolan would be called in in terms of the political implications of accepting or not accepting. “If I accept for the Zionist dinner, am I also going to be forced to appear at the [United Jewish Appeal] UJA dinner because they’ll say, “Well, if you went to the Zionist, why don’t you go to the UJA?” Or in order to avoid that do I have to close up both; do I have to decline both?” So Joe would be called in on it. Angie would be called in on it in terms of what time was available. She kept the schedule book. And then obviously the legislative people had to be brought into it so that they’d know the legislative condition or activity on the floor that week or what was happening that day. Or perhaps the subject matter was so ill-defined legislatively that some organization wanted him to talk about it, and it would be better just to postpone it for another time. But I think the press assistant did--invitations were put into his office.

GREENE: I might have missed this. Who did you say was screening the invitations before you started doing it, when the slipups occurred?

BARTHELMES: My recollection is that a member of the secretarial staff was. I don’t remember her name because she wasn’t there long thereafter.

GREENE: But Guthman wasn’t doing it?

BARTHELMES: Guthman had told me…. When I saw Guthman after I had assumed this chore of invitations or this had been given to me, I mentioned this to him, and he said, “Good luck. Once in a while they asked me to do this and I managed to escape it."

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GREENE: You said that you would occasionally work on a speech. What type of speech would you be most likely to get involved in? You can be

specific if that's easier.

BARTHELMES: I don't think there's any specific speech. There was a speech on…. It didn't happen very often. It was only occasionally, quite often simply because the speech burden on Walinsky and Edelman was such that they simply didn't have the time to do it. There was a housing speech one time, a water conservation speech the other time. Very often there were radio stations, particularly, that would want just one or two minute comments on a day's events or the Senator's vote. That would be put on the phone and a beeper and I would do those with some regularity. Statements--now these aren't speeches--statements that magazines wanted for their annual issue, whether it be a veterans magazine or a Jewish organization or a national housing journal. These were done in the press section Statements that were wanted--statements that would be read to organizations in place of his own personal appearance would be done in the press section. "The Senator couldn't attend, but he wanted you to know that teaching is a form of special politics and that teachers should be encouraged to vote and to actively campaign in their community." But Edelman and Walinsky did most of the speech writing.

Now, once again, on the Vietnam speech in February of '66, the Vietnam-Dominican speech in May of '65, no one person, although it's human nature to say so, I don't think any one person can say, "I did this speech." First of all, there were two conspicuous examples of very carefully tailored speeches. They were circulated among a number of persons who were sort of the "kitchen cabinet", individuals who were not on the payroll of Senator Kennedy, but those whose judgment he respected or those whose judgments he was curious about. I think Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] would fall in the latter category. And they would be circulated among Burke Marshall, occasionally a newspaperman, Evans or Joe Kraft. The February '66 speech on Vietnam, the "watershed" speech that aroused so much criticism, Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] was involved in that. He was in Washington--I believe just happened to be in Washington. Sorensen came down and had a lunch in the Senator's office over it.

McNamara was told what was going to be said, and I understand on the other end of the line he said, "I don't think you're correct, but go ahead." So on major speeches a number of persons were drawn into it, and if it were on water conservation or a matter of amendments to the Appalachian Development Act, land economists at the upstate universities, the University of Buffalo, or somewhere in New York State were drawn into it.

I don't think there are very many speeches that were done simply at one typewriter by one person. I think there were a number of persons that were called in to review it or to give a sense of style to it, perhaps to polish it up a little bit, to put some feathers on it so to speak. Joe was asked to look at it if at all possible. I, for example, would be asked to look at it from sort of a schizoid point of view--not what does it say, but how is it going to be written about. What is the lead in this speech? The AP man who's got it clutched in his hand and gets to a phone and there are three other stories or assignments to do--where does he see the lead, and what is it going to say, and how is it going to be viewed, and what is its "play," what kind of

play is it going to have? This was probably, in a way, a role I enjoyed and also, I think, one of the more substantial functions of my job.

In the February '66 speech, the Senator said, "Do you think there's any news in it?" I said, "They'll be writing about it till the end of the world. You're going to get some awful criticism on it, and they're going to hit back from downtown on you. And I'd be surprised if it didn't lead every paper goings" It took no insight because of that particular speech, but there were a lot of speeches that had to be looked at in terms…. If he were interested, he would say, "I'd like to get some attention drawn to this speech." So then you talked about timing and what are heavy news days and what are light news days. You just put it in the gallery where it's up for grabs; you would call the individual reporters who are responsible for that type of beat, who specialize in that type of news, whether it be conservation or labor or economics or civil rights or what have you. You call them and say, "Would you regard this as a major speech?" And know a good many press secretaries don't work this way, but I would, saying that, "You may have your own view of what the speech says, but in our view this is what we are trying to say: boom, boom, boom. And I always found that helped.

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GREENE: Were you able in some to get over their using it as another Johnson versus Kennedy story?

BARTHELMES: It was really very difficult to control that, particularly on the subject of Vietnam and the arms race. I don't remember the names, but I know for a fact if you gave the speech out a day or two in advance, as sometimes would happen, so that the reporter would not have to write it on the run, there were cases when a reporter would run down to the White House with it. So that a story would then have in the second paragraph, "But an Administration spokesman knocked the idea in the head 'because' he said, 'we've already done that.'" Well, you can't prove that he did it. So the business of keeping up the promotion was--it takes two to tango. And I think that it got pretty regular to call down and say, "Kennedy says this is white; don't you think it's black?" And they say, "Well, yeah, I think it's black." So then you get the boxing bout all over again.

GREENE: How frequently would you say you did this type of promotion, where you'd call the press people in advance to let them know what was coming?

BARTHELMES: Oh, I think fairly regularly. First, out of courtesy, and secondly--well, for courtesy--also a matter of self-protection so that they would have a chance to know what was being said and that hopefully that they would have it early enough in the day before things had clicked in the editor's head what was going on page one, and he couldn't unclick it, which very often happened late in the day. I think it was a fairly regular thing. It just got to be like breathing for the most part.

And at the time, for the first few months at least, he was a novelty, really. In a town where there are so many political figures that are "professional human beings", the Senator

was really a private man in a public vocation, which caused some problems for the press people, too. He had a great sense of his own privacy, but he could literally stand at the corner of First and Constitution waiting for a light to change from “Don’t Walk” to “Walk” and he’d get a crowd. There’d be six giggles and four squeals and there it would be. But it would be as a curiosity, and he always, for the must part, insisted on walking outside

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unless there were six feet of snow. Most of the time he refused to ride the Senate subway. there was a time when the USIS [United States Information Service] was doing a documentary, thirty minutes—“Day in the Life of a Senator”, Robert Kennedy, in his office, at home, the rest of it. One thing they wanted to do simply was sort of symbolic or illustrative, the Senator’s ride from the Senate Office Building to the Capitol on the “Toonerville Trolley”. He wouldn’t do it. They said, “It’s just for window dressing because everyone knows about the Senate subway.” “But I don’t do that. That isn’t how I go to the Capitol. I walk across the campus. “But Senator, this is simply for effect.” He’d say, “It wouldn’t be right. It wouldn’t be true. That wouldn’t be true if you had me on the subway because I almost never take it. I walk.” So we’d walk across the campus. I think he was a little…. He always held people--he’d try to keep honest about it. But he was pretty insistent on—“The cameras are here, but this is my routine; I’m not going to dress it up for you.” But this--and I don’t think I can remember any others right now--type of episode, happened so frequently that it made a favorable but a deep impression on the camera crews who were used to saying, “Okay, Senator, put your arm around the secretary or look as if you’re reading the mail.” Once CBS did a half-hour “Day in the Life of Senator Kennedy” in about April or May of ‘65, and they also wanted him to be doing things in the office. “Well, Angie, you look over his shoulder as if you’re reading the mail.” He said, “Angie doesn’t 1ook over my shoulder at the mail. That isn’t it. Adam comes in and talks to me about legislation or something, but Angie doesn’t do that so it wouldn’t be true.” So they’d do something else. It was very appealing in an age of public relations for someone to insist on his authentic own self.

GREENE: Getting back to this Vietnam speech. How would you be prepared for follow-up on it, for the criticism and the questions that you knew were going to come up?

BARTHELMES: Well, first you call your wife and tell her you wouldn’t be home for a day and a half, but secondly that he should be available. But then for the most part there’d be run-down which I engaged in and others, but each with a slightly different angle of vision on what questions the press was most likely

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to ask, and what is your answer. So that he would be relieved of a good bit of the clarification, but he would be somewhere available in case the unexpected happened, where perhaps the President himself made some personal comment and undoubtedly the reply

should come directly from the Senator. You know newspapers are obviously going to say, "To give the NLF [National Liberation Front] a share in any provisional government, isn't this putting the foxes in the chicken coop?" as Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] did say. And I think he was probably in Vietnam at the time or he was in Thailand or somewhere over there… What is the answer? And always the question at some point was--the Vietnam situation didn't begin with Lyndon Johnson. It has a long history beginning in '45, but it has a particular history in John Kennedy's Administration. I'm referring to those 500 advisors and sixteen thousand American personnel. So it was simply a matter of trying to anticipate questions and giving the answers. And on that the calls would be so many that Joe would get into it and Adam would get into it and Peter would get into it. So everyone sort of manned the switchboard. The next step in thinking ahead would be this constant compulsion to analyze. So that after the first day's story, after the so-called hard news story, then the second and third day you'd begin to get the "dope" stories and who is apt to be writing them from Jack Bell [Jack L. Bell], who did an interpretive piece for the AP, who was then chief of the Senate bureau over there who was rather unfriendly, to Reston [James B. Reston] and Wicker [Thomas G. Wicker] and Broder [David Salzer Broder] and Murray Marder at the *Post* and various others. And there was a matter of being prepared, if we thought his content would be misinterpreted, to attempt to get an editorial that would satisfactorily reflect the Senator's point of view.

GREENE: How would you go about doing that?

BARTHELMES: The one who was the most susceptible to that approach was [James A.] Jimmy Wechsler [James A. Wechsler] of the *New York Post*. At a time when the orthodox liberals were unfriendly to both John Kennedy and to Robert Kennedy, but particularly to Robert Kennedy, Wechsler, in an article in the *Progressive Magazine*, probably in '64, I'm not certain…. I have a copy of a draft that he wrote that he gave me that says on it "edited version" but I'd have to remember. I think it was a three part series if I'm not mistaken.

GREENE: I remember seeing at 1east one of them.

BARTHELMES: Wechsler was always very susceptible or willing to run a piece, editorially, a piece that reflected the Senator's point of view. It was very difficult in the *New York Times*. John Oakes (of *New York Times* Editorial Board) was decidedly unfriendly despite a number of top-floor luncheons there.

GREENE: A number of--excuse me, I didn't get…

BARTHELMES: Top floor luncheons. The Senator would put himself, I can get to that, put himself at the disposal of bureaus or editorial writers on particular newspapers and say, "If you'd like to have me for lunch, do it." The *Herald Tribune* Thayers [Harry Thayer; Walter N. Thayer] was impossibly unfriendly

because of the Kennedy-Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] campaign. But you could hunt and find, from time to time, editorial writers who were friendly or columnists who were friendly who would be able to reflect the Senator's positions. One of the there tasks was to make the Senator available to the editors and the editorial writers of newspapers, radio, TV. If he were in Syracuse, he would be available to the editorial writers there. Or he would go down to the Willard Hotel for a luncheon at which the *New York Daily News* bureau would question him about his position, informally and off the record. The *New York Times*, when it was located a 1000 Connecticut [Avenue], the same way. And he was very patient, and I think it was a plus because they were really…. Bureau chiefs particularly tend to be very insular. Really, a lot of news in this town is covered and columns are written about people that bureau chiefs literally have seen but have never spoken to. So there he was sitting down and they could talk to him, and I think he came across as someone who was neither devil not god someone who just was trying to do his job, trying to do a good job. He had some decided views.

One of the problems on one occasion at the *New York Daily News* luncheon at the Willard was that during the luncheon a call came from the Senate office saying that there was an unexpected vote on an housing amendment on the House floor. The Senator excused himself and said he'd come back. And his car in which he'd been driven down had left and hadn't expected to have to be on a stand-by

basis. So I said, well, I'd go out and get him a cab, and he said, no that'd be all right he'd do it. He went down and about three or four minutes later he called from the house phone downstairs and said he could get a cab all right, but he didn't have any money. So I said, "I'll come down." "No, I'll come up." So he came up. He borrowed five dollars and he got his cab and he went up to the Hill and he came back. Other people who should know have told me, but I would doubt that aside from a handkerchief or a pocket comb--not a pocket comb, that's a story in itself. That was one of the things Ed Guthman told me that you carried, long combs, not the small, little pocket combs, but a long comb, with you, and you could lose two or three a day because every so often he'd take one, put it in his breast pocket, then wonder why it's there and discard it. This was one of the pieces of equipment that one needed. But he didn't carry any money, apparently, so that you'd be in the middle of LaGuardia terminal at the shuttle, at the Eastern shuttle and be doing something and you'd hear a plaintive voice say, "Wes, I want a Hershey bar and I don't have any money." He liked Hershey bars, and he'd eat two or three of them with nuts, but he didn't have any money. And he never carried any money, and I think this is a way of life for extremely affluent people. And I know Joe Dolan told a story one time about how one time he drove he Senator home from the airport at one or two in the morning--it was a late flight--and got to Hickory Hill to reach in on the latch on the back porch to get in.

But there wasn't a great deal of awareness of this. For example, there was an occasion when it was decided that it would be useful to ride the subway in Manhattan. And I would gather he'd never been on a subway because we went down the stairs I guess at 72nd Street--I wouldn't be certain about it--and down through the turnstyle, he almost doubled himself up because he wasn't aware of tokens. It was just a place to go through. You know you can really lose your life that way! So we have tokens and then we got on at 72nd, it was an

express, and the next stop was 42nd. We didn't want to stop at 42nd, we wanted to stop at whatever the local stop was, but we weren't on a local--51st. This was very annoying. The world, in these little ways, the world just didn't work that way. And he was very upset because we had to go to 42nd and the damn subway train didn't stop at 52nd. These are really more enchanting things than anything else.

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There were times in upstate New near Rochester, there was an occasion there, and at eleven-thirty at night the sidewalks had been locked up and a chocolate fudge ice cream sundae, which he liked. Jerry Bruno, his advance man, is very political, and he's so political that instead of calling to the desk downstairs to see what drugstores were open or looking in the yellow (telephone) section, he called the county chairman and said, "We're here." He didn't have to tell who he was. He said, "We're here and we want a chocolate fudge sundae". And he ordered it through the county chairman, and the county chairman, of course, knew the county and lived in the town, and he found a drugstore and within fifteen or twenty minutes the fudge sundae arrived.

GREENE: What would Robert Kennedy say about something like that? Was he aware of that?

BARTHELMES: No, I don't think so, probably not. Jerry, this is simply an aside, but Jerry has a wealth of stories that way. One of them has to do with a similar incident involving John Kennedy in West Virginia. And it was late at night and the Senator, Senator John Kennedy, had an arduous day, and they got up to the room, the hotel room which actually consisted of two rooms, a suite. And before that when they'd gone into the lobby, the Senator said he was famished, he wanted a chicken sandwich. At this point, Jerry Bruno gave the bell boy in the lobby, or said, "I'll give you a five dollar bill if you get a chicken sandwich up here on white bread in five minutes." They go up to the Senator's room, two rooms; the Senator goes in the other room to take off his coat and his shirt preparing to retire. The knock does come on the door within five minutes. The bell boy does come in. He does have the sandwich. He goes into the inner room and leaves the sandwich in the room in which John Kennedy is, and on the way out he takes the five dollar bill from Jerry Bruno's grasp. He goes to the door and then he turns and he says, "Oh, I saved you a lot of trouble." Jerry said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Well, I knew you forgot it was Friday so I brought a tuna" at which point he closes the door. At which point there's an eruption from John Kennedy who says, "This isn't chicken this is a tuna sandwich. If I wanted a tuna fish sandwich I would have ordered a tuna fish sandwich. Go get me a chicken sandwich." Jerry is out five dollars. The bell boy hasn't done him any favor at all by switching the sandwich on him because it was a Friday, and he thought

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the Senator had forgot that he shouldn't have meat or fowl on a Friday. Jerry could go on for hours that way, but the chocolate fudge sundae is the one I think of in that connection.

[BEGIN TAPE II , SIDE I]

GREENE: Okay, let's go back to the speech writing for a bit. Would you explain what the criteria was as far as weeding out the invitations that you thought would be worth presenting to him for consideration. Was it obligation, geographic, type of audience--how did it work?

BARTHELMES: I think the only real requirement that was laid down was that as a general rule invitations within New York State had preference over others without being rigid or doctrinaire about it. Obviously, there were exceptions. We wanted as much as possible to appear in as many portions of New York State as possible, before as diverse groups as possible, and particularly in those areas where there were some weaknesses in terms of support, organized labor, the suspicious "labah" organizations who were bothered by Kennedy, who didn't give back the answers they wanted, whom, when they would ask him to support minimum wage, he'd ask them how effective the apprenticeship council training program was going to employ minority groups. And they didn't want talk about that. First, they didn't have any program didn't want to have any program, so he made people uncomfortable. He was a prober. But if a labor organization would like to have…. Many of the labor groups, the Steel Workers in New York State and others took positions, supported other than Kennedy, either in the primary and/or in the general against Keating. Also with a county or a city ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] group Kennedy felt philosophically uncomfortable but nevertheless recognized that he had to show himself, expose himself so they would have an opportunity to see him as not somebody with horns but someone who was not only doing their work, but breaking new ground in their general political area. We'd try to be on the lookout for that.

And probably more than anything else--I thinking these two groups I mentioned, organized labor and ADA, were not those that I was told to be on the lookout for but this was largely my surmise--also college groups, campus groups. I think

just statistically the fact that the '60 census said that the average age in the country was 33 and that by 1970 the projection was that the average age in the country would be twenty-five. Plus the push to lowering the voting age to eighteen would indicate that the electorate was going to be infused with a highly new group of people, younger people with fewer ties with the past, more ties to the future, campus groups particularly. And it was consistent, obviously consistent with the Senator's empathy for young school students, young people. He often used to tell them how, unfortunately, we had forgotten that some of the great political leaders of the world were in their early thirties or in their twenties, that regardless of our attitude toward them, whether it be Castro [Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz], or Tom Mboya [Thomas J. Mboya] or any number of people, that they were very young people and that in our early age, the Constitutional Convention, that Madison [James Madison], Monroe [James Monroe], Hamilton [Alexander Hamilton] were in their late twenties and early thirties. And to invite them into participation in policy making, they don't have to have a period of indentured

servitude for thirty years before we can say, “Well, stop licking envelopes now; you’ve served your apprenticeship.”

So, I think those were the three areas and also areas in which Kennedy ran relatively badly which I don’t think--there were really no bad areas. He ran extraordinarily well upstate which was a surprise, I think, as I understand it, to him and to others who were associated in the campaign. And we also would look for invitations…. There were a few invitations that were simply I.O.U. invitations--those that had been extremely helpful. This included organizations that then said, “Now we’re having our annual dinner,” or, “We’d like to have a spring seminar and we’d like you to talk.” So therefore, that type of invitation had a certain priority. So for the most part the idea was not to speak outside the state and also to stay away from, as ‘65 went on, to stay away from invitations from political figures around the country that were engaged in primaries directly or indirectly. There were one or two exceptions Lucey [Patrick Joseph Lucey], Pat Lucey in Wisconsin. The Senator did go out there and speak on his behalf in the spring of ‘65, but I think that was probably the first exception. With forty-five invitations, there was obviously no lack of invitations, and I would assume…. Well, with the shuttle, it was not at all uncommon to go up during the day for a noon speech and then come back on the shuttle for whatever legislative business was on the Floor and then go back again for the evening, then come back down from New York in the morning. This was not infrequent; we traveled usually by

commercial flight although from time to time the *Caroline,* which was then still in operation, not retired, was on call for appointments in Watertown and places where the commercial plane connections….

GREENE: Do you remember ever seeking an invitation, someplace where he particularly wanted to speak?

BARTHELMES: I think probably there were solicitations made in the direction of the Puerto Rican community in New York City and also middle class Jewish groups in New York City and the middle class white groups in the suburbs such as in Scarsdale, Hawthorne and White Plains and New Rochelle and other places in Westchester County and also on Long Island, particularly Suffolk, and the other county….

GREENE: Nassau.

BARTHELMES: Nassau, yeah, Nassau County.

GREENE: Were there any groups that he deliberately would not appear before, which he did not want to be identified with in any way?

BARTHELMES: No, I don’t recall any. I don’t recall any.

GREENE: Did you ever get invitations from things like the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] and the more conservative…

BARTHELMES: No. I think probably the DAR had made up its mind or there'd been a mutual meeting of minds, making up of mind before that. I know what you have in mind, and I was trying to remember if there might be just such a group. I can't think of any. There was a problem with middle New York State, up river in the Poughkeepsie and the Kingston and the Newburg area, and there was an effort to find invitations in this area. It was compounded by the fact that on the east side of the river, Dutchess County and below, was represented in the House by a newly-elected congressman by the name of Joe Resnick [Joseph Yale Resnick]. And Resnick was, in shorthand, a Kennedy hater, just compulsively so, and very difficult to determine why…. In 19--I don't really remember the year, I'd been there a while, and through some intermediaries it was possible to develop an invitation to speak to a group which Harry Thayer, who was one of the *Herald Tribune* Thayers and owned a radio

station in Kingston, and his station was really extremely very handy. [Interruption] And the Thayer radio station, which was located in Kingston but heard on both sides of the river in that area, had these one minute editorials before and after the news broadcasts, as well as through the day. And there seemed to be a pattern consistently of being critical of Kennedy and didn't seem to be very well founded. But in any event, there was an invitation that developed to speak at Thayer's group, which was a community group. And Resnick was invited, it being in his Congressional district. Now at the dinner Resnick was shown by the Senator a copy of the speech that he was going to give. And there was a criticism in there at one point, in a general sense, of the warped priorities and the unnecessary devotion to the pursuit of the Vietnam war and the need to realign the priorities and the needs at home, which was beginning to be a rising theme in the Kennedy speeches. And Resnick read it and said, "Okay, fine." Well, the next afternoon, this is the next day, the afternoon of the next day, I have a call from George Redding who was when at Columbia Broadcasting bureau here saying, "Will the Senator say something to me in reply to Resnick?" Well, we didn't know that Resnick said anything, but Resnick apparently had taken to the floor and simply denounced Kennedy as a destructive critic of Johnson and Johnson had a very terrible and awesome job as President, which the Senator, if anyone, was well aware of.

So I went in and I relayed this to the Senator and said, "Well, first I've got to find out what was said directly." He was very flushed, one of the few times I ever saw him visibly angered. He picked up the phone and asked for Resnick's office. He was told Resnick wasn't there, and I think once the first flash of anger had passed, I don't believe he ever reached Resnick after that in connection with that episode. I think we talked about it and decided that the graceful and mature way was just to have no comment, let Resnick's diatribe speak for itself.

To get back to the Thayer group invitation, this was a case of deliberately soliciting an invitation from a rather unfriendly group. And he had no hesitancy in doing that if he thought he could usually expose himself unless there were organizations that were just

hopeless—it just was impossible to make any inroads whatsoever. I don't remember them particularly now. They would come to me. We just would decline or turn them aside.

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GREENE: Did you usually go on the road with him, when he went to speak outside Washington?

BARTHELMES: Into New York frequently and into--well we went down into West Virginia to dedicate a recreation center in Weirton, West Virginia that was named after John Kennedy, went there, but mostly into New York…

GREENE: How was his performance affected by the audience he was speaking to? Were there certain groups that he really couldn't come on with and some that he could even if his speech wasn't particularly good? There's been a lot said along these lines, that he was…

BARTHELMES: Generally speaking, I think as the Senator got into a speech and the audience seemed sort of blah, sort of unresponsive, whether it was unresponsive-bored or unresponsive-hostile, the tendency was simply to read or mumble through the speech and get out. But this didn't happen very often. It was almost anticipated as to where these audiences would be. Middle class Jewish organizations tended to be rather reserved, but outside of that—there were one or two of those in April of '65 at the American Hotel—aside from those two appearances I can't remember any audience that didn't develop after a while a rapport with him. I think probably he felt more comfortable and best of all with organizations that were ethnic, blue-collar, or somehow dispossessed.

For example, in New Haven—the dates blur on me—in New Haven he toured New Haven on behalf of Mayor Lee [Richard C. Lee], who was then running for another term as mayor, and one of the places he was taken was the Polish National Alliance Hall. He had been to Poland, too, a few years before when he was Attorney General. He had one or two words of Polish like "Hello" or "Goodbye". I mean it was just a catalyst that set everyone off in a frenzy. And he seemed to sort of improvise as he went along and enjoyed doing that and the audience came to him, but the formal, stuffy sit-down ten, fifteen, fifty, hundred dollar a plate dinner for something or other really wasn't his dish of tea. And I had to be very firm on that.

And this gets to the most distressing characteristic I think that the Senator had. He evidenced it at the time. It was an almost pathological impatience; sometimes it meant inattentiveness to detail or even to context that caused some problems with the public. Since he couldn't stand the conventional dinner, and who can, but most politicians do—

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that's there tithing and they put up with it. So you would have in the Americana or the Hilton or no matter where a formal dinner. So the invitation would be 6:00 to 6:30, VIP cocktails, 6:30 to 7:00 head table cocktails, 7:00, sit down and have your dinner, then quarter of nine or 8:40, introduction, 9:00, Kennedy. The only way that could be handled—and he was always very insistent on it—would be simply to say, "What time does the Senator speak?" "Nine p.m.", illustratively. "All right, the Senator will be there at 8:55, he'll speak and he'll leave." And there'd be whooping and hollering and rolling in the aisles and cries of outrage. And that really was how it was, but once again, it was a case where they wanted him sometimes simply as an ornament—they may not have shared his outlook. That was the basis on which you had him or you didn't have him at all. Now if it was the type of affair where there was an opportunity for question and answer afterwards, he would stay for that. But usually it would be in the jargon "in-and-out". Get in and get out. And this would apply even to politicians.

One time he accepted an invitation to Congressman John Murphy's [John M. Murphy] political club on Staten Island, Richmond County, and it was one of those raucous affairs, but it was a sit-down affair. It was a Saturday night. It was quite apparent that by 9:00 at night everyone would probably, without doing any injustice to him, be bombed enough so they would probably talk through the speech. And he knew that, and Murphy was a supporter of his, but again, in this particular case, I too carried the water. I simply told Murphy, "He'll come, and he'll make his appearance, and he'll say his words, and he'll leave." And Murphy said, "Christ, you Kennedys sure drive a hard bargain." Well, that's how it was. This is how the Senator generally performed.

But there was a type of appearances that delighted him such as appearance along the lines of the one I'll describe in Harlem in '65 in the summer. And it was not only delightful for him but delightful for the audience, delightful for members of the staff who were fortunate enough to be there. It was on East 102nd Street, I believe, and it was a ceremony in which trainees to be VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] volunteers were "graduated" and given their certificates. And the block was roped off—the brownstone houses with the people just coming apart at the seams because there were so many families inside. It was in the Puerto Rican section

of Harlem, and the Senator was asked to speak. And up from the New York regional office of OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] and up from Washington came two OEO bureaucrats. And one introduced the other on an improvised platform and the other introduced Kennedy. The Senator stood up and he looked down at the two bureaucrats who were sitting beside him in folding chairs and said, "I'll give the certificate but isn't there any sort of oath." He said, "Well, we'll make up an oath." There were—I don't remember how many of these volunteers, maybe a dozen, maybe two dozen. He said, "Raise your right hand. I solemnly swear"—I've forgotten most of the details—"that I will be faithful and true to the VISTA concept and help my own and take care of my baby brothers and sisters and vote for Robert Kennedy in 1970." But the bureaucrats were so outraged at this—so startled and stunned. They were very much taken back; it was something that just wasn't done. It was almost as if it was sacrilegious. But the audience liked it. He enjoyed it, the kids enjoyed it, the young people enjoyed it. Then he went off into the crowd.

At one point on that occasion, he darted off into one corner where a fellow had a spunge rubber ball and a stick and said, “Well, let’s play stick ball.” But because he had this looseness with him, this sort of child-man character, and because he was able to talk to them in their own terms, in athletic terms—back to that interest in being a paratrooper. He said, “You be Willie Mays [Willie H. Mays], and you be Cepeda [Orlando Cepeda], and who will I be?” You know, he said, “Well, I’ll just be myself.” So he threw the ball up in the air and struck it with the stick. The kids just had a howl. They just had a great time. All this took place for just a few minutes actually, but this is what he enjoyed and it was very memorable to him. This was his idea of a date. This was his idea of an evening. He enjoyed it very much. His best didn’t come through, nor did he encourage his best to come through on the more formal, conventional, highly structured evenings.

GREENE: Do you think this is why he was so misunderstood by so many people, including the press?

BARTHELMES: Yeah, I think it was, probably. He didn’t play the game. It was, as I said earlier, a private man in a public vocation. And he wasn’t going to become, as Humphrey was and still is for that matter, a professional human being. What he is, he is. In a time of public relations and cosmetics

where everything is dressed up and you wonder what’s real and what isn’t, here he was, sort of a natural man. I mean if he felt gloomy and unhappy about some things or was preoccupied, he was preoccupied.

GREENE: What about the student groups? Did he enjoy particularly speaking in front of them?

BARTHELMES: Did he enjoy them?

GREEN: Yes.

BARTHELMES: Oh yeah. He sure did. [Interruption]

GREENE: O.K., you were talking about student groups.

BARTHELMES: Student groups. Well, I think his attraction to student groups and I think for the most part the student’s attraction to him was mutual. And I think it was a case where Kennedy felt that this was--because most of them had their lives before them--that there was a greater potential and that there was a real need at this time in the country’s life to summon people, if you will, to reorganizing the country in a way that it would, the country would, be fairer and more equitable for all people. And I think it was consistent with his liking for children, which was tremendous, and his performance at the VISTA volunteer graduation ceremony and his appeal at that time was

unblemished, as I recall. The audience reception was warm and he enjoyed that, and it was without dissent which anyone is apt to enjoy.

Usually the manner in which he handled most of his student appearances was of such a nature that they were not being talked at, but there was a conversation going on. Very often his formal presentation tended to be relatively brief. And he had a great habit, a practice, of sort of turning the tables and asking students questions--what did they think? He did this at the Western Senior High School out here at 35th and Reservoir in Georgetown. He'd done it at high schools in Scarsdale and Watertown and Malone (New York) and numerous of other places as well as colleges. "What do you think? How many here are of draft age? How many of you are in favor of our policy in Vietnam? How many favor lowering the voting age to eighteen?" Then he usually put in a quip to the effect, "I'm not going to let you do it unless you write me and say you're going to vote for me." Or when obviously a majority of them were

over twenty-one, the questions were even more searching than that "How many registered to vote?" And many hadn't. How many voted?" And you'd see relatively fewer raised hands. And then he'd have something to say about that, the importance of the vote and the importance of the vote for the people in the dark areas of this country, in Mississippi and Sunflower County, and the work that Charles Evers [J. Charles Evers] is doing down in Mississippi and what a treasured thing that was and it wouldn't be taken for granted. We're not talking about a Russia or Franco's [Francisco Franco] Spain; we're talking about right here in the United States. This is where I thought his truly great audiences were. This is where the greatest response was.

It was ties into his great sensitivity to young people and his sensitivity to his own children. And while he often tended to have a rather impassive expression, I think it was quite obvious that when his own children were around him or when his own children would call him at the office, as would happen from time to time, it really wouldn't matter what personage was sitting on the sofa talking to him about some profound issue, soliciting his views or giving him their views. When he got a ring from Angie Novello and that red light on the telephone lit and Angie said it was Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy II] or Bobby, Jr. [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.] or Kathleen or whoever it may be, up with the phone and never mind the visitor. And he had a really unself-conscious attitude; it was as if no one else was there. Very often many of us don't want to show affection in front of our office staff or in front of someone else or in public, but he would just sort of melt and his face would literally be wreathed in smiles, and he would listen. It was obviously a problem. Maybe Brumus had put his foot through the favorite painting or they couldn't get him out of the pool or whatever it may be. He affectionately described Brumus as "The only dog he never liked". Brumus would sort of run around, not run around, but sort of move around with a nest of gnats and flies following him. It was really quite a sight. The conversation would go on, and it was quite apparent that the person who ended the conversation was not the Senator, it was the son or the daughter on the end of the line. Then the blinds would be drawn, and he'd go back to the conversation.

And the same would be true with Mrs. Kennedy. It was quite obviously a very warm and loving, relationship which I think in politics is an uncommon quality, but I think they were both very supportive of each other.

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GREENE: We could go on talking about that, but let's go back to the speeches for one more question? As far as choosing the subject, were they usually suggested in the invitation or were they so glad to have his presence that the topic was more or less up to you?

BARTHELMES: No. Their suggestions were always solicited. And obviously they were pleased to have him speak, even if he spoke in Swahili. But generally speaking, the topic was consistent with the organization. And with Democratic groups his favorite theme in 1965 and into 1966 before Democratic groups was to recall the words of Grover Cleveland [Stephen Grover Cleveland] and Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Jefferson and various others saying, "What is the party for if not to be a vehicle for the larger purposes of the country?" And that when the Democratic Party had been that, it had prospered collaterally with the country, Wilson and the New Freedom, Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and the New Deal, but that when it had been untrue to its basic self, as in the twenties, and would nominate John Davis [John W. Davis] in '24 who received the smallest number of votes of any Democratic candidate in the country, it deserved the rebuke. And the Democratic Party also should be in the nature of a community action program as well. It should do more than thirst for party victory. It should have convictions as well as appetites. This is a recurring theme--and that there's no reason it couldn't adopt or overtake a community action program or do something outside itself and be a year-round, seven-day-a-week organization that was responsive to the call of the needs of the community. And in that way the party organization in this time of great need couldn't do else but prosper. That was usually his general theme with variation as to Democratic groups.

His general theme that year to youth groups in his formal presentation, besides when he just engaged in questions and answers with them, was along the lines I'd earlier described as the importance of young people, and how in the years passed and decades past--this country's early history--the directors of the country and the directors of the Constitutional Convention were very young. And in the developing countries of the world today, Africa, Southeast Asia, Cuba, and others, regardless of how we may feel politically, that--and Latin America--there was a great call for young people who sensed the future. I think generally speaking when he spoke to more conventional groups, it was somewhat in the nature of a challenge. If he spoke to a

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labor organization, it would generally be in terms of a challenge, which I'm sure discomforted some of them, in terms of attempting to assure them that we've outgrown the period of the Pullman strike and the Homestead Strikes and that there are a large number of

permanent statutory protections not only for the labor movement but for its members, minimum wage and the rest. And we should protect it, but we shouldn't babysit for it.

Just as, I'm interpolating now but just as at one point when they seized the auto plant in Pontiac and Dearborn and there were people sitting around in their living room "tut-tutting" that—and maybe there was another way that they would have achieved the same goal but the industrial system was so inflexible that out of sheer frustration and rage this is the way labor went--that remember this was just a scant thirty years ago, that now that they've come of age and have been a permanent feature of the American economy and the American political landscape as well, that there's still great section of America, the unfinished America. It's not just black, it's white. It's all colors and it's in all areas. We have great numbers of hospital workers and agricultural workers who are waiting to be organized, and the labor movement has been negligent, derelict in this responsibility.

At that time he would more likely than not throw in something that was one of John Kennedy's observations, perhaps something along the lines that "If society can't help the many that are poor, it can't save the few that are rich." And if he talked to a business group, he would talk about how the business group really should be one of the primary factors in saving the cities and job training, bringing people into the system. So the conventional groups, orthodox groups, he'd challenge them.

During this period there was a characteristic trait which reflected his state of mind—numerous references to his brother, John Kennedy. I don't think one formal speech was given that there weren't at least two references to statements his brother, "President Kennedy," had said either directly or indirectly. There were occasions in early '65 when there were as many as four or five references. At this point, then, I think the staff began to talk among itself about drafting speeches with fewer and fewer, feeling

he had said as much as there was to say about it and that there was almost sort of an eerie quality about the constant references and it was becoming very noticeable.

GREENE: Were these his own interjections or were they things that the speech writers had written in?

BARTHELMES: Well, it may have been carried over from '64 and the Senate campaign, I don't know. No, these very often would just be submitted in the draft and sometimes he'd interpolate it--about Lord Tweedsmuir [Baron John Buchan Tweedsmuir] and, "politics is an ancient and honorable adventure". And there were four or five standard ones which he knew by heart. But I think there was a feeling--as I said, the staff began to talk among themselves and aim for fewer references and let Robert Kennedy speak in his own right. As a thickening of distance from the assassination came about, it was necessary for him to speak for himself and in terms of himself. And I think the references became fewer, and I think in early '66 there were speeches in which John Kennedy's name wasn't mentioned at all. I think the feeling on the staff level on this aspect of it, which doesn't really brook very large, was that really he was doing himself an injustice. Robert Kennedy was a person in his own right with his own thoughts and his own

insights and his speeches and his public pronouncements could very well stand on their own feet in terms of what he said without resort to other people. This, I think, was a sense of really a vote of confidence in the Senator, in Senator Robert Kennedy, feeling that he really didn't have to draw on other people, even his brother. Although I must say that there were newspaper men who would remark, "Isn't he ever going to stop referring to his brother in his speeches?" But this wasn't, in my view, this wasn't the reason there was a "de-escalation" in this area.

GREENE: Was he sensitive to that kind of criticism in the press about . . .

BARTHELMES: I don't know if he ever heard it. I know I never brought it up with him. Now maybe someone else did. I never brought it up with him, and to my knowledge he never heard that type of criticism from a newspaperman. And there wasn't a lot of it,

but every once in a while someone would mention that and then go on to say, "How is he bearing up? Is his state of mind improving, or is he still pretty well in the funk?"

GREENE: Was his state of mind very evident when you first got there?

BARTHELMES: Well, he never really had a comparable before and after. It's difficult for me to gauge it. I thought there were periods of, it seems to me, prolonged introspection or very heavy silences. But I never knew how to attribute that, whether it was part temperament or part just this continued grief over his brother which was obviously very real. I didn't know how to weigh it. I think others that had been with him longer would be in a better position to weigh it that I was. He obviously had periods of extreme silence.

GREENE: Could you see him emerging at all? Did you see the morose quality being reduced at all in the time you were there?

BARTHELMES: No, I don't think so. No, I think it was pretty consistent in that period from my observation.

GREENE: What about political activities and all the usual politicking that went on among people like that? Did he have much patience for it? Some people have said that he really had a very low tolerance as far as this type of activity was concerned.

BARTHELMES: Well, he had that frightful mayoralty in the fall of '65, the primary and then the general. And that would be really enough to try anyone's tolerance. He finally ended up leading Abe Beame [Abraham David Beame] around the streets of New York from Far Rockaway to the West Side of Manhattan.

And I know of one long taping session, I think for a half-hour program that was being taped to be shown later on. In the middle of it Kennedy just broke it off and pounded his fists on the table. They were sitting on a table before the cameras and, "Damnit Abe, look alive. Say something. Don't just sit there." And Beame was a very phlegmatic fellow. He just said, "I'll try better." So they went back and resumed taping. Then he would be exposed to malaprops such as Procaccino [Mario A. Procaccino]. And there was a rally where Procaccino—

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you know, he'd sit there and Procaccino was really trying to complimentary and he would say, "You know", he said, "The fellows I'm running with have been in our beloved New York City as long as I have, but I've never got to know them. But now that we're running as a ticket, they really grow on me--like cancer." [Laughter] Of course Procaccino was trying to be complimentary—"You know, I grew to love them". But this is the way it would come out. And then at another rally I think around that same time, he was introducing Humphrey and Robert Kennedy, and he said, "I now give you the Vice President of the United States, Robert F. Kennedy." It was a very trying campaign for other more substantial reasons than that. And obviously Beame wasn't his ideal candidate by any manner or means. The political end of it, the ins and outs of the political end of it, I didn't get into a great deal. But he obviously was not very satisfied with the primary; and I don't think he really felt that any candidate was really fulfilling--really filled the needs. Despite their apparent dislike for each other, I would think he really felt privately that perhaps Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] measured up to it more than anyone. But Lindsay was always sort of persnickety towards Kennedy I'd always thought.

GREENE: In what way?

BARTHELMES: Well, it just seems to me--I've never heard him directly--but it seems to me in newspaper accounts that he couldn't resist the weakness to talk about, "Who's a candidate, Beame or Kennedy?" or "We have a lot of newcomers in town, but one of them we sent to Washington." Nothing very serious, just gratuitous, and I think, more aggravating than anything else. The Senator had a great resource to draw on, and this gets back to the business of where I think the newspapers once again distorted the whole thing. "This one's his closest advisor; this one's his chief speech writer, this one's his confidant." He had many speech writers and many confidants and many advisors for different things. And he may well have on immigration legislation reached out to Abba Schwartz [Abba P. Schwartz] who was then in the government, under duress, for that type of information. And although Edelman had jurisdiction over it and would write the speeches or draft the legislation, Abba Schwartz was really his advisor for that, for example, that springs to mind particularly. He just had many advisors. People would float in and out of the office and float in and out on issues and perhaps never be seen again, but he knew where to draw from. He had a great knack for

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wanting to reach anywhere for information, and it wasn't always on his staff. Sometimes it was and sometimes it wasn't, but he had a tremendous number of resources, and I don't know that any one person can claim to be that close to him on all things or that persuasive on all things. He took the best of what he felt was in each one.

GREENE: Was there ever any resentment on the staff's behalf when he would call in outsiders who perhaps didn't agree with their own…

BARTHELMES: There probably--I don't think Adam Walinsky was very happy to see the one or two occasions when Fred Dutton was at the typewriter or Theodore Sorensen was at the typewriter or Arthur Schlesinger because I think Adam thought he was far superior a writer to all of them, and that well may be. The Senator wasn't one to concern himself with or let himself be involved in staff differences. If there was some problem, you settle it yourself, don't bring it to me. Angie Novello was a bone of contention in the office for various reasons, and generally speaking, I think the male staff thought she was entirely too possessive of the Senator. Where was I? I lost my train of…

GREENE: Well, you were saying Angie Novello was a bone of contention, especially with the male staff.

BARTHELMES: Yeah, you were talking about staff problems.

GREENE: Why would this be a problem, because she handled the schedule?

BARTHELMES: Yeah. She handles the schedule, and maybe some staff person unexpectedly came across someone who he thought really should see the Senator on a rush basis and very briefly, but it just was very difficult to do. The story is always told that down at the Justice Department that she wouldn't let Ed Guthman look at the schedule book. He never knew what free time the Senator had. But it's a type of possessiveness that I think you find in sort of career women; that's women who make a working career of one person. You find them in the legislative branch, and you find them as confidential secretaries to presidents of large corporations. Once again, it got to be a confusion of roles. Angie really had been with him longer, I think probably, that anyone else.

Guthman had left. She'd been with him since the McClellan Committee, so she had sort of seniority which is very much prized in the legislative branch in the Congress.

GREENE: Did he rely on her a lot? How much broader than her...

BARTHELMES: No. I don't think it was that, but I think she read into the relationship a great deal. She was cool and calm and competent and collected, very

possessive. And he had to fight it off once in a while. She had qualities of loyalty and ability to keep secrets and to be closed-mouthed, very valuable, I think, particularly to a person of the Senator's stature. There were some good points, but I think at a staff level there was some minor irritations nothing--very serious.

GREENE: How did you decide what should be given out in the way of information and what form it should take, whether it would be releases or statements or whether it warranted a press conference? Was this always your decision or did you do it in conjunction with…

BARTHELMES: No. It was in conjunction--I think it was definitely in conjunction. I think the releases and press statements pretty much flowed from the Senator's activities. If he was going to give a Floor speech, there would be a press statement. I think there were occasions where in reading the newspaper, suggestions were brought to him that it might be useful to comment on this or look into this or that or the other thing. But I think more often than not the press statements were induced by queries from the press. And if there were numerous ones on one subject or asking for elucidation or clarification on some condition, then the easiest way is simply for him to make the statement, stencil it, mimeograph it, and put it in the Senate press gallery. But I don't think that…. I think his press statements just flowed from the nature of the work. I don't think there was any great hectic business of shoving out press statements just to have press statements. And obviously there were far more opportunities to say things publicly than he ever accepted.

In terms of issues, he really staked out, I think, poverty and education domestically. And in that sub-category, race, if that's the word. And in terms of foreign policy, I think really Vietnam and the arms race. I think that matters in that area, public events in that area, he was willing to comment on. But there really was an effort to draw him into all sorts of controversy--because he was Senator Kennedy--which weren't relevant to him as a U.S. Senator. And this would include where to put a bridge across Long Island Sound, or whether the wetland area for wildlife in upper New York State should be enlarged; whether Consolidated Edison should build near Kings Point a power plant. There were some things that were either not within his jurisdiction as a member of Congress or just the load was too much to handle.

GREENE: Well, what about some of these obscure statements? There was one I remember on the sale of walnut logs.

BARTHELMES: I don't remember that. I'm sorry.

GREENE: It was in the period that you were there. You know, fairly remote subjects--how would they come to his attention? Who would

determine that something should be said about them. Would they be issued through the normal press channels, or would you go through a specific source to someone in a more specialized organization?

BARTHELMES: I would think something like that might well…. I don't remember that. And I don't remember…. I'm sure there were specialized things that I just don't recall. I would think very often someone favorable to him in, say Monroe County, might call down to Tom Johnston or call to Polly Feingold, if he was really well-known--to Steve Smith or to perhaps Joe Dolan or perhaps to me or just blindly into the office and say, "You know we've got a situation here which I think needs some correction. I think the Senator can do himself some good, and it's within his duty as a member of Congress."

It might have to do with the fact that the businessmen in one of the counties along the Pennsylvania line in New York State, wanted to be included in the Appalachian Development Program so they'd be eligible for assistance funds. There was such an amendment for Kennedy. It was one of his early legislative accomplishments. So we'd think it over, try it out on a couple of people, and maybe call down to the Economic Development Administration, and then decide that--and to Edelman or Walinsky, depending under whose jurisdiction it lay--and then decide if it should be, "No," or "Yes, we will do it."

And then obviously an extension of that would be to put a statement out, in that particular case simply aimed at the newspapers and the radio stations in that county or fed into that county. And that would be done by phone, telegram or on occasion by beeper, where a radio station gets a call and then they can put a tape on the other end, "This is Senator Robert Kennedy and today I am pleased to announce that…." And it wouldn't be the general broad distribution into press and radio and TV galleries in the Senate. I don't remember too many of those special cases.

GREENE: Do you ever remember releasing something through an interest group? I can't think of one offhand. Well, let's say the walnut logs to a forest, to some group interested in forestry or forest product? Would you ever do something like that rather than release it yourself--maybe something you'd rather not have as general knowledge?

BARTHELMES: No. I don't remember ever doing that.

GREENE: Would that be something that might have been done, or is it something that is never handled that way by Senate offices, do you know?

BARTHELMES: I can think of instances where it's been done. But I don't remember it being done in Senator Kennedy's office. But usually the only instance, I think, of that--and I don't know, it probably isn't germane to this discussion--is where a government department will call in and very brightly announce to you

that they're closing down an Air Force base and wouldn't you be pleased to announce it. Or they've decided that they're not going to give a Model Cities' grant to Utica and they just wanted to let you know. Now those types of things occur no matter where you work. The first instinct on that

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is to say "Well, thanks a lot, but you go announce it. We don't want to announce it. Let somebody else announce it or just simply let it be known. We're certainly not going to put that out." But I don't ever remember that being done. I thought the government departments--I worked for four members of the Congress--now, I thought the government departments were inordinately cooperative with requests from the Kennedy office. And I don't mean they were either patsies or else they were calling up looking for work. But usually, I think the answers were unusually prompt. And they were kept unusually busy.

I know that of all the material that would arrive in the mail room, that a noticeable amount of it would be publications, foreign language publications with articles about, at that period of time, mostly John Kennedy, Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], but occasionally Robert Kennedy, himself. And they would comment, you know, they were in Greek and Albanian, and French and Spanish. We'd get them from Finland and various other places. But all this is to say is that when they came in they were bundled over to the Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service for translation. Obviously, there were those in the office among us would do maybe French or German or Italian or Spanish. But they came in very uncommon languages, Russian and Chinese, which are common languages but no one in the office knew them. They'd go to the Legislative Reference. And I remember once asking whether they had completed the translation of a particular article and the fellow said, "You know, we're not fussing at you. We sort of enjoy it, but I want you to know that there is the equivalent of one full-time translator working on Kennedy material each working day over here." I mean there'd be twenty different persons for twenty different languages. "But it all adds up", he said, "to the equivalent of one full-time translator working on the material you fellows send over to us." But he wasn't being critical. But he said, "I thought you'd be curious in knowing just the volume of it: We're sort of interested because we obviously don't get this from any other office. The other thing, of course, the mail room was not germane, but always a little bit because that's where they kept all those newspapers I tried to keep up with. But all the exotic things would arrive from overseas spontaneously, that would have spoiled--foodstuffs that would be pretty spoiled and gamey by the time they arrived here.

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[BEGINNING TAPE II, SIDE II]

GREENE: What about the whole idea of leaking a story to a single journalist or to a couple of journalists? Was this something that you did fairly often? And was it pre-arranged so that you would be prepared to handle….

BARTHELMES: Well, it would take various forms. One would simply be--it comes to mind easily, and it's not really what you have in mind--the conventional leak--where the *New York Times* in New York queries and says, it's Johannesburg bureau has a report that the Senator is coming to South Africa. "Now the Senator is not now coming to South Africa, but there's some thought about it. We'll let you know," we reply. When the firm decision is made to go to South Africa, it's only fair that there not be a general release, at least from my point of view, but that in fairness the *Times* should be called and say, "You were the one that made the query, so you can have it and then let the other papers and press associations pick it up afterwards. But that's not the conventional wisdom about leaks. The Kennedy press situation differed from other offices, particularly in offices of U.S. Representatives. There, someone who's assigned the press duties is obliged to virtually go into the press gallery and grab reporters by the throat and call to their attention a speech that his member made. There was sort of a curious inverse function in Senator Kennedy's office of fending off--the volume, for one thing, was so intense—and fending off inquiries and fending off interviews. There was just too much, just too many to handle.

As I said, there was every effort made by Kennedy to be circumspect in terms of his staff toward the White House. So there was no encouragement to go out and find a *New York Times* reporter and say, "Johnson said this yesterday. You know, it's curious, but a year ago he said this." You might find you'd made yourself a column. I don't recall that being done. And I don't ever recall there really being any real leaks. What there were, they were--very often if the Senator felt that his point of view was not being treated fairly or adequately or comprehensively, he would again ask to call Peter Lisagor or call a reporter, Warren Rogers [Warren J. Rogers, Jr.], who might have been with Hearst then and then I think it was *Look*, to "come by and let me tell you what I

really meant by that speech. Maybe there's no news in it, but if there ever is for a background column sometime, I'd like to know about it." He'd do it that way. And I think some matters that were news leaks, although they weren't world shaking, the Senator took positive steps that they not be put out to the paper.

In 1965, there was a Negro man, a resident of the District of Columbia, who was a member of the National Guard and had been on active duty in Georgia. He was driving home through this small Georgia town. Driving along the road, he was ambushed, shot, and killed. I don't remember his name offhand. Well, he had two, three, four children here. Without prompting, the Senator saw to it the wife was helped financially--Cooper, that was the name. And shortly thereafter the mother, the widow, died of natural causes. The Senator then called the funeral home and other things, or asked me to. He found out where the children were and who was taking care of them--which was no one. And it turned out that there was an aunt in Syracuse. So he talked to the aunt in Syracuse. And he made arrangements to provide for them financially, but without prompting. You know, he made it very clear to me, I happened to be the only one in the office, as far as I know, the only one who knew about it at the time. He said, "I don't want it to get out. I'm not winking when I say it. I don't want it to get out." So it never got out. There were two or three other occasions where that type of…. For

publicity, I'd understandably have an inclination to let it be known. What was happening certainly wouldn't hurt him in the crude political sense. I don't think there were leaks in the Drew Pearson sense.

I think that simply he had a rapport with certain newspaper people. And so therefore Joe Kraft would end up at dinner at Hickory Hill. And Kraft wondered whether the government was so old, lumbering and lopsided and out of balance, that perhaps the only way we're going to find…. You know, what are we going to do about this? And then that would give Kennedy a chance to talk about seeking non-bureaucratic solutions to the problems of poverty and health services, racial harmony. Then Kraft would come up with a column. If that's a leak…. You'd have a column that used his views. Or Lisagor or Evans or Wechsler or one or two others. But the leak, as

I understand the leak, as I practice, the leak, I don't really recognize…. I'm sure there was a time in '68, those three months of '68 where it may have been an entirely different situation, but certainly not now. And when the Senator had made up his mind in February of 1966--he made up his mind in early '66 he was going to speak out on Vietnam, damn the torpedoes--it wasn't done as it could have been done. He made it very clear he didn't want it put out, trumpeted and made known he was preparing a Vietnam speech. It was distributed the night before, actually the morning, the same morning of the day of delivery because the final drafting session lasted to three or four in the morning, as I recall. But before that, there was no public indication that he was going to give it.

GREENE: What about problems with friends like Kraft or Evans where he would say something privately to them that later appeared in print? Were there ever times when he had said it off the record in an informal way at home or at least privately and it appeared in print? Were there problems with this kind of thing?

BARTHELMES: He never told me about them because I wasn't in that situation very often. He, like other elected office holders, and a lot of us, expressed some perplexities about how the press plays the stories. And one perplexity I remember, which is just a very odd, aberrant thing--it would only happen in this particular circumstance--is when the Senator had completed and approved the final draft of his February '66 Vietnam speech, he showed it to Rowley Evans. Rowley Evans read it and said, "No problems with it." He showed it to him because Evans was a bit of a hawk as was his colleague, his column partner, Bob Novak [Robert D. Novak]; well, Kennedy gave the statement on a Saturday morning of February, '66. But on the next Monday morning in the Evans and Novak column, there it was, whacking the devil out of Kennedy for this terrible speech that he gave. The Senator couldn't figure it out. It turned out that he'd showed it to Evans, but Novak was the one who wrote the column. The Senator called Rowley, "How could you do this to me?" And it turned out that it was Novak who had written the column on the speech for that particular day. But I don't know of anyone who had a continuous social relationship with him who was a newspaperman who "broke a confidence"

simply because I don't think it really paid to do it. It was much too valuable to have. What you would be doing was sacrificing a relationship for a spot column or a spot item.

GREENE: Of course, I was thinking mainly of inadvertent things which weren't clearly off the record that might have been mistakenly used.

BARTHELMES: That had happened--I don't remember specific incidents--that would happen simply with ad hoc interviews where a fellow from *Time* or a fellow from the *World Telegram* or a fellow from somewhere or other who was not acquainted with Kennedy--and he was very difficult to follow in an interview, he could be very enigmatic and someone who was simply sort of a paper-and-pen artist and came in and sat down and started asking him questions--he would get confused. Because Kennedy had a habit, as a lot of public officeholders do, of saying something like, "Goldberg's very unhappy with what's going on in the Dominican Republic." Then the Senator would say, "I didn't mean to say that. I mean that's an exaggeration. I mean that's not what I'm saying. I was only using that as an example." Well, those reporters who would be covering the Senator on a continuous basis--in the long run and not just a one-day shot--they'd agree not to use the unguarded remark, although they were *NOT* obliged to, because the Senator should have prefaced that remark by saying, "What I'm about to say is 'off the record'" or, alternatively, "What I'm about to say is for non-attribution, for background only." But others would use it, and then he'd get in trouble. Or they just maybe had a legitimate misunderstanding of what's on and off the record.

But I don't think any of those who had a long relationship with him socially, newspaper people, I don't believe that made such a misstep. I don't know of any case where there was any major and grievous violation of account. Because as reporters became acceptable to him and gained his confidence--something he gave out slowly like a rope, as you feed a rope out--they realized that in order to arrive at this position of confidentiality was an indication that they were competent in reading the pauses and the grimaces and the enigmatic remarks and the

quizzical look and what have you. It was the experienced, not in terms of professional training, but the person inexperienced with any regular contact with the Senator who was the one apt to stub his toe.

GREENE: Was the fact that he was so much more accessible to some people than to others a problem with the rest of the press corps? Did it create all kinds of jealousies and…

BARTHELMES: I think it probably did.

GREENE: Did they come back at you to some extent?

BARTHELMES: Well, the older hands, the more senior reporters, I don't think they did because it's my view--and I think it's borne out by this example--that senior correspondents in this town cover the town as lawyers do. They have "clients" and they have six or seven, just to pick an arbitrary figure, of important news sources. They sort of "live" off of those sources. They may be a mixture, a bipartisan mix of Republicans and Democrats, judges and members of Congress and the House and Senate and some of the executive branch. These are people that are almost--except for three o'clock in the morning--they can call up almost at any time or even go in without an appointment and get a quick interview if they're on a deadline or they need a quick column or they really need to clarify something. So Correspondent A has his clients and Correspondent B has his clients. So that people like Pearson and Bill White [William S. White] never came near Kennedy. They didn't have to come near Kennedy. They knew all about him--he was a son-of-a-bitch and, you know, so who needs to ask any questions.

Now, to put it frankly on the record, there were a few toadies on the press corps who came to the Kennedys. I think they did their newspaper or their radio station and their listeners and their readers a disservice by being bootlickers or sycophants. But there were those who actively sought him out. Now, my view of it is, although once again Senator Kennedy was very well guarded, I don't think he had a great deal of respect for them. But on the other hand, I think he was perfectly willing to take advantage of their interest.

GREENE: Who would you include in this group?

BARTHELMES: Well, I would think Andy Glass who was then with the *New York Herald Tribune*. I think Jimmy Wechsler, who was editor of the editorial page of the *New York Post*. I think Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News*. I think they're the three that come up the most to my mind. There're two or three others, I would think.

GREENE: You said, "until recently," about Glass. What did you mean by that?

BARTHELMES: Well, Glass made the Latin American trip with the Senator in the late stages, in late '65, but in the last months of the declining *Herald Tribune*. Then he wrote an article on the trip for the *Saturday Evening Post*. And I think there was a feeling at the staff level and also a view held by Senator Kennedy, but much less forcefully, that Glass had included in the story for the purpose of the "color" or "human interest", incidents that might happen at any large gathering or any of us might say if we're tired at the end of an arduous day and say, "Good Lord, am I sick of this country." This wasn't in the article, but it was that type of thing, the unguarded remark. This certainly is fair game. But on the other hand, the Kennedy feeling was that the article would have held up without it.

This was the view held by the staff. It was a sort of human interest article that really missed the point of the Senator's visit. Once again, this is in the framework of what so much of Kennedy was, what he did. His activities were placed in the context of "What makes Sammy run?"--the running for president, the harder he'd run, running harder again--how everything he does is simply to advance his own political ambition. I think the title or the story, which escapes me now…

GREENE: I was just going to say, yes.

BARTHELMES: …conveyed that.

GREENE : I can't remember it either. But it was definitely with that…

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BARTHELMES: With that connotation.

GREENE: Yeah.

BARTHELMES: And Andy got a very hard time, excessively hard, I think, from one or two of the staff people. As a result he turned, as frequently happens, he turned and he became very critical.

GREENE: Who on the staff was involved in it?

BARTHELMES: I think probably Walinsky more than anyone. You know, staff does have a habit, and that would include myself and others no matter where we were, of sometimes over-reacting to the wishes or the desires or inclinations of the employer, in this case, the Senator. There are those who, you know, if you hear the boss say, "Well, I wasn't very pleased with that," you know, that is sort of a trigger to go tearing out of the inner office and on to the phone and give somebody hell. This isn't what it meant at all. It's like supposedly, and I have no firsthand knowledge, but it was supposedly John Kennedy's wry observation about the *Herald Tribune* that was exaggerated to the point where delivery was stopped at the White House. And, you know, you can well say, "I hope I never have this damn paper in the house again." But you get over it. But with some people it's carried out literally. And I think this is the type that sometimes happens at the staff basis. It carries farther than the Member (the Senator) permits, the Member would want.

GRFFNE: Would there be a follow-through either by you or the Senator himself on articles which were unpleasing like this one?

BARTHELMES: He'd wrinkle up his nose and grimace.

GREENE: Did he get on the phone at all?

BARTHELMES: No. The only, I think--I may have said earlier--the only time I'm aware was as a result of an article that was on page one by Ted Knap with *New York World Telegram* in which the Senator did call the editor of the *World Telegram*, I forget his name, and complain. It was simply one after another of "hooker" stories in which extraneous political things were dragged into the story that weren't relevant to it.

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I could probably put my finger on the story itself if I went through my files. The Knap piece purported to cover a speech by the Senator about water pollution… water conservation. It was a subject the Senator, supported by his staff, had a deep interest in. A great deal of care had gone into preparation of the speech. The Senator thought it both thoughtful and detailed. He wishes for serious and wide coverage. He did not view the speech as a pious plea against pollution--or as Knap did, a Kennedy criticism of the direction of the Federal anti-pollution programs as administered by the Johnson Administration. It also got very poor play in the *New York Times*, but the *Times* reporter was not chastised. The Senator asked me to find out why was the reporter's reaction to the story as it was. The reporter said, as I recall, it kind of struck him... He had a fairly busy day, plus it sounded to him like another water pollution story even if it was the Senator from New York, one of the two Senators from New York State and the *New York Times* published it in its late city edition only. That's how the reporter saw it. That's how it fell. That's how he reported it. He sort of wrinkled his nose, and that was it. So only Knap for a long time was in Coventry. Glass, on the other hand, was "permanently exiled". In addition, there were magazines that were consistently unfriendly to the Senator, such as the *U.S. News & World Report*.

There was a fellow by the name of Ruth [Robert W. Ruth] who worked for them--I don't remember his first name--who would come in once a week, regularly. The only thing that interested him was where was the Senator going to be next week. He obviously was trying to put together a story that the Senator was trying his presidential wings, was reaching out, putting a "strangle-hold" on Idaho, or Minnesota or California, or some other devilish thing. I think there were some press secretaries that would tell him to get the hell out. I simply would tell him where he was going; I thought he was entitled to that information. I had press problems enough without being put in the position of turning up in that magazine's gossip column, saying "Kennedy office won't give out the schedule." He'd get the schedule and that's all. Once in awhile he might write an item about, "The Senator is going to California next week, and what's he going to do with Jesse Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh], with the CDC and Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown]?--and you know a whole lot of things that he just…

[-64-]

GREENE: Speculated on.

BARTHELMES: …speculated on. One thing occurs to me about the business of the

leak. There have been cases where one or two members in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* bureau here have come to the Kennedy office—and I think others, but I just remember those two--saying, "I'm doing a story on Vietnam. Is there anything you'd like to say? Or "I'm doing a story--Johnson has now been in office in his own right two full years, and I see some programs of the Kennedy Administration he's turning around or not implementing or changing direction on. Would the Senator have any views on it?" There was a case where you were offered a showcase to say something. Once again the acceptable definition, I think of the leak--this one a proffered one from the press.

GREENE: Well, what would you do in a case like the one you described? Would you usually issue some kind of statement?

BARTHELMES: Well, not off the cuff. First they wanted to know the day that the Senator wanted to do that. He would usually, if it were in this case of doing a piece on the Johnson Administration— "Lyndon: Two Years in Office in His Own Right", he'd say, "No. I don't want it; it wouldn't be useful", which was a very frequent expression of his--something, "wouldn't be useful". Instead of saying "It's a lousy idea", he'd say, "It wouldn't be useful" and that ended it. But there were cases when he would be offered a chance to express his view on a story…. Stories were being frequently written that the Johnson policy in Vietnam was simply a continuation--although of a greater magnitude--of a policy that was started by Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. Then he was more apt to say, "Well, in '63 Roger Hilsman came to me and we talked about it and Mac Bundy." He'd put together a paragraph or two. My judgment was the paragraph always appeared after he'd talked to McNamara and he'd talked to Mac Bundy and he's refreshed his memory. He talked to Hilsman and tried to test his recollection and make sure that fit. Then very often there'd be one or two sentences that he'd throw out and he'd say, "You can use this if you want to." And it usually got used.

GREENE: Did you get a lot of calls from people doing articles on non-political issues that wanted…

BARTHELMES: Well, there were a lot of issues from the specialty magazines and newspapers about the…. *Boys Life* wanted to do a story on the Kennedy children. Then they wanted to know if his father had ever been a Boy Scout. Or some women's magazine, *McCall's*, would want to do an article on Mrs. Kennedy--did she have any hobbies, or just her life. That was very difficult. With Mrs. Kennedy really pretty much the lid was on. She didn't like them. I don't recall any being done. She was a delightful person. She didn't want to do them, and "Ethel" didn't have to do them. There were articles from when he climbed the mountain in *Sports Illustrated* or maybe someone else would want to do a story on what he does with spare time. Or *Field & Stream* would make a blind stab as to "Does he ever fish?" Or *Yachting* magazine had called in and wanted to know this spring, "If the Kennedys had a new boat and if so what it is", and everything from--I'm not a sailor--the description of the sail to how many masts and its class

and the whole thing. They wanted a story on, "How did I [RFK] learn to sail." You know, you were getting these side things all the time. Now, when those get done, if he wanted them done, which wasn't very often, they were just usually done at the staff basis. He had a look at them usually but not always. They were harmless enough stories and there was no harm done. They were just plain done once you get enough information.

GREENE: Actually when I asked that question, I was thinking more of somebody doing an article, let's say, on the need for some kind of project in Bedford-Stuyvesant, something he was sincerely interested in perhaps when the project itself hadn't started. Would he cooperate as far as giving the staff permission to work with the guy to some degree and give information?

BARTHELMES: Oh, sure, once he gave the general okay.

GREENE: Can you remember any specific things of this nature where you cooperated with a writer on a specific story which didn't deal directly with the Kennedys, but on an issue in which they were interested?

BARTHELMES: There was cooperation given with two or three authors who were writing books about Kennedy stewardship as Attorney General, where there was a decision—usually

after consultation with Steve Smith or with Burke Marshall (I guess usually Burke Marshall)--to make an offer, to agree to cooperate, to agree to be available for an interview at some point, although not now.

GREENE: Which were under consideration at this time? Do you remember which books?

BARTHELMES: Yea. There was one, Ronald Goldfarb. Goldfarb? yeah, Ronald Goldfarb. What the devil is the name of that?

GREENE: This is a, book or an article you're speaking of?

BARTHELMES: A book.

GREENE: A book?

BARTHELMES: What I have here, I think is an article. I think it appeared in *The Washingtonian*, about his stewardship as Attorney General in fact. But I'm certain Goldfarb was working on a book on Kennedy's stewardship. Then there was another one by Victor Navasky [Victor S. Navasky].

GREENE: Navasky?

BARTHELMES: Navasky. Now, he showed up in my time.

GREENE: He's doing a book now.

BARTHELMES: Is it out?

GREENE: No. It's pretty close.

BARTHELMES: Well, he showed up; he first made an inquiry in my time.

GREENE: I didn't realize that goes back that far.

BARTHELMES: Goes back quite a way. There were always…. There was someone doing a book on Lyndon Johnson who worked for Newhouse. I don't

remember the name. He'd ask if the Senator would sit still for an interview--e.g. "My impression of Lyndon Johnson was such and such…." The Senator said, "I don't think it would be useful." So I'd just call and say no. This fellow happened to be very understanding. He said, "Well I can understand that. That's fine." But usually, as I said, they were disturbed by being denied an access to Senator Kennedy more than they would have been if they were denied access to anyone else. It would be an affront. You could tell. I always thought it got very petty--particularly television and television commentaries coverage never impressed me as a result of my stay with the Kennedys. There was a time in February '66 at the time of that Vietnam statement when he was suddenly willing to go on TV. He went on NBC's "Meet the Press" with Larry Spivak on a Sunday. I got a call that following Monday morning, first thing from the woman who collects panelists for "Issues and Answers" at ABC, Peggy Whedon, just giving me hell saying, "That NBC program is a stinking show. Spivak's a shit…." You know, it gets irrational. But what she, was really telling me was she was chagrinned and disappointed. Maybe the president of ABC had called her and asked her, "How come Peggy, you're not…. How come you didn't get Kennedy?" You know, she was playing the Army game. And this would happen frequently with television. Not newspapers. If you gave an interview to the *New York Times*, you know, it doesn't mean that you caught hell from the other newspapers. The newspaper people seemed more mature. I think that the outlandish competiveness at television would mean that if the rival networks in the gallery got wind or the fact that you'd given Herb Kaplow [Herbert E. Kaplow] two minutes or a minute on some issue, right away it was "Equal time, you've got to give it to me." You can't give it to him; he (RFK) might be on his way to the airport. But I thought that the television people were for the most part very childish. The other thing that we always had problems with, I thought, was the right wing stuff that was put out. I don't know when this was….

GREENE : I think it was ‘65 or ‘66.

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BARTHELMES: ‘65. This May. It showed up first in Long Island, I think John English sent us a copy. It showed up early in ‘65, that April or May of ‘65. Here’s a memo dated 4/13/65 which was a result of a memo after I did a check on who and what it was. But, see, then the newspaper *Newsday*, which is published out there, and the Newhouse papers have outlets in Long Island City and various places, would call and say, “Well, what about it?” And then I’d say, “I’m going to tell you that.” I’d tell him that it was a false account and untrue. But the reporters still would insist that there was some subterranean effort that was being financed by the Kennedys and it wasn’t. It didn’t do any great harm. But once again, you’d get a rash of stories about “He’s striking again.” And this could occupy about half the day, once in a while.

GREENE: I meant to ask you, how, much of a staff did you have on the press side?

BARTHELMES: There was one other. When I first came on, Gail Tirana [Gail R. Tirana]. Gail, you probably know her.

GREENE: I’ve spoken to her on the phone, yes.

BARTHELMES: She was there, and she had been there with Ed Guthman. Then Gail was married, and then shortly after I was there, she became pregnant and she left. Then she came back in other capacities. Then a girl, a young lady by the name of Wendy Cimmet, C-i-m-m-e-t, was there. She’s now married. She wasn’t then, lives up at 4201 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. She worked with me. It was the two of us. She answered the phone, kept the messages, did a lot of the letter writing, you know: “Dear Sir, we’ll answer you when we can.” or “You wanted to know what committee the Senator was on….” A lot of that would come in to us. It was just as easy for the press section to do it as, say, legislative people. Then, my recollection is, I think Wendy, not Gail, but Wendy was, I think, then drawn into the invitations operation. She’d answer a lot of the--she answered a good many of the press queries. You know, “Send me a bio, a photograph: what time is the Senator speaking tomorrow?” A lot of the routine press inquiries we would answer, taking a considerable burden off of anyone else.

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Now, the answer is the press man and one other. At some point later, I think in ‘67, it was enlarged. Besides Frank Mankiewicz and Pat Riley, there was another fellow, at least one other fellow, Hugh McDonald. I think Earl Graves was up in New York. And I think he had some press function, I may be mistaken. It grew a little bit as time went on.

GREENE: Did you really get more help during the period you were there?

BARTHELMES: No. I don't think so.

GREENE: It was manageable?

BARTHELMES: I think it was manageable. I worked probably from a quarter of eight or about eight o'clock in the morning to about that time at night, That's about how it ran. Saturdays were fairly loose--you know, ten till two, ten till three. It would all depend. But it was really very enjoyable. But it didn't leave much time for anything else, That's another story, or it's still this story, I don't know.

GREENE: You can go into it now--it's fine--if you would like.

BARTHELMES: Want to go into it now? I think that it just got to the point where the job was so demanding, properly, that there was really no other, was really very little time left for outside the office. I think it just depends, in sum, on a person's general outlook on life--what are the most important thing or things for them. If a job is the all compelling and overwhelming consuming affair, which is perfectly fine, the predominant thing in one's life, then this is all right. If in order not to be completely built-in, drawn in to the point where there is relatively little privacy, relatively little sense of person, very little time, for home life, why then, I think, someone has to make a decision.

My decision was that he was a very constructive and very admirable fellow, but I'm just not temperamentally inclined to either hero-worship or to think that being in the White House is the epitome of human existence.

[-70-]

Subsequently, anything I could do afterwards, as witness to the Oregon memo which I've given you and other things, I was perfectly, kindly disposed, perfectly willing. Many times I helped out in response to phone calls, a number of things, in that subsequent period, ensuing period. But I just wanted to see my family. And I just wanted to have some time to myself.

GREENE: How understanding was he of all this?

BARTHELMES: Oh, I think he probably understood it. Maybe he was nostalgic. It was fun. Just about that time, a coincident, a friend of mine was running for the Democratic senatorial nomination in Oregon, a fellow named Bob Duncan [Robert Blackford Duncan], who was then in the House of Representatives. I worked in the Oregon delegation before with Mrs. Edith Green. I enjoyed Oregon. I thought it would be, whatever I did in the future, it would be an advantage to have played a primary role is a statewide Senate campaign, even though Oregon is politically an atypical state. So I went out there for the primary in May, late May of 1966. I barely got out there before the primary date, really. I didn't have much to do with the primary. But then I did in the general, 1966. The Senator came out that fall and spoke for Duncan, toured the state. Then I guess I went to Portland with him and up to Seattle. We talked about my situation if Duncan lost, which he

did, but very narrowly. There are other things I could have done in the Kennedy operation, but I really didn't want to go back on the staff.

GREENE: Do you think that a good portion of the staff was hero-worshipping to some extent?

BARTHELMES: Oh, I think so. Yes. I think very much so. I don't mean necessarily in a misty-eyed way. I think there was, yes, I think there was a sort of a hero-worshipping syndrome. Lord knows, of all the mature human beings I've met, I can't think of anyone who would rate a niche, if I were temperamentally willing or able to give it, than Robert Kennedy. He was really a very constructive person. He had that sort of…. I grew up--despite my name, I was raised by Irish relatives, the McDevitts and the O'Gradys and the Sheas in Boston. I think there's a type of Irishman

living today who really has a sense of grievance. It's almost as if he can sense Cromwell [Oliver Cromwell] or he can sense the grievances of the Irish settlers. I can remember getting it from my grandfather about relatives that were hung by the British. But I think Senator Kennedy had a remarkable sense of injustice. You can either experience it or you can imagine it. He had a tremendous gift of imagination which is extremely critical.

And everyone resorted to this old saw about he was a hater. I don't think he was a hater at all. I think had a great rage against injustice, and I think he had a rage against impenetrability and the immovability of institutions. I think this probably accounted for this tremendous impatience he had. But I think he quite successfully channeled his rage into constructive channels. He was…. But I think there was some…. I always thought as I listened to him or was with him that at the same time with this rage--that there should be so much inhumanity perpetrated on human beings in a country that has so successfully managed to spread so much economic well-being over a large group of people, more so than any other country in the world, but still had the intensity of the poverty and insensibility of the people--at the same time I always sensed sort of a sadness that although this was all so, he had a sort of sadness from the knowledge of the uncertain worth of most means and the uncertain glory of most ends. There was just sort of the feeling that with all this, you were going to change it a little perhaps here and there, but not a great deal. It was sort of, you know--I think it was the enigma of human existence. I think he felt this. I think he felt this very deeply, which made him unorthodox and made him unconventional, made him unsettling. I think this was….

You know, in the Senate he was sort of--he was more than just fitting in that category, the "presidential Senator". I think he gave the impression--he, probably more than most presidential senators that had been through there in the past, including John Kennedy, of being sort of a boarder. There's something about him that I think because he had conveyed this feeling of injustice and this rage about it--I think for conventional or comfortably fixed people and for the Pharisees among us, he was like a living reproach. When he came into the room it was like

he was reproaching people for feeling their worldly goods and not being concerned with what's before their noses. And I'm not sure whether…. This is obviously conjectural; I don't know if he was aware of it, but I always thought this is why he made the welfare, labor, business, school administrator, any of them, so uncomfortable in his presence. He somehow conveyed the sense of reproach: "Why aren't you doing better? Why not make things that are in your domain more just, more humane?" And I think this is why he caused so many people to feel uncomfortable.

GREENE: I think that's right and very well expressed. You were talking before about the idea of off-the-record conversations, either because he had private conversations with friends who happened to be journalists or off-the-record conversations, not conversations, but passages in the course of an interview. What about organized off-the-record press conference? Were things like this going on while you were there, where he wanted to discuss something but without having it attributed to him, or only portions of it put on…

BARTHELMES: Yeah. There were. I think after some effort I succeeded in arranging probably the first off-the-record session of Kennedy with the press that covered his office, some of whom--it came fairly late in the first year--some of whom he'd never met. And once again, with exception, they were…. The first such gathering was an attempt to confine it to members of the press from New York State newspaper and broadcasting outlets who covered the office, plus I think *Time* and *Newsweek*. It was an occasion just enough "to get to know him". The drinks were there. He was new to everyone for the most part except for maybe Alan Emory [Alan S. Emory] from the Watertown paper or one of two others. It was the first time they really had a chance to see him except as a blur or as a fellow saying, "Yeah, come to see me", or, "It's not useful", or, "I don't want to say that", or, this, "How are you?" of something like that, or on the press bus. It was an attempt to sit in the inner room, where Senator Charles Percy [Charles Harting Percy] is now, in the New Senate Office Building, and just talk. They would ask him a number of things. The primary question was then, "How do you like being a Senator?"

They wanted to write the answer. They wanted him to say, "Well, it's a can of worms because you can't get anything done. Everything's so immobile! You have to wait so long! I can't wait until I get out of here." Of course his answer was something else. It was a soft turn-away. He did feel this way. He was impatient. I think he outgrew it a little bit. But at that point, he was extremely impatient. Anyone would be if they were in a Cabinet position, pretty much able to move the department and then suddenly, they're one-one hundredth or less. He was really more because he was a Kennedy. Even so in the Senate…. But he had had some legislative achievements to his own credit at that point, the amendments he's added, those New York tier counties on the Pennsylvania line, the Appalachian belt which were

added to eligible counties in the original Economic Development Act. That's the one I remember most. There were two or three others. But I think that was the first.

Then there were other social gatherings where he would invite the newspaper people out to Hickory Hill in the good weather, to the pool. It would be a workday, but usually, you know, from noon to two or something--come when you can, stay as long as you can, within those two hours. He'd just be there and they could bring their swimsuits and swim. And I was always interested that when he invited them, he invited not only Sandy Vanocur [Snader Vanocur], but he also invited the cameramen and the guy who lugs the tripod and the other unsung supporting employees. It was made very clear to me that they were to be invited too. He'd say to me, "The people who do this and the people who lug that, they're to come too." Most of them were anonymous people; I knew very few of them. The sound man and the whole pack of technicians that goes with the team--they'd be invited, and the newspaper photographers…

GREENE: What was the purpose of that?

BARTHELMES: It was very clear they were to be invited. And most of them would come for the hour, hour and a half, two hours, chat and dine with their feet in the pool. He'd have a swim suit on and would talk a little bit.

GREENE: But was that primarily social or to in his own way express his appreciation, and feeling each other out.

BARTHELMES: No. I think that was just perhaps an attempt to induce, to see him in a more natural surrounding, and perhaps to get them to see the home side of him. I don't think it was an appreciation of much. At the time, there wasn't very much to be appreciative of.

GREENE: I was thinking in terms of so many of them having to be patient at many points with his schedule.

BARTHELMES: No. I think it was just to give them access. You know, he always, he sort of startled the newspaper and TV people too because they'd dangle their feet. I remember one occasion… Eventually there'd be one sort of scholar type that would draw him into a long discussion about Vietnam, probably because he (the guest) had boned up the night before. And if the Senator didn't want to talk about that, he'd say, "I heard one of you fellows on TV the other night using the word 'camp'. What does 'camp' mean?" And, you know, the guest's eyes would widen. Nobody ever came up with a definition of camp. The Senator got to enjoy such 'fencing', at which point his staff would move further away because they were afraid he'd ask them what camp meant. Nobody was really prepared. Then the Senator began to have fun with them.
So at the next outing, he said, "You're under thirty"--Sam Donaldson [Samuel A. Donaldson], a reporter who was then at WTOP and now at ABC--and the Senator asked him

what camp was. The fellow said, “Well, It’s sort of old-fashioned.” The Senator said, “Well, I don’t think it really means old-fashioned.” But the Senator never would define it himself. No one ever said, “Well, if you were so smart, why don’t you tell us what it is?” which might be the natural rejoinder. The Senator had great fun with that. Most everybody pretty much enjoyed it, although a couple…. I remember one TV type fellow was decidedly put out because he was the object of the game. He got sort of stiff-necked about it. But the Senator would entertain at home and he would go to the news bureau if they’d invite him, *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the others. And he would hold court there. And the pool and in his office….

GREENE: But how much of what was discussed on these occasions was for publication?

BARTHELMES: None. Nothing.

GREENE: None. Held never put portions of it on the record? None of it was for quotation?

BARTHELMES: No. Not at all.

GREENE: Did you ever have any foul-ups on that, things which did appear that were said at occasions of this sort?

BARTHELEMS: No. Now Ed Guthman told me this had happened in the Justice Department days, and if this type of abuse of confidence was done, to watch it. But I wasn’t aware of anything at that time, particularly that spring, summer and fall of ‘65. I don’t know if that was continued into ‘66-‘67. It probably was. But I think the first year was a bit of a tryout. I think perhaps it wasn’t after that. Everything sorted itself out perhaps.

GREENE: Did you ever get complaints from journalists that he was impossible to interview, that he’d turn their questions around and start the interviewing process himself? I’ve read this and heard from some people that he was more comfortable asking the questions than answering them.

BARTHELMES: That’s probably true. I think he probably did enjoy reversing the roles. He did enjoy asking questions, just like he enjoyed asking questions, just like he enjoyed asking questions of student audiences. Yeah. There were occasions. Milt Viorst [Milton Viorst], the free-lance writer of books, magazine articles--he did that piece in *Esquire* called the “Skeptics” in the November, 1968 issue--once was in for an interview with the Senator. Afterward, he came out of the Senator’s private office and came over and shook his head and said to me, “It’s just like tearing the flesh off the bones.” For some reason if he (the Senator) wasn’t sure of his grounds or he wasn’t sure

of his person, the interviewer, he would be just about as helpful as a deaf mute. It was most unsettling for an interviewer. I don't remember that it happened often, but it did happen.

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I should also point out something else. His attitude oftentimes was that he preferred to be interviewed alone when he's in his office, rather than have me there. His grounds for that, I thought, were rather sensitive perceptive ones. The grounds he gave was simply that he didn't want reporters to think they were being monitored, or they weren't being trusted. Some reporters are sensitive to that. If he "made news" at the interview, I'd read about it, or he'd almost always tell me about it beforehand, if he said something that he thought he shouldn't have said, which occasionally occurred. But for some reason when people came up to see him in the Carlyle Hotel in New York City or on a plane, in a hotel room or something, this ground rule never applied. But when he's in his office, at the outset he'd say, "well, I'd just as soon do this alone." He was very cautious. If he had some guy down from the city desk of the *Long Island Journal*, it was very conventional interview, nothing would be kept from me or anybody else. This is what he said. This is how it was.

GREENE: Did he particularly want you around when he was being questioned outside his office? Did he like to have somebody with him?

BARTHELMES: Yeah.

GREENE: Why do you think that was?

BARTHELMES: I always volunteered without being asked--but I think he thought it useful. When he left the Senate Floor to go upstairs (upon request) to the TV-radio news gallery on the third floor of the Senate Wing of the Capitol, or when he was on his way to a press conference in a hotel room or somewhere else, I usually told him what I thought might be on their (the reporters') minds in terms of topics, not specific sentences or questions necessarily, but topics. I would gather from what he said that he found it useful. Very often if it were on some reasonable technical subject or whether a question in that area were apt to come up, he would ask Adam Walinsky or Edelman to come with him too, to sort of sit in. He was also, I thought, very good about reporting to reporters' requests. He couldn't be everyplace at all times. But very often he'd go to hearings with Adam or with Walinsky or with Edelman or with Wendell Pigman. Sometimes with no one. Then

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he'd come back, and he'd usually say, "I was asked this and I said that (to a reporter or a witness) so in case you get a call or something…." He'd say, "I think I made it clear, but what I meant to say was so-and-so," Then there would be times--I don't remember specific instances--where with a grimace he said, after an interview where none of his staff was present, "Well, you know, this wasn't my finest hour."

GREENE: It looks to me like we're just about out of tape.

BARTHELMES: Out of tape?

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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