

James B. Brennan, Oral History Interview – 12/9/1965
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Biographical Note

Brennan, a Democratic State Senator from Milwaukee, Wisconsin from 1959 to 1960, and campaign worker for the Kennedy for President Campaign in 1960, discusses the 1960 primary campaign in Wisconsin, John F. Kennedy's (JFK) campaign visits to Wisconsin, and the reasons why JFK lost Wisconsin to Richard Milhous Nixon in the general election, among other issues.

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James B. Brennan

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Oral History Interview

with

James B. Brennan

December 9, 1965
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Let me start by asking when you first got involved with the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] people before the Kennedy-Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] race in Wisconsin.

BRENNAN: I would guess that it would be the late spring or summer of '59 when the representative here of the.... I can't think of the name of this union; Harvey Kitzman runs this union. The Auto Workers. The Auto Workers, Region 10, were having a big dinner, and Hubert was their pet and idol so they were having this great big dinner at the Schroeder Hotel. I was there. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] came into the back of the room, and somebody pointed him out. I didn't even know him, but I went over to him and I said that I was sure if Kennedy ran in the Wisconsin primary that he would win and that this dinner was designed to scare Kennedy out so that he'd know that this was Humphrey's home territory. And I said, "I'm with you, one way or the other. If you can use me by having me against you, I'll be against, you know, or for." But I said, "I really think you've got a nice candidate there."

MORRISSEY: Why did you think Kennedy would do well in Wisconsin?

BRENNAN: Well, everything I had read about him up to that time indicated to me that if the Democrats were going to beat Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon], they weren't going to do it with Humphrey and they weren't going to do it with Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. It would take a very personable guy and a talented man and somebody with a little extra, plus, I suppose, being a Catholic there was a little truthful tie or affection or something there that just made him that much more attractive to me.

MORRISSEY: Had you ever met him?

BRENNAN: No, never met him.

MORRISSEY: What was Ted's answer to your comment?

BRENNAN: Well, he was always.... He looked like he smiled about once a month, you know? I don't really recall whether he answered. Then I went back to the table. Then I think it was a week or so later that Pat Lucey [Patrick Joseph Lucey], our state chairman, contacted me and said that, I think Kennedy was coming to town. Somebody was coming to town; it might have been Kennedy. He wanted me to meet him and take him on a tour.

MORRISSEY: Did you know Lucey before?

BRENNAN: Oh yes, yes, I had know Pat. Well, I was active in politics. I started in about 1954. I organized a Democratic unit in a Republican area for which I received a lot of publicity. I don't know if it committed me or what but it put me in.... It was an unusual situation.

MORRISSEY: When were you first elected to the state senate?

BRENNAN: In '58.

MORRISSEY: I see. One thing intrigues about this and that is Kennedy was very careful not to make the Kennedy campaign look like a bunch of Catholics out working for a Catholic and your name is Brennan and yet they contacted your right at the outset. Did you feel sometimes that they were looking for some good old fashioned Protestants to bring into this?

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BRENNAN: Oh sure. In fact, after that meeting with Sorensen, I believe the chronology would be that we then started to have meetings. By "we" it was Pat Lucey of Madison, Bob Dean [Robert W. Dean], another state senator, from Wausau, one of the Duffys, I believe, from Green Bay. At that time we were discussing who was going to head up the committee for the encouragement of

JFK to run in the primary. At that time we were discussing Ivan Nestingen [Ivan A. Nestingen], the Norwegian from Madison and the mayor of Madison.

MORRISSEY: Who approached Nestingen?

BRENNAN: Lucey, I would guess.

MORRISSEY: I figured it probably was.

BRENNAN: I'm quite sure of that because I can remember conversations along that line.

MORRISSEY: My impression as an outsider is that Hubert Humphrey had many more contacts within the Democratic party than the Kennedy people did.

BRENNAN: Yes, that's another thing, I suppose, that made Kennedy's potential candidacy attractive to us because he would have to go to the Convention after.... He had to show that a Catholic could win and he had to demonstrate it here where the population was against him. It was really quite a race and it showed a lot of guts on Kennedy's part to make it because Humphrey had been our senator. Up to '57 when Proxmire [William Proxmire] won the special election, we had two congressmen, period. We didn't have the governor's chair, we didn't have any of the other congressional seats and we didn't even have a prayer for the U.S. Senate job. So Humphrey had come into this state and had made an awful lot of friends because he was very generous with his time. So that was the picture. First of all, the Catholic population wasn't right and Humphrey had been a friend of many people.

MORRISSEY: It's for reasons such as these that I'm surprised that you thought that Kennedy could beat him in his own backyard.

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BRENNAN: Yes, that is unusual but I felt that if he didn't it was worth a good shot. It was worth a try, but I knew Humphrey was a good friend of the political workers and of the union people but I also knew and felt, as one can possibly know in politics, that Humphrey always talked too much and that everybody thought that he was the gabbiest guy. Even at political dinners it would take him twenty minutes to say "hello," to say "howdy," to everybody up and down the banquet table and then he would just talk forever. The people that like him were those that knew that he was generous with his time and a good help to Wisconsin in political fund raising drives. Because of his gabbiness and being outspoken on so many issues, I didn't think he would be attractive to Wisconsin voters. Then, another thing, Wisconsin had been—it's getting fifty-fifty now, but had been—a republican state. In our open primary Wisconsin takes great pleasure and pride in crossing over to try and throw off the other side. We had done this to

the Kohler-Wiley [Walter J. Kohler, Jr.; Alexander Wiley] fight back in '56. We all jumped in and put Alex Wiley in because we knew he was the easiest one to beat and so Wisconsin voters, the Republican, conservative oriented people, would not vote for Hubert. They would.... Kennedy was the most attractive guy. This would not be really a pure Democratic primary.

MORRISSEY: Do you think there was quite a crossover then, Republicans voting for Kennedy?

BRENNAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: A lot of Catholic Republicans voting for Kennedy?

BRENNAN: I don't know about that. I don't know. It seemed to me that that did not hold true. There certainly were a number of them.

MORRISSEY: After you got Nestingen set up, how did the Kennedy organization begin to move?

BRENNAN: Well, then—it was about Christmas—we moved above a drugstore up here at Twelfth and Wisconsin. About Christmastime—if my memory serve serves me

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correctly—the people started to come in. Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] started to come in quite a bit and almost on a full time basis. Then there was Chuck or Charlie Roche [Charles D. Roche] came in and Pamela Turnure. Then of course when Bobby came in Ang....

MORRISSEY: Angie Novello [Angela M. Novello]?

BRENNAN: Novello came in. Then Garrity [Wendell Arthur Garrity, Jr.] from Boston came in. Then it was maybe a month or two; it was in the spring then, maybe January or February—we moved downtown. We got an old condemned storefront on Wisconsin Avenue. That was spacious and we had a nice headquarters there. I would guess that it was about January that they assigned men to each Congressional district. My job was here in the fourth and fifth district with Art Garrity and Leo Racine from the Ambassador's [Joseph P. Kennedy] office—he was here—and in the seventh, Paul Corbin. Billings [Kirk LeMoyné Billings] was in the third; that's in the southwest corner of the state. The artist—I can't remember his name—was down in the first here.

MORRISSEY: Bill Walton [William Walton].

BRENNAN: Bill Walton. That's in the southeast corner. And Madison, I guess Lucey took care of that. I don't know, but they set it up in the districts.

MORRISSEY: How about the seventh district? That's the one that the Kennedys just barely carried.

BRENNAN: Paul Corbin.

MORRISSEY: And Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith, II] was up in the tenth?

BRENNAN: Tenth. You know, he was with Kennedy's.... Was he? Or was Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]? Was it Reardon? Where was Reardon?

MORRISSEY: I can't keep them straight.

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BRENNAN: Reardon.... I don't know but they were up north there, in the northern part of the state. Yes, those two were there. Well, then, backtracking, I had contact early with Kennedy. It must have been shortly after this time that I met Ted Sorensen and I was going to take him on a little tour up here through Sheboygan and Port Washington and so forth—a speech at 8 o'clock at the U.W.M. [University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee] and luncheons. Two things in the early part there that I remember were riding back after this—it was a pretty rigorous day of speeches and handshaking and he was smiling all the time—and Kennedy dozing in the front seat. I was driving and next to him and Congressional candidate by the name of Jim Megellas [James Megellas]. He had run a couple of times for Congress and he was bending Kennedy's ear about what tremendous campaigns he runs. Kennedy, you know, he was an awfully polite and generous and nice guy but he was trying to get some sleep. It was about four or five in the afternoon. Megellas keeps talking about the calliope and all the gimmicks he used in his campaign, you know. Finally, in a nice way, Kennedy turned him off by saying, "Say, how did you come out in that race?" [Laughter]

Then, when we got back to Milwaukee, in the hotel.... This was really amazing, see, because I just was in very local politics; I just had a glimmer of what goes on. I was up in the hotel room and Bill McCauley [William J. McCauley] who's the D.A. [District Attorney] of the country, and Pat Lucey and I don't know who else was up there, but anyhow he was seeking our viewpoint. This was very strange that he knew, and had some many good political advisors, that he would just take almost a man-on-the-street poll of whether he should come in or not. Of course, he was interested in knowing did we want him to come in here just to boost us—he's an attractive candidate—to help the program along or do we really think he can win or do you think we have to come in here at all. I remember telling him, "You have to. You can't go to the Convention without this." He didn't expect to get that.

MORRISSEY: Oh really?

BRENNAN: He said, “Well, what about Ohio?” Evidently all the experts wanted him to go into Ohio where they felt that he had a cinch out there. But from little things he probably heard, then he felt, “Well, by gosh,

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if I’m going to go to the Convention after that nomination I’d better lay it on the line and take these chances.” It would seem to me he did this by asking the unwashed, like me, about his chances.

MORRISSEY: Who else besides yourself was there?

BRENNAN: Well, there was Pat Lucey and this Bill McCauley and Powers, this fellow who was in the White House with him.

MORRISSEY: Dave Powers [David F. Powers].

BRENNAN: Dave and, I think it was, Max Barczak—he’s a former sheriff here and he’s now, I believe, the country clerk. Then the funniest comment I can remember from him.... We put on one of these shows—what did he call them?—anyhow, the motif. They’d crowd everybody in a hall and then after everybody was standing and hot and sweating and waiting for a while, Kennedy would come in to the band playing “Anchors Aweigh,” and he’d get up on the stage. Then—we did this throughout Wisconsin—we’d sing this “High Hopes.” Well, I was supposed to organize this thing and we did have a great crowd. There was a lot of people working on it. I don’t mean to imply that I brought the crowd there or anything but it was a whale of a crowd in the Schroeder Hotel. I was supposed to get a singer and then I was going to introduce Kennedy. But I was supposed to get some extrovert that would sing this song and lead the whole group in the “High Hopes” song. I forgot to get him so I had to sing the song. I’m just a shower room bass and so I start. The band, they were way in the back of the room and I couldn’t tell them so they didn’t start up. So I was at the microphone and I started it off and I started it off flat, flatter than a pancake, and nobody can follow me. Finally we get through with the song somehow; somehow, somewhere, I got the right tune and everybody finished it off okay. Then when Kennedy got up to talk he said, “Thank you, Senator Brennan, for singing that song like it’s never been sung before.” [Laughter] Then, after it, he was busy thanking everybody and instead of just thanking.... I had left early. The ballroom’s on the fifth floor and I had gone down the steps to the fourth floor to get my coat. He came running down after me

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and instead of saying just “thank you” he called me aside and he said, “Jim, I need your advice.” There was something he was asking me, some question. I never did listen to the question because I was so flattered that he would ask me. Then he knew that I wasn’t even paying attention to the question so he had to give me the answer too. He was quite a guy.

The main thrust of this organizing was to distribute this Kennedy brochure all over the state. Every city of any size, or village, would be broken down into the ward and the precincts. You’d get a precinct captain. Then we’d get letters out of Washington from Kennedy with his signature or his third best or fourth best forger and they’d say “Congratulations. We’re glad to have you aboard. I’m so happy that you’re going to serve as a Kennedy secretary. This will be a permanent basis. I’m sure we’re going to get along well together.” Well, all these would go out. Then at the ten day mark before the election all these papers came out, all these brochures or tablets or whatever you call them. I remember one district, Garrity and I were calculating we’d sent eighty-nine thousand or, I don’t know, two hundred and fifty thousand of these papers and this one person in charge of that district would call in about forty minutes after they got up there and said they were all distributed. We were laughing, saying that he.... I don’t know, we calculated that they were distributing at a thousand a second or a thousand a minute. [Laughter] The Wisconsin River ran through this one town and we said, “I’ll bet they’re floating pretty thick down the Wisconsin River.” [Laughter] So we got those papers out.

MORRISSEY: I would gather that the story you told us is not indicative of the general distribution.

BRENNAN: No, that was the only call we had like that. Nobody ever called.... Everybody else called in and said, “Gee, this is tough, tough, work.” which it is. Door to door work is the most difficult you can do.

MORRISSEY: But I’ve gathered the Kennedy organization was reaching the Individual voters throughout the state.

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BRENNAN: They did, sure, and that is the way they did it. They organized down at the ward level which this state has never been organized like that.

MORRISSEY: Did a lot of these volunteers come easily?

BRENNAN: Well, around Milwaukee they did, I know. We had no problem. And then everything was done.... I don’t know about upstate but I know in Milwaukee these ward secretaries and unit secretaries were invited down to the Schroeder hotel. Before the reception Kennedy came to that room to personally thank them. Then after it was over they wrote a letter. There was quite a follow-up. The people really felt that they were part of the campaign.

MORRISSEY: Were a lot of these volunteers young people?

BRENNAN: No, I don't think there was any breakdown. We had high school children going and we had older people—middle aged, college. We really ran the spectrum. In fact, I think we probably didn't have as many college people because the university clubs were more party line oriented and it would be Humphrey. "Why change just because this fellow is coming in from Massachusetts? He'll be in today and gone tomorrow."

MORRISSEY: Did you see much of Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] out Here?

BRENNAN: No, not too much. He came in about the last ten days, if I recall correctly. He came in. Dick Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] came in at that time. I think Powers came in at that time to really spend time. No, the men that lived out here were Garrity and Bobby Kennedy. Ted [Edward Moore Kennedy] came in, I think, the last month. He spent a little more time than that group headed up by Larry O'Brien. Bob, Ang, Pierre.... Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger] came out; I think he was out about six weeks ahead of time.

MORRISSEY: What was he doing?

BRENNAN: Smoking cigars and...

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MORRISSEY: In addition to that?

BRENNAN: Had a phone growing out of his ear and writing releases and talking to different people. He was there in the headquarters, though; he had a desk there. I don't know just what his output was. He always seemed to be pretty busy.

And let's see, what else do I know? That was our big effort here in town. We couldn't do much with, you know, house to house when you get into town. In fact, Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] was the one that said, "No, don't bother with that." We had the reception at the Schroeder and I think we had one other big rally at Jefferson Hall—it's up on the northwest side of town—just several days before the election.

MORRISSEY: I get the impression that because of Humphrey's well known stand on civil rights that the Kennedy people pretty much wrote off the Negro vote in Milwaukee.

BRENNAN: I don't know if there is much of a.... First of all, our Negro population is only about 10 or 12 percent, seventy thousand. I'd

worked up there, and a lot of those don't vote, period. I don't think that there was any identification by the Negroes. First of all, I don't think the vote was significant. Secondly, I don't think there was any complete identification that Humphrey was their friend. We had the woman alderman, the Negroes' woman alderman.

MORRISSEY: Vel Phillips [Vel R. Phillips].

BRENNAN: There were Negro newspapers up there who claimed to have circulations of "XOX," and I'd never heard of them, but as in all campaigns they wanted to throw their weight, throw the vote this way or that way, which I don't think they could have done.

MORRISSEY: Was there a registration drive as part of the Kennedy operation?

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BRENNAN: I don't think so. Now wait a minute, they wanted to have a "check out the votes." They wanted to have a poll follow-up and I know we didn't do that. We just didn't have the manpower for that. Registration, I don't think so. I don't think we had anything organized on that. They always talk about those get-out-the-vote campaigns but I have never seen any really honest-to-gosh attempt. We didn't make one. We didn't have that manpower. I mean, we were lucky to get our ward secretaries and have the ward secretaries send in lists to us the precinct captains. So that we were trying to get as many involved as possible so that we could get the newspaper ready. This was the tangible item, commodity, that would indicate to us that these people really were helping and that they had something to do, those that wanted to help. No, we didn't go out, we didn't have any vote registration that I know of.

MORRISSEY: Tell me about this speakers bureau. Were you in charge of that?

BRENNAN: Well, we didn't do an awful lot on that but we did have several people that volunteered and we tried to get them to the ward units. Like all things, you know, you've got to be able to follow up on them and as I recall there was only about four or five of us that were going around speaking to the ward units. It had to be done because Humphrey was doing it a little but he wasn't doing it too much himself. But we did have a speakers bureau that was covering only the ward units in the Milwaukee political setup.

MORRISSEY: How many wards are there in Milwaukee?

BRENNAN: Twenty.

MORRISSEY: Is that country or city?

BRENNAN: That's city and the ward units would be like the north shore covers

Fox Point, White Fish Bay, Bayside, and I think Shorewood, too, Shorewood. And there's a Wauwatosa unit, South Milwaukee, Cudahy.... Well, there're several other subdivisions that I can't think of.

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Glendale, and several others that I can't think of offhand, but those would all be units. Our political party system structure is not too helpful because the only patronage, shall we say, is the booth workers job, so unfortunately a great bulk of the people attending a meeting in a ward unit, other than the candidates running for office, are these booth workers who are there so that they can keep their job to get eighteen or twenty bucks, whatever they do, so we don't have, in a majority of our units.... Suburban units are good coming up with ideas, and debates, and getting good speakers and so forth, but for the rest of the units it's kind of a waste of time to come in there and talk to them. That's like a captive audience. It's like a preacher that goes wild with his audience that can't get out of the rain.

MORRISSEY: Was there any tension between all the outsiders coming into the state and the fellows already here as to who was running to show?

BRENNAN: No, I don't think so. No.

MORRISSEY: I'm surprised that this wasn't more of a campaign issue for the Humphrey people, all these Ivy League Easterners.

BRENNAN: Oh, they did all they could to make it an issue.

MORRISSEY: But it didn't seem to have much mileage.

BRENNAN: No, it didn't. They were working it but.... You know, the Kennedy millions were coming in here and just buying votes and so forth but that never got off the ground. In fact, I think they abandoned it.

MORRISSEY: I wonder why.

BRENNAN: I don't know. Well, I think because they knew that there were just a lot of people that just sincerely liked this guy Kennedy and no matter what Hubert had done before, this was a likeable fellow and the only one that had a chance to make it. I mean, if you're really serious about winning the presidency and winning it for the Democrats you had to get your best man and Hubert—God

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bless him for all he had done—wasn't going to do that. He just didn't have that attraction and he didn't have that attraction for many Wisconsin people who do not normally vote Democratic. So maybe that did it. But they did try to make mileage out of that. I just can't

recall what stopped that or when they stopped or whether they ever did but I know people used that—this guy is just dragging the money in here by the bushel baskets and you know.

MORRISSEY: What were your impressions of the Humphrey organization?

BRENNAN: Well, I just didn't think it was much of an organization at all. It centered its efforts here in Milwaukee. I don't know how much money they had, but they just never got off the ground. I thought they did dumb things, like they put up billboards here in Milwaukee. Well, you don't put up a billboard for a presidential candidate. If you don't know him by then it's too late, forget it. And they had a very expensive brochure that they put out and they tried to mail to as many people as possible. Other than talks—it seemed to me—speeches and talks to groups that were pro-Humphrey to begin with.... The unions would have great big crowds. Like they had a bean feed and they sent invitations and concentrated mostly on union people and people that liked Humphrey to begin with and knew him, personally knew him. He traveled around in those particular circles whereas Kennedy was primarily.... Now maybe it was because we didn't have any other way to go but we were beamed at people who do not normally become involved in politics. I know in this ward secretary business, guys who had never been involved in politics before were now ward secretaries and were peddling his papers, so to speak, and attending meetings and making calls to get people to come down to his big reception. I guess two things were the major.... The newspaper, that was to get many people working. And then the other was the reception, and we counted primarily on women to do this. We had a meeting where we tried to get.... I think we got a hundred and twenty people and then they were to call ten to call ten. We made some effort to follow up but they all worked hard. They worked too hard. They had the Schroeder so loaded that you couldn't get in or out; they jammed the elevators. It was

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really quite a success. That was due primarily to women who, for the most part, had never been involved in politics, nor their husbands, and the same with delivering papers. We actually, I think, read Wisconsin much better than Humphrey. Humphrey was in solid with the old line Democrats and the unions and he should have been because he's a good guy and he'd been very generous with his time.

But he did not have the picture that Wisconsin is an open primary and when I mean open, open. The only problem we would have had if the people would have looked way ahead and felt that Kennedy was the only guy, as we felt, that could beat Nixon, then Wisconsin voters would have voted for Humphrey just to mix us up. But they were voting against what they thought would be the liberal Democratic candidate. They were trying to knock him out of the box, I think, a certain part of it; plus Kennedy's attractiveness. To show you how this works, we have one Congressional district that gave Wallace [George C. Wallace], the governor of Alabama, a victory over our, at that time, Governor Reynolds [John W. Reynolds], Democratic governor—he's now a federal judge—and Wallace picked up, I think two hundred thousand voters in our state. So this is the way we go. When we say

we've got an open primary, we've got an open primary. One party will go into the other's primary and try and jazz it up.

MORRISSEY: How many of these volunteers stayed active after the Kennedy-Humphrey primary?

BRENNAN: I would say very, very few.

MORRISSEY: They tended to fade out almost as quickly as they got enthused.

BRENNAN: That's right. Well, you don't maintain enthusiasm if you don't do anything and I think after the primary was over there was a miscalculation. We lost Wisconsin in the finals to Nixon. It was a miscalculation; people felt that we had spent all this time in this primary and we therefore didn't have to do a thing in the finals. I don't think they analyzed that we got Republican votes in the primary and that now those votes were going to go back home in a traditionally Republican state. So all Kennedy

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forces did at all time was to consolidate, invite the union leaders back into the camp and all the boys that had been wild and give them the feeling, "Well, it's all over. Come back home now," and that it would be just a family affair now and all we had to do was sit and wait for the results. And we got fooled. It would have been so simple to reactivate because Kennedy did come back into the state shortly before the finals and there was no attempt to just send one more letter, just that goofy "Hello, Secretary." They didn't do anything. I know LeMoyne Billings; I talked it over with him and he said that. I said "Look, I don't know much about politics. All I learned was watching you people maneuver. We've got to work. I don't think this premise is sound—that we can just go on what we did in the primary." The feeling was that that would be enough, and they were surprised.

MORRISSEY: How many of the Humphrey people were still disgruntled because their man had lost? And how many unhappy Stevensonians sat on their hands during the autumn campaign?

BRENNAN: Well, there isn't really much you can do. There only way you can check somebody if they're going to help is to give them a project and give them a project that involves people. If people are working and doing something, this is the only way you know. As far as the finals, now I don't know if Kennedy made a trip to Madison, but I'm sure that Jim Doyle [James E. Doyle], who was the strong Stevensonian [Adlai E. Stevenson] man, was now for Kennedy but he was never asked, as I recall, to make a speech, or had any harmony sessions, or write letters or sign letters. And here in Milwaukee, probably the guy that was the closest to the top would be Christ Seraphim [Christ T. Seraphim], a judge here now and he was county chairman, Democratic chairman, at the time. Nobody asked him to do anything but if he had been asked

there would have been no problem. I know there were several Humphrey people on the bandwagon once he lost at the final meeting when Kennedy came back to Milwaukee. I believe he just hit Milwaukee; he might have hit Madison at noon or something. Nobody was ever asked to be involved as I know it. As I recall when this Billings was asking me, you know, he said, "Now I don't want you to take the same job. I want you to be chairman for Milwaukee County." I said, "Fine. What

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are we going to do?" He said, "Nothing." I said, "Well, that's.... Are you sure you've got the right idea?" He said, "Yep. We're drawing huge crowds," which they were, all over the country, wherever he went. So that was it. So I don't think if they didn't ask me to do anything and I was the chairman for the whole county, or for the fourth and fifth Congressional districts.... I don't know if you know our population, but this is 25 percent of the state, and Racine and Kenosha and the Fox River Valley, going up this way, you have Oshkosh up to Green Bay, along the seaboard is about two thirds. So if we didn't do anything.... Then the visit, when he came into town, there was a spontaneous reaction. There was no problem getting a crowd. But nobody that I know of was really involved.

MORRISSEY: I was wondering if one reason Nelson [Gaylord Nelson] was reelected and Kennedy was defeated in Wisconsin by Nixon was due to the fact that some Humphrey people might have been working for Nelson that weren't necessarily either working for Kennedy or coordination the Nelson campaign with Kennedy's campaign.

BRENNAN: I don't think that there's much of a parallel to draw there. Nelson didn't win by an awful lot. This is a traditionally Republican state. Nelson was running against a guy by the name of Buz Kuehn [Philip G. Kuehn]. Six weeks before the election, or a month or something of that nature, Buz Kuehn got all tangled up in taking out his secretary. The press started dumping him and he started missing his speeches, you know, he wasn't around. Kuehn wasn't a popular candidate to begin with, and Nelson was. The upset, if there was one, is Nelson only won by as few votes as he did. The Republicans didn't concede Kuehn a chance. People misread that this was basically and predominantly a Republican state. Kennedy could have won it, but he would have had to crank around out here and he just felt.... And this was a call, too, that made sense—he had to concentrate on the big states and as it turned out that was a smart procedure. But I think with very little effort we could have done and should have done much more, but it was just assumed "We all lived out there for three months. We don't have to do any more out there."

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MORRISSEY: Going back to the primary, in the last few days before the election, some of the newspapermen were predicting a real Kennedy sweep.

Some people were saying, "He's going to take ten out of ten." Do you think this was an honest job of reporting or perhaps a Humphrey ploy?

BRENNAN: My reaction was that the papers liked Kennedy and liked going around in his camp and hearing his speeches, and they completely misread the place. This was religious war back there. This was a "man bites dog" story when a Catholic comes into a state that's only 20 percent Catholic and then wins all ten districts. They were all writing for their home offices to predict the "man bites dog" story, and they didn't want to be caught short. I don't think they really made an honest attempt to really study Wisconsin. Anybody that thought Kennedy could take those districts close to Minnesota is out of their head because they're all Minnesota oriented: they don't take Milwaukee or Madison newspapers; they don't have Wisconsin radio and television stations; the big stations come out of Minneapolis and St. Paul. So how were they supposed to.... They had no idea; they just didn't read it right. Tongue in check, and maybe a little prodding, but if there was any prodding, it was by the Kennedy men not Humphrey because he was so surprised.... He believed it, he and his people; they didn't think they had a shot at it.

MORRISSEY: Were you with him when the results were being counted?

BRENNAN: No, I was sick at home in bed. I had a bad cold the last day. I couldn't make it. Darn thing. Well, we were doing everything. We were working by day making calls and at plant gates out with Teddy [Kennedy] and his cousin Gargan [Joseph F. Gargan] running around to different plant gates, maneuvering around and staying up late. It was pretty rushed up that last ten days when the bossy from Massachusetts moved in, the first team. They had all kinds of ideas of what to do. Peddling those papers, we were out peddling those papers. [Laughter] See, we would call up a guy and, you know, "How are you doing? How many have you got done?" And, you know, he was goofing off on us, so we got to go down and embarrass him into making a few calls and get some out. So that it was very interesting, it was very interesting—physical and mental—quite a job.

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MORRISSEY: Do you have any other recollections of being with Kennedy at particular times?

BRENNAN: Well, we picked him up at the airport. We took him down to the airport. I remember one time he and O'Donnell were going back to Washington and somebody else. He saw one of those Humphrey billboards. "What the hell is this all about?" he said. "How come they let people campaign against guys like Kennedy and O'Donnell and Brennan?" [Laughter] What's the matter with people out here?"

Well, then, I was with him down at.... There was a meeting just like the one here down at Racine and Kenosha. That would be typical. There was a reporter who now works

for the mayor, by the name of Ken Frye [Kenneth Frye]. He was going around at this meeting—it was highly successful as all of them were—asking people if they were Catholics. I was with him and he asked about five people, then put that in the newspaper the next day—that he took a poll and 92 percent were Catholics.

MORRISSEY: Took a poll?

BRENNAN: Yes and 92 percent Catholics at the meeting. Those were the things.... That's all forgotten now. That hurt a little and it's been obliterated. But, boy, that *Journal* was taking a poke at him. That didn't help him. He never got close to the *Journal*. He went over to the editorial board a couple of times. I don't know why.

MORRISSEY: They weren't outwardly for Humphrey, though were they?

BRENNAN: No.

MORRISSEY: They didn't endorse anybody.

BRENNAN: They were Stevenson, really.

MORRISSEY: Oh really.

BRENNAN: No, wait a minute. Was it Stevenson or Johnson? Johnson, I believe, Johnson. They warmed up to Kennedy later but I don't know why

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we could never score. We had a tough time with them, with digs like this—this 92 percent were Catholics—and trying to find out how much money was raised here, and you know.

MORRISSEY: How much was raised here?

BRENNAN: I don't know.

MORRISSEY: My impression is not much.

BRENNAN: That would be my impression too. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: Did you see anything of Kennedy after he became President?

BRENNAN: No. Now wait a minute I got involved with him before he became President out in Washington one time.

MORRISSEY: Washington State?

BRENNAN: No.

MORRISSEY: Or Washington, D.C.?

BRENNAN: D.C. I got involved in the political campaign and he granted me a conference so that I could have a picture with him. We were discussing something of monumental importance. It was, you know, one of those two-second meetings for home press consumption only. [Laughter] Then the Convention. I didn't see him at all in the Convention other than him being up in the rostrum. Because we only had six of the Congressional districts, we had kind of a divided caucus. I can't recall.... There was some big scrabble. Oh yes, we were trying to get the whole caucus to be unanimous but they hung tight to their Humphrey people.

MORRISSEY: Even though Humphrey had released his delegates formally?

BRENNAN: Yes, that was the only fight in the Wisconsin delegation. Then he had it before we got to the Wisconsin votes so there was really not much

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activity. We shouted and screamed at the demonstration and were scared to death when Stevenson put his on.

MORRISSEY: Were you a delegate?

BRENNAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: When it was announced that Lyndon Johnson was going to be the vice-presidential nominee, did this cause a little turmoil in the Wisconsin delegation?

BRENNAN: Oh yes, that did, too. Yes, that's right. Johnson just didn't fit into the liberal picture of it at all. There wasn't any rupture though like Michigan. Michigan had a hell of a time swallowing that one because of Reuther [Walter P. Reuther], I guess. I don't know who was against the guy but we didn't have too much of a problem with that. He was president and that seemed like a real good ticket. There was bickering of both very labor oriented people and the liberals. You know, what happened to civil rights with Johnson? I mean, this was based on 1960 thinking and his voting before that. But basically the general feeling was that Kennedy's the man now and he should make for as strong a ticket as possible and you can't beat that one. He was sure right on that. But we weren't without the dissents and the wonderings. I would guess the most vocal were the labor delegates; they didn't like that at all. Then after that we didn't see

him. He came back, as I recall, just that once; he came back before the election to this party at the arena. We just didn't do much work. We didn't have any speeches; we didn't have any more of these letters to the delegates. It was just thought that, "forget Wisconsin and concentrate on the Ohio, New York, Illinois, California." That's what they did. They won, so they knew what they were doing.

MORRISSEY: Really.

BRENNAN: Yes, it was a landslide, a mandate. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: Does that about cover it?

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BRENNAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Anything else?

BRENNAN: No.

MORRISSEY: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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