

Albert J. Zack Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/28/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Albert J. Zack
Interviewer: Larry J. Hackman
Date of Interview: November 28, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 32 pages

Biographical Note

Zack, Director of public relations, AFL-CIO (1957-1980), discusses the AFL-CIO's relationship with John F. Kennedy and their influence on presidential appointments and legislation, among other issues.

Access

Open

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed May 21, 1970 copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Albert J. Zack, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, November 28, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By

Albert J. Zack

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Albert J. Zack hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, the tape(s) and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed

Albert J. Zack

Date

May 21, 1970

Accepted

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

May 26, 1970

Understanding Regarding the Use of the
Oral History Interview Conducted by the
John F. Kennedy Library
with Albert J. Zack

1. The interview transcript may be made available, on an unrestricted basis, to anyone applying to use the resources of the John F. Kennedy Library. (This includes journalists and students as well as professional historians, political scientists and other scholars.)
2. Copies of the interview transcript (or portions thereof) may be made and given, upon request, to all researchers.
3. Copies of the interview transcript may not be deposited for research use in other institutions, such as university libraries, public libraries and other presidential libraries, without my written permission.
4. The interview transcript may not be published (i.e. reproduced or printed for sale to the general public) in whole or in substantial part without my written permission until 25 years from the date of the interview.
5. Researchers may publish brief quotations from the interview transcript (but not the tape) and may paraphrase or cite the text without my permission.

Signed: Albert J. Zack

Albert J. Zack

Date: April 12, 1971

Albert J. Zack – JFK #1

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Zack's interview with John F. Kennedy (JFK) during his campaign for Congress in 1946
2	Massachusetts labor unions and their opinions toward JFK
3	Working with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO) during the 1960 Democratic Convention
7	Labor unions' feelings toward JFK
9	Choosing the vice presidential candidate
15	Campaigning with JFK
18	AFL-CIO's work during the primaries
19	AFL-CIO's position on presidential appointments
25	Labor attitudes toward Robert Kennedy as Attorney General
26	Labor's work on several legislative programs
29	AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education
30	JFK's visits to the AFL-CIO conventions in 1961 and 1963

Oral History Interview

with

ALBERT J. ZACK

November 28, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Zack, can you recall when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

ZACK: Yes, quite easily. It was during his campaign for the Democratic nomination for Congress in 1946. I was working for the *Springfield Daily News* in Springfield, Massachusetts. My city editor had an idea of doing a story about the first war hero in the Commonwealth who was running for political office. And I went down to Boston [Boston, Massachusetts] to see Mr. Kennedy. I saw him in a small apartment in Back Bay. It may very well have been the same apartment that was his voting address all of the years he was in office.

I remember the interview quite clearly. He persuaded me that a war hero running for office would have a tremendous disadvantage. He didn't want to be portrayed as a war hero. He said that anybody who had been in the service knew that being a "hero" was a matter of accident. You just happened to be at the place where some commanding officer saw what you were doing at the right time. And he persuaded me to write a story about a man of this century who had seen war at firsthand and abhorred it and who felt that he had a duty to do, to perform. And that's the kind of a story I wrote. I remember very well the day that he was inaugurated, standing with an awful lot of other people on that very cold, wind-

swept plaza up at the Capitol. In his Inaugural speech the President talked about generations of Americans who had seen war at firsthand. And many of the concepts that were in that speech were in that first interview I had with him that long ago.

HACKMAN: Did you have any other contacts with him in that campaign of '46?

ZACK: No. After all, it was one more congressional campaign at the other end of the state. I saw him several times right after he came to Congress. When he was back in Massachusetts, he was a frequent visitor at trade union conventions. I was quite active in the unions in Massachusetts, and I saw him quite often as a speaker at union conventions. I still remember how thin he was in those days; his shoulders were much broader than the rest of him. And he had in those days all the charm that everybody saw on the national scene in later years.

HACKMAN: What was the feeling on the part of the labor people around the state?

ZACK: They liked him. He was a very early favorite of the trade union movement. They felt at home with him, and they don't always feel at home with a lot of politicians. I can't ever remember anybody saying, "There's a rich kid. What's he doing on our side of the tracks?"

HACKMAN: Yes, I'd wondered about that, why they would feel particularly at home with him.

ZACK: They felt that he had an instinctive understanding of their problems and a desire to help them solve them. There were a lot of times when unions and union leaders felt that he was wrong on some of his earlier stands, but they never felt hostile to him, and they felt hostile to a lot of politicians, as you well know.

HACKMAN: Can you recall any of the labor people in Massachusetts in that period who were particularly fond of him or who worked closely with him?

[-2-]

ZACK: Well, one man that I do recall, that I'm sure was close to him in those days, was Ken Kelly [Kenneth J. Kelly], who is now with the State Department [United States Department of State] in Washington and who was then an official of the Massachusetts Federation of Labor. I can't remember now which position he held. I remember Ken in association with President Kennedy. I don't remember many of the others. I left Massachusetts myself in 1947, went out to Ohio for the trade unions, and didn't see Mr. Kennedy again until, oh, sometime after I came down here to Washington in about '52.

HACKMAN: Why don't we pick it up there then.

ZACK: Well, I saw him quite a few times during that period. I remember well a day just prior to the Democratic Convention [Democratic National Convention] in 1960 in the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles [Los Angeles, California] where all of the Convention proceedings were being held. The President of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization], George Meany, had just finished testifying before the Democratic platform committee. We had a number of proposals before the platform committee. Mr. Kennedy had a suite in the Biltmore Hotel. It was a corner suite. I remember that downstairs one or two floors Senator Symington [Stuart Symington, II], who was a candidate, had a suite, exactly the same suite. Two or three floors above, the same corner, Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], who was then the Majority Leader, had a suite.

Mr. Meany went to see each of these three candidates. And we went over to some other hotel—and I forget which one—to see Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], too. Mr. Meany took me and he took Andy Biemiller [Andrew J. Biemiller] with us. We saw first Senator Symington and then Jack Kennedy and then finally Lyndon Johnson. This is how the schedule of meetings took place. Mr. Meany wanted to explain to him what it was that we were seeking and why, and the platform, and to solicit his support, or the support of each of them through the delegates who were committed to them, for the various positions we wanted to take in the platform.

[-3-]

There was a fantastic contrast between the three men. Senator Symington was absolutely alone in the suite, with the exception of a single secretary. He knew by that time that he was gone; he knew that he didn't have a chance, that the two chief candidates were going to be Johnson and Kennedy. The question was: How many votes Stevenson would take away from the Kennedy camp on the first roll call, and then where would these votes go?

HACKMAN: Did Symington say that at the time, that he felt...

ZACK: I don't think he...As I recall, he didn't say it; he indicated it. He knew that it was gone. He was disappointed. He had been, not only then, but since has been, a very good Senator and a very strong liberal and a good man as far as the trade union movement was concerned, and he was disappointed that he didn't have this kind of support. He spent no time at all discussing the platform proposals with us, just as though, you know, "You can count on me when the issues get to Congress," but until then he really didn't count.

Senator Kennedy, his office was much different. It was very busy....His headquarters was an office really. We went into a side room, and Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] was busy with an electric typewriter. I remember we were met by Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith]. And I was quite impressed when we came into the room. I had never met Steve Smith before. He obviously knew George Meany; he obviously knew Andy Biemiller, our director of legislation; but I had never seen him before. We came into the room, and he shook

hands and he said, “You used to be in Springfield, Massachusetts, didn’t you?” You know, they obviously had a dossier on everybody there.

We went into the parlor which was, oh, almost a stripped bare parlor. The key thing was on the coffee table in front of the President—or the Senator then—was a telephone; one with a lot of buttons and a lot of lines, and it rang quite often. I remember Dave Powers [David F. Powers] was there. He wanted us to have a beer and had messages for Mr. Meany from various places to call back. They were operating quite a political organization. And Kennedy was talking, as we said afterwards, not like a candidate for the nomination, and not even like a candidate for President, but like a man who knew he was in, and “What will we do starting in

[-4-]

January to achieve these kinds of goals?” One of the major things that we were talking about at that time was civil rights legislation. You remember that this was in the period of the sit-downs—or the sit-ins—in the restaurants. It was our position, the union position, that you could demonstrate where a man stood on the gut issue of civil rights at that time: whether he was for support of public accommodations; whether he was in support of the kids who were sitting-in in restaurants in the South so that they could buy a hotdog. Restaurants? These were even lunch counters in five-and-ten-cent stores.

One of the other issues that was most important to us at that time was minimum wages. The minimum wage then stood at a dollar an hour. That’s about two thousand dollars a year. And the federal poverty level was well about that; the federal poverty level then stood at, oh, I would think about twenty-six hundred dollars a year. We wanted to increase the federal minimum wage, but, most important of all, we wanted to extend the coverage of the federal minimum wage. It had never been extended in all the years it had been on the books. As a matter of fact, it had retrogressed. Over the years various interests had been able to cut away at some of the coverage of it. This was an issue that was quite close to Kennedy’s heart. He understood it; he was quite involved in it. As a matter of fact, once he became President it became the first public welfare issue that he pushed through the Congress. And we talked about that.

And we talked about what was then and remains the concept of the AFL-CIO: that we oughtn’t to talk about all of these big issues of social welfare and improving the status of American citizens from the point of view of how much does it cost us; it’s the value rather than the price tag that....When you put money into federal aid for education, for example, you’re not adding a cost item to the federal government; you’re investing in the future of America. And John Kennedy was with that right away. He wanted to talk about this; he spent a good deal of time talking about how could you implement this.

[-5-]

And we went from there to Mr. Johnson’s suite. It was vastly different. There were a great many flowers. Mrs. Johnson [Lady Bird Johnson] was an advocate, even then, of beautifying what were pretty sterile hotel suites. We had a long conversation with the Majority Leader. Mr. Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] came over, the Speaker of the House came

over and joined in the conversation. It was a long discussion about whether or not the trade unions should support Lyndon Johnson as a candidate for the nomination. Mr. Meany's position then, as it has always been in elections, is that the AFL-CIO has no position until the parties have chosen their candidates, that the individual trade union leaders who were delegates to the Convention have a right to make up their own minds, that they are elected or appointed or however the state chooses its delegates; but that the trade union movement itself didn't take a position until after both parties had chosen their nominees. And he was resisting any attempts by anybody to change that position, including Lyndon Johnson. That was more of a social affair. Kennedy's suite was all business. Symington's suite was all gloom. And Johnson's suite—Mrs. Johnson was there; they wanted to give us a drink, give us something to eat, have some fruit, you know, a social event type of thing. The contrast was fantastic.

HACKMAN: Going back to Symington, you said he was down and expressed some disappointment. Did he talk about particular disappointment with labor support? Some labor people were supporting....

ZACK: Yes, that's right. He had some labor support; he thought he ought to have much more. He also talked about possible support for the vice presidential nomination. He had reached that stage. And as you remember, he was one of those that the newspapers were speculating might be a vice presidential candidate no matter who won. He could be with Johnson because he didn't come from the Southwest and he was a liberal. He could be with Kennedy because geographically that would help balance the ticket.

[-6-]

HACKMAN: Did he express any feeling at that time that he had a commitment from anyone?

ZACK: No, no. I don't think anybody felt that they had a commitment. Every politician who supported any group at any time sort of feels that there ought to be a quid pro quo. And I think that Symington would have liked to have got it, but he wasn't resentful. He was sad more than anything else.

HACKMAN: What were some of the arguments at that time then that Senator Johnson used in an attempt to get Mr. Meany's support for him?

ZACK: That he had never been farther away from George Meany than his telephone. "You pick up a telephone and put in a call for Lyndon Johnson and Lyndon Johnson will be there," he said. And incidentally, as President of the United States, that's absolutely what's happened with Lyndon Johnson; he's been there. He had a feeling that an awful lot of union people were committed to John Kennedy—and a great many of them were—without having taken a good, hard look at the record of the two of them. Johnson had been in the Congress much longer than Kennedy; he had been involved in many more tough fights. The fact is, however, that he had been on the

wrong side of a number of issues as far as the trade union movement was concerned. He was wrong, as far as we were concerned, on Taft-Hartley [Labor Management Relations Act of 1947]. He voted for it, and he voted to override President Truman's [Harry S. Truman] veto. Around here this is pretty well understood. For a United States Senator from Texas, a United States Congressman from Texas, this is an understandable position. As President of the United States, he has shown none of this provincial, parochial, anti-labor point of view.

HACKMAN: Right. What about the attitude of various people, various labor leaders, at that time toward Kennedy and toward his past record, particularly the McClellan [John L. McClellan] hearings and the Landrum-Griffin bill?

[-7-]

ZACK: Well, on the McClellan hearings Kennedy had been a supporter of the trade union movement. Kennedy had opposed McClellan on many of the things that McClellan tried to do. Kennedy had been quite determined that the trade unions got their day in court and got a chance to answer charges, got a chance to present their own case, something that didn't happen, for example, when McClellan held the hearings during the Kennedy Administration on the situation at Cape Canaveral [Cape Canaveral, Florida] and the strikes that were taking place down there. Then McClellan heard from the employers and refused to allow the unions to have a defense or even an hour before his committee. While John Kennedy was on that committee, the unions got a chance to defend themselves.

And the fact is that the AFL-CIO's position at that time was for some of the control legislation that is contained in the Landrum-Griffin bill. It was not a position of total opposition, which is the popular recollection of that period. As a matter of fact, our battle cry was "Get the crooks, not the legitimate unions." And under the guise of getting the crooks, people like McClellan drove very far into hurting the trade union movement. The unions supported the Kennedy-Ives Bill. What happened was that the Kennedy-Ives Bill, when it got the House of Representatives, was pretty badly mangled.

John Kennedy was, during the hearings on the Senate side, he was the chairman of the subcommittee that held these hearings. He was no great expert on labor law in those days. I remember that he spent a number of evenings closeted with Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg], who was then the Special Counsel to the AFL-CIO and who was the counsel to our committee that was charged with investigating corruption in the trade union movement, our Ethical Practices Committee. He spent a good deal of time with Arthur discussing the unions, discussing exactly what would happen if this or that were in the law: how is a union affected? What does it mean? And we thought around here that the role that he played in the Conference Committee of the Senate and the House on the Landrum-Griffin bill was tremendous, that he did a yeoman's job of protecting us from some of the worst parts of the bill that had cleared the House of Representatives—by a narrow margin, but had cleared it. (It was the vehicle that they were discussing). There were a few people in the trade union movement who were opposed to any kind of legislation

[-8-]

at all, who wanted to call that the Kennedy-Landrum-Griffin Bill. The AFL-CIO would have no part of that and defeated that idea very fast.

HACKMAN: Did the feeling on the part of some of these people continue through, let's say, up to the Convention and on through the campaign?

ZACK: Well, I think some of it continued until the early days of the—even after the Convention. Some of it was reinforced. Some of these people were reinforced in that view by Kennedy's choice of Johnson as his running mate. But John Kennedy was helped in that campaign by his opposition. It came to mean....There was very little choice, if you were a union member, between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]; you're always for the Kennedy and never for the Nixon. And any opposition evaporated very fast and very quickly. I think the first of the Kennedy-Nixon debates took care of the whole picture as far as the trade union people were concerned.

HACKMAN: A lot of people say that. You were talking about the Convention and the selection of the Vice President. Did you people feel like you had any commitment on who would be chosen as Vice President?

ZACK: No, not on who would be chosen.

HACKMAN: Or that Lyndon Johnson would not be chosen? Let's put it that way.

ZACK: A number of people felt quite sincerely that it would not be Johnson. And a number of John Kennedy's staff, who also felt that it oughtn't to be Johnson, were saying, quite openly, around the trade union people, "It'll never be Johnson." The choice of Johnson came up as a surprise. It came as a surprise to us. It came as a surprise, I think, to practically everybody that was around there. I'll tell you what George Meany's instant reaction was: "This is the first choice of the man we're going to be backing for the President of the United States, and we're not going to disagree with him."

[-9-]

HACKMAN: Can you remember—I believe there was a meeting then called of some of the labor out in Los Angeles to discuss this whole issue. Can you recall that meeting and what were some...

ZACK: Oh yes, I recall it quite well. As a matter of fact, Meany, as soon as we heard about this, sent Andy Biemiller and myself out to the Convention auditorium to tell as many of our delegates as possible the

reaction, as I just said—that this is the choice of the President-elect, of the candidate we're going to support; we are not going to oppose him—and to find the vice presidents of the AFL-CIO who were there, many of them as delegates, a number of them as Convention guests, and bring them back to the Ambassador Hotel where we would have a meeting.

And by the time we got back there, some people had openly endorsed the ticket. Dave McDonald [David J. McDonald], who was President of the Steelworkers [United Steelworkers], had done an interview on the Convention floor with one of the television cameramen, and he had hailed the choice of Johnson as a great choice for political reasons. Alex Rose of the Hatters' Union, Arthur Goldberg, Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther], who were the people who had been meeting with the various candidates, especially had been meeting with the Kennedy forces during this time, had all already taken positions exactly similar to Meany's. David Dubinsky's position was this was a stroke of great political genius. Dubinsky was in New York; he wasn't at the Convention. But he was on the telephone, might have just as well have been there really for the impact he had. It was a tremendous impact.

We had a long session in the Ambassador Hotel, in a meeting room there, in which Meany said first of all, "There's enough people here to have a quorum, but this isn't the body that makes the endorsement. The body that makes the endorsement is the General Board of the AFL-CIO, so we're not going out of here and say we're for this ticket. The fact is that we've got to wait and we've got to go through our procedures. I'm not going to change it. Meanwhile, whether I like it or not, this is John Kennedy's choice, and the presidential candidate's got a right to determine who his running mate will be." And we also were looking forward to that rump session of the Senate. Remember,

[-10-]

the Senate had an August session coming up. There was an awful lot of liberal legislation still pending at that time.

HACKMAN: Had you discussed any of that with Kennedy at the time you were out there with him?

ZACK: We had discussed it with Kennedy. We had discussed it with Johnson. We would have discussed it with Symington if there had been any chance, but there really wasn't.

HACKMAN: Do you remember any of their reactions to specifics brought up at that time?

ZACK: They were both with us. There wasn't any difference of opinion on any of these issues. But that was not a Congress in which the Democrats had a great majority, if you will recall. And nobody wanted to be in a position of getting a bill on the Senate floor that would come into a tie vote and give Dick Nixon an opportunity to make a great hero of himself as a liberal, which he never was, but which he might have thought about doing in the political campaign. In Los Angeles

at that time there was a good deal more, oh, I suppose “innocent enthusiasm” is the correct term, about what could be done in that short session of the Congress than was realistic. When we got down to examining where the votes were and what the problems were, it was not going to be a productive session.

HACKMAN: Enthusiasm on who’s part? On labor people’s part?

ZACK: Oh, on the labor’s part, yes. “Here we got a good team. Now go in there and, you know, clean up the floor with the conservatives.” You know, all of this sort of stuff. Then when you got over your enthusiasm and you sat back and counted noses, which is the only way you can proceed if you’re going to lobby something through, we realized it wasn’t there. The votes weren’t there. In the end the best thing to do was get this session over with and to get the candidates out on the road.

[-11-]

HACKMAN: I think the minimum wage was one of the things up at that time in....

ZACK: Oh, yes. Well, there were several things up at that time. There was an improvement in the social security bill that was up at that time. And there was always the possibility with these various kinds of pieces of legislation that you could have made compromises, you could have gotten almost as much out of it. One of the hard pieces was social security, because the old people needed more money. There was no possibility in that kind of a Congress of putting Medicare into the bill. There was no possibility of getting a decent minimum wage. So you took a calculated risk on these occasions. And this was the calculated risk, that we would do better by waiting until January of ’61 than we could do in the Congress that was then sitting. I’ve forgotten the number of whatever Congress it was.

HACKMAN: Eighty-sixth, I believe. Going back to the talk that Mr. Meany and Mr. Biemiller and yourself had with Senator Johnson, I’ve heard that after that long session that at that point Mr. Meany did give some of the labor people the go-ahead on working for Kennedy on the floor. Do you think this took place at that time, or was there a change as a result of that meeting?

ZACK: No, I don’t think so. I want to make it quite clear that when Meany talks about the trade union movement taking a position here, he’s talking about the official AFL-CIO and himself and the apparatus of the organized labor movement. This is a very loosely woven trade union movement in the United States, as you probably know as well as I do. Nobody tries to make union people do anything. Meany’s personal position on these things is that we ought to make a choice after the parties have made a choice; that is, the official apparatus of the organization should make a choice after the parties have made a choice. As far as people are concerned, there’s no doubt they’re going to go as their individual choices are.

[-12-]

I think if George Meany had been a delegate to that Convention, he would have been a John Kennedy man all the way. I flew out with Meany to Los Angeles. It was quite a planeload of people. The Speaker of the House was on it. Everybody was going from Washington to Los Angeles at that time. Mrs. Meany went along. And as the plane landed and we were about to get off, Mrs. Meany [Eugenie McMahon Meany] took out of a bag a John F. Kennedy hat and put it on. Meany said to us, "There goes my neutrality." There was no doubt that she was for Kennedy. I think there was no doubt that George was for Kennedy, and this wasn't an anti-Johnson move. He just thought that this was, for 1960, the better of the two candidates.

HACKMAN: Who were some of the labor people at that time who found it most difficult to support Kennedy?

ZACK: I think probably the Machinists [International Association of Machinists] of everybody. This is the union that I think was most likely not to have supported Mr. Kennedy.

HACKMAN: That was Mr. Hayes [Albert J. Hayes] who was then President at that time?

ZACK: Mr. Hayes, yes. This is a union that's got a strong, almost Masonic, base to it, as you probably know. It was formed as a secret society some seventy-five years ago. But at their convention—which was in St. Louis [St. Louis, Missouri] that summer; I guess it was in September—both Kennedy and Nixon spoke. And after that, there was no doubt the union was all the way for John Kennedy. But earlier in the maneuvering and the politicking that goes on before the Convention, I think they would probably have been on the other side. Oh, there were a few people who had been very close to Symington who were for him. There were a number of people who were for Adlai Stevenson.

HACKMAN: You had mentioned that you also saw Stevenson at Los Angeles.

ZACK: We saw Stevenson on another day in another hotel, and I can't remember which one of the hotels. He still hadn't made up his mind

[-13-]

whether he was a candidate or not at that moment. And this was, as far as the union people were concerned, this was one of the biggest handicaps as far as Adlai Stevenson was concerned. They're people who make up their mind, you know, and stick to it, and they're not people who have great difficulty making up their mind. And they didn't

really understand a man like Adlai Stevenson, who took so long and did so much soul-searching.

HACKMAN: We were talking about the choice of Johnson as Vice President, and you had talked about some of the Kennedy people who didn't feel that he should have been the choice. Could you discuss that in a little more detail?

ZACK: Well, I don't know that it.... These were all private conversations. I remember some of them quite well. I remember some of the people that we had the conversations with quite well, some of the people who were sure that it wouldn't be Johnson. I've heard from Reuther, Rose, and Goldberg about the time when Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] came over to the hotel room they were in at the Statler and told them that it was definite that the candidate had decided on Johnson. One of these three—which one it was I don't remember; I'm sure it wasn't Goldberg, so it was either Rose or Reuther—said, "Well, let's talk about it." And Bobby said, "There's nothing to talk about; the candidate has made up his mind," and left in that kind of a—a moment.

Early in the morning of that day these three—Walter Reuther, Arthur Goldberg and Alex Rose—had gone over to see Kennedy and to talk to him about vice presidential candidates. Our choices would have been any one of a number of people. Symington would have been perfectly acceptable. A number of our people were for Scoop Jackson [Henry M. Jackson]. Many of our people were for Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]. It was a pretty wide choice. None of them would have said Lyndon Johnson. Before they left the room, as I understand it, Jack Kennedy took Arthur Goldberg into the men's room and told him that it was Johnson. He was the only one that knew anything about it, that he had made the decision.

[-14-]

HACKMAN: Did some of these people, some of the Kennedy staff people who had not favored Johnson or who hadn't thought it was going to be Johnson, come around and after the choice was made—I would image this would be people like Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] and O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and, you know, some of these people—and try to, in effect, patch things up or smooth things over?

ZACK: No, they didn't try to patch them up. I remember having one conversation on the Convention floor with Ralph Dungan, who two days before had told me absolutely, flatly that it would not be Johnson, saying, "I was never more wrong in my life, but I'm all the way with Jack Kennedy, and that's what he decided." They didn't attempt to patch it up. They didn't attempt to do anything more than say, "This is a fact of political life, and we all must live with it."

HACKMAN: I've heard that after the Convention, I think Bobby Kennedy held a meeting of people to try to get things back together again with labor people. Do you recall anything about that?

ZACK: No. If he did, it was not a meeting that I was at. I saw a good deal of Bobby during the campaign, but by that time it was "How do we do this," and "How do we do it better," and "Where can we be helpful," and "Where aren't our people working as hard as they tell us they're doing," and that sort of conversations. These were all the nuts and bolts of a political campaign. He was a damn good campaigner.

HACKMAN: What specifically were you involved in during the campaign? Did your job here change a great deal because you were in the middle of a campaign?

ZACK: No, not any more than it would in any other kind of campaign. Mostly I'm desk-bound throughout it. As an old reporter, I wanted to get

[-15-]

out and spend some time covering the campaign and was able to get away for a week and followed John Kennedy around throughout Illinois when he was going up the trail of the Lincoln-Douglas debates; in Indiana, which was absolutely the frostiest political reception I ever saw. As a matter of fact, we stopped overnight in Chicago [Chicago, Illinois] and were going from Chicago down to Indianapolis [Indianapolis, Indiana], and I got a call from Mr. Meany on something that he wanted me to tell Kennedy. He didn't want to talk on the phone to him, and he wanted me to describe it to him. He said that when I got out at the airport I would find that I was going to be on the *Caroline* going down to Indianapolis. That was the only trip I took on the *Caroline*.

I spent about ten minutes with the candidate in his private quarters there telling him what position Meany had on this particular issue. The whole question was whether or not the right-to-work law in Indiana ought to be a major issue in the campaign there, whether—something that we were out to do was repeal Indiana's right-to-work law—but would it help or hurt if he made a special issue of it on that night. It was Meany's position that he might just as well forget it; he wasn't going to change any votes in Indiana on it and all he could do was maybe get some more enemies in Indiana.

We had all written off Indiana at that time, anyway. Kennedy said he felt that Indiana was gone. I spoke to him briefly late that next day when we were in Kentucky, and he said, "Were you as cold as I was in Indianapolis?" "Yes, sir."

As a result of that trip on the *Caroline*, I got a keepsake, a sort of a cigarette box, oh, a plastic type of cigarette box with a replica of the *Caroline* on it, which is not only one of our most important keepsakes, it happens to be my one-year-old grandson's favorite toy.

HACKMAN: So it worked out well, I see. Do you have any general comments on the relationship of the AFL-CIO and the Kennedy campaign operation during the campaign? Any type of problems come up in this relationship or...

[-16-]

ZACK: No, I think they meshed well. It was one of our feelings—always been one of our feelings—that a registration and get-out-the-vote campaign is terribly important. Trade union members move a good deal, so they have trouble keeping registered with all of the horrible registration laws that are around in various states. They don't vote in every single election with the regularity that the silk stocking wards do, and getting and keeping going a registration campaign and getting people out to the polls we consider an extremely important part of our political activity, and engage in it regularly, election after election.

John Kennedy was in complete agreement with that. As a matter of fact, one of the first things he did with the Democratic National Committee was set up a special registration and get-out-the-vote group. Frank Thompson [Frank Thompson, Jr.] of New Jersey and Roy Reuther of the Auto Workers [United Automobile Workers] were the co-chairmen of it, did an excellent job on it. The AFL-CIO set up a special registration fund for that campaign, something that we've done every two years since. For a number of years Roy Reuther ran it for us. Especially in big cities, especially in working class wards, and especially in minority wards, we think this is an absolutely vital thing. Kennedy agreed, and we did an awful lot of work together with the Kennedy people on that.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any particular issues that Mr. Meany or the AFL-CIO hoped that the candidate would take at that period, that they had trouble impressing him that he should take?

ZACK: No, I don't think so. I think we were pretty much in agreement. I remember that we did a special section of the *AFL-CIO News* at that time, which was basically questions and answers, Meany asking questions and Kennedy answering the questions. It was not done at any one time. They met on a number of occasions. And after all of these meetings I wrote this. I wrote the questions and wrote the answers, which then were submitted to both parties to make sure I was synthesizing the positions that both of them had taken on this. I think it was Bob Kennedy that we cleared it through. Bob Kennedy took it to the presidential candidate and brought it back. And it was an extremely popular section. It was a four-page

[-17-]

section in the paper. We reprinted it in reams of copies and sent it around to the trade unions. And the idea that a presidential candidate would sit down and discuss these kinds of issues with this kind of frankness was a big asset in the campaign.

HACKMAN: Was there any problem in getting then Senator Kennedy to make a sufficient number of appearances at labor meetings and conventions in that period?

ZACK: No, he was gung-ho for it. He was at them all. He had plenty of time for this, or made time, rather, saw a tremendous number of union people around the country. He had a good political memory for faces and names. And, of course, he was such a fantastic quick study that he could take his briefing paper and, you know, a minute later he knew everything that was on the paper.

HACKMAN: Something we kind of skipped over and that was the primaries. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that. Did the AFL-CIO have problems in keeping their people neutral in the primaries?

ZACK: We didn't try and keep them neutral. We said to them, "You can't use the organization. You go wherever you want to in the primaries as individuals, but don't wear your organizational hat if you hold a position in the AFL-CIO." A number of them using the hat of the union that they were affiliated with were involved, and we had great splits. In the Wisconsin primary, for example, the Auto Workers, which is a big union in Wisconsin, were split pretty well down the middle, half of them for Kennedy, half of them for Humphrey. This followed in a lot of places. West Virginia, there was a split in the trade union movement, some people for Humphrey and some people for Kennedy.

[-18-]

But once we were past West Virginia, the situation seemed to change, and for the rest of the primaries there seemed to be no major split in the trade union movement. There were some people that were split, but not many. I think probably one of the most important things that happened—this was after the primaries; this was in the campaign—that happened for Lyndon Johnson's own good was the session in New York—for the Liberal Party dinner in New York, to which Johnson, as the vice presidential candidate, was invited. It was one of the first major appearances in the North, and it was before a tough audience. The Liberal Party was no push-over audience. And he was a big hit; he just snowed them. And from then on the Liberal Party has been the Lyndon Party, you know, no doubting it at all.

HACKMAN: All right, let's see, after the campaign is over, during the period after the election and before the Inauguration, do you have any memories about the AFL-CIO's position on appointments?

ZACK: Yes. Yes, I've got some memories on that. George Meany was going overseas; he had to go over to an ICFTU [International Conference of Free Trade Unions] meeting. He called in Biemiller and myself and said that he wanted us to work with the Kennedy people on appointments, that he thought the trade union movement had some people that it could offer that would be of value in a number

of positions. He said, "There are three things I want to tell you. Number one, keep away from the Cabinet. Don't have anything to do with the Cabinet. I'll have to do that myself. Secondly, don't take care of any of our problems; don't give them anybody but the extremely good people. Don't solve any of the headquarters' problems." We have people that are less than good, and it would be easy to ease them out. "And thirdly," he said, "don't either one of you guys go." And with that, we worked with the Kennedy people on quite a number of appointments.

HACKMAN: I might reverse the tape.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

[-19-]

ZACK: And so we did, we worked with them on quite a number of appointments. We knew early the business about the Secretary of Labor; we knew what the situation was. Meany gave the President, at his request, six or seven names of trade union leaders. Arthur Goldberg's name wasn't on that list because these were all elected union officials and Arthur Goldberg didn't want to be Secretary of Labor at first. Arthur was interested in going on the Supreme Court, his ultimate ambition. And I think Arthur figured the Solicitor General was the job that would best lead to the Court. Traditionally, it has been a stepping stone to the Court. And so he wasn't that interested in the Labor Department.

Kennedy said to Meany, somewhere down the line, "How about Arthur Goldberg? You didn't have him on the list." And Meany said, "Because you asked me for elected union officials. That's what I understood." He said, "If you are going for a man, for a technician, for a man who is a lawyer, for a man who is eminently qualified and knows the trade union movement, you couldn't do better than Arthur Goldberg." So it was Arthur. That's about the time we knew definitely that it was going to be Arthur Goldberg.

At around that same time, Kennedy told Meany that he was seriously considering naming Joe Keenan [Joseph Daniel Keenan] of the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] as one of the Assistant Secretaries of Defense, the man-power job. Keenan had done an excellent job in Europe and during World War II in the home manpower operation, and after World War II in Europe with General Clay [Lucius D. Clay, Sr.] in rebuilding the German trade union movement. He was an extremely capable guy. McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] took the position that he would have absolutely nothing to do with these kinds of commitments; if he was going to be the Secretary of Defense, he personally was going to choose the man. That ended the Keenan hope of getting into the Cabinet.

As a matter of fact, Kennedy said to Meany, "You know, McNamara's a funny guy. He said absolutely no to me when I said I wanted to make young Frank Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] Secretary of the Navy." And Meany said, "Good for him." Hardly any love lost between Meany and Franklin Roosevelt, Jr.

[-20-]

HACKMAN: Can you think of any other appointments that...

ZACK: Well, there were a number of appointments that....A number of people went out of the trade union movement and into the government at that particular time. I'd have to scratch my head to think of them, who they were and exactly what positions they went into. But there were many of them that went into the government at various sources where we thought and the Administration thought these people could make a contribution.

HACKMAN: Who were you primarily working with? Ralph Dungan, I know, was working on appointments at this time.

ZACK: Ralph Dungan, Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.], Bob Kennedy to a degree. These were the three that were.

HACKMAN: Would you usually submit a list of people or one person that you preferred, or how did you work that?

ZACK: Mostly it was done verbally. I don't think there's anything on paper about any of these. And mostly, as in the case of the Labor Department, three, four, or five names among them, not trying to choose for them, giving them ideas of people and with a sort of a thumbnail sketch: This guy is good for these reasons, but he's got these kinds of problems, you know. I remember submitting one name, or submitting three names at one time, to Ralph Dungan, George....This was one of the Civil Defense posts. You must remember in those days Civil Defense was much more important than it is now. And we had quite a strong interest in it, as not only do our people work in the target areas, many of them live right around the target areas. And I submitted three names. One of them was a man who was in his late sixties, and Dungan said, "Not in this young man's Administration."

HACKMAN: Was that for the job—you may not recall—Frank Ellis [Frank B. Ellis] eventually got himself into?

[-21-]

ZACK: This was Ellis' deputy. A guy by the name of John Cosgrove later got it. That was his position. Cosgrove came from there. He was Assistant Director of Education. He was one of the three names that was submitted.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any of the other Cabinet appointments, other than Goldberg, that people reacted to here? Were there any they were particularly upset about or particularly strong for?

ZACK: Well, they didn't know McNamara, of course. They didn't know Dean Rusk very well. The older people around here remember Rusk when he had been in the State Department, but many hadn't had any contact with him, didn't really know. There were a lot of people who knew and liked Bob Kennedy who were amazed that Bob Kennedy got the Attorney General's job. They sort of thought that he would go into the White House as a chief of staff, amazed because Bob Kennedy's legal background was sort of meager.

Bill Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz], for example, was the Under Secretary of Labor, and everybody thought that was a very fine appointment. He was on the list of names of people we thought for either that job or chairman of the National Labor Relations Board. Frank McCulloch [Frank W. McCulloch] got the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] job, but the reverse would have been just as good. We wanted, for either one of these two positions, people who really knew the field, who were of excellent reputation. The Secretary of Commerce, the former governor of North Carolina, Hodges [Luther H. Hodges], asked for and got one of our staff people as a special assistant, (the first time—this doesn't exist anymore—that a guy from the labor movement was a special assistant to the Secretary of Commerce), Hy Bookbinder [Hyman Harry Bookbinder], who later was with Sargent Shriver. Well, it was like this all the way through in the positions.

There were two other incidents that took place during that time. There was a humorous incident. The leaders of the trade unions, oh, maybe a dozen, fifteen of them, had been invited by Kennedy to come to his Georgetown [Georgetown, Washington, D.C.] home the night before Thanksgiving, just a little party to thank them for their help, chat with them. And the *New York Times* got hold of the story. It was a lead story in the *Times*: It had been reported to the *Times* that the labor leaders

[-22-]

were going there to demand of Kennedy "the payment." Well, they obviously weren't, but there's no sense in trying to deny a story like that. First thing in the morning, Meany said to me, "We've got to get out of this; we've just got to get the meeting cancelled." And I suggested—we agreed that we say to the Senator, "Gee, we've got a problem. We can't get these people home to spend Thanksgiving Day with their families if they're in Georgetown that night."

So I talked to whoever was the acting press officer at that time, a chap that came out of *Time* magazine, was later in the State Department as a press officer for the State Department. He was the acting press officer with Kennedy, who was down in Florida at his father's [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] home. I got a hold of him, and he said, "We have also seen the story, and we feel the same way. It can't be helped." So I told him the cover story we had thought of. And so Kennedy called Meany. It was a four-way conversation then, and Kennedy said, "This makes a good deal of sense. Why don't we leave it this way?" Wilson was there, a chap by the name of Wilson.

HACKMAN: Donald Wilson [Donald M. Wilson]?

ZACK: Yes, Don Wilson. He said, “When Wilson holds his press briefing this morning, he’ll say that Zack called him and told him this, and he told me, and I said that we’ll just have to have it another day. And I called you, Mr. Meany, and said, ‘Can you get another date on this?’ And you said, ‘Yes, I’ll get it together.’ And we’ll do it that way.”

So I was standing over the ticker watching the story to see how it would come. And it comes, and it was done exactly this way: “Don Wilson said that Al Zak called him”—the AP [Associated Press] spelled it Z-A-K, and you know, in the first graft and the ninth graft, you know, six times in the story. And I tore the thing off the ticker and handed it to one of my fellows and said, “Call the AP and tell them to spell my name correctly.” About a half an hour later I got a call from the AP from the guy who was on the desk. He said, “While you were so interested in getting your own damn name spelled correctly, you didn’t notice we misspelled Meany’s name five times.” Took me about six months before I got up enough nerve to tell that story to Meany.

[-23-]

Well, eventually what we did was have a lunch for Kennedy at noontime of the day before the Inauguration. And we had it over at the Sheraton-Carlton. When we went outside to meet them—Biemiller and I went out to meet him—it was snowing; the storm that really paralyzed the city that night was just starting. I remember that day very well. George Meany started it off by saying, “You know, some of you around here have been a little less formal than I have. Some of you call our guest of honor ‘Jack.’ I’ve always called him ‘Senator’ or ‘Congressman.’ No matter what any of us have called him, from this day for as long as he lives we’re going to call him ‘Mr. President.’ I want to say something else to you, Mr. President. We’re not going to agree with you all the time. Sometimes we’re going to disagree, and when we do, we’re going to say so. We’re not going to stop being your friends because we disagree with you on something.

And Kennedy said, “You know, I’m delighted you said that. I want to make it quite clear: I’m not labor’s President and you’re not my labor movement. And there’re going to be times when I’m going to have to make decisions that you won’t like. And there are going to be times when you’re going to do things that I don’t like. But as far as I’m concerned, I’m going to be everybody’s President, and I hope and I intend to keep on being your friend.” And everybody around me was quite charmed. He had a chicken sandwich and a glass of beer, and he went out in the snowstorm. By that time, the snow was really coming down. It was only about 3 in the afternoon. Those are the two incidents that I remember in that period between the Conventions and the Inauguration.

I remember the announcement on the first day, the first Executive Order the President signed right after he entered the White House.

HACKMAN: That was the food stamps?

ZACK: The food business for West Virginia. And I think, as far as the trade union people were concerned, that was the demonstration of the kind of man they elected.

[-24-]

HACKMAN: You mentioned a second ago the appointment of Robert Kennedy as Attorney General. Had people been worried about him, the labor people, because—I don't mean just in terms of the Attorney General appointment but during the primary period, the Convention, and the campaign period—because of his earlier work on the McClellan Committee? I've heard that some people were upset.

ZACK: Well, I'm sure some people. If I had been a Teamster [International Brotherhood of Teamsters], I'd have been upset. We weren't upset. Our guys never warmed up to Bob Kennedy like they did to Jack and like they have to Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy]. He was a colder guy. They worked with him very well, especially during the campaign. We had some clashes with him when he was Attorney General. There's a pretty strong civil libertarian movement, you know, in the trade union movement, and some of the things Bob did as Attorney General were less than wholesome, viewed from a civil libertarian's point of view. We're not believers in wiretapping for any circumstances, at any time, for example, and we wouldn't switch our position in spite of the fact that he strongly urged us to do this. But they liked the guts that he showed in Mississippi, and they liked the guts that he showed throughout that whole, ugly summer on the civil rights issue. Most of the unions in New York supported him when he ran for the United States Senate.

He isn't as warm a man as Jack Kennedy was, and I think this is probably the difference. I have heard it said of Bob Kennedy—as I said earlier, I have never heard it said of Jack Kennedy—“He's a rich kid. He doesn't know what it means to work for a living.” I've heard that often about Bobby, never with Teddy.

HACKMAN: Did you get involved, after the Administration started, in working on behalf of legislation?

ZACK: I do this normally in working with Andy Biemiller here. We worked closely with the Administration on a number of things: the civil rights bills, the minimum wage bills, the trade bill, the Trade Expansion Act, the Medicare bill, the early fights for Medicare. The Administration in those days used to put together task forces for various things. I was on several of these task forces during the Administration. I worked closely with Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] on many of these. O'Brien sort of masterminded most of these task forces that

[-25-]

had anything to do with legislation.

HACKMAN: Do you recall specifically what these were on?

ZACK: Well, the Medicare one for sure, and the minimum wage one and the trade bill, the Trade Expansion Act, I think there were two or three others. Legislative battles, as far as we're concerned around here, go on practically every day of the week, and it's hard to go back and pinpoint any particular one.

HACKMAN: What about civil rights? It's always been discussed that the trade union movement, the AFL-CIO, was more anxious to move to legislation than the Administration was which wanted to rely on Executive measures.

ZACK: That's true. We were pushing the White House quite hard for it. When the first Kennedy civil rights bill was in the making, when it was in the drafting stage, and they were building the pressures for it, we were quite alarmed at the fact that there was not going to be any federal fair employment practice section in it. Now the reason for it not being in the early drafts was the legislative determination at the White House that if it were in, Everett Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen] wouldn't play on the team, and Everett Dirksen was absolutely essential to a victory on that, as he demonstrated in killing the bill last year, the civil rights bill last year. He wasn't with that one, and he was the key to whether or not we got the legislation.

We finally won after many arguments, many discussions. We finally got, in the presidential message that accompanied the bill, a reference, a very favorable reference, to the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] bills that were then pending in the Congress. The FEPC bills were not in the same committee that civil rights bill was referred to; they were in the Labor Committee of the Senate. This, of course, went to Judiciary [United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary]. And one of the first things we did was get it incorporated in that bill. We felt that you couldn't have a civil rights bill in that atmosphere at that time that didn't have a federal fair employment practices section, now called the Office of Equal Opportunity—Equal Employment Opportunity—but then it was being referred

[-26-]

to as FEPC. We said that that was an absolute must and we eventually won, got it in. I don't think that Jack Kennedy was running away from the issue; I think that he was trying to be a pragmatist and was trying to get a bill that he could get passed. Eventually we got it passed, but it was a tough battle. But it never would have been possible without Everett Dirksen.

HACKMAN: Did he ever bring up the point that it might be more possible to do something after '64 than it was during the first Administration?

ZACK: Quite often, quite often, but we didn't feel it could wait. We thought that it had to be. I think it was a sound, respectful judgment.

HACKMAN: How receptive was Attorney General Robert Kennedy to the AFL-CIO's point of view on civil rights?

ZACK: I think—well, now, let me take this back. Let me put it this way: I think Bob Kennedy initially was suspicious that the trade union movement wanted to put FEPC into the bill to make it so unpalatable that it wouldn't pass. I think he felt that there were enough trade union people who were opposed to working with Negroes on the job that this was what we were out to do. That wasn't our purpose; we were quite sincere. This is not to say that we don't have some bigots in a trade union organization of more than fourteen million people. When you have fourteen million people, you get all kinds: good guys, bad guys, people that are faithful to their wives and those that beat them, and we even get some Republicans. But we convinced Jack Kennedy, and that was the important thing. And that's how we got it into the bill.

HACKMAN: Can you remember other pieces of legislation that you had to push the Administration particularly hard on?

ZACK: No, we had to...

HACKMAN: What about the tax cut?

[-27-]

ZACK: Well....

HACKMAN: The tax reform, more than the tax cut.

ZACK: We were more for the tax reform than we were for the tax cut, like we are more for tax reform than we are for the tax increase bill that is pending now—I guess it isn't pending; it's sort of on the shelf now. But, we've long felt that tax reform was an absolute essential, that them that has, gets more, and we're not very happy with it. But we wouldn't have gotten the tax cut bill except—it's my judgment now, and I'm Monday-morning quarterbacking—except in the atmosphere that followed the assassination; and probably wouldn't have gotten it if Lyndon Johnson hadn't turned off the lights in the White House, hardly an economy but it helped at that time in establishing the proper atmosphere. But we never got much in the way of reform. We still don't have much in the way of that.

HACKMAN: I had down that one of your visits to the White House was when the President addressed a citizens' Committee for Tax Reduction and Revision in 1963, and I thought maybe you were particularly...

ZACK: Well, I was there that time. The thing I remember most about that was that this was both a labor and management group that was there at the White House. The President went down the room shaking hands with people and knew the labor people by their first names and had to be introduced to all the business people. And I don't think that they liked it very much.

I also remember during that period of time, the President had a lot of groups in on the civil rights issue, almost daily sessions in the East Room. And I remember being with a small group with him when he described what happened the day he came in to speak with the business people. None of them stood up. He said, "Those son of a bitches haven't got any regard for the office of the presidency." It was a word he used fairly often.

[-28-]

I remember one other time I was at the White House, taking over a little girl who had won an essay contest on the Ed Morgan [Edward P. Morgan] program, which we were sponsoring on ABC [American Broadcasting Company]. We went in really for a picture-taking ceremony, the little girl and Ed Morgan and some brass from ABC or Mr. Meany. The President had a briefing sheet about the kid, you know, like all Presidents have about everybody. I'm sure he glanced at it as we were walking in the door and put it down and had a long discussion with this girl about her IQ and what she had said in the statement and so on, and that little girl was nearly fainting.

HACKMAN: He always asked a lot of questions.

ZACK: He sure did.

HACKMAN: Do you have any comments on what the relationship was between the COPE [AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education] people and the Kennedy Administration, McDevitt [James L. McDevitt] and...

ZACK: I think they were very good. They worked—as I say, under Kennedy the whole concept of registration and voting, which is a key to our kind of political activity, was very important. We worked very closely with them, and worked, I think, quite well with them. They were for him all the way. He was quite cooperative as President, doing little films that were shown at COPE meetings and things of this nature. This was obviously a good political gesture on his part, but he was quite cooperative in doing it, and they liked it very much. I think that they worked with quite easily. Of course, in those days the real political operation in the White House was being done by Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien....

HACKMAN: Did Ralph Dungan continue to have any contact with AFL-CIO?

ZACK: Yes. He was probably the liaison man with us on any kind of appointments, on any kind of problems, on everything with the exception of legislation (that was Larry O'Brien), and on getting to see the President (that was Ken O'Donnell, of course). But if the President wanted some names for somebody or wanted to know reactions to names he had gotten elsewhere, Ralph

[-29-]

Dungan was liaison.

HACKMAN: A lot of people have said—you had mentioned this before—that if labor was dissatisfied with the Kennedy Administration, they had really nowhere else to turn, in the same way that in the campaign they only had Nixon to turn to. Was it a problem in keeping dissatisfaction on the part of AFL-CIO people down?

ZACK: No. I think not. I think there was some of that; there always is some of that. Hell, Jack Kennedy used the Taft-Hartley injunction, I think, twice. I remember one in particular on the maritime dispute. Lyndon Johnson hasn't. Johnson has used the special act....John Kennedy got the first compulsory arbitration bill through Congress on the rail dispute.

HACKMAN: On the wage-price guidelines...

ZACK: Well, the wage-price guidelines we never paid any attention to, and we told them right from the beginning that we weren't going to, and we told Arthur Goldberg we weren't going to. This falls under the heading of the things we told the Administration, or Meany told the Administration, that first day: that we couldn't buy it, we weren't about the buy it, and that was that. Meany told a press conference around here one time, "I don't blame the President for having the guidelines, but they're his not mine." And that's the attitude we took on it.

Yes, there was some dissatisfaction, but it never got to be great. And along about the time there was mounting dissatisfaction, there was John Kennedy addressing a trade union meeting, and that took care of all the problems.

HACKMAN: I had wondered if you had any particularly memories of his trips, in '61 and '63 both, to the AFL-CIO conventions?

ZACK: I remember them both very well. The '61 convention was in Miami Beach [Miami Beach, Florida], the same hotel where our convention is going to be this year. And this was a security problem because Cuba was still a hot issue. Nobody knew which Cuban was a Castroite or an anti-Castroite. The security people in the Administration were

[-30-]

quite concerned about it. I remember working with the Secret Service people setting up the security in the hotel.

I remember the '63 convention exceedingly well. It was exactly a week before the assassination.

HACKMAN: It was in New York.

ZACK: In New York, at the Americana Hotel in New York City. And I remember I met President Kennedy and his group when they came up the back freight elevator, actually, and asked him if he would pose with Mr. Meany and inspect a model of a big housing project which we were building in Mexico City [Mexico City, Mexico] for the Graphic Arts Union down there, a ten million dollar project, a trade union building as part of the AID [Agency for International Development] program. The President was delighted to do so and had his picture taken there and chatted with some of our people before he went on.

While he was speaking, or as he finished speaking, a big rush of people went backstage to shake hands with him. I remember thinking, "Well, I won't bother doing that this time. I'll see him later." But then I let my baser nature take over, and I pushed up like everybody else. I remember I had a bad eye operation about a year and a half before, and for about eight months I wore a patch over my left eye. By that time, it was off. I went up, and as I shook hands with him and said, "That was a great speech" or something, he said, "Hey, Al, your eye must be all recovered." And you know, the concept that the President of the United States could remember one guy's eye—I don't know.

I remember that day he was assassinated was my birthday. We were still in New York. I guess we were just winding up the convention. Of course, there were a lot of things to write as far as we were concerned: the statements to get out, the newspaper queries to answer, and all this sort of stuff. I had opened up a line from there to the switchboard here. During that time, our son had tried to reach me. He was in college in Walla Walla, Washington. He had tried to reach me and couldn't get through. And when I finally got finished and released the line, they called from downstairs to say that there was a telegram. And the telegram said, "Oh my God, I'm sick with grief." And I think it was then that...I don't know....When you stop and think about it, well, it was a long time that

[-31-]

I'd known him. Just about the same age. He was a few months older than I was.

HACKMAN: Well, that's all that I have, unless you have something else.

ZACK: No, that's it. He was quite a guy.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-32-]

Albert J. Zack Oral History Transcript – JFK #1
Name List

B

Biemiller, Andrew J., 3, 4, 10, 12, 19, 24, 25
Bookbinder, Hyman Harry, 22

C

Clay, Lucius D., Sr., 20
Cosgrove, John, 22

D

Dirksen, Everett M., 26, 27
Dubinsky, David, 10
Dungan, Ralph A., 15, 21, 29

E

Ellis, Frank B., 21, 22

G

Goldberg, Arthur J., 8, 10, 14, 20, 22, 30

H

Hayes, Albert J., 13
Hodges, Luther H., 22
Humphrey, Hubert H., 14, 18

J

Jackson, Henry M., 14
Johnson, Lady Bird, 6
Johnson, Lyndon B., 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
14, 15, 19, 28, 30

K

Keenan, Joseph Daniel, 20
Kelly, Kenneth J., 3
Kennedy, Edward M., 25
Kennedy, John F., 1-20, 23- 32
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr., 23
Kennedy, Robert F., 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 25, 27

L

Lincoln, Evelyn N., 4

M

Meany, Eugenie McMahon, 13
Meany, George, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19,
20, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31
McClellan, John L., 7, 8
McCulloch, Frank W., 22
McDevitt, James L., 29
McDonald, David J., 10
McNamara, Robert S., 20, 22
Morgan, Edward P., 29

N

Nixon, Richard M., 9, 11, 13, 30

O

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 25, 29
O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 15, 29

R

Rayburn, Sam 6, 13
Reuther, Roy, 17
Reuther, Walter P., 10, 14
Roosevelt, Franklin D., Jr., 20
Rose, Alex, 10, 14
Rusk, Dean, 22

S

Shriver, R. Sargent, Jr., 21, 22
Smith, Stephen E., 4
Stevenson, Adlai E., 3, 4, 13, 14
Symington, Stuart, II, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13

T

Thompson, Frank, Jr., 17
Truman, Harry S., 7

W

Wilson, Donald M., 23
Wirtz, W. Willard, 22

