

**Robert W. Kastenmeier Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 10/25/1965**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Kastenmeier (1925-2015) was a Democratic Congressman from Wisconsin from 1959 to 1991. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] 1960 election in Wisconsin, the formation of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Committee, and JFK's civil rights proposals, among other topics.

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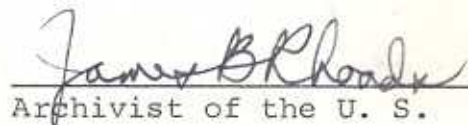
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Robert W. Kastenmeier– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT W. KASTENMEIER

October 25, 1965  
Washington, D. C.

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE:           Congressman Kastenmeier, do you recall your first meeting with John F. Kennedy?

KASTENMEIER:   Well, I'm not exactly sure. I, of course, met John F. Kennedy a number of times. The first meeting, I think, was in connection with the television report that I was making to my constituents. He agreed to come as my guest. This was, I think, in the year 1959. I had previously had his brother on-- [Robert F.] Bob Kennedy--and Bob suggested that the Senator might like to be on the show and indeed I was glad to have him. It was a five-minute television show and he made an excellent presentation.

GRELE:           On what?

KASTENMEIER:   Well, on general questions. I think he talked about education and labor, one of the committees he was on, and expressed, generally speaking, some of his views. I don't recall precisely what he said as much as how he said it. He was a very effective television personality.

GRELE:           Is this the full scope of your impression of him at that time or were there other impressions?

KASTENMEIER: It's difficult, as I'm sure you're aware. to go back and to try to subjectively analyze how you felt at the time. Certainly now all of us have, I think, the warmest and most sympathetic memories of the late President. At the time, I think some of us, in face, were critical perhaps, for one reason or another. Perhaps because we felt he was, at least in terms of Wisconsin Democratic politics, less liberal than we had hoped. Some of us, I think, felt a little more akin to [Adlai E.] Stevenson or to [Hubert H.] Humphrey (although John Kennedy was later proved to be part of the sphere of modern American Democratic liberalism). I think as a preface to the primary campaign of 1960, it was felt that he was a more orthodox Democrat than some of the others that were supported in Wisconsin.

GRELE: To go back to 1956, you were a delegate, I believe, to the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago?

KASTENMEIER: Yes.

GRELE: What were your opinions of John F. Kennedy as the vice-presidential candidate that year?

KASTENMEIER: Well, you know, I don't think any of us took him too seriously, at least prior to the Convention. He was quite young, as you will recall, at the time. Everyone knew he was enormously popular, certainly in Massachusetts and in Washington. I was, along with the rest of our delegation, pledged to Estes Kefauver when we went down there, and, in my own case, I was sufficiently ambivalent so that supporting Stevenson was no problem for me when Senator Kefauver withdrew. In other words, I respected both men. We were all very strongly for Estes Kefauver for vice president and he later narrowly won the vice-presidential nomination from John Kennedy. At the time of the balloting for Vice President, you may recall the way Adlai Stevenson had thrown that open, we were very strongly committed to Estes and I think tended to regard John Kennedy somewhat as an opponent and with some misgiving, but not with any animosity, to be sure. It was really since then that people began to take him seriously.

GRELE: Various people who were in the Minnesota delegation that year tell us that it was his farm record that really put them off. Was that true in the Wisconsin delegation also?

KASTENMEIER: Yes, there was some discussion of this, although events moved so quickly that I don't really think that there was an involved discussion about it because, as you will recall, we didn't really know whether Stevenson had a choice when he threw it open. There wasn't time for discussion between that time and the actual balloting for Vice President between Kefauver and Kennedy. But at the time, Kefauver had campaigned years and years in the State of Wisconsin and was quite well known as a national Democratic personality in our state and quite beloved, actually. So it was no contest for Wisconsin Democrats at the Convention at that time, although clearly Kennedy was at the earliest stages of being a rising star.

GRELE: Did you have any contact with John Kennedy after the radio program and before the opening of the April, 1960 primary in Wisconsin?

KASTENMEIER: I think I did not. I think I met John Kennedy very casually at one or two political affairs but my memory fails me on precisely when and where. During the primary I saw him in my hometown of Watertown, where we had a rally for him. I was the one who received him. I say we--I was not committed. I was a first-term congressman in a very marginal congressional district. In my congressional district, the Second District of Wisconsin, commonly believed to be a liberal district, Democrats and progressive-minded people were largely divided between Stevenson, who was not an active candidate; Hubert Humphrey, who was; and John Kennedy, who was. Almost in equal thirds, you might say, at the time. As it turned out Humphrey won that district by something like 52,000 to 50,000. It was very close. And for me who was pretty well tied to Washington in my first term in the marginal district, I didn't find the time to be active in that campaign. Indeed, with the several personalities involved, all of whom I respected, I didn't have the inclination to dive into that particular contest. And so, to the extent that I could have helped any or all three of them, this would be what I would prefer. One thing that I remember. The Kennedy people had scheduled Senator Kennedy for Watertown, my hometown, and I was there at that time and introduced him to the group, to the rally, and had the chance to talk with him at some length before he moved on. I was on good terms if not close terms--I say close in terms of both intimate and the fact that I was in Washington most of the time with the Kennedy people who were working in my own district in his behalf.

GRELE: Who were the people who worked for Kennedy and for Humphrey in that district?

KASTENMEIER: Prominently, of course, were the state people. That is to say, the people who ran the Kennedy operation in the state who were from my district. I refer to [Patrick J.] Pat Lucey, who was perhaps most prominent of the leaders and later became the state chairman and is now the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Wisconsin, and Ivan Nestingen who was, I think the chairman; and whether Ivan was as active, really played as active a role as Pat, is beside the point. Both of them were from my district.

Furthermore, there were many others. Some who were not as prominent politically before this time were Jack De Witt from Madison, a very prominent lawyer, Bill Fitzgerald from Watertown and many, many others. Most of these people-- certainly Pat Lucey and Ivan Nestingen and Bill Fitzgerald-- were always prominent Democrats. But John Kennedy also wakened the political spirit of many in my district and there were many of these people, too.

GRELE: Do you know offhand who worked for Humphrey?

KASTENMEIER: Well, my recollection is that Gretchen Pfankucher of Madison was one who worked very actively for Humphrey. Laura Auerbach and Elizabeth Tarkow worked for Hubert Humphrey, as did [Joseph W.] Joe Checota who had been on my staff. I had nothing to do with his going to the Humphrey people but he did leave me and went to work for Hubert Humphrey. There were a number of others as well but these were some I recall.

GRELE: You released a poll showing a large number of your constituents favored Stevenson over either Humphrey or Kennedy.

KASTENMEIER: I don't recall the results of that poll. My recollection would be that it would show a preference for Stevenson over Humphrey or Kennedy, but one must remember that the poll was taken early in 1960. I don't think the margin for Stevenson was very large.

GRELE: Would you say the Stevenson people ended up in the Humphrey column in the Second District-- or the Kennedy . . .



KASTENMEIER: The majority of the Stevenson people ended up in the Humphrey column but certainly not all of them.

GRELE: Was the release of this poll any part of the pre-convention activities of the Stevenson supporters? Did you cooperate with anyone who was connected with . . .

KASTENMEIER: No. I've taken these polls every year. When I can get a personality item in the poll I will put it in if it's relevant and of high interest. It was amusing to me that people in the various camps thought I might be using this poll for one purpose or for another or to the disadvantage of one and the advantage of another, but this certainly did not enter my mind. I wanted to stay quite apart from this if possible and I was not really able to assess that either of the candidates, or indeed Mr. Stevenson, would be of more help to me. I would have had to assume that Mr. Stevenson would not be of help to me as the presidential candidate for the third time against a Republican nominee, but that either Humphrey or Kennedy would do quite well against [Richard M.] Nixon. As it turned out, I think this is true. I really had no personal advantage to be gained by blowing Mr. Stevenson's trumpet or taking sides in terms of this poll and I certainly did not. The poll was conducted as fairly and as objectively as any I've ever conducted. We feared, as a matter of fact, that one side or the other might attempt to try to get hold of copies of the poll and load the results, but this did not really come to pass, I'm sure, because these were mailed to individuals before any idea like this cropped up. Copies of these polls were not available as ballots.

GRELE: Were there pressures on you by either one of the candidates to support them publicly-- or supporters of the candidates?

KASTENMEIER: Yes, but these were relatively mild, moderate, not what most people would think of as real arm-twisting. No, I do remember [Eugene J.] Gene Keogh and Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., whom I had not met before, were supporting Kennedy.

GRELE: Gene Keogh. Is this the Congressman?

KASTENMEIER: Yes. Congressman Gene Keogh, who was down the hall from me and a very active John Kennedy supporter, strongly urged that [Gerald T.] Jerry Flynn, then Congressman from the First District, and myself support John Kennedy. Both of us decided not to. We were both in our first terms. We decided not, indeed, to support anyone. We had no intention of supporting anyone. But this is one of the incidents I do recall where someone really actively solicited my support for one of the candidates. Other than this, I think that most people understood my position quite well. My administrative assistant had many contacts throughout the state with many people. My recollection was that Kaz [Kaz Oshiki] had indicated to other political leaders in the state what my position was, informally, and I had as well. The result was that I wasn't bothered. I think that people were willing to assume that I was neutral and did so assume.

GRELE: Do you have any comments on the outcome of the primary? Why did Kennedy win where he did and Humphrey win where he did?

KASTENMEIER: The outcome of the primary, of course, was not surprising. It went fairly much according to form. We could not predict my district because it was assumed to be close and, predictably, it was close. It was felt that John Kennedy would do well in certain areas, those areas that tended to be, for example, more Catholic than others, and he did: the Fourth District, which is the south half of Milwaukee; the Eighth District around Green Bay; the Tenth District in Northern Wisconsin. Humphrey was expected to and did do well in the Third and the Ninth, which were more Scandinavian and more adjacent to Minnesota. So really the outcome was not a surprise, although it was a major blow to Humphrey and it was not so clearly decisive as the Kennedy people, you will recall, had wanted. Nonetheless it was not a surprise to me. I felt that I could run very well with John Kennedy as the presidential nominee, and I had thought he would run ahead of me, looking forward to November, but that isn't the way things ultimately turned out.

GRELE: We have heard that in the primary John Kennedy brought out people who were not usually politically active--concerned, but not politically active. Do you have any recollections along this line?

KASTENMEIER: Yes. As I indicated before, in discussing people who supported him, there were a number of people who were new to the party--talking about the Democrats as the political party in my district. For instance, Jack De Witt would be one who was not a party activist but was very prominent in the Kennedy campaign, and there were many others. This is true.

GRELE: Did you attend the 1960 Convention?

KASTENMEIER: No, I didn't. I didn't attend it because it was in Los Angeles and I felt that my own political position was sufficiently precarious, seeking reelection for my first term, so that I needed to be back in Wisconsin to campaign. It was expensive to go out to Los Angeles. You, see, I had assumed the posture of neutrality in the campaign. While I could have gone out as a party official, an individual holding party office in some capacity as a delegate or an alternate, I felt that I had better spend my time in my own district.

GRELE: Do you recall any of the tensions within that delegation when it finally got to Los Angeles? We have heard that there was a great deal of conflict between Humphrey supporters, Kennedy supporters, and neutrals. So you recall hearing any of this?

KASTENMEIER: Well, I've heard this too, although, as I say, not having been in Los Angeles, I am having to go on secondhand recollection. I don't think I could shed much light on that.

GRELE: Were you comfortable running with John Kennedy in 1960?

KASTENMEIER: Yes. It was an excellent ticket, Kennedy and [Lyndon B.] Johnson, that is from the standpoint of political appeal. At that time, however, Johnson was a question mark for Wisconsin as a Texan who had been opposed on certain issues from time to time in Wisconsin, but Kennedy was quite acceptable. Granted there were a few hard losers among the Humphrey-Stevenson supporters who held out until perhaps the final month of the campaign but I think it is fair to say all of these people supported the nominee in the end. Some of them did not support him with much vigor, but they did support him. I thought that the nominee, John Kennedy, would run ahead on the presidential ticket in Wisconsin. Most people thought that the ticket would win in Wisconsin. It did not, to my surprise.

I won reelection by 15,000 votes but the Kennedy-Johnson ticket lost to Nixon by 23,000 in the Second District. I don't know why that was but generally the ticket did not fare as well as hoped in Wisconsin. Thank heavens they won nationally; that's all that counts.

GRELE: Do you recall who the strongest holdouts among the Humphrey people were?

KASTENMEIER: No. I think there were quite a number of them. This is the impression one gets. What is important, for example, is not so much the individual holdouts, but whether, for example, in this state The [Madison] Capital Times supports the ticket. The Capital Times, the liberal Democratic newspaper, doesn't care to be called the Democratic newspaper but it is a liberal paper that supports Democrats overwhelmingly in Madison, important in my district as an opinion leader in all of Wisconsin. It was not enthusiastic about Kennedy earlier, that is, at the time of the Convention, but finally came all out for John Kennedy. As a matter of fact, I remember the nominee, John Kennedy, visiting Madison, my district. I was picked to be one of the several who were with President, the presidential nominee at the time, and the editor-publisher of The Capital Times [William T. Evjue] was another; also the Governor, Gaylord Nelson, and the Senator [William] Bill Proxmire. I think the four of us were with the President throughout. I was called on to introduce the President at the field house, which was a great honor and something I appreciated because either of the others, the Governor or the Senator, might have certainly had a prior claim. Or indeed, Pat Lucey, who had done so much, who had led the fight in Wisconsin during the primary for John Kennedy. But I was the one who was permitted to give the big welcoming speech and introduction of John Kennedy at the field house in Madison, and that was a moment I won't forget. I rode with John Kennedy in the car--several of us did--remembering that this is to a great extent a university community with tens of thousands of students, the enthusiasm was astounding. We had to be careful in the car not to run over youngsters. They were pressing in on the car, and it was all this type of experience that I understand was repeated elsewhere but it was certainly true in Madison. He did have that type of appeal for people and for young people particularly. Getting back to your question, it was important that The Capital Times come out for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket and they did. This was the important type of holdout--not so much which individuals were enthusiastic at the last. The Democratic party as a whole was enthusiastic for the ticket, certainly in the last six weeks when it really counted.

GRELE: As a spokesman for disarmament or nuclear detente, were you comfortable with the Democratic platform and its discussion of missile gaps and more money for the military?

KASTENMEIER: I must say in all candor I felt there was some duplicity. But you see, both Kennedy and Humphrey were strong on the question of disarmament. Humphrey, as I had, had proposed a peace agency to deal with this and John Kennedy had proposed an arms controls institute which was virtually the same type of body. Later, after he was President, we got together on what that was to be called--that is, the President and I and several other people. His posture on that and indeed my recollection of his speech in Madison, Wisconsin, on the war-peace question, was excellent. When I say there was some duplicity in the platform or even, I suppose, in political speeches, I was particularly concerned about this when John Kennedy was in his first year of service as President. Was he not too much to too many men? He was for more peace, more arms control, more disarmament. He was for more war, more spending for a bigger military, more of everything, you see. There was a little bit of this and this may be hypercritical, but he certainly, I think in the campaign as well as, let's say, in the first year in the Presidency, indicated more acceleration of everything. While President Eisenhower had been somewhat passive on a number of questions, John Kennedy was going to give it a new élan almost without distinction or discrimination. On some of these questions a few of us felt, some of the answers should be pursued to the exclusion of other things.

GRELE: To go ahead, you mentioned that you conferred with the President on a disarmament control agency?

KASTENMEIER: Yes.

GRELE: Could you tell us what that involved?

KASTENMEIER: This was in the first year, in 1961. I again, as I had the previous year, introduced a bill calling for creation of a peace agency. I got a number of other House members to introduce the same bill, I think perhaps roughly fifty of us, but I took the lead on this. In the Senate, Hubert Humphrey did the same thing again--pursued a peace agency type of approach. The President called John McCloy to head a special task force to create an appropriate agency to deal with disarmament. I dealt with these

people; that is, John McCloy, [Adrian S.] Butch Fisher and George Bunn, who were there to help him through the spring months of the President's first year. Things appeared to bog down in about early May so I promoted a letter signed by many members of Congress, thirty-five or forty--I've now forgotten--to the President on this whole question of having this agency and what it was going to be like. We were a little bit afraid that certain necessary ingredients in the agency would be dealt out in the internal business that was going on at the time of the formulation of this agency.

GRELE:                Like what?

KASTENMEIER:        Whether it would lose its independent status; whether it would be just part of the State Department; whether it would be in the White House; whether it was to have a laboratory; many questions about its status; whether the agency head would be able to send cablegrams; many technical aspects of the authority this agency would have, once created. The President didn't answer this letter right away. I think several weeks went by, but the several weeks were marked by accomplishment as far as the final formulation of the Administration position of the bill and its recommendation on the question. So the President wrote me, said okay and said, "Come on in and bring your people." I said, "Yes, we'll come and see you," and we went to the White House. Hubert Humphrey was there from the Senate and I was there with perhaps fifteen or twenty other House members. I led this delegation of House members. The President was there and John McCloy and several other people. The President deferred to Hubert and Hubert deferred to me. I said, "Well, Mr. President, largely our criticisms or suggestions or our concern as reflected in this letter, have been resolved by the actions of the McCloy task force in the last few weeks. We are getting a recommendation from you or have just gotten a recommendation which we think pretty well measures up to what we wanted. Accordingly, we don't really come today outraged or terribly upset, rather to indicate our support for the recommendation as it finally came out from the McCloy group. Really, the only question which remains is the name of the agency." And so we sat around, a group of us, the President, Humphrey, myself, and the others, and chatted about the name. We had always proposed Peace Agency and the President favored Arms Control Institute as far as nomenclature was concerned. We agreed on calling it the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency for World Peace and Security, I believe, or United States Disarmament Agency for World Peace and Security. I don't know whether Arms Control was in there or not. It's got shaken up a

little bit since then, but it came out United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which was quite close to what we had recommended. That was largely our meeting and discussion on that particular agency, and the President has always been good on it. I think in his campaign he understood the war-peace question and military strategy--Daedalus was one thing he had read. He was quite knowledgeable about military strategy and the strategy of arms control disarmament and the problems involved, more so than probably any Chief Executive we have had in recent times.

GRELE: Do you recall offhand from where the chief opposition to the McCloy recommendations came?

KASTENMEIER: Really, we were quite intent on passing that bill quickly in September of 1961, the first year. Our meeting with the President was in June. Thereafter I came back from that meeting and led a group of, I think, about seventy-five members to introduce bills identical to the President's recommendation. We were quite anxious to pass it before adjournment--before opposition built up and this is about when it happened. It moved so quickly that there was no significant opposition in September 1961 and it passed overwhelmingly.

GRELE: In Congress?

KASTENMEIER: In Congress. On opposition made to it by others, I am sure there were some military people who opposed it. Conservatives and Southerners generally regarded it with distrust as they regarded the notion of disarmament generally with distrust. But there was no organized national position that these conservatives could adhere to, they opposed it largely without argument and perhaps voted against it. It passed by an overwhelming vote in both Houses.

GRELE: Moving on now to March of 1962, in that month various leaders of the Republican party attacked you and several members of Congress on the publication of The Liberal Papers. Do you have any comments on this attack and what its purpose was?

KASTENMEIER: I don't know that it has any connection with the President, that is, President Kennedy.

GRELE: They attacked the existence of the Liberal Project and other members of Congress said there wasn't any. You said there was such a project. Did the Administration ever comment on the existence of the Liberal Project? On your endorsement of The Liberal Papers?

KASTENMEIER: Well, I didn't endorse The Liberal Papers, nor did the editor. That is, the content. You're talking about the substance of the content of The Liberal Papers. Although again this has nothing to do with President Kennedy, I do remember a discussion with him at a White House social function because I had a very able man on my staff who spent time working with the Liberal Project and who, at the time, was working for the President.

GRELE: Could you tell us who this was?

KASTENMEIER: No, I don't see that there is any purpose in mentioning him, but the President and I chatted very affably, I remember, about that because his name was brought up by, I think, the Republicans. I suppose they did so with the idea of embarrassing him with the President, but I think that this did not bother the President very much.

GRELE: Why I asked the question--it was an election year and I was wondering if the Administration had any comments on the attack or on the papers.

KASTENMEIER: I think the position of the Administration was to let the members speak for themselves, because I'm sure the President or the Administration would have gathered there was some question of what the position was of the various Congressmen whose names were suggested as having produced The Liberal Papers. As a matter of fact, the various Congressmen did not actually produce the book. The Liberal Project was something else. This distinction was lost, of course, because--the Republicans had the initial attack on it and they involved [Everett M.] Dirksen and [Charles A.] Halleck and [William T.] Bill Miller. They got the press on it, although I always felt that there was much too much attention given. I think they did succeed in selling quite a few copies of The Liberal Papers by virtue of their attack, but that's about their only accomplishment. Because they used the views of some of the authors of some of the articles and painted these as being horrendous.



and so forth, I think they did succeed in putting us on the defensive, with reference at least to that project or that book.

But the Administration had no particular role to play. It was not involved in any sense. It was true that there were then in the Administration a number of people who had made contributions, not necessarily to this book but to the Liberal Project, which was a much broader thing. The Liberal Project involved more than just the questions of military power and foreign policy. The book dealt almost exclusively with military and foreign policy. But economic policy, domestic policy, civil rights, and all these other things were never put into book form.

GRELE: This probably is off the subject, but whatever happened to the second volume? Wasn't there a proposed second volume on domestic policy?

KASTENMEIER: A second volume? I suppose there were enough papers at the time so that a second volume could have been published had that been desired by [James] Jim Roosevelt or anyone else, but frankly, most of the papers were prepared in 1959 and 1960, so even when the book came out in March of 1962 they were a little bit out of date. This is also true of domestic policy. On civil rights and civil liberties--certainly on civil rights--everything of that age is dated. On economics much has happened so that that's quite dated. I don't think that those early papers would ever be published because they would just be dated. Granted there are probably some ideas in them which would be of interest to some but not as a general proposition.

GRELE: You serve on the House Committee on the Judiciary, I believe. Do you recall anything interesting or significant about the debates in that Committee over the civil rights program proposed by John Kennedy?

KASTENMEIER: I served on that committee since I came in January 1959, and the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, which was heard and debated by the Judiciary Committee in 1963, was the highlight, really. A number of us on the Committee wanted a strong bill. It was felt that if we didn't write a strong bill we would have to come back and write it again.

GRELE: Does this include Congressman [Emanuel] Celler, who offered, I believe . . .

KASTENMEIER: I can't speak for Congressman Celler. The Chairman, Congressman Celler, did support the subcommittee bill at the time the subcommittee reported on it--a very strong bill. Later the Chairman was persuaded by others, by the Administration I think, that some compromise was necessary and so he took a different view which is perfectly acceptable because I think flexibility in these questions on legislative matters is perfectly in order. But some of us were rather inflexible on it and for good reason, I think.

Voting rights in that bill were relatively weak. The Attorney General, representing the Administration, wanted it to apply to federal elections only, not to state and local elections. The events that subsequently came to pass including the Voting Rights Bill of 1965, indicate that that position was, I think, wrong. This isn't because the Administration and the Attorney General didn't believe in voting rights. They were looking at what they considered to be politically possible. They thought this could give way. I felt it was quite important and I fought very hard for this. I lost that battle then.

Some of us, a good many of us, in fact, the majority on the committee, at one time, were ready to report to the House from the full Committee the subcommittee bill. This was, I suppose, the most dramatic week of the House proceedings. This was when the Chairman, representing the Administration, held over the hearings on a day-to-day basis waiting for a majority consensus to develop on the part of the Administration for an Administration substitute bill which was being concocted by Congressman [William M.] McCulloch, the Republican from Ohio. In the meantime, we were asked to come in and we did. I talked with the President. Several of us talked to the President. The President was somewhat more congenial than others on this matter. Some people felt very desperately about it. They had some of the columnists including [Joseph W.] Joe Alsop and others who are more or less, in questions of this type, likely to be in the Administration's hip pocket, criticize us. [John V.] Lindsay and myself were under criticism from Alsop in his column.

But the President himself was quite congenial and I thought was absolutely correct in the way he handled matters, politically, as far as we were concerned. He suggested that he knew there were some of us who, because of our districts, would not be able to go along with the compromise bill. He said he knew there were others of us who, because of conscience, just our individual positions, would not go along

with it. But those of us who could--he wanted to help them out because this was their judgment, their political judgment of what they could do. We met again. This was, I think, on a Friday or Saturday morning. We met again next Monday after they had the compromise bill worked out. I remember they had [Nicholas deB.] Katzenbach in there and I was paid a rather dubious sort of compliment by the President's referring to the Attorney General as Attorney General Kastenmeier, rather than Katzenbach, the same type of slip on the part of the President which, at least once, the present President has made.

In any event, some of us continued to perservere in what then became a minority position. I felt it was necessary to create the greatest pressure for a better bill, a stronger bill. Actually, that bill, as it was passed out by the full Committee, even though I supported the subcommittee bill which was even stronger, was infinitely stronger than the first Administration bill sent down. Many people then felt, earlier in the year when the first Administration bill was sent down in May or June, that that bill would be compromised downward. So we came out with a much stronger bill. I suppose all of us view history through our own eyes and in a sense of self-justification, but I would look at the opposition to the Administration as quite justified and useful, actually, in terms of the ultimate result in getting a strong civil rights measure passed.

GRELE: In May of 1961, the President disavowed a series of bills on two constitutional amendments drawn up by Congressman Cellar and Senator [Joseph S.] Clark. Do you have any recollections of this?

KASTENMEIER: Constitutional amendments on civil rights?

GRELE: Yes. In May of '61 they submitted two constitutional amendments and four pieces of legislation, or said they were going to, and the Administration disavowed any connection with these proposals. I believe Senator Clark was quite vehement about it, claiming that he had been asked to draw up legislation by the Administration.

KASTENMEIER: I must say I don't recall Senator Clark, or Chairman Celler, introducing these particular bills. I must say this was a period, May 1961, during which there may have been a misunderstanding between the Administration and certain congressional people who were strongly for civil rights. My recollection doesn't touch those questions.

GRELE: I believe you are a member of the Democratic Study Group?

KASTENMEIER: Yes.

GRELE: Could you recollect for us some of the general opinions that this group held of President Kennedy and his program?

KASTENMEIER: Only very generally speaking can I do so. There are others who could, such as our leaders, John Blatnik or Chet Holifield, who worked much more closely with President Kennedy. These were the last two chairmen of the group before Frank Thompson. Any of these three fellows, could comment more cogently on this question. I think, generally speaking, that the Democratic Study Group viewed John Kennedy and the Administration proposals they got from John Kennedy as worthy of support. If I sat and thought, I might be able to conceive of something sent down by the Administration which they would not support or might even oppose, but I would have a very hard time doing so. Ordinarily speaking, they felt, the philosophy was that the Democratic Study Group, to a very large measure, when you had a Democratic President such as we predicted we would have, would be in support of administration positions and proposals and be the instrument for these proposals in the House. This was necessary, they felt, because often you have many Democrats who are against the normal liberal, democratic progressive aspects of the platform and oppose the Administration position to bills. So they felt quite comfortable in supporting the Administration position. There may have been one or more that I do not now recall that would not be supported by this study group. I can't think what they would be.

GRELE: You ran for reelection in 1962. Do you think that the Cuban missile crisis was the important issue of that campaign, or didn't it have an effect on the local level?

KASTENMEIER: Yes, actually it overshadowed other aspects. It was critical to the campaign, although it's almost impossible to measure precisely how or in what connection. I mean psychologically how it affected people. I think it did tend to benefit the incumbents.

I remember the President was coming to Wisconsin, and I met him in Chicago, at O'Hare Field, I think. There were quite a few people there and he had just left downtown Chicago.

He came up alone--there were several other people following-- and came and talked with me. I was to fly up with him on the plane. He said he would not be coming. He was going back to Washington. Now this was at the time that the Cuban missile crisis was developing in secret but was not yet public. I guess the networks had taken film of this. He is talking to me the five or ten seconds of it at the Chicago airport. It was often used in connection with documentaries or news relating to the missile crisis, just because it signaled an instant in the campaign where the campaign had to give way because of preoccupation with this national security problem. I don't think it had very much to do with my campaign, but it didn't hurt me, surely. It may have even helped.

GRELE: In July 1962, you protested alleged American atrocities in Vietnam to President Kennedy. Did you ever receive any reply or answer? Do you recall the incident?

KASTENMEIER: I think I received a reply from Secretary [Robert S.] McNamara, Secretary of Defense. I can't now tell you, it was several years ago, what the reply was, honestly.

GRELE: As a spokesman on disarmament and nuclear detente, what were your opinions of the President's policy, in particular the Test Ban Treaty?

KASTENMEIER: I thought the Test Ban Treaty was magnificent.

GRELE: Were you consulted on it at all?

KASTENMEIER: No, I wouldn't expect to be. First of all, it was a fairly technical thing which has to be worked out with foreign powers and the consent and advice has to be given by the Senate, not members of the House of Representatives. Many of us, including myself, used it as a political question in terms of speaking out on it or giving support to the President, but not in terms of a formal relationship of advice or anything of the sort. I had no technical advice to give the President, but I felt that both politically and in actuality in terms of what it meant in policy it was extremely important. I think it was perhaps the finest thing the Kennedy Administration did.

GRELE: Do you recall any other incidents when you met John Kennedy, talked with him, conferred with him?

KASTENMEIER: No, the references we made here pretty much describe my total contact with the late President. I met him once or twice more casually when particular things were not discussed, that is, when the conversation was very casual, not related to a specific problem that we were meeting to discuss at the time. I remember one time I was quite surprised. I remember his first State of the Union Message to the Congress. I ran into him as he was going through the Capitol, one of the Capitol halls, I think on the first floor. He stopped and we chatted for what seemed to me quite a little while, considering that he was going up and he had to give this talk. He remembered me and he talked about my district. This was when he first came into office. He was, I thought, unusually calm, cool, and his willingness to just chat when he must have been under enormous pressure to go upstairs in an instant or two, and to have to go down the aisleway in the great House of Representatives and stand before the entire Congress and collection of American political notables, with television cameras, before the whole country and give the State of the Union address, I thought it was really a remarkable thing that he was this calm and detached.

GRELE: Do you recall any other incidents?

KASTENMEIER: Actually, I don't. There may have been one or two others. My memory isn't as sharp on things of this sort as I sometimes wish it were. I think, really, I told you pretty much what my relations, especially my political relations, were with the late President.

I would say that I certainly came to be a great admirer of the President. He didn't always take positions I agreed with, but I felt that his growth in office, enormous capacity, and his personality, insofar as it's related to other things, was something to behold. I thought that he would surely have been one of the great Presidents.

GRELE: Do you have any final comment that you would like to make before I turn the machine off?

KASTENMEIER: No, I think I just made them.

GRELE: Thank you.