

John J. Burns, Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 11/25/1969
Administrative Information

Creator: John J. Burns
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Biographical Note

Burns was Mayor of Binghamton, NY (1958-1966); chairman of the New York State Democratic Party (1965-1973); delegate to the Democratic National Convention (1968); and a Robert Kennedy campaign worker (1968). In this interview, he discusses the Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) decision to run for president in 1968, and the presidential campaign in New York State; RFK's relationship with Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Johnson's decision not to run for reelection in 1968; negotiations with the Eugene J. McCarthy campaign over electoral delegates, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

John J. Burns

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John J. Burns—RFK#1

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First of Three Oral History Interviews

with

John J. Burns

November 25, 1969
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Why don't you begin by remembering what you can about your conversations with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] between '65 and let's say middle '67 about his own plans for the future?

BURNS: Well, let's see, we never really talked about his running for president too much during the period of '65 and '66. He would say to me things like, "You know you ought to get to know other state chairmen around the country, and you ought to keep in touch with people and develop relationships with people around the country. That would be good." It was sort of unspoken—in other words, he never said to me, "John, I'm going to run for president. I want you to do this or that." He more or less knew we were sort of on the same wavelength and that I naturally hoped he'd run for president someday, and that we would work towards that goal, but not in a sort of an outspoken, planned way. And from time to time he'd say, "You ought to get together with so and so from another state," or that sort of thing. Of course, when he would say those things I'd become more aware than ever that we had something looking to the future, that he would someday run for president.

During that period, of course, the early days of Johnson's [Lyndon Baines Johnson] Administration, he didn't have any idea that he'd run against Johnson, and I think everybody assumed that Johnson would run for re-election again. It was only as a gradual thing, particularly involving the Vietnam War, that this tremendous anti-Johnson sentiment

developed, and that the Senator became the focal point for the anti-war people around the country.

Also, he developed, during that same period, a tremendous relationship to the disenfranchised, to the blacks and the Mexicans and the Puerto Ricans and others in the country. He became their unofficial spokesman, and he saw quicker than anyone else that the programs that he had supported, and that President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] had supported, and Johnson had passed through the Congress, weren't resulting in the kind of tranquility within our nation that all had hoped. I think he became convinced that they were too little and too late and that they were badly administered, and he became outspoken in that sense too. He became the focal point within our party of the more liberal, dovish, progressive group that became, as each day went by, more disenchanted with President Johnson. But it was a gradual thing, so we never had a meeting some day and said, "Okay, we're going to try to dump Johnson," and that sort of thing. It never happened. I mean, as each day went by someone would contact him—I know, as I found out subsequently—and once in a while at the time he'd show me a letter from somebody or tell me that somebody had called him and asked him to run for President. I know that he was very reluctant to; he really didn't want to in the sense that he didn't want to become a divisive force within the nation, within the party. He was really distressed, and he had tremendous mixed emotions about what he should do.

When he finally decided he would, he did it against the advice of many of his close advisers. I wish now that I had been one that had urged him to get into it before McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] did, although I was not one of those; I was advising him not to. I think if he had, McCarthy wouldn't have gotten into it and he would have been elected President. I think he would have been elected President anyway, but it would have meant a lot easier time for him in the primaries.

It wasn't until we were.... Let's see, it was in the early part of 1968 that there was a meeting in Washington of state chairmen from around the nation. I think the National Committee [Democratic National Committee] called a meeting. I think they had half the state chairmen there and they were going to have the other half some other time, so I was naturally invited down. The National Committee was under the complete control of the Johnson people and they wanted to know who I was going to bring—I don't know if this is relevant or not, but...

GREENE: Yes, it is.

BURNS: ...I wanted to bring John English [John F. English], who's a close political associate of mine and close friend, and very close to Senator Kennedy as well. In fact he's one of Senator Kennedy's earliest supporters in New York State. And they, for some reason, really didn't want me to bring English, they called me two or three times saying, "Why are you bringing English?" And I said, "Well, I have a right to bring anybody I want. If you don't like it, it's too bad."

Senator Kennedy got a big kick out of that because he knew, as I did, that they were very suspicious of him and that the Johnson Administration, through all of its agents from the National Committee or wherever, were always watching very closely what Kennedy was

doing and what the people around him were doing. What people who were known to be close to him were doing.

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So, Jack and I went to Washington; we set up a suite of rooms and we had an open house for about three days. We went to the meetings, which were perfunctory things that didn't amount to much; and then we entertained and talked with all these leaders from around the country. We found quite a bit of support—this was long before, of course, it was known that Johnson wouldn't run—for Robert Kennedy there and a lot of interest in his candidacy, even though he had not himself indicated in any way that he would run. We were very subtle, saying, "We're very close to Kennedy. He's getting a lot of people after him to run but we don't know what he ought to do. What do you think he ought to do?" that sort of thing. And I remember taking the chairman of Oregon over to see the Senator; the chairman of Oregon urged him to run and pledged his support to him if he did run. The Senator thanked him for his interest and showed no indication whether he'd do it or not. The chairman of Ohio—we didn't get him over there; we were trying to get him out to breakfast with the Senator, and he had to catch a plane home and couldn't make it—was quite interested in the Senator; and other states were very interested.

We found that all the time we were there it was like a comedy in a way. The National Committee guys would hang around our suite all the time seeing who was coming and going and eavesdropping on our conversations. Of course, we knew what was going on with them; they were very unfriendly to us and very suspicious of us. On the surface they were friendly but they didn't take us into their confidence in any way, and I can't say that I blame them. That would be in, let's say, January or February of '68 when that happened. We, of course, didn't know that he was going to run. It was only at the time of the New Hampshire primary when he finally decided to run. When he did decide—we knew like a day ahead, or we knew, I think, when they were forty-eight hours ahead that he was very seriously considering it—Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] got a hold of me and a few of the others, Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] and Jack English, and asked us to put together what he calls a "script" of what we think would happen if he announced for president. "Where would the power in the party in the state go?"

So, Jerry and I sat down and we wrote a script of what we should do, how we should contact the various leaders around the state and where each one would land, whether they'd be with us or with Johnson and so forth. And it was amazing how accurate it was. It turned out almost exactly the way we called it, and we carried out this script the way we called it. For example, Joe Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle] from Erie County was number one on the list, and we called in Steingut [Stanley Steingut] of Brooklyn, and different ones. The way we had the order that we wanted to talk to them. We did it that way, and it worked out pretty well. You were going to ask me a question?

GREENE: Well, I was going to ask you—you said it turned out the way you had assumed it would—do you mean by the end, by the time of the assassination, this is the way people had lined up, or as soon as he announced?

BURNS: Oh, no, what I mean is by the time that we were putting together the delegates pledged to Robert Kennedy to run in the primary. By the time that worked out, why, we had pledges of support from practically every county chairman that

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we had figured we would. We didn't get the ones we figured we wouldn't, and even those that we thought would be wishy-washy turned out to be that way. It just came out pretty well the way we called it.

See, what we did, immediately I called every county chairman—not at the point where he said he might announce, but when he announced. As soon as he announced we got on that phone; we stayed on it for a couple of days. We talked to everybody—meaning every county chairman and every important leader—and asked for their support. We put together a list of county chairmen who immediately came out for him and then we'd add to it, as time went on, those who finally came around to support him. You see, in some areas the county chairman is the leader and can speak for himself; in other areas the county chairman is sort of a nominal figure, and he has to call together his executive committee and that sort of thing and then take a vote. So, they didn't all come out at once, but we did do quite well.

Then we immediately set up the New York State program, which was a very substantial one. John English and I ran it; Carter Burden played a major role in it; a lot of other people did—Ronnie Eldridge [Ronnie M. Eldridge]—and it was a big operation. Jack English and I were in charge more in the political end of it, in dealing with the regular party organization, and not with the other factors like voters, and lists, and independent people, and that sort of thing.

We got mostly the party organization, setting up the names of the delegates from each district who would run pledged to Robert Kennedy, and also making sure that state committeemen supporting Robert Kennedy were running for state committee because the state committee, subsequent to the primary, would nominate or elect delegates-at-large to the National Convention. And at the time of the Senator's assassination we were in good shape. There was going to be a tough primary here.

It was planned that he'd come back here right away, and for two weeks just really blitz the State of New York. We had already planned his trips—Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] was in on that, and Jerry Bruno, and a number of others—and we had everything lined up for a tremendous campaign. We had a big mailing all ready to go into every Democratic home; we had a big rally at Madison Square Garden planned; we had a lot of television and radio—I wasn't in on that, but I understand that Steve Smith had all that planned. So, it was right at the key moment for New York State that his death occurred, where he would have come in from California, having won the primary there, with a real head of steam going and really blitzed the State of New York. We thought that we had a good shot at it. We didn't think we'd carry every delegate—there were some areas that it was impossible—but we thought we'd carry the great majority of them.

When we first started out we didn't get a good reaction in a lot of areas about Robert Kennedy running for president. There were a lot of people that thought he was very brash in thinking he should be president. Democrats, I'm talking about. It was his campaigning in other states in the primaries that began to turn that, and by the time he had won California the

feeling had been changing. We feel confident that had he lived and come in here that he would have carried a great deal of the state; out of 190 delegate votes to the convention he would have had somewhere between 150 and 170 of them, in my opinion.

But getting back to your original question, we never really spoke much about his running for president *per se* during the years '65, '66, or '67. We just always sort of had the feeling we wanted to project him and help him—he projected himself, I shouldn't say “we

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projected him”—to help him in every way we could, both in the state and in our relations with other state Democratic organizations, so that when the time came that he did make the big step, we'd be in good shape.

GREENE: Did you do any soundings in this period, surveys or polls, to get an idea of where his strength was in the state or did you get that mainly by talking to people?

BURNS: We did some. We were doing some polling of our own. We didn't have a poll taken, that is Jack English and I didn't—I don't think Steve did either—of the state. This is during the time that he was in the primaries you're talking about, I presume?

GREENE: No. Actually, I meant prior to that, through the whole period of '65 to '67.

BURNS: No, we had no polls here. We watched the Gallup poll, which showed him doing very well against Johnson. I don't think the Senator had any polls. There would be polls taken in localities within the state on other candidates, and often within those polls we'd have them throw in, “Do you think Robert Kennedy is doing a good job as Senator?” That sort of thing. And he always came out well in those polls.

GREENE: Was he very interested in this kind of stuff? Did he ask you about that?.

BURNS: He was always interested in polls, yes, but very confidentially though. I mean I'd tell him about it confidentially and I'd give him the information confidentially. Actually, he was more interested in the governmental aspect of his position, trying to accomplish something for the people and trying to do something about the grave problems, which he understood and few did in this country. He was more interested in that aspect than a lot of the day-to-day political stuff; he was bored with politics to a great extent.

Where he'd have to meet with a bunch of district leaders or county chairmen and that sort of thing, he really didn't like that at all. He was always friendly with them, but he was impatient with many politicians. He was impatient because he saw that the party was not responding to the great needs of our country; that we were sort of a “politics as usual” bunch; that we were always fighting among ourselves and within the Democratic Party here in the State of New York; that there was always jockeying around for position; and we always

seemed to come up with a lot of mediocre people for high office. He was very concerned about that but he gave most of his attention and the priority of his time to the issues themselves and how he could apply himself as Senator to helping to correct the big problems that faced our country. He depended on some of us to advise him on the political aspects and to get him involved where it was necessary, but he didn't like to do it on a day-to-day basis. He depended a lot on Steve Smith, on me—within New York State politics—and on John English and a number of other people. Jerry Bruno. Jerry was of tremendous assistance to him. Jerry is a very unique guy who has an unusual capacity to get a feel of how things are going in a given area. He could go into a given area and see how the Senator's doing and

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how his relationship with the leaders are and all that sort of thing. He kept the Senator posted and kept me posted. We sort of kept each other tuned. I worked very closely with Jerry during those years.

GREENE: Did you ever have any problems with him, personality problems?

BURNS: Who? Jerry? No, never. He was a tough guy—he was a pusher, you know—he was a tough guy on a lot of people but he always did it on the basis of what's best for Senator Kennedy, never for himself. Jerry and I always got along very well.

GREENE: Did the Senator talk to you at all about the political repercussions of positions he was taking on issues or projects he had in mind?

BURNS: Yeah, he talked to me. And I remember when he came out with his big statement on Vietnam. He said to me, "It's going to hurt me, isn't it?" Because at that time it was not a popular position—it's far more popular today to be a dove than it was then. He said, "It's going to hurt me, and what do you think?" And I said, "Well, it will hurt you for a while but over a period of time you'll be proven correct." And he said, "That's the way I feel about it but I'd feel that anyway, no matter whether it hurts me or whether it doesn't." He said, "It's true. Somebody has to do something about it."

He didn't ask me first—or anyone as far as I know—and decide to make the statement based on what's best for him politically. He did it because he thought it was the right thing to do at that point in history, and that he had an obligation to do it. Then he said, "Well, now you guys have to tell me what it's going to do to me politically, and how do we handle it."

We did have trouble in the party. I remember one chairman—a fellow who's not the chairman now, his name was Larry Delaney [Lawrence Delaney], the chairman of Suffolk County—called me up. He was going to have resolutions passed through his county committee and have meetings out there supporting the President. That's just one example; there were a number of Democrats really in a state of shock throughout the state that were supporting the President. You see, within a political party the old-liners feel that it's a cardinal sin to go against an incumbent President—right or wrong, the party is supposed to

support him, in their opinion—and here Senator Kennedy was departing from that tradition and they were very upset about it. There were some areas, like the regular party organization in Rochester and quite a lot of places, who were very concerned about it but as time went on, of course, they saw that he was right.

GREENE: Do you remember any discussion in the same '65 to '67 period about his trying to go for the vice-presidential nomination?

BURNS: '64, '65?

GREENE: Yes, well, once he became a Senator.

BURNS: No. When Lyndon Johnson was the President and there was no vice president

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and Lyndon was arranging the '64 Convention [1964 Democratic National Convention], I remember him describing his meeting with Johnson. Johnson told him that nobody presently in the Cabinet would be qualified or considered or something, which Senator Kennedy felt was strictly aimed at him; and I think most political observers felt the same way.

I don't know how to describe it, but his relationship with Johnson was not a happy one. He told us about it objectively though, you know, he didn't editorialize in any way. He just told us about how Johnson handled that situation, and how he then decided to run for Senator from the State of New York. Once he was elected Senator he never mentioned to me that he was interested in Vice President. I wasn't aware of that if he was.

GREENE: There was no talk around among other people that this is what he ought to try to do?

BURNS: Well, I don't remember. There might have been. Maybe Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] or somebody like that. I think maybe Bill talked about that to some extent. I don't think the Senator ever took it seriously. In the first place, during those early years of his term as Senator I don't think he saw himself getting on the national ticket at all. I think he figured that Johnson would run again and that he would probably support Johnson. In that event, why, it would be entirely up to Johnson to name his own Vice President. It could be that they felt at one time that Johnson would be smart enough to name Robert Kennedy and ask Robert Kennedy to run for Vice President.

Frankly, I don't think he would have run for Vice President with Lyndon Johnson. I don't think he'd want to put himself in the position because he knew what kind of a President Johnson was in terms of a personality. I'm not talking about the issues because we didn't at that time know how bad the Vietnam thing would become. He saw that Hubert Humphrey's [Hubert H. Humphrey] dilemma was that he, who had once been one of the great liberal leaders of our country, was being just a spokesman for the President and had no independence of any kind. He couldn't take positions on issues of his own. That was one of

the things that finally defeated Hubert for the presidency, because he didn't become independent of the President. I think he felt that a Vice President shouldn't run with a President and then be his own man, that the President is entitled to have a Vice President that reflects his views. So, I think he felt that it would have been a conflict of interest for him and that he couldn't live with that kind of a situation.

GREENE: Do you know if this is the way he felt in '64 too, when there was a lot of talk of this?

BURNS: No, I don't know. I really don't know if that's the way he felt in '64; I'm not sure about that.

GREENE: Well, maybe—just to jump around a little bit before we get back to '68—we could talk a little bit about the Senate race in '68, which was kind of an involved situation?

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BURNS: Yeah.

GREENE: Do you remember when you first started to talk about this with the Senator or his associates, as far as who they favored?

BURNS: Yeah. We didn't talk to Senator Kennedy himself so much because he was busy running for president, and he was out of the state a great deal, and he was in the primaries, and he was really having a very hectic, overwhelming time. We talked to Steve Smith and others around him. Even before he ran for president, I'm sure he was interested in who was going to run, and he had talked to some people at an early date about if they were interested in running, that sort of thing. And he'd visit with various people about it, such as Paul O'Dwyer [Peter Paul O'Dwyer]. Percy Sutton [Percy E. Sutton] was one that he was quite interested in. Wait a minute, I have to sign this.

GREENE: I'll turn this off.

[INTERRUPTION]

BURNS: By the time we nominated, or designated.... Well, under our law, which was then the first time we had operated under this law—it's a relatively new law—a state committee would meet and designate its candidate for state-wide office. For several weeks before our meeting it looked like the Kennedy forces would back Percy Sutton, who is a black president of the borough of Manhattan, a liberal, and a good supporter of Senator Kennedy's. He was very well satisfied with that but he was not involved in any of the day-to-day discussions about it because he was busy, away from the state, running for president. And Steve was away a lot but we kept him posted. Jack English and I did a lot of the talking on that.

We had control of the state committee—we had the votes—but we didn't have the kind of control where you just call people and say, "Okay. You'll vote for so-and-so." It took time. Brooklyn would have to meet among themselves—the people from Brooklyn—and we'd have to get their leaders to get their people to agree to a candidate and that sort of thing.

It looked like we could get Sutton put across and at the last minute Sutton pulled out. He felt that it was a major undertaking to try to run against Javits [Jacob K. Javits] to begin with, and that without the kind of money that he felt he needed he just thought he'd go down to defeat. He thought it would be a bad thing to have a black man defeated, particularly if he was going to be defeated by a large margin, which was quite possible. So he came to us and said that he finally decided not to run.

By that time Resnick [Joseph Yale Resnick], Congressman Resnick from the Hudson Valley, who was very anti-Kennedy and very pro-Johnson, pro-Humphrey, had announced he was going to run and had already started campaigning. We just couldn't let the nomination go to Resnick. O'Dwyer was interested in running but he never tried to get the state committee designation because he was affiliated with the McCarthy group. You see, he had committed to McCarthy before Senator Kennedy got into the picture for the presidential nomination, and an awful lot of the McCarthy people were behind O'Dwyer. So we couldn't give it to O'Dwyer; he knew enough not to try to get it through the state committee.

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We had to find someone who was a Kennedy person, who was associated as a Kennedy person, who would run as a running mate of Kennedy in the primary. Overnight, just before the state committee meeting, we got Gene Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson]. Then there was another Congressman in the picture, and that was Otis Pike [Otis G. Pike]. Otis is from Long Island and he was never a friend of Robert Kennedy, although he'd become a little more friendly with him during the time the Senator was in the Senate than he had been before. But he worked hard to prevent Senator Kennedy from getting the nomination for the Senate in 1964. He was Stratton's [Samuel Studdiford Stratton] campaign manager. Stratton was his only opposition in the convention.

Pike thought that he had a pretty good shot at it because he was getting a lot of people that were for Kennedy because they didn't want to go for the McCarthy candidate; they didn't want to go for Resnick, who was so anti-Kennedy, so it looked like it might go to Pike by default, or to Resnick.

Overnight, Gene Nickerson decided that he would do it. I believe Gene was doing it more as a service to Robert Kennedy and his chances than he was to himself, because Gene is a very knowledgeable politician and he knew what his chances against Javits would be, particularly without a lot of dough. So, overnight we turned it around and working into the early hours of the morning, getting practically no sleep, by the time the state committee meeting was held we had enough support for Gene Nickerson between the Kennedy forces—I mean those really committed to Kennedy—plus some that were leaning towards Kennedy to put Nickerson over. Resnick got a little over 25 percent of the vote so he was allowed to go on the ballot. Then O'Dwyer went and got ten thousand signatures throughout the state and he got on the ballot; it was a three-way race.

The only one spending any money was Resnick, who spent money like a drunken sailor. He spent about a million dollars. He had full-page ads all over the state in every newspaper in the big cities as well as the little towns. He had a lot of television. He had a tremendous telephone campaign, which must have cost him a fortune. The whole thing was a pro-Johnson, anti-Kennedy thing, and he was a hawk on the war. By this time the feeling in the public on the war had changed, turning against the President; the Tet offensive really had done a great deal to do that, so Resnick was not too popular. He came across there as a mean, nasty guy anyway; he wasn't very friendly. He ran quite a long campaign.

Nickerson pinned all his hopes on Kennedy. He didn't spend much money, although we had one thing going for Gene that never hit the public. That is that we had a well-done printed piece that was going to be mailed to every Democratic home in the state. It was a pro-Kennedy piece and we had it arranged so that in each district the names of the candidates running for Kennedy would be on the piece, as well as Kennedy's name and Nickerson's and a picture of Nickerson. It never went out. It was all set to go, and then the Senator was assassinated and we just stopped, of course. It never went out, so Gene didn't get the benefit of that either.

Then, of course, when the Senator was killed we stopped campaigning. Our troops didn't campaign anymore—just sporadically in some places they wanted to win anyway, they wanted to win the delegates. There were some public statements made, that sort of thing, trying to get support for our candidates for the delegates seats, and we did win quite a few anyway. But we didn't have any troops out in the field on election day, nor did the

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Humphrey people. Humphrey had shut his organization down, told them not to do anything in New York.

The only people out working on primary day were the McCarthy people. And they were very effective anyway—even if the others had all worked they were still very effective. McCarthy people were bright, zealous people. They had a lot of college kids, and they had all kinds of liberal, dedicated people out working the polling places. So, they won a lot of seats to the convention, and they carried in Paul O'Dwyer at the same time. That's about how that happened.

You know, it's all conjecture what would have happened, but I think that Nickerson would have had a good chance of winning had Senator Kennedy lived—if we'd put on that kind of campaign—because he would have traveled with Kennedy, too, and appeared with him at different places throughout the state during that two-week period. I think people would have been more attuned to the fact that he was Kennedy's associate candidate.

GREENE: Well, I have a couple of questions on this whole thing that I think we could get down in a little bit more detail. I had heard that Nickerson was the Senator's original choice, that he prevailed upon him to run several weeks before this whole incident that you describe occurred, and that Nickerson had refused. Do you know if that's true?

BURNS: Yeah, that could be true. He thought very highly of Nickerson. I think that he

would have been satisfied with Sutton, but I think that he would have liked Nickerson. Nickerson, I believe, had considered it earlier and then decided not to run, but I think one of the reasons was that he was a close friend of Sutton, that he didn't want to pre-empt Sutton's chances of getting our nomination. He stepped aside for Sutton and I think Kennedy agreed with him. It could be that Kennedy sensed—maybe he had had some discussion with Sutton earlier that made him believe it—that maybe Sutton wouldn't go through with it anyway and wanted Nickerson to win.

GREENE: You made an upstate tour, I know, to find out what Sutton's chances would be up in the upstate area and your findings were not particularly favorable to Sutton. How much of an impact did that have, do you think, on his decision to drop out?

BURNS: Well, I think that Sutton was a realist. I think he felt that, first of all, because he was black he'd have problems, which unfortunately was probably true. But I think that the money was the main problem with Sutton, that he couldn't raise enough money to put on a reasonable campaign.

GREENE: What about the Liberal nomination? Had you done anything to try to get that for him? That was another reason he gave for dropping out.

BURNS: Let me think. The Liberals wound up endorsing Javits; they liked Javits very much. Alex Rose plays very close to his vest and probably didn't give Sutton an indication of what he would do. My guess is that if Senator Kennedy

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lived, then we might have gotten the Liberal support for our candidate, but I just can't say that for sure.

GREENE: Who was in on that telephoning marathon the night before the state committee met, besides yourself and English?

BURNS: Jerry Bruno. Let's see, that was mostly it.

GREENE: Was Bill vanden Heuvel?

BURNS: Yes, let's see; Bill was there.

GREENE: How was he on things like that?

BURNS: Well, Bill would come and go; he never stuck with anything too much. A very bright, able guy, but we didn't give him any assignment on that, so he didn't have to do it. He'd pitch in where he could and help and then he'd move to

something else, but really you see the state committee wouldn't respond necessarily to Bill vanden Heuvel, too much. They'd respond more to the chairman himself, or whoever the chairman happened to be; it happened to be me. They would respond to the chairman or a fellow chairman like Jack English or somebody that they had more relations with over the years—and with Bruno because he was on the Senator's staff and was sort of his representative with a lot of these upstate people. Bruno had developed some very good contacts and very good working relationships with upstate area people, and he worked on those.

Of course, in some counties, you know, they'd be split. Like Oneida County, for example, Jerry had a lot to do with helping elect the Mayor of Utica. Some of the state committeemen were with him and some were with the other side; he'd call each one individually or he'd get the Mayor to call each one, each state committeeman. So, there's a lot of work involved but it had to be done by just a few of us because just a voice on the phone doesn't mean anything in a case like that; there has to be somebody close in that they respond to. I don't remember whether Bill was in on that. I presume, maybe, he was.

GREENE: Did you talk about the Senate race much with Robert Kennedy once Nickerson was established as the candidate?

BURNS: Yeah, he seemed to be quite satisfied with that and he knew, of course, that the money that... You see, if Robert Kennedy didn't run for President he could have raised money for the candidate for the Senate, but because he was running for the President himself he needed the money desperately for himself. So he knew that the candidate for the Senate would have to understand that and he regretted it very much but it was a fact of life. Nickerson understood it; he went into it with a full understanding of that. But he liked Nickerson in terms of his liberal position on issues and his ability—his administrative ability is very well known and respected—so he was satisfied with Nickerson.

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GREENE: There was one other thing in that period, kind of peripheral to the presidential race, and that's this contest for the speakership in the Assembly in New York.

BURNS: Oh yes, that was back in '65.

GREENE: No, I mean in '68 when Travia [Anthony J. Travia] was supposed to be taking the judgeship and there was going to be a wrestling match for his position.

BURNS: Yes, right. Right. I was very much involved in that. That had a lot to do with Brooklyn politics. Brooklyn, you know, elects more members of the state legislature than any other county; therefore, they come into any kind of a contention for speaker or leader with a pretty strong position, but they don't have enough votes, by far, to elect anybody themselves; they have to have alliances. Under the law, the speaker has to be elected by a majority of the whole body, including all the Republicans or, if there are any, independents, and the Democrats—150 of them. You'd have to have 76 votes

in order to win the speakership, so that anybody who could control enough votes to prevent the Democrat front-runner from getting 76 votes could throw the thing into a very uncertain state of affairs.

That happened in '65, as you may recall, when we voted for weeks until we finally solved it by Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] having a pact with Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] where a lot of Republicans voted for Travia and Zaretzki [Joseph L. Zaretzki].

What we were trying to work out was to have Steingut, who wanted to be the speaker—he was then the Brooklyn leader and had been the leading contender for it in '65. He had more Democratic votes than Travia but lost out because of the arrangement that was made with Travia-Wagner forces with Rockefeller. He still wanted it, so he was very favorable towards Speaker Travia becoming a federal judge so that there would be an opening and then he could get it. Meade Esposito [Meade H. Esposito], who was then a district leader but probably the most powerful and able district leader in Brooklyn, was very much in his corner because he wanted to become the leader of Brooklyn.

I had arranged meetings with them with the Senator a few times. The Senator was, first of all, very cautious about recommending anybody for federal judge unless he passed the muster with the Bar Association [American Bar Association]. So, he had what they call a quiet, informal request to the Bar Association and Travia passed it. He wasn't so sure Travia would pass it, as a matter of fact, and he was really surprised he did. He liked Travia and thought that Travia had been honest with him and that he'd been fair with him, and that if he did qualify, then he was perfectly willing to recommend him.

The other figure in this triangle was Mo Weinstein [Moses M. Weinstein], who was the leader of Queens and was majority leader under Travia, by Travia's appointment, in the Assembly. He wanted it just as bad as Steingut and felt that he had earned it by virtue of having been majority leader. He had a number of assemblymen for him, particularly from his own county, so that if he held out Steingut couldn't get it; if Steingut held out, Weinstein couldn't get it, and we would have gotten into another kind of a bad situation such as we had in '65. Senator Kennedy wanted to avoid that if he could.

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I arranged on two occasions.... I remember one night, first, the Senator had to appear at some public function at the Commodore Hotel, so I took a suite at the Commodore. I had Weinstein standing by up there in a suite, and we went from the dinner that the Senator spoke at upstairs and talked to Weinstein. The Senator said that he wanted to get an agreement between Weinstein and Steingut over who would get the support so that he could go ahead with Travia's appointment, and Weinstein would not agree. Then we all went over to the Dryden East Hotel where I had another room set aside. I had Steingut, Weinstein, Senator Kennedy and me in the room and we talked about this. We talked around about, for about ten minutes—which the Senator never likes; he wanted to get right down to cases, you know—and we put it right to Weinstein and he wouldn't agree. All we wanted was to have them agree to abide by the decision of a caucus, in other words have a caucus of all the Democrats and then whoever won the caucus would have the support of everybody in the caucus. Steingut agreed to that.

[INTERRUPTION]

GREENE: Well, what we were talking about is why Weinstein didn't want to agree to a caucus.

BURNS: Weinstein would not agree to a caucus. In my opinion, he felt (a) that Steingut had more votes than he had in the caucus, but not 76 votes, and (b) that he, Weinstein, could make a deal with Rockefeller the way it was made in '65. So, he wasn't about to throw away his chance to become the speaker; he wanted it very badly.

We never did get an agreement on that, but in the meantime Travia became a judge, so, at the time of the Senator's death the question was not resolved. It was only resolved, incidentally, by the fact that we lost control of the Assembly. We elect a minority leader by virtue of a majority of the caucus, and that's how Steingut was elected.

GREENE: As I understood it, the appointment was held up along with a lot of others by the President when Robert Kennedy entered the race. Is that true?

BURNS: Yeah. Travia, with the knowledge of Kennedy, went to Ed Weisl [Edwin L. Weisl, Sr.] and other...

GREENE: Johnson.

BURNS: ...Johnson people in the state, and asked them to prevail on the President—and so did Steingut, I'm sure, use his influence with them to get the President to go ahead with it anyway; and the President did.

GREENE: And there was also, as I understood it, a question of the timing of Travia's resignation which Weinstein was using as a support for himself. Wasn't he saying that if Travia resigned while the legislature was still in session then the new speaker would be elected, as opposed to if he held off?

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BURNS: Right. You're right there; I'd forgotten about that. That's true. If Travia had taken office as a judge and resigned as speaker during the session, then the first order of the business of the Assembly the next day would be to elect a speaker, and if that had happened we might well have gotten into that impasse that we described here. Whereas if Travia waited until the session was over then Weinstein would become the acting speaker under the rules of the Assembly.

If there had been a special session—that can only be called by the Governor, incidentally—the first order of business would have been to select a new speaker. There was no special session but there was that situation and it was a very troublesome one to all of us. We weren't particularly interested in having Travia leave during this session because we had

not solved the problem and we didn't want to have—particularly with the Senator running for president and so forth—that kind of a national focus on the problem in the state party that we couldn't solve. So, we were privately for Travia not taking it then or not getting it that early, and having it timed in Washington so that it wouldn't happen before the session was over.

GREENE: That must have presented some problems with Steingut, didn't it?

BURNS: It did, yeah. Steingut wanted it right away but as it turned out we didn't have to do anything overtly against Steingut's interest to change the timing because that's just the way it worked out in the Senate. Oh, I think I called Joe Dolan about it a couple of times, asked him to see what he could find out from the committee of the senate, in terms of the timing, to protect the Senator on it.

GREENE: Yes. What did he find out, do you know?

BURNS: I've forgotten now but I think he found out that the Senate would cooperate. I believe that's what happened. I really don't remember but I think that's what he found out, that we had the situation under control.

GREENE: All right, then let's get back to the Senator himself with his own activities. Can you remember conversations with him or with Smith or others up 'til about October of '67, as far as how his thinking was developing, the pressures on him to run and not to run? Who specifically was influencing him in either direction?

BURNS: Well, I knew that John Kenneth Galbraith and other people like that were after him to run, and Al Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein]; and I'd see people come and go from his apartment. Of course, he was in Washington more than he was here, so I didn't see what went on down there, but occasionally he'd say something about it, saying he was getting all kinds of pressure to run. He caused some meetings to be held that he was not present at but his brother, Senator Edward Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy], Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen].... I think the first meeting was arranged by...

GREENE: Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger].

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BURNS: ...by Pierre Salinger at the Regency Hotel, which I went to. And we had a pretty broad discussion of what the situation was and what we thought he should do. As I recall, we decided he shouldn't do anything at that point in time; we'd have to meet again to see what developed in the meantime. The general impression was that he shouldn't run, but there was still an open mind on it.

GREENE: Was everybody asked to take a position at that meeting?

BURNS: Yes. It went around the room, and I think most of them were against his running. I think Ivan Nestingen [Ivan A. Nestingen] was for his running—Ivan was an old friend. It's a funny thing, he and I came up on the same plane from Washington that day and didn't tell each other where we were going because we didn't know the other one was going to the same meeting. So, we said goodbye at the airport, and half an hour later we greeted each other again. Ivan was very hot for him to run; Ted Sorensen was against his running; Bill vanden Heuvel, I've forgotten what his position was—he was there. Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] wasn't for it. It was a general consensus at that first meeting that unless there was some change in the situation that he shouldn't run. Then there was another meeting held after that with approximately the same people. Jerry Bruno was in that one.

GREENE: In December?

BURNS: Yeah, in December.

GREENE: At the law firm?

BURNS: Yeah, some law office; yeah, before some dinner we were all going to, or something. He got basically the same response; most of them thought he shouldn't run.

GREENE: Was there anybody that stands out who was in favor?

BURNS: I'm trying to think. I don't remember anybody really standing out in my mind about it.

GREENE: What's your own feeling about this type of large, conglomerate session? Do you think that is useful and helpful?

BURNS: I don't know if it's useful or not. I think that maybe he should have had just a few people around him because, as it turned out, he made his own decision anyway, against the advice of many of his advisers. I think many people after that felt that they wished—because I do—that we had recommended that he run before McCarthy got into it. I think we were too cautious about having him risk his political neck, and we shouldn't have been that cautious. But we were thinking of '72, you see; that if he

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didn't run in '68 it would be wide-open for him in '72 because Johnson, whether he won or not again, would be out of the picture.

GREENE: Were there any other decisions taken, or any decisions taken, at this meeting to take polls or make surveys or anything of that kind?

BURNS: Not polls as such, but to talk to different people around the country and get their opinions, and to get sort of a feel of it that way. That was going on a lot.

GREENE: Do you know how these meeting affected Robert Kennedy? Did you discuss this with him? Did it have any influence on his feelings?

BURNS: Well, I don't know how they affected him. I think that it just contributed to his dilemma, to be honest with you. I think that he respected everybody there and their opinions, but I think he probably felt that they were more representative of the John F. Kennedy era than they were of the new era, in that he didn't have in the meeting an Al Lowenstein or a guy representing the New Politics or the new problems.

GREENE: Why were people like that, and, even more, people like Adam Walinsky excluded from these meetings?

BURNS: That, I don't know. I was told very confidentially to show up. I wasn't asked who should be there or anything else; I just came. I had no idea when I went there who would be there. It was very hush-hush; I got a call from Pierre Salinger saying, "Come to my suite at such-and-such a time. Don't tell a living soul you're coming," period! And that was that.

GREENE: Was English at either of these meetings?

BURNS: I think English was; yes, he was at the second meeting.

GREENE: Okay. Then on February 15th—or maybe it's the 14th, I'm not sure—the Democratic state committee overwhelmingly voted to back Lyndon Johnson.

BURNS: Yeah, we worked that out. That was quite a.... Bob Kennedy was very much aware of that, you know. What I was trying to do was to.... We never mentioned the war, and there was a very carefully worded statement that was worked out between Ed Weisl and Steve Smith, actually, which I was the broker on, the mediator. We had agreement on it from both sides. Resnick was up at the meeting and tried to push too much for the Johnson side, tried to get a resolution through endorsing Johnson's position on the war, which failed. It was a tough one because the people that were for Johnson weren't satisfied, nor were the people that were for Kennedy. Nobody was happy with it but it was the only thing we could work out. The only reason we got it through was because we said to both sides, "This has been worked out with Senator Kennedy and with Ed Weisl representing the President, and they both have agreed to it."

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GREENE: Why did you have to have a session of this kind with a resolution at all?

BURNS: Well, under our rules we have to meet in January, had to have a meeting

anyway, and we knew that there would be resolutions introduced backing Johnson and if we didn't do something to head it off at the pass that the wrong kind of resolution would have passed. You couldn't just oppose the President at that point in time because Kennedy at that point was not opposed to the President publicly as a candidate or anything. You had to have something to substitute for that, so we worked that out.

GREENE: Were you convinced at that point that Robert Kennedy wouldn't run or did you still feel it was up in the air?

BURNS: I was pretty much convinced that he would not run, although in the back of my mind I knew there was still an outside chance. But I thought as each day went by the chances were less.

GREENE: Did you talk to him personally about this meeting and the resolution or was that handled all through Smith?

BURNS: Mostly through Smith, although I do think I talked to him about it originally and then he had me work it out with Smith. Smith was....

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1; BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

BURNS: I talked to him about it originally and then he had me work it out with Smith. Smith was in touch with him all the time.

GREENE: Yeah.

BURNS: And I thought that Smith bent over backwards to do this. I really thought that they'd be less inclined to bend over that far. You've got to understand that the party officials didn't reflect and often don't reflect the feeling of the voters. It's hard to believe sometimes but that was true in that case because this was the time of the Tet offensive and the whole country was shifting in its opinion about the Vietnam War. There is the inclination of party officials to support the President, no matter what. There's that kind of a feeling that they have, and it's a longstanding tradition and so forth, so, they're the last ones to come around to something like that. It would have been terrible if we had something pass through there endorsing the war. They had some strong support in the state committee at that time, which a couple of months later wasn't there, but it was there then. We didn't have the votes to put through like a dove resolution at all. We were lucky to just get what we got, under the conditions that existed then.

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I can remember up there Frank Sedita [Frank A. Sedita], who is the mayor of Buffalo, looking at that saying, "Why the hell...?" Then he had another resolution; he had both resolutions in his hand, and the second one was the one that Resnick wanted to put through. "That's the one we ought to pass. Let's back the President." He wasn't being anti-Kennedy,

he was just being for the President—his feelings for it. That’s the kind of feeling that existed in the party. Even into the primary there was some of that around Brooklyn and different places. They’re traditionalists, a lot of them, and they’re more conservative. They don’t know the New Politics.

GREENE: Whatever that is.

BURNS: Whatever that is.

GREENE: Okay. Then what happened between then and the second week in March, as far as you know, that finally convinced him to run, both in terms of events and advice?

BURNS: Well, I wasn’t present at it but I know that Adam Walinsky and Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] and a number of others were after him to run; and Al Lowenstein and a lot of people. I think, probably, others like Cesar Chavez [Cesar Estrada Chavez] and a lot of others were looking to him for leadership. They didn’t feel it with McCarthy, a lot of them. I think that they felt that in spite of the fact that he knew and they knew that he would take a lot of knocks for coming into the campaign after McCarthy did so well in New Hampshire, that he had to do it at that time. I didn’t see too much of him during that period, as a matter of fact. I was in touch with Steve Smith a lot. I think Walter Cronkite interviewed him when he said he was reassessing his position. That was really when I really was hit with it—that he really was reassessing his position.

GREENE: You were at the Smith’s at that time, right?

BURNS: Yeah, I was at the Smith’s apartment at that time. Well, I knew before the interview that the interview had taken place. I mean, it didn’t hit me when I saw it on the air because that same day they called us up there and said, “Here’s what he’s done,” you know, “and it will be on the air at 7 o’clock,” or whenever it was. We all watched it and then we knew then that he was probably going to run. That’s when we started going on all this business of lining up what our activities should be, a script in other words. This was Steve Smith’s phrase, “Write me a script of what we’re going to do,” he’d say. And that’s when we wrote the script for New York State.

GREENE: Who else was in on that?

BURNS: Well, Ted Sorensen was up there and Bill vanden Heuvel and, of course, Steve and his wife [Jean Kennedy Smith] and I think his other sister Mrs. Lawford [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] was there; they weren’t in on the meeting part of it. I’m trying to

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think who else was there.

GREENE: Maybe its easier to say who worked on the script for New York.

BURNS: Well, the script for New York was Jerry Bruno and me.

GREENE: English wasn't involved?

BURNS: Well, he was involved but he was involved more in other aspects of it: getting the work out, who'd be good delegates, and contacting people other than party people in the state, other than formal party leaders like county chairman and so forth.

GREENE: What about Bill vanden Heuvel? Did he work with you on that?

BURNS: Yeah. Bill was more, you know, working in the liberal community thinking in terms of how we'd handle these McCarthy people who were going to be blasting us, and all that sort of thing.

GREENE: Did you discuss at this point how you would handle McCarthy, whether you'd try to get a coalition delegation?

BURNS: I don't think we did that day, but we did before long. We talked about having some coalition delegates. We did in two cases only. McCarthy people would say something publicly that they were willing to do it, and when you get right down to bargaining with them, they were very tough; they didn't want to do it. Only in a couple of cases did we get it.

GREENE: Who were you dealing with in the McCarthy group?

BURNS: Well, we dealt with Sarah Kovner [Sarah S. Kovner] and Harold Ickes [Harold LeClair Ickes], Eddie Costikyan [Edward N. Costikyan], Mrs. French [Eleanor Clark French].

GREENE: Who do you think was particularly the tough liner?

BURNS: I think Sarah Kovner was.

GREENE: She kind of comes off that way in the press.

BURNS: But I think they'd meet, you know. They didn't have any one person making policy; they'd meet all the time and they made their decisions jointly. We worked out a coalition in the 19th district—that's the west side of Manhattan—where we had two McCarthy delegates and one Kennedy delegate running the regular organization.

GREENE: I also have one, I think, in the 27th District.

BURNS: Yeah, John Dow's [John Goodchild Dow] district. Sears Hunter [B. Sears Hunter] was the Democratic chairman of Orange County and he was a Kennedy man. Then there were two McCarthy people on the same ticket with the understanding that if either one pulled out they would all support the remaining candidate.

GREENE: I want to ask you, is that kind of an agreement the kind of thing you were seeking in all cases, or were you...?

BURNS: No, only where we felt it was necessary. For example, in the 27th, you see, a three-way race would have nominated the Humphrey people. We would have split the Liberal group and the Humphrey people would have won without any problem. So, by combining our slates we had a better chance to defeat the Humphrey delegates.

GREENE: But in those cases you didn't try for agreements to support the other if one dropped out?

BURNS: We did in that case, in the 27th.

GREENE: But in other cases?

BURNS: Well, we tried to work it out in Rochester and a number of other places but they wouldn't do it. Jack English worked on that more than I did.

GREENE: Getting back to this meeting, was there anybody that you can remember who was still hoping he wouldn't run, who was trying to persuade him against it? I'm talking about the meeting at the Smith's before he announced.

BURNS: No, I don't think anybody at that point. I think they figured the die was cast.

GREENE: And there was no discussion of supporting McCarthy or supporting in the hopes that he would drop out and Kennedy could take over?

BURNS: Yeah, wait a minute. I don't know that it happened at Smith's house. There'd been some talk about that, you know, that he should announce his support for McCarthy and then if McCarthy didn't cut the mustard that McCarthy would then have to back Robert Kennedy. Yeah, there was some talk of that. I think maybe vanden Heuvel mentioned that, if I recall. It's hard to say, really.

GREENE: Did you have any strong feelings...?

BURNS: Wish you'd interviewed me a year ago, my memory would be better.

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GREENE: I know, it's unfortunate. Did you have any strong feelings one way or the other about it?

BURNS: I wasn't particularly anxious for him to support McCarthy. In the first place, I thought McCarthy was strictly a one-issue candidate. I didn't like McCarthy—let me put it that way—so I wasn't particularly anxious for him to support McCarthy. I didn't think that it would work; I didn't trust McCarthy or some of the people around him. And, I thought that in the long term he would hurt himself with a lot of people in the party. I thought that McCarthy would fail and I thought Kennedy would hurt himself. He might better run himself if he's going to get the same kind of animosity for it; then he would hurt himself for '72.

GREENE: In the discussions that you had then and at other times did most of the people consider McCarthy as strong a factor as he turned out to be?

BURNS: No, I think before New Hampshire a lot of them thought he was a weak candidate that didn't inspire anybody and had sort of a poorly run campaign, and he was not dynamic in any way. I think it was only in the last couple weeks in New Hampshire they began to see that McCarthy had something going for himself. Prior to that, when he came into New York and different places, he didn't seem to do too well at all, except with the real hard-core support that developed behind him only because of Vietnam. That he wasn't really going to get as far as he did, that's the way a lot of people felt about him. Well, he did so well in New Hampshire and he seemed to have this soft-sell, understatement type of approach. And he was attractive to a lot of people, obviously—his ways, his mannerisms, which we didn't think, at least I didn't think, was too attractive for a candidate for president. But he didn't do bad.

GREENE: What kind of pressures were on you once it became apparent that he would run, as state chairman, and especially in light of that resolution that was passed?

BURNS: Well, I immediately came out for him for president and my resignation was demanded by a lot of people. Of course, I knew that would happen, I mean, but I was perfectly happy and willing to do it. I found that I would have been most uncomfortable if the Senator had told me to stay neutral—which he had done in other cases when we had troubles within the party where he'd be attacked or something. He'd say, "Don't you say anything," you know, "because you've got to keep your relationship with all elements of the party."

I can remember one time Jim Farley [James A. Farley] blasted him, and I called him up and I said, "How about if I blast Jim Farley?" you know, 'cause Jim Farley was calling

him “Bobby,” and saying that, “We got an incumbent President; we should all support our President.” I said, “I remember when Jim Farley broke with Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and he didn’t support an incumbent President.” I said, “I could really blast him.”

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He said, “No, don’t do that. You should keep your good contacts with everybody. It would be more useful to us in the long run.” So, I didn’t.

In this case, he didn’t ask me to endorse him for president; he just knew I would, and I did. It was never mentioned. I just did it. I was asked, of course, immediately by the press, “What are you going to do?” I said, “I’m for Robert Kennedy for president.” I think I was the first. There were only two of us, the Massachusetts state chairman and me, at one point. So, immediately Ed Weisl and Frank O’Connor [Frank D. O’Connor] and a number of people in that faction of the party were very upset and distressed with me and really blasted me. Then we had a running battle during the primary. At one point we found that Ed Weisl was not a registered Democrat and we made a big deal out of that.

GREENE: Was that just to irk him or did you have any serious intentions of trying to force him out?

BURNS: No, we didn’t really want to force him out; his term was expiring anyway. At the national convention we felt we’d have control of the delegation and we’d elect our own national committeeman who was going to be Jack English. That’s who the Senator wanted. There was only a few months between the time we raised the question and the convention, so we weren’t going to try to have some kind of a legal proceeding to throw him out. It was a political attack to try to show that they were unfair with us and that sort of thing, just an attack, that’s all.

GREENE: Just an attack.

BURNS: But it was amazing. Here is a guy who’s a national Democratic committeeman, wasn’t an enrolled Democrat, and had not been.

GREENE: He kept trying to make it look like that was his son and it was just an error, but that wasn’t the case?

BURNS: No, no. He finally admitted to it. He never registered. He voted, too, but he never registered as a Democrat and didn’t often vote. We had his whole history. We sent a guy down to the election board and xeroxed all the documents and had a big press conference and blasted him for it. A good offensive is your best defense, you see. They were knocking my brains out all over the state trying to get me out of there.

GREENE: And it was trying to get some of the heat from you?

BURNS: Yeah, so we were trying to just put it back on them.

GREENE: I know you sent telegrams to all the state and county leaders telling them that your time would come in June, when you came up for reelection, they could show their hostility. Where did this come from? Was this just your own idea?

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BURNS: Yeah, it was my own idea. I was getting tired of answering questions so I just said, "My term expires in June and if I run for reelection people can vote me in or out. It's a democratic party, a democratic procedure. Anybody that doesn't like me can vote me out if they want to."

GREENE: Did you have any conversations with the Senator or Smith or anyone like that about how you could explain the fact that you had supported this resolution in February against one dove and not against another?

BURNS: My rationale was two things: number one, that at the time of the resolution Senator Kennedy was not a candidate, therefore, I didn't take into consideration his candidacy at the time that we passed the resolution; and secondly, that public opinion on the war had changed so much since then and that it was a different situation, a different ball game. A lot of people didn't buy that, but that was my reasoning. A lot of people did though; a lot of people themselves changed their minds.

GREENE: Okay. What efforts were you and English and other people making, at this point, to try to round up as many early supporters as you could? And were you asking them to commit themselves to Robert Kennedy, or simply to stay neutral until after he'd shown what he could do in the primaries?

BURNS: We did both. We called every county chairman. I spoke to every county chairman in the state; asked them to come out for Robert Kennedy right away; said we were going to announce a list and we wanted them to be part of it, if they were for Kennedy for president. I told them it wouldn't be any of the anti-Johnson business in the statement at all, that we just felt that—I've forgotten the wording of it—the crisis that faced our country called for new leadership and Robert Kennedy would fulfill that new leadership. Something like that. Where we'd find someone who didn't want to associate with it, we'd ask them then to just stay neutral for a while, see what happened, and not jump on the other side.

GREENE: How well did that work?

BURNS: It worked pretty well. We had a majority of the chairmen with us. I think at the beginning we had about twenty-two or twenty-three, and then it worked up into over forty.

GREENE: Were there any surprises, people who you thought would support you and didn't, or vice versa?

BURNS: Yeah, there were some surprises. Victor Bahou [Victor S. Bahou] supported us, I thought. He has always been associated with Sam Stratton. I was surprised that he supported us. Let's see, I was not surprised at some of them; most of them I wasn't surprised at. There was a couple of them that didn't go with us that I thought might go with us, I've forgotten who the heck they were. Oh, Sears Hunter surprised

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us. He was very outspoken for Kennedy and he never gave the impression of being that kind of a standup guy before, but he was. George Whalen [George E. Whalen] was another one. He was then the Dutchess County chairman and was terrific. He was sort of an old-fashioned kind of guy and everything. I thought he'd be, you know, on the other side or at least neutral, but he was very standup. Bill Luddy [William F. Luddy] was good in Westchester....

GREENE: Well, he had been a long time Kennedy.... What about the Bronx situation?

BURNS: The Bronx was a surprise, let me tell you that. Henry G. McDonough is a very conservative guy, a very likeable chap, nice fellow, but very conservative and we just didn't think we were going to get the Bronx to endorse us. They were rather pragmatic about it; I mean, they had a tremendous problem with McCarthy forces in their county because they were not only for McCarthy, but they were the Reform Movement pretty much that were out to get them. So, they countered with an endorsement of Robert Kennedy, which they put through their executive committee. Although a lot of the regulars up there were not in sympathy with that, they went along with it because they were organization people. It was a ploy on their part to stay sort of in the middle between Johnson and McCarthy—and they liked Kennedy, I must say. Henry liked Kennedy, but I think he did it, you know, in his own self-interest.

GREENE: How much help was Badillo [Herman Badillo] in the Bronx?

BURNS: Well, he was helpful in two respects. First, from the fact that he's a Puerto Rican and, secondly, because he was an important person in the Reform Movement in the Bronx. And he was probably the most outstanding reformer up there who was not for McCarthy but for Kennedy. One of the most outspoken, I think, Bingham [Jonathan Brewster Bingham], was for Kennedy—was he?

GREENE: Yes.

BURNS: Scheuer [James Haas Scheuer] was for McCarthy, and Badillo was helpful in getting Kennedy support from legislators, elected leaders that were from areas

that were for McCarthy but they'd pledged to Kennedy, reformers. Badillo was helpful, yes.

GREENE: Was Scheuer a surprise? Was he someone you thought might...?

BURNS: No, he was not a surprise. He never liked Robert Kennedy. They had an unfortunate relationship. I don't know if "unfortunate" is the word; they had an unfriendly relationship for a long time.

GREENE: What happened to Manhattan? I know there was a real tussle of the McCarthy people there. Were you able to make any inroads?

BURNS: No, we didn't make many inroads. The Manhattan groups were probably the

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most vehement of the McCarthy people and there was no compromising with them. They were bitter against Robert Kennedy for coming out for president. I think some of them would have supported him if he'd come out first and McCarthy hadn't come out, but by the time he came out they thought they had something great going and that they were really going to win the presidency. They thought he was killing it for them and they were very bitter.

GREENE: How much help was a woman like Mrs. Eldridge, or Justin Feldman [Justin Newton Feldman], people like that, in loosening some of these people?

BURNS: Yeah, they were help. Mike Cohen is another one. William Fitts Ryan was helpful. They were in the minority in the Reform Movement but they were people who were respected within the Reform Movement and who could help get some votes. Of course, we don't know what would've happened in the primary, but they worked very hard and obviously would have had some good effect.

GREENE: In this initial survey did you get many people who said, "Well, come back and see me, you know, after Indiana or after California," or something like that? Were there people who seemed receptive even if they weren't ready to make any statements?

BURNS: Yeah, there were some. Like I remember Doc Carson [Alexander F. Carson], who's the chairman of Otsego County; he said, you know, "I'm going to wait and see and see how it goes. I like Bob Kennedy but I hate to go against my own President. You put me in a tough spot; I'm going to wait and see what happens." Yeah, there was some of that.

GREENE: Would you stay on those people; go back to them after the individual primaries?

BURNS: Yeah, we kept calling them.

GREENE: How are you on time?

BURNS: I'm all right. It's only ten after one. You have a date with Jack English at two?

GREENE: Three.

BURNS: Oh, three?

GREENE: It was three.

BURNS: I thought it was two? I don't know.

GREENE: I'll check it. Okay. Then on March 22nd, according to what I have, you and the

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Senator met with party officials, and one of the purposes of this was to reassure those concerned that he would be willing to make coalition agreements with McCarthy people. Remember that?

BURNS: Yeah. That was up in the Hilton Hotel?

GREENE: Got me. I'm not really sure where it was.

BURNS: Forgotten. Well, let's see. We brought in all the McCarthy people; we brought in all kinds of people. We had a suite at the Hilton [New York Hilton]. When the Senator would be in town, you know, we'd have all kinds of people come in. We brought in all the Queens leaders, for example, and we brought in leaders from all over the state. Among the people we brought in were leaders of the McCarthy movement from the Bronx and Manhattan, and so forth. He spoke to them as a group and then we would try to work out with them some kind of understanding. They listened but they didn't really change any. The Queens situation was an interesting one.

GREENE: Yeah. I was going to ask you about it.

BURNS: Weinstein, who wanted to become speaker, he didn't know what to do. A lot of these guys, you know, think of their own skin, you see.

GREENE: Right.

BURNS: He became hard to get to, hard to speak to even, home sick.... Wait a minute. What? Wait 'til I pick up the phone.

[INTERRUPTION]

GREENE: Go on.

BURNS: Well, I called up Weinstein and asked him if we could talk to his leaders. You know, just a matter of protocol. He said, "Fine, go ahead." We called in the leaders. We talked to them one at a time and didn't think we were doing too bad, but a lot of them, we knew, would do what Mo wanted. Andy Mulrain [Andrew W. Mulrain], who was treasurer of the Queens County organization, was friendly to us and committed himself to help Kennedy; worked with us. We couldn't get Weinstein. He went home, said he was sick, and wouldn't take any calls, wouldn't talk to anybody for three days.

GREENE: When about was this? Could you place it? Was it before the President's speech?

BURNS: It was before Johnson pulled out. And then he called a fast meeting of his committee and they endorsed Johnson. Weinstein's position was that he loved Robert Kennedy and all that but that he couldn't go against his own President

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and he had no choice but to do it that way. So, we then started lining up our own delegates in Queens and had our own slate ready to go. Then, when Johnson pulled out, Weinstein came over to us and said he'd support Kennedy. So, then we had to go back over the list of delegates again and merge ours with his so that he was satisfied, you know, getting people to be delegates that he wanted to be delegates, but they'd be pledged to Kennedy. And we kept on some of them that we had lined up ourselves. We had to take some off in order to, you know, compromise it. He was the only leader that was ducking us. Even those that didn't come out for us at least came in and spoke to us, you know, talked things over. He was sort of a coward, I'd say.

GREENE: Well, I think the next thing was your testimonial dinner on March 23rd. Were there any conversations with Robert Kennedy there that are significant?

BURNS: Well, that was a tumultuous thing. There was no real chance for any private conversations. That was some dinner. We had planned that before he announced for president and the idea was to get some kind of support, you know, united support behind me as chairman. It was Jerry Bruno's idea originally and we had all factions of the party. We had Weisl and O'Connor, a lot of them, agreeing to be honorary chairman or something or other. And then when Kennedy announced, of course, and I announced my support for him, those that were for Johnson wouldn't support the dinner anymore, but we had a big turnout. Apparently every county chairman in the state was there. We had Zaretski and Travia, we had Arthur Levitt, we had everybody there. We had two

planeloads of people from New York come, traveling with the Senator going up there. Jesse Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] from California came along.

We couldn't land at Binghamton because of the fog; we landed at Syracuse and took buses to Binghamton. Then they had to take buses back to Syracuse, and by the time the Senator got back to Newark it was almost time to leave for California. He was really whipped. It was his only upstate appearance during the presidential campaign. But there were those fantastic crowds, you know, there was a public response to him.

I think one significant thing there is that with the exception of O'Connor and Weisl and people like that, we had every important elected official in the state there: Arthur Levitt and Travia and Zaretzki and an awful lot of others, a lot of congressmen. Pike came up with us on the plane—he was looking for the Senate nomination at the time. A lot of county chairman came that weren't yet committed to Kennedy, and became committed after that.

GREENE: Did he do a lot of talking to people trying to persuade them at that dinner?

BURNS: No, not at the dinner. You know, it was so jammed with people. He was like the eye of the storm, where he'd walk in and there would just, you know, be thousands of people around him. They took him to a table and sat down and the press was on top of him, the photographers and everything. He had no chance really to talk to anybody privately there. He just made a speech.

GREENE: Then how do you account—you say a number of people came out for him after that?

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BURNS: Well, I think they saw the tremendous outpouring of people for him, how popular.... I mean, I think it sort of was an indication to them that he was a popular candidate.

GREENE: Okay. Then between this and March 31st what's worth putting down? Did you do anything special?

BURNS: Was that when Johnson pulled out?

GREENE: Right.

BURNS: Well, we just kept working on the county chairmen and on getting delegates where we knew that the organization wouldn't be with us. And where we knew the organization would be with us, we worked with them on getting them to put up the kind of people for delegates that were wanted, you know, well-known, respected people in their community, that sort of thing. And where we didn't have the organization, that's where Jack English came in. He would line up the support for and the personalities to run as delegates. The Rochester area is one good example. We had the Erie County area. We had strong support in the Syracuse area. We had support in Utica. We had a

unique situation with the Albany people and I handled that one with Mayor Corning [Erastus Corning] and with Dan O'Connell [Daniel P. O'Connell]. At one point Mayor Corning called me and said that Dan O'Connell said that it was all right with him if we wanted to run our own slate up there against the organization slate. And I said no, we didn't want that. I had talked to Kennedy. The day he in...

[INTERRUPTION]

GREENE: ...making.

BURNS: Yeah, well, when we got to the apartment, I had a list of calls for him to make and one of them was Dan O'Connell. They talked and Dan told him that he wouldn't be against him; he didn't say he'd be for him. He said, "What do you want me to do?" He loved Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] and had a longstanding affection for him and felt some obligation to him for something that happened years ago—and had supported Jack [John F. Kennedy] and was a great admirer of his.

When it came time to get delegates up there O'Connell naturally was going to run his own regular slate. Normally, he would resent any other running but what was happening was, in Albany County a lot of people that were for Kennedy were outside the party organization. They didn't know who the party organization was going to support so they wanted to be sure there was a Kennedy slate. So, there was a lot of talk in the newspapers about us.

They called me and said they wouldn't be offended if we ran our own slate. I didn't like that because I thought that's just going to make a fight where maybe no fight is necessary. I talked to the Senator and I talked to Steve about it, and Jack English. We decided to gamble on ultimately getting their support at the convention. So, I went to see him and he

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said that—I went to Albany and talked to O'Connell—they wouldn't make any public announcement and they wouldn't do anything 'til the last minute. And I said, "Well, we'll take our gamble that you'll come out for us and we won't run our own slate." He said, "Well, that's all right if you do it with the understanding we're not fully committed." So, that's the way we left it with him and we didn't run our own slate against him.

GREENE: Were there other places like that?

BURNS: Well, in Brooklyn we didn't run our own slate anyplace. There was the regular organization slate and the McCarthy slate. We had an understanding with Stanley Steingut and Meade Esposito that by the time the convention came around they would be for us. They needed time. There was a lot of resentment on the part of their leaders against Robert Kennedy. They thought he was brash and, "Who in the hell does he think he is, running for President?" and all of that.

The Brooklyn organization is fairly conservative organization except in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area. We agreed together that we would not run our own Kennedy delegates, as McCarthy delegates were being run over there. The regular organization guys would

ultimately support Robert Kennedy but they didn't want to make any announcement ahead of time; so we didn't run any delegates in Brooklyn. And as it turned out, you know, after the Senator's death, McCarthy carried more of Brooklyn than the regulars did. That wouldn't have been the case had he lived.

GREENE: Was there anywhere else that you did this?

BURNS: Let's think now. Those are the two most notable ones. I don't think there was anyplace else where we did it. Just where I mentioned, in the 19th and the 27th we had coalition slates. In most places where we had the regular organization, we ran them pledged to Kennedy, and where we didn't have the regular organization, we ran our slate pledged to Kennedy.

There were many three-way fights. McCarthy's people ran delegates almost in every district. He didn't run them in Harlem. Harlem, for example, I think there was just the regular organization slate, but we figured Kennedy would get those. The same way in Bedford-Stuyvesant. No, there were two slates over there. We were aligned with Willy Thompson [William C. Thompson] who was then a state senator, he was a regular organization man. We had their support and we knew we had the support of the Harlem delegates, even though they were regular organization. Kennedy was so popular in Harlem that we knew they'd have to be for Kennedy, although the regular organization in New York County was not too friendly to Kennedy over the period of time he was Senator.

GREENE: It seems like you were doing most of this yourself with perhaps Jack English's help. Was there anybody else? Was Bruno working with you at all?

BURNS: No, Bruno took off and went out with the Senator in the primaries.

GREENE: And he didn't come back?

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BURNS: Well, we talked to him on the phone a lot. He'd come back once in a great while, but we were in touch with him a lot on the phone. He made calls for us like from Indiana, or wherever he was, into the state talking to people. You know, we'd have things for him to do and he'd do it or he'd have suggestions and we'd do what he'd suggest.

GREENE: What kinds of people was he talking to?

BURNS: Well, see, he had been in charge of the Senator's upstate office, which encompassed all of the state except New York City. Long Island, all of Westchester, and part of the Hudson Valley wasn't under his.... But in every bit of territory where he had been working for the Senator—in charge of, for the Senator, during the time he was Senator and before he was running for President—Jerry had contacts in every one of those areas. Where, for example we had the regular organization against us,

he'd have Kennedy people spotted already, you know, and ready to go. So, he'd tell us who they were; we knew all these things anyway, but I mean he'd call the people, tell them what the Senator would like them to do, and work with us and that sort of thing. So, we had a pretty good system.

GREENE: What about Steve Smith? Was he doing the same?

BURNS: Well, Steve was running the thing, nationally. He was in touch with us, you know; we were on the phone a lot but we didn't see too much of him.

GREENE: He wasn't making calls?

BURNS: No, very few. He was on the money end of it a lot too, making a lot of calls about money. We'd get a little of the money but only where it came to us. We weren't on fundraising, but, for example, the day Kennedy announced I got a telegram from Abe Hirschfeld [Abraham J. Hirschfeld] saying he'd pledge \$50,000 to the campaign. So, I immediately got hold of Abe Hirschfeld and got him over to the Senator's apartment. I brought over Milton Gilbert and some other heavy contributors, but those were really people that would respond to Steve more than they would to me. I just happened to be, you know, in the case of Hirschfeld, the one he contacted.

GREENE: Were they having problems with funds?

BURNS: Yeah, yes, they were spending money faster than they were bringing it in. They were bringing in money, you know; they were getting money, but the cost of campaigning is fantastic. When the Senator died, they had a huge deficit which wouldn't have existed at the time, you know, if he'd been elected. They would have made up a lot of that. Oh, we probably would have had a deficit; most Democratic campaigns windup in a deficit. Only Rockefeller doesn't. Even Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] did recently.

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Steve was doing all kinds of things. He was the key guy on fundraising, and he was also the key guy on taking charge of the campaign in a given state like Indiana or what have you. Get things moving, get them coordinated and so forth. He had people traveling with him. Bruno was all over. He helped Steve and he'd advance for the Senator. He'd travel with the Senator. He was all over the country so he helped us in our work, but only by long distance phone most of the time.

GREENE: What about Carter Burden? What was his assignment?

BURNS: Carter worked very hard. His assignment was in New York City. He had worked in the Senator's office here in New York City and so he had a lot of contacts. Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston] left.... Wait a minute. My

daughter's out there; she wants to... [INTERRUPTION]

Of course, Tom Johnston ran the office in New York but when the Senator announced, then Tom was taken out of the state and was working in other states. So, Carter was busy using all the people that had been helpful to Senator Kennedy here in his office, putting them in key spots in the city campaign and doing a lot of things for the city campaign that had to be done. He worked long hours.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves]?

BURNS: Do I, or did I?

GREENS: Did you?

BURNS: Yeah. Earl moved around the country with the Senator. I didn't have too much contact with him during that time. I did before the Senator announced, and I'd see him from time to time when he'd come back to the state, but we didn't really work with Earl during the campaign.

GREENE: He had done some preliminary work, before he started to travel, in New York.

BURNS: Yeah, I think in the black areas especially. Lining up key people and all that sort of thing, yeah.

GREENE: Are you aware of how that worked out?

BURNS: Well, he worked with Jack English pretty much on that—I didn't work too closely with Earl—Jack could tell you more about that.

GREENE: What about March 31st when you gave Robert Kennedy "the word?"

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BURNS: Well, he was coming in from—where was it?

GREENE: Indiana?

BURNS: Indiana or someplace and we went out to the airport to meet him—John Moran who's my aide and I—and there were a lot of people out there to meet him, fans and supporters and so forth, Dall Forsythe [Dall W. Forsythe] from his staff. While waiting for the plane, we knew Johnson was going to be on the air, so we went in this room American Airlines had and watched Johnson on television. When he came out with the bombshell, I knew Kennedy hadn't heard "the word" because he was up in the air; he was about to land.

About ten minutes later he landed. There was huge corps of press there and I wanted him to get the word before the press gave it to him, you know, so he'd be ready for it—that

was the main thing—so that he didn't come off the plane not knowing about it and be hit with it right off the bat. So we rushed on the plane and I told him about it. He says, "Sit down, John." I was so excited, you know. So, he said, "Now, tell me again what the President said." I related to him that the President said that he was not going to be a candidate for his party's nomination for reelection as president. He was going to give all his time devoted towards peace and bringing about peace in Vietnam, and so forth. He didn't have time to campaign and all that jazz. And I related it to him as I best remembered it, which was a lot better than it is now. Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] was there. He talked to Fred and they decided that the he would have no comment to the press at that time. And so, when we got off the plane, Fred announced to the press he wouldn't have any comment at that particular time.

We drove in to his apartment, and Dick Dougherty [Richard Dougherty] of the *Los Angeles Times* was in his car with him, I know. When we got to the apartment, Jimmy Breslin [James Breslin] was already there and came up with him, and Ted Sorensen, vanden Heuvel. I forgot, I think Adam Walinsky was there. I'm not sure, I think he was. There was a lot of them. Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy], of course, was there. He was on the phone a lot and Sorensen was writing something for him. They were trying to think of a word and they finally came up with it the next day: magnanimous. I remember they were looking in dictionaries and everything trying to figure out what word to use with the President in the telegram they sent him. They used the word magnanimous and they were struggling for it that night, I remember.

GREENE: Were you on the phone that night, too, calling people?

BURNS: Yeah. I called Charlie Maloy [Charles T. Maloy] in Rochester, who was the county chairman up there, and asked him now that the President pulled out if they'd support Kennedy? He said, "No, I don't know what we'll do," and then they stuck with Humphrey. Yeah, I immediately called all the chairmen who had been for Johnson.

GREENE: Could you get any movement?

BURNS: Yeah, we got some movement. We got Queens; we got, let's see....

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GREENE: Well, let's see. There are five I think that came out April 2nd, with would have been pretty close to that.

BURNS: Yeah, which ones were they? I forget that.

GREENE: Crangle, Savage [George Savage], Douglas [Arthur J. Douglas], Mahoney [John F. Mahoney, Jr.], and Conway [John O. Conway], plus Queens.

BURNS: Well, Crangle we already had but he hadn't announced yet.

GREENE: Right, that's right. These were largely people who just hadn't announced.

BURNS: Savage, yeah, that helped with Savage, yeah. And who else was there?

GREENE: Douglas in Essex.

BURNS: Yeah, Art Douglas, yeah. I think we would have had him anyway.

GREENE: And Fulton, Mahoney.

BURNS: Mahoney, yeah, that did it with Mahoney.

GREENE: And Oswego, Conway.

BURNS: Yeah, right. He was troubled about the President.

GREENE: Was there anybody else?

BURNS: If I'd look at the names, I'd do better probably. I'm trying to think about Baranello [Dominic J. Baranello]. What happened to him?

GREENE: Baranello?

BURNS: Suffolk County.

GREENE: Yeah, I know. They did go for....

BURNS: I don't remember now.

GREENE: I'm not sure either.

BURNS: I know there was some movement after that, you know, to Kennedy. We really picked up a few that way.

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GREENE: Were you able to convince others to at least hold still and not jump right into Humphrey?

BURNS: Yeah. I think we did with a few but by that time it was, you know, the hardcore anti-Kennedy people; we knew who they were. We didn't expect to get all of them; we knew they would go to Humphrey. What about McKeon [William H. McKeon]? Where was he on that? He was with Kennedy early, wasn't he?

GREENE: Yeah. What about O'Connor and Wagner, was there ever any hope of getting them or were they solid, especially at this point? Could you...?

BURNS: Well, with Wagner on that day I mentioned—we came back to the suite the first day he'd announced—Wagner was on one of the calls. He says, "Why should I call Wagner?" I said, "Well, I just think, you know, you ought to talk to him. He probably won't do anything, but if you keep in touch with him it'll help."

GREENE: Right.

BURNS: So he called Wagner and they talked a few minutes and Wagner was noncommittal. We knew, of course, Wagner was looking for an ambassadorship from Johnson. We had hoped that with Johnson out of the picture it might have changed it, but Wagner ultimately came out for Humphrey. That's what I recall. Kennedy never felt he'd get Wagner, but he talked to him anyway.

GREENE: What about O'Connor?

BURNS: Well, we never thought we'd get O'Connor. O'Connor, from the time that he had been nominated for governor and even after that, was wooed by Humphrey all the time. Humphrey would have him down to Washington. They were going to send him to Vietnam, and they had him really 100 percent in their favor on the war. O'Connor was one of the ones that disagreed publicly with Kennedy when he came out on his big statement on Vietnam.

GREENE: Because both Wagner and O'Connor's statements when they said they would support the President were very kind towards Kennedy. They were not.... So, I thought that maybe once Johnson was out....

BURNS: Well, O'Connor owed Kennedy a lot. I don't know if he felt that way himself, but Kennedy campaigned hard for O'Connor, even though it was a losing cause. But a lot of people around O'Connor often felt that Kennedy didn't do enough for him, which was not true at all, Kennedy did a lot for him. But O'Connor stuck with the Humphrey people and we thought he would.

GREENE: Also, on March 25th Harriman [William Averell Harriman] was named

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honorary chairman of the Johnson effort. Do you remember what Robert Kennedy's reaction to that was?

BURNS: No, I wondered about that myself. I never talked to him about it. I think he felt Harriman was in the administration. He was a close friend of both of them, but he never said a word against Harriman; he always loved Harriman. I think he

understood that; I think he understood that more than he did the Democratic National Chairman, Fred Harris [Fred R. Harris]. He and Ethel both felt very bad about Harris going over to Humphrey, but I think they felt that Harriman was in a different position.

GREENE: Did you make any contact outside of the state once the campaign got underway?

BURNS: Not too much. I kept in touch with.... I wasn't asked to and we were so busy in the state. Everyone felt that he had to do well in his own state or else it was a lost cause and so it was too important to.... They had planned, I think, once our primary was over that I would tour the country, although we never defined it much. Once our primary was over we had the state committee meeting, we had the delegates-at-large chosen, we had all our delegates chosen; it was all cut and dried. Then I would go to work with him on non-primary states, you know, travel around either with him or separate from him trying to line up all the support we could. Until our delegates were chosen, I couldn't be spared from New York.

GREENE: What about this citizens' committee that was formed with Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] and Sutton and Badillo? What was the purpose of a group like that? Were they primarily fundraising?

BURNS: No, they were to get support of people who weren't.... You always do that in a campaign to get people that don't particularly want to work with the party structure for one reason or another.

GREENE: Like they did in '60?

BURNS: Yeah. That's what that group was, and it also was to show minority support, and all that sort of thing.

GREENE: How effective were they?

BURNS: Well, we don't know because he was dead before the primary. I think they were effective. Yeah, they were good names. In fact, Sutton traveled around the country for him. In the state I think that they were effective. They were, what you might say, like any committee like that; the names are sort of window dressing to show that kind of support.

Badillo was concentrating chiefly in his own area, where he was running as a delegate, and among his people. I don't know what Roswell Gilpatric did; I have no idea.

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GREENE: What about what they were doing in the minority communities? Were you making a concerted effort there? I know at least in California there was some philosophy among the younger people that it wasn't worth cultivating the

black areas or the minority areas in general because they were for Robert Kennedy in any case. What was the attitude in New York? Were they working hard there?

BURNS: Yeah, we were working hard in every area. We knew that the bigger the vote you get out in the minority area the more votes Kennedy would get. You see, it was on a congressional district basis, it wasn't on a statewide basis. In other words, as long as your delegates get elected in the district that's all your vote counted for; it didn't count. Like if he was running statewide, a vote in Harlem is just as good as one in Westchester, but when you're running on a district basis then it didn't have the same meaning. California was statewide, the difference.

GREENE: That's right. Among the congressional delegates, who was working with them first of all, primarily trying to get the congressional people behind him?

BURNS: Like our Congressmen?

GREENE: Yeah.

BURNS: Not too many Congressmen came out for him: Hugh Carey [Hugh Leo Carey], Ottinger [Richard Lawrence Ottinger], Bingham. Let's see....

GREENE: I have a list, maybe it would spark your memory. Ottinger, Bingham, Dow, Rosenthal [Benjamin S. Rosenthal], Carey, Gilbert [Jacob H. Gilbert].

BURNS: Yeah, Gilbert of the Bronx.

GREENE: And I also had Scheuer.

BURNS: Scheuer? No.

GREENE: He never did as you said before.

BURNS: Scheuer was for McCarthy.

GREENE: I don't know why that's on the list.

BURNS: He came out for McCarthy.

GREENE: Was there anyone else that you remember?

BURNS: Didn't have too many.

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GREENE: Who was working on them?

BURNS: As I recall, I think we had Carey working on them, Carey and Ottinger. Hanley [James M. Hanley] up in Syracuse was against us. Trying to think about Max McCarthy [Richard Dean McCarthy] up in Erie; I've forgotten what he did. I don't think he ever came out.

GREENE: You didn't contact the congressmen at all yourself?

BURNS: I've forgotten, I think I did contact them. I think we gave the job to one of the congressmen, Ottinger or Carey. But we had problems.... We had some old-timers like Emanuel Celler and Rooney [John James Rooney] and those guys. They all had such contacts with the White House, you know, different things; pretty tough to break them loose.

GREENE: Was there a lot of cultivation, by the White House, of New York—well, you would know the New York situation better—of political leaders in general during the previous years? Did they seem to make a real effort?

BURNS: No. Johnson didn't pay any attention to our area, to speak of. Humphrey did some work, like with O'Connor.

GREENE: You personally were not wooed at all?

BURNS: No. To the contrary, they just almost ignored me. When I first became state chairman, I went down and met with Cliff Carter [Clifton C. Carter], who was the President's guy on the National Committee. He told me, you know, that I would deal with him and that John Bailey [John Moran Bailey] was merely window dressing. And that we'd be happy to work together and everything and they just never worked with us. They'd hand out jobs in New York State without consulting us. For example, Howard Samuels [Howard J. Samuels] was appointed Undersecretary of Commerce and they never even told us about it. We read about it in the paper.

GREENE: Was that, do you think, because you were considered a Kennedy man?

BURNS: Yeah. Although, nationally every state chairman bitched about Johnson's attitude towards the party. I think ours was more, in any case, because he just didn't trust me. They had a real phobia about Kennedy and anybody that was close to Kennedy. They didn't trust us at all.

GREENE: Do you think Humphrey shared that?

BURNS: No, I don't think so. Well, I think he knew, you know, where we'd stand but I think he was far more friendly, more decent—very decent man.

GREENE: I haven't got too much more. What about labor? Was there anybody specifically working with the labor groups?

BURNS: Yeah, let's see, labor; we had several labor guys. Oh, I can't think. Sam.... Well, we had Dave Livingston [David Livingston] and a lot of the more liberal labor leaders with us. Dave Livingston was one of them. Trying to think of another guy's name who was a liberal labor leader.

GREENE: Maybe if you tell me.... Do you remember his union? What group he was from?

BURNS: He was from Brooklyn and I think, think it was the Auto Workers [United Auto, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implements Workers of America], I'm not sure. I'm not sure of his union. Well, I'll think of it; it's a Jewish name. But they organized a whole group of labor leaders who came out for Kennedy.

GREENE: Who was working on that?

BURNS: Well, Dave Livingston did a lot of that and Jack English was working with him, with Dave Livingston, yeah. But most of labor was for Humphrey, you know; the established labor organizations were for Humphrey.

GREENE: Did you meet a lot of resistance because of Robert Kennedy's background particularly his work with McClellan [John L. McClellan]—that always came up?

BURNS: Well, you did among Reformers, but that was over the years by now.

GREENE: No, I mean in the labor groups?

BURNS: Oh, yeah, you generally saw that, yeah.

GREENE: Okay, as far as I know, except for the couple instances we've talked about, he made only one appearance in the state and that was on May 8th. Is that right?

BURNS: Was that the one at the Inn of the Clock? Talking about Kennedy?

GREENE: Yeah. When he talked to the delegates and alternates.

BURNS: Yeah. It was in a restaurant called the Inn of the Clock which was in the same building....

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1; BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

GREENE: Oh, I didn't realize that.

BURNS: Yes, we had arranged that.

GREENE: How did that come off?

BURNS: It came off pretty good, except that we had every delegate that was for him, or were unannounced, but we thought were going to be for him. In other words we didn't have delegates there who were for McCarthy or for Humphrey. That included the whole Brooklyn delegation. Somehow, somebody published a list showing who these delegates were for and they had listed that Brooklyn delegates were for Kennedy, which bothered some of the Brooklyn delegates.

We had our arrangements already made with Steingut and Meade; some of these delegates didn't even know about it, I suppose, now. So, they thought they were there just to hear, to make a judgment and all that. They found themselves listed as being supporters and they weren't too happy about that. We had them all up to the Senator's apartment, and we spoke to them. And we had delegates from all over the state there, candidates for delegate, and it went quite well; it was a very friendly and good meeting.

GREENE: How did he feel about...? You had mentioned before that he disliked politicking as such, but how did he find this?

BURNS: Well, he disliked some things about politicking; he didn't dislike everything. He liked going out to meet people, but what he disliked was the pettiness of some parts of politics and the boring, long, drawn-out junk you have to go through sometimes. He was too impulsive. He just didn't have the patience for that kind of thing, but he liked the challenge of politics and the challenge of meeting people and with getting their support, and that sort of thing. But the day-to-day stuff where they go through... You know, like county dinners used to bore him to death. Everybody would make the same speech, and you'd shake the same hands you shook before and go through the same motions. Those things bored him.

GREENE: But this type of thing that we're talking about now?

BURNS: No, this he liked, yeah.

GREENE: Did this have any real effect on the New York situation? Were there any people that you persuaded by it?

BURNS: No, you see most of them were committed, but what it does is they say hello to him and they shake his hand. It really gives them a lot of excitement, and they take home with them a real feeling they're going to go out there and win, that kind of thing.

GREENE: And among those that you said were just leaning towards him, did that push them over?

BURNS: Yeah, that helped push some of them, yeah. They got the feel of it and the flavor of it.

GREENE: Okay. Now, you had said at the beginning that you felt things were in pretty good condition by the time of the California primary, as far as New York was concerned.

BURNS: Yeah.

GREENE: Were you counting heavily on that primary?

BURNS: On California?

GREENE: Yeah.

BURNS: Yes.

GREENE: Was the percentage he ended up with there adequate, do you think?

BURNS: It ended up smaller than they announced earlier in the evening, as I recall.

GREENE: And they did. It was only about 46 to.... It was pretty close; it was not as close....

BURNS: We thought it was enough; we were quite happy about it. We had a party with champagne and everything. We just thought that coming out of the Oregon defeat and to win California was a real plus, even though it might have been closer than we would have liked. There was a tremendous psychological snowball effect going in our favor.

GREENE: Can you remember anything about your last conversations with the Senator? Did you speak that night after the statement?

BURNS: No, we didn't get through to him. We didn't try, I mean you could see it was hectic, we didn't try to get through. We knew we were going to see him in a day or two, so we didn't try to get through.

I think the last time I spoke to him was kind of odd—well, maybe it wasn't the last time. I've forgotten. I talked to him on long-distance a few times, and I told him it was going

tough here for awhile. We were getting bad reactions around; people kind of resenting him running and all that. I told him that on the phone.

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I remember once he was in Indiana, I told him that and by some quirk the telephone.... Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] was in California, Kennedy was in Indiana, and I was in New York. He got both of us coming in on the same line at the same time, kind of strange. So, he said, "Well, Dick, you be quiet a minute and I'll talk to John." So I told him that. I said, "We're getting the bad reaction in different places." We had some polling going on and it wasn't good. Humphrey was doing much better than we expected.

He said, "Well, what do they think?" "Well, they think you're brash, that you've got a lot of nerve to run for President," I said. "Why do they think that way?" He'd always ask these disarming questions. So I said, "I don't know, I mean they just feel that there's a lot of anti-Kennedy stuff going on. We're working; don't worry about it. I just wanted you to know what the feel of it is so you don't come back to New York and think everything's great if it isn't. We'll keep you posted on it."

GREENE: Did you stay in closer contact with Steve Smith?

BURNS: Yeah, we talked to Steve more often than we talked to him.

GREENE: Were these conversations largely a question of keeping him up to date? Or did you seek advice? Or did he...?

BURNS: Both, yes. We'd ask him about what he might have said to somebody or something. We'd have to find out different things like that.

GREENE: What's your own opinion of Smith's ability?

BURNS: Very high. I don't think there's any better man in the country to run a campaign. He's got a unique ability to handle all kinds of things all at the same time, to get things organized, and to make order out of chaos. He's a tough guy, very tough, but he's very fair and he's a real nice guy. He's got a good sense of humor, but he works hard and he demands a lot of people that work for him. He's got a hell of a clear brain; he can see things ahead and analyze things and so forth. He's a good leader.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the campaign?

BURNS: I wish he'd run for Governor of New York.

GREENE: Yes, I guess a lot of people would. Is there anything else on the campaign?

BURNS: All during that campaign we practically got no money. I mean the money was all going to wherever they were, in whatever state was being contested. One

day we were locked out of our headquarters. Jack and I had a suite in the Lancaster Hotel, which was an old fleabag on the corner of Madison and 38th Street, which is across the street from where the main headquarters was. We had phones and everything set up there, and we had to have a place to meet privately with people so we had to be separate from the rest of it.

One day we came to work and we were locked out; we hadn't paid the rent. Sal Cattell[?], who was the treasurer, hadn't paid the rent, and he said he'd looked for the guy the day before and couldn't find him. Sal would only pay when he had to. So we got George Carroll, who weighs about 280 pounds, to push the door in, and we got in. And then we settled with the hotel and we got Sal Cattell to pay him.

We had no literature, very few buttons, and people were driving us crazy for materials; we didn't have it. Gerry Cummins [Gerald Cummins], who was a specialist on the material, was with Steve out in California. I remember calling him up, and saying, "Jesus, what do you think we're doing up here? You know you guys are killing us with no material? When are we going to get the material?"

They had it timed, I'm sure, so that when he came back the material would open up, and during that two weeks the whole thing would flow. In the meantime, all of our people were driving us crazy because there was Humphrey material and all kinds of McCarthy stuff. McCarthy had material and buttons and everything going for months, or weeks, ahead of us; and we had nothing practically, just small shipments of buttons once in awhile. You'd only find them in Manhattan; you didn't have any anyplace outside of Manhattan. County leaders would come down and steal some from here to take up to their counties. So that was frustrating, the lack of money.

GREENE: You know, I didn't ask you much about the organization because I got the feeling that your own effort was mainly with political contacts, but how much of an organization did they have in the metropolitan area and how much outside? Was there much.... I know in many places you'd find that outside the metropolitan areas there's nothing. Had you been getting...?

BURNS: You mean for Kennedy?

GREENE: Well, yeah, for Kennedy.

BURNS: We were organized in every area. The upstate we had a fellow named Tom Lowery [Thomas J. Lowery, Jr.], who was suggested by Jerry Bruno. Tom was a lawyer in Syracuse and he was sort of in charge of the upstate area for us. We were in contact with him every day. Is that the kind of organization you're talking about?

GREENE: Yes, just campaign organization.

BURNS: He had an upstate office up there and he would have handled like the distribution of material up there if we ever had the materials. He had a lot to do with delegates. We had a lawsuit on some delegates and he handled all

that; and making sure that we complied with the election law every place; and setting up phone operations around the state. We had telephones going all over the place. We had a telephone operation and he was on top of that to see that the telephone operation was set up with good people running it in each county, that kind of thing. He was a Bruno suggestion; he was a good man.

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GREENE: And money?

BURNS: Money is a problem. The bills are still around now: we're still getting called on bills for that campaign.

GREENE: Did you bill whatever your own expenses were through Helen Keyes [Helen M. Keyes]?

BURNS: Yes. Actually, you see, I couldn't have any of my staff paid by the state committee if they were working for Kennedy, so what we did, we took them off the state committee payroll and put them on the payroll over there. They were paid as staff people on the Kennedy campaign, and there wasn't any state committee money used—it would have been illegal—for Kennedy.

GREENE: This shortage of money: was this a question of simply not taking the responsibility and just spending the money and sending in the bills, or did you have to advance the money?

BURNS Well, sometimes you have to advance the money on a lot of it, but, you see, we didn't design the literature, the buttons or anything. That was all done under Steve's direction, through Gerry Cummins and so forth; and the layouts were done by professional people and all that. Jack English did the layout, with a professional guy, for the New York State one that we were getting out, but they had agreed to pay for it.

There was some literature which would apply to any state and that sort of thing, and it was all coming out of Washington, all out of the national, but they weren't giving us any because of the money shortage. Then we were dying for some television or radio to get on here; there was nothing here. Of course, the whole plan was that two-week blitz.

GREENE: I was going to say you were relying very heavily on that.

BURNS: We were, yes, the last two weeks. We were the last primary in the country.

GREENE: I think you said in the beginning that you had about 150 delegates. Is that counting those that you felt you would have had after this two-week effort or is that at the time you assessed it?

BURNS: We figured places where we knew that the McCarthy people would win no matter what, then places where we knew that the Humphrey people would win, and then where we knew we'd win. Then what we did to arrive at that estimate was, where you didn't know, we just sort of estimated how many of those we'd get. We might have had as many as 170, but I mean honestly I can't say that: I just don't know.

GREENE: Anything else?

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BURNS: I knew some of the votes for Humphrey you couldn't stop. Like on the state committee my vice-chairman, Mae Gurevich, was for Humphrey; she was working at the Humphrey headquarters while I was working at the Kennedy headquarters. Under the bylaws of the state committee, she'd be a delegate, so you knew there were some that were there; you'd never get unanimous.

GREENE: Were you counting at all on McCarthy, or at least some of his people, coming over once California was over?

BURNS: We were hoping for that, yes. We were hoping that if Kennedy won California that McCarthy would see the light and say, "If I can't win myself, and if we're going to beat the Johnson-Humphrey gang, we've got to get behind Kennedy." I must say, I really didn't believe he'd do it, but I was hoping he'd do it.

GREENE: I know in other states there were a lot of McCarthy top people who told Kennedy's people before the California primary that if Kennedy took it they were planning to come over. Did you have anything like that in New York?

BURNS: I think there were some, but I didn't have too much contact. I think maybe Jack may have; he could tell you more about that. I didn't have too much of that. The Humphrey people here that we were in contact with were so.... In the first place they were mostly people that had never been for Kennedy. They were sort of anti-Kennedy people right along. They were in command of that campaign. I think some of their troops in the field might have come over. We had some of that but not on the higher level. Like Sarah Kovner, I don't think she would ever come over; Costikyan, I doubt it. Not too friendly.

GREENE: One question that occurred to me: When you told Robert Kennedy about this, or afterwards, was it your impression that Johnson's withdrawal was a complete surprise, that he had never really expected it? I had heard that there had been some warnings about this.

BURNS: I couldn't tell whether he was surprised or not. He was solemn, very cool, but he stayed on the plane awhile and had me repeat it a couple of times, what he [Johnson] said, just to make sure he understood what it was. I think there were

people that told him that Johnson will never stay in and all that, but that was pure conjecture. I don't think anybody knew what Johnson was going to do. What I think was that Kennedy—you know, I was one who thought, "Jesus, we're in. Johnson's out of it. This is it. We're in."—knew that wasn't about to happen.

GREENE: Would you say that your feeling was more prevalent among people that were at the apartment that night? Did most of them think that this was...?

BURNS: Yeah. I can't say that for sure but I think that's probably true. I felt it, but it's

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probably naïve on my part. Then the next few weeks.... And soon Humphrey just automatically got a lot of support he didn't even try for—in a lot of the non-primary states, and that sort of thing. I couldn't see that; I couldn't understand why they did that. He looked like a sure loser. But I knew they were soft enough so that if we'd won the New York primary and then went after a lot of them—like Pennsylvania was a pretty good one; and Illinois, and a number of them—I think we would have gotten them. Even though some of them had taken a prior position, I think we would have switched them.

GREENE: Did you get involved that night at all in a discussion of how Johnson's withdrawal would effect the issues in the campaign and the tenor of Kennedy's?

BURNS: Yeah. It kind of took the war out of the campaign. What Kennedy saw, I'm sure, was that he was campaigning against Johnson and the war, and this was now, to a great extent, taken out of it. We had to change his whole strategy.

GREENE: Did you talk in terms of what else he might seize upon?

BURNS: I didn't talk to him much about it that night, I must say. He was pretty well closeted on the phone, and with Ted Sorensen and a few others, and I didn't get involved in that. I think at that time he was still thinking of...

[INTERRUPTION] ...he'd come out for Johnson and then for Humphrey, and we kept after Procaccino [Mario Angelo Procaccino]. He wanted to speak to the Senator before he did anything. We had a date all set up for him to see the Senator in the hope to—there's Jack English. Come on it—get his endorsement that he had carefully avoided it up until then. He says now that he was going to endorse him.

GREENE: Naturally. How did Kennedy feel about him after the election?

BURNS: He didn't know Procaccino very well. Frankly, I don't think he had too high an assessment of Procaccino. I mean I think he liked him as a person, but as a dynamic leader or something he didn't think too great of him. He just thought

he was a nice guy holding an office but he never saw any great signs of leadership on his part. He was sort of the old; not the new.

GREENE: Were there other people like that in New York that he...?

BURNS: Yes, we had a lot of... We had congressmen that we were going to have him see; and we had state legislators, and various people that had remained neutral we had lined up for him to see. We had great plans. I don't know if there's

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anybody else; I mentioned Procaccino. Who else is there that's significant that we haven't talked about? Arthur Levitt; what about Arthur Levitt? Oh, he told us that he'd ultimately be for Kennedy, but I don't think he ever made a public pronouncement.

GREENE: How did Kennedy feel about...?

BURNS: He was trying to walk the fence.

GREENE: How did Kennedy feel about people like that who were taking the safe road, what they thought was the safe road?

BURNS: Well, he was a little more tolerant of them than you might think. He understood they had a problem, but he was hopeful of getting them. He had a lot more respect for somebody who would stick his neck out, though. He'd never say, "That so and so" or anything, with some notable exceptions. But generally he understood. I remember one time he came into a dinner—of course, Arthur Levitt was a very dignified, sort of a vain guy—they were going up the escalator over at the Hilton, and he saw Arthur and he said, "Hello Abe."

GREENE: Oh, dear.

BURNS: Then he said, "Oh, it's not Abe, it's Arthur!" and he nearly died.

GREENE: I don't know how politicians ever manage not to do that all the time.

BURNS: Yeah. But Levitt, I'll say this, he went to the dinner at the time Kennedy was announced, and traveled with him and was associated with him. And Zaretzki was for Kennedy, and so was Travia. They announced for Kennedy. So they stood up.

GREENE: The Johnson peoples' effort to downgrade that dinner didn't work out very well, did it?

BURNS: No, it was a huge success. I mean, you couldn't get near the place, it was just

fantastic. And their effort to pull back important leaders didn't work either.

GREENE: Well, if you think of anything else we can always put it on another tape.

BURNS: Okay.

GREENE: Because I know you're fairly anxious to go.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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