

John M. Patterson Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 5/26/1967
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

John M. Patterson was the Governor of Alabama from 1959 to 1963. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign in Alabama, the Kennedy administration's stance on civil rights, and the 1961 riots following the arrival of the Freedom Riders in Alabama, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

with

JOHN PATTERSON

May 26, 1967
Montgomery, Alabama

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Governor, why don't we begin by my asking you if you recall when you first met John Kennedy and what your impressions of him were?

PATTERSON: Well, I had read a good bit about him. I had read some statements and excerpts from speeches that he had made, and I had some knowledge of him, at least, the kind of person he was, and the things that he stood for, and the statements that he had made concerning various problems in the country. I had looked forward to the opportunity of meeting him personally.

Now, the first time I met him, though, was in Birmingham, Alabama, at the Alabama League of Municipalities Convention. This was in 1957, or '58, I believe, the convention of one of those years. Ed E. Reid, who was a friend of Mr. Kennedy's, was the Executive Secretary of the Alabama League of Municipalities. He called me up and told me that he had three banquets during this three day convention and that he had a prominent speaker for each banquet, but he could only invite me to one of them because of limited space and wanted to know which one of the speakers I wanted to hear. He told me that Mr. Kennedy was going to be one of the speakers, so I told him I'd like to attend the banquet that Mr. Kennedy was going

to speak at. And I did. He spoke that evening on organized crime and some other matters, but primarily on organized crime in the United States. I sat at the head table--I was the attorney general of the state at that time--and after he finished his speech I walked up to him and introduced myself to him and talked to him for a few moments. I remember something he said to me on that occasion, he said, "Yes, I know you. You knew what I was talking about tonight, didn't you?" And I said, "Yes, sir, I sure did." You see, I had somewhat of a background in fighting organized crime myself, that's how I happened to come on the political scene in Alabama, because the organized crime situation in the state and particularly in Phenix City, back at the time that my father was the Democratic nominee for attorney general and was assassinated over there.

STEWART: You hadn't been, then, at the 1956 convention?

PATTERSON: No, I did not attend the '56 convention. And I'd never met Mr. Kennedy until at this League Convention in Birmingham on that occasion.

STEWART: Following up with that, did you, as attorney general, have any contacts with him in connection with the hearings that he was holding on the corruption in the labor movement?

PATTERSON: Not directly with him. My contacts with the people that were doing investigating at that time on the Federal level were with Senator [Estes] Kefauver. I had some personal contact with him. I had on one occasion testified before the Kefauver committee in Miami about some things that were going on in Alabama.

STEWART: Was it immediately clear to you after this first meeting and with your knowledge of the political climate of the country that Kennedy was going to make a run in 1960?

PATTERSON: Well, my feeling about the thing was this: I felt like the people were looking for a young man with a sort of a new look, at least, that

was my feeling and my thinking. And Mr. Kennedy was a very attractive fellow. He had a very pleasing personality; he was friendly; he had a rather informal way about him that would put you at ease when you talked to him. He appealed to people. And he had, as I say, a new look in politics. A lot of people were then, and are now, dissatisfied with the old way of doing things, and he sort of represented a new look in that it was a new way of doing things. At least, that was what people thought. And this is what I thought, and I had a feeling at that time that this was probably the next President of the United States. And I felt that even more strongly a little bit later on before he ever made it clear that he was going to run. But even at that time there was considerable talk in circles here that he was going to be a candidate. This is probably one of the reasons why Mr. Reid invited him to the convention.

STEWART: Now you were elected Governor, if I'm correct, in 1958?

PATTERSON: And then took office in '59, that's correct.

STEWART: In early 1959 you had a meeting in Washington with Senator Kennedy which later became somewhat publicized and, I assume, as a result of this you endorsed Senator Kennedy for the Presidency. Could you describe, do you remember this meeting you had with Senator Kennedy in February of 1959?

PATTERSON: I had been in Washington several times along during this period of time before he ever became a formally announced candidate for the presidency. And on two or three occasions I had dropped by his office in the Senate Office Building. And usually with me on those trips was Charles Meriwether, who at that time was my finance director. Mr. Meriwether and I worked very closely together in Alabama in our politics, and he usually was with me on these trips. He was a very close friend of Mr. Kennedy's, himself. On this particular visit that you're talking about, we had been invited--I say "we," it was Mr. Meriwether and myself and I had a couple of people from my staff with me--and Mr. Reid might have been along on that trip, but I don't recall. Anyway, we were invited to come out and have breakfast with Mr.

Kennedy out at his home in Georgetown. And we went out and had a talk with him and had breakfast with him. We discussed the political situation in Alabama primarily at that time. I expressed my interest in his candidacy if he was considering that. It was pretty generally understood at that time that he was considering running for President. He was very interested in what was going on in Alabama and the South politically. Our talk at that time was just primarily about what the situation was down here. And I at that time expressed my interest in his candidacy and told him that I would be pleased to help him in any way that I possibly could.

STEWART: you
Do you recall any specific discussion as to whether you should or should not endorse him for the Presidency?

PATTERSON: There was no discussion of that at all. In fact, that question never came up.

STEWART: Was it your feeling then that he would be quite in favor of an open endorsement by you at that time?

PATTERSON: I didn't ask him that, nor did he bring that up. The way that thing came out in the paper, when we left the breakfast that morning and went back to the Capitol, we were there on some other business, Mr. Reid, who was up there with us at that time, was a very close friend of Grover Hall, who was the editor of the Montgomery Advertiser down here. And Mr. Reid called Grover on the telephone and told Grover that I was going to support Mr. Kennedy for President. Grover put it in the paper that afternoon as an announcement from me that I was going to support Mr. Kennedy for President. Mr. Hall, who's now the editor of the Richmond Leader, was not a Kennedy supporter, nor was he a Patterson supporter either, and I suspect that the reason he did this was to try to in some way discredit me and Mr. Kennedy.

STEWART: The reason, of course, that I think--and possibly this meeting wasn't as important as people later made it out to be. But, of course, during the 1960 campaign Negro leaders in particular, certain liberal leaders, kept referring to this meeting with you as an indication of the lack of a liberal outlook that President Kennedy presumably had.

PATTERSON: This is true. They tried to use this meeting to hurt Mr. Kennedy's candidacy. And they used the meeting in the South and Alabama to try to hurt me, meeting with a Catholic, a candidate for President. They used that here in Alabama against me, and they used it against him wherever they thought they might hurt him. We didn't discuss at this meeting, nor did we ever discuss, the racial situation or discuss anything along that line. My interest in Mr. Kennedy and my support of Mr. Kennedy for President was because I thought that he was the best man for the United States at that particular time for President of the United States. He never promised me anything. I liked the man personally; I considered him a friend. I liked his views; I liked his economic views. He wanted to do something to solve some of the problems in this country today that needed to be solved and have not yet been solved. And I was very much interested in that. I don't classify myself as any conservative, particularly in reference to economic matters. And I was primarily concerned with Mr. Kennedy for his policies and statements in regard to economic conditions in the country. I think that some of the things that he said concerning foreign relations are very important to us. I think that we need a complete re-evaluation of our foreign policy in this country, and I think that if he'd have lived that it might have been a little different, as far as our foreign relations are concerned. And I was interested in him for those reasons. Also I think he disliked organized crime as much as I did, and this was something I was very interested in, too.

STEWART: Did you foresee the problems that would result from your endorsement when you did endorse him in June of 1959?

PATTERSON: I didn't realize, myself. Maybe I'm naive; maybe I was then. I'd be a lot smarter about it now, I guess, but I'd do the same thing all over again. I'd still support him again. I didn't realize that people here in Alabama would be as strongly against a man running for President because of his religion as they were. From a political point of view here in Alabama, endorsing him was, there was some considerable risk involved for myself politically. I never realized that they would be as strong against a man because of his religion as they were. The Baptist and Methodist churches here in the State of Alabama had an organized thing going against him, and of course, they drew me into it, too. In fact, The Christian Advocate, which is the newspaper of the Methodist Church, and I'm a Methodist, one of the issues coming out had a headline--"Why Does Governor Patterson Want a Catholic for President?"--had a front page editorial. It was a vicious thing.

STEWART: I've seen quotes from that.

PATTERSON: On a given Sunday every Methodist and Baptist church in Alabama, practically every one of them, well, they preached a sermon against Kennedy for President. And my own church, they did that. I had words with my own minister about that. I didn't realize that this would be such a factor; I had just not realized that. As far as he's concerned, I think probably my endorsement and my working for him here in the South at that time was of some embarrassment and difficulty to him because of these liberals, so-called liberal Negro organizations that didn't like me at that time. But my association with him, certainly whatever his views were in regard to the racial situation, I'm sure that my endorsement and support of him had no effect upon that.

STEWART: And this wasn't at all a concern of yours? Religion was more of a concern than the race problem at that time?

PATTERSON: Well, as far as my working and campaigning for him here in the South and particularly in Alabama, the thing that I ran into that was the worst was the religious aspect. The racial situation at that time was not as great a factor as. . . . Supporting him didn't hurt me at all, from the racial point of view. At that time in Alabama there was no integration of public schools anywhere in the state. And we had not yet reached the point where there was a showdown at that time. The showdown came after I left the Governor's office and after Mr. [George C.] Wallace came in, was when the showdown came, after Kennedy was gone.

STEWART: Then you would conclude that there was no, that neither President Kennedy nor any of his top advisors encouraged you not to make the endorsement?

PATTERSON: No. No, sir. Nobody in the Kennedy organization ever tried to get me not to say anything. Nobody ever said anything about it, nor even after the endorsement came out in the paper. It started right here in Montgomery. Nothing was ever said by Mr. Kennedy or Mr. [Lawrence F.] O'Brien or any of those people about it. I was always left to say and do whatever I pleased. That's correct.

STEWART: The reason I ask is that because in [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen's book, he quite specifically says that the endorsement was against Senator Kennedy's wishes. But. . . .

PATTERSON: Well, if it was, it was never made known to me. Never.

STEWART: Did you undertake to generate support for Kennedy throughout the South before the convention? Were you actively campaigning for him before the convention?

PATTERSON: Yes. Now here's how we did that. He was, of course, interested in doing well in these preferential primaries. And he undertook first the Wisconsin preferential primary. Alabama at that time was essentially a one party state, and still is, for that matter. The Governor is the titular head of the party by virtue of just being Governor. The party is governed by the Democratic Executive Committee, and the chairman of the committee had all the power. He can spend the money of the committee without committee authorization, and he can just do anything. The chairman had all the power. Traditionally the Governor gets to appoint the chairman, and I did. So I had the chairman of the committee, Mr. Sam Engelhart, who was my highway director.

So we had the machinery of the Democratic Party that we could put behind anybody that we chose to do so. And we put it behind--as much as we could, we had some division in our ranks--behind Mr. Kennedy. So we, I say "we," me and Mr. Meriwether, Mr. Engelhart and Mr. John Overton, who is a good friend of Mr. Kennedy's. Mr. Overton's with Turner Bonding and Insurance Company here in town. We helped collect some funds to help finance the Kennedy campaign in the preferential primaries in Wisconsin and Maryland--no, not Maryland, in Wisconsin and West Virginia, correct. And we did raise some money to help him in those campaigns. Now we dealt with [Stephen E.] Steve Smith, he's the man that we worked with who was obviously put in charge of this area. In other words, he was our contact man in the Kennedy organization, and we frequently contacted him, went to see him in New York, and worked with him right on up through the convention and the campaign. We worked right with Steve Smith, who is Mr. Kennedy's brother-in-law. We helped mainly financially in the Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries.

And during this period of time we were organizing here in Alabama to get delegates elected to the Democratic Convention who would support Kennedy. This was our primary job at that time was to get Kennedy delegates elected. Now, you have to get them elected. I believe at that time there were thirty-six delegates and they were divided into halves, which meant that would be seventy-two people, which made it more difficult. And in an effort to get Kennedy delegates, we would try to find candidates whose names started with an A so they'd be first on

the ballot. A lot of people, when they get down to voting on a long list like that, would go from the top. We had people running who were Kennedy people running pledged to vote for [Orval E.] Faubus and stuff like that, just trying to get somebody elected so that we could go to California to the convention with Kennedy delegates. Believe you me, it was a job. And when the final vote came at the convention we had fourteen votes out of thirty-six, which was twenty-eight people. And believe you me, they were tough to get. It took a long time to get them, and it was hard, and it was expensive.

STEWART: How many of these were Kennedy supporters?

PATTERSON: There were fourteen votes.

STEWART: Fourteen.

PATTERSON: Twenty-eight people. That's right. Now when the--we'll come back to the convention a little later; I'll tell you a little bit about it. Go ahead now, you were saying, we helped him in the primaries.

STEWART: Helped him in other areas of the South.

PATTERSON: I went to Alexandria, Louisiana, and made the principal kick-off speech of the Democratic campaign in Louisiana. The reason that I was asked to do this was because of my position on the racial issue and other questions that were sensitive in the South at that time. I was very well-known as the spokesman for the Southern cause at that time throughout the South so I, at the request of some of the party leaders in Louisiana who were strong Kennedy backers, went to Alexandria, Louisiana, and kicked off the Kennedy--not the Kennedy campaign, but the Democratic campaign in Louisiana.

STEWART: Which I think amounted to the Kennedy campaign because of the situation there where this group, primarily Camille Grawel and people like this, were Kennedy people that were having their problems with the Louisiana. . . .

PATTERSON: Well, the principal people over there that were working for Kennedy were Senator Russell Long, who was a very close friend of Senator Kennedy's, and a person who is now on the Federal bench down there. Kennedy appointed him. . . .

STEWART: Clyde Ellis. Frank Ellis.

PATTERSON: Frank Ellis.

STEWART: He's retired now.

PATTERSON: Is he really?

STEWART: Yes, that's right.

PATTERSON: Well now, Frank Ellis and Russell Long were the two people that I recall that were primarily in charge of the situation in Louisiana, and they instigated me coming over there and making the keynote address there for the party.

STEWART: Did you definitely feel that Senator Kennedy on the ticket would be an asset in the South locally? Would be an asset to other candidates in the South?

PATTERSON: Well I knew that it was going to be a tough thing in the South and tough here in Alabama with him on the ticket. But I felt very confident that he was going to be elected, and, you know, this is another reason why I worked for him, and it wasn't entirely because of what he stood for and everything; I felt like he was going to win. And I felt like that we ought to get in there and help him if we could, and if he did win, then we would have a voice in the Administration in Washington, which is something that we very badly needed in Alabama and something that we need today and don't have. This was an effort partly on my part to play a part in national politics and try to get a voice for Alabama in national affairs, which we did not have.

STEWART: Right. As far as the . . .

PATTERSON: I'm not finished. In Alabama at that time [Lyndon B.] Johnson, of course, was running. He sent his people in here to try to undermine us. He sent in here a fellow from Dallas named [Robert A.] Hall, Judge Hall. He used to be a District judge out there in Dallas. And he came in here and tried to undermine our efforts. And they selected MacDonald Gallion, who was my chief assistant when I was attorney general, who later was attorney general when I was Governor. They ran Gallion in Alabama to try to get the chairmanship of the delegation going to the convention. They were trying to beat our efforts because the chairman had most of the authority, but we were able to elect the chairman going to the Democratic Convention. The Johnson forces made every effort to try to undermine us, and as far as most of the political leaders of the state were concerned, practically none of them were openly for Kennedy. I don't guess they felt it was safe to be for him. Not a single Congressman or United States Senator from Alabama went to the convention, and they were all Democrats.

STEWART: Was this usual practice, or did they normally go?

PATTERSON: No, they were just laying out. They found business in other places. And so I was carrying the banner for Kennedy at the convention, and there were no other public officials there of any high rank. And those who were there, in my judgment, most of those were for Johnson. I think that's right, I think the political, the old political setup in Alabama, the old political organization was working with Lyndon Johnson. And we sort of represented a group of folks that sort of revolted. And, of course, after the convention, when he became the nominee and during the general election, it was a tough thing here. We did have a few rallies, and we had some speeches by Senator [Lister] Hill. I think Senator Hill came down and made several speeches during the general election. And Congressman Albert Rains of Gadsden and Carl Elliott of Jasper made several speeches, and I made several speeches. It was tough in the general election. And the Democrats won, but, you know, we had eleven electors in,

and when they met in December to cast their votes, six of them voted for Harry Byrd and five of them went for Kennedy. This is what you're faced with in Alabama.

STEWART: Was the matter of people pledging their loyalty to the Democratic ticket before the convention a factor in the election of delegates? There was a problem as there . . .

PATTERSON: Yes. I would say, yes.

STEWART: . . . was in many other Democratic Conventions of . . .

PATTERSON: I would say, yes. We used to have a loyalty oath in the state that was rather severe. I think it said if you hadn't supported openly and actively the Democratic ticket for several administrations back, you couldn't qualify and run for office on the Democratic ticket. But today that only applies to the last election. This is a typical oath that's in, I think, all the states. So the oath is not really a major factor any more in Alabama like it used to be. But at that time, we had people running for delegate and running for electors who said, "Now I'm not going to vote for Kennedy." They would run as independents, and they'd get elected. Some of them were really Republicans in the Democratic ticket.

STEWART: There were some of these within the delegation then that went to the convention?

PATTERSON: Sure. Oh, we had some real mavericks in the thing. We had some folks, I think, that ran for delegate for the sole purpose of going out there and trying to disrupt the thing any way they could. But essentially it was divided pretty much down the middle between Kennedy and Johnson. I'd say two-thirds of them for Johnson and about a third of them for Kennedy. That's what we were faced with.

Now at the convention we dealt with Smith, Steve Smith. We had to have a buddy system; we'd just take one of my men and put with one of these delegates and say, "You live with him. Now you have him there when the time comes to vote." They would wine them and dine them and entertain them and you just hadn't ever seen nothing like it, to try to woo our votes away from us. At the time that we got ready to ballot for the nomination for President, Steve Smith came to me on the floor of the hall and said, "How many have you got?" I said, "Well, we've got about fourteen, we think. It could be one or two either way, because we don't know what's happened in the last few hours." He said, "Well, we want you to cast five votes for Kennedy on the first ballot, and then if they go all the way through and he doesn't get a majority and they start back over again, we want you to cast your full fourteen at that time to show that we picked up in Alabama to try to start a trend." So we agreed to that, and we had a hard time getting some of them fellows to agree to vote for somebody else on the first go-round, to reduce it to four or five. But we did, and of course it never got back around before he got the majority. Several of the delegates who had changed at our request came up to me after it was over and said, "Are you sure now that Mr. Kennedy knows that I was going to do that?" And I said, "Yes, I'm sure." [Laughter]

STEWART: Who did. . . . The others voted for Johnson? Was it strictly Johnson?

PATTERSON: No, no. Some of them voted for other people. We had one man, I think he was going to vote for Kennedy and voted for Faubus on the first go-round.

STEWART: Is that right? Did you have anything at all to do with the civil rights plank of the Democratic National Convention Platform in 1960?

PATTERSON: One of the members of the Democratic Executive Committee and a member of the delegation was Ralph Smith, who was my legal advisor, and Ralph

was placed on the platform committee and, actually, was able to do very little in reference to it. It was a pretty cut and dried situation. The platform writing committee was pretty well stacked. About all we could do through our people on the committee was just keep ourselves informed. That's about all.

STEWART: Had you anticipated the extent to which the civil rights plank would go in, for example, endorsing demonstrations and calling for abolition of the poll tax and so forth?

PATTERSON: Yes. We figured it would be pretty stout. However, the platform, in my judgment, is not a very important or has not been a very important factor. I just don't put too much stock in the platform. That's something to argue and fuss about during the campaign, but after the campaign is over, the platform essentially becomes something that's relegated to history.

STEWART: Had there been any discussion, either during the convention or before, on the probable policies and practices of the Kennedy Administration in the area of civil rights if he was elected?

PATTERSON: Oh, yes, there was considerable talk about that, and a lot of people down here took the position that he was an integrationist and that he was going to cram this thing down our throats. But, of course, the Republican platform was just as stout. There wasn't that much difference in the two platforms, when it came to this issue. Each of them were obviously trying to outdo the other, and, of course, I wasn't naive enough to think that a man could be elected President of the United States at that time on a segregation ticket. I think primarily the people who attacked me and attacked him in this area on the racial situation were more interested in trying to seize control of politics in Alabama than they were in trying to affect the outcome of the national presidential race. Oh, it's been long known, and long before Mr. Kennedy ever came on the scene, we knew down here that we were fighting a delaying battle in so far as the segregation of public schools and public facilities were concerned. So, I mean, nobody ever entertained any real hope of changing the

policies of the Federal government in reference to the integration of schools and public facilities.

STEWART: Right. Of course, again, it's frequently been charged by very liberal people that there was some type of an understanding reached between the Kennedy people and people like yourself in the South who were supporting him on the policies that the administration would carry out.

PATTERSON: Now this is absolutely not true. There was never any conversation between me and Mr. Kennedy or any of his people or associates about any sort of an agreement involving the civil rights field in any way. They never tried to interfere with anything that I said; they never tried to dictate to me. I think if I had approached him on any sort of a go-easy proposition, he'd have probably resented it. My hope in the matter was that we would have an active part in his campaign, that we would contribute something to it, and that by doing that we would have a place where we could get an audience for the problems that we had and could be heard, which is something that we did not have at that time and do not have today.

STEWART: Did you anticipate the stand that the Kennedy campaign would take on civil rights during the campaign?

PATTERSON: Yes.

STEWART: Certainly, I think, as the campaign went along, his identification with Negro leaders and with liberal groups in general became stronger and stronger.

PATTERSON: Well, of course, things like calling up Mrs. [Martin Luther King, Jr.] King on the telephone--you remember that?

STEWART: Right.

PATTERSON: Well, these things, of course, were hard to carry here, in view of the constant harassment and

badgering by the daily press . . .

STEWART: Right.

PATTERSON: . . . and our political enemies. But I guess that that Drew Pearson column every day of my support of Kennedy was hard for him to bear, too. You see, we thought something else, too, in this thing. You know, he never came to me and asked me to support him. I went to him. I never did it on any condition that I'd receive anything. I never asked for anything. And I think that one of Johnson's biggest selling points at that time was he had a solid South. But so long as I was here, publicly for Kennedy, publicly campaigning with him, going to the convention with a bunch of delegates from Alabama for John Kennedy, Mr. Johnson couldn't honestly say that he had a solid South because he didn't have the most southern of all of the Southern states, Alabama. And we were a chink in his armor. And it was quite apparent at the convention. Now, I think he remembered it a long time, too.

STEWART: Is that right? Do you recall any direct contacts with the Johnson people in an attempt to dissuade you from your . . .

PATTERSON: Oh, yes. It was just terrific; it really was.

STEWART: Were you personally . . .

PATTERSON: They didn't put a lot of heat on me, not directly. It came through the press and speeches made by other political leaders in Alabama. I was talked to by some of the Johnson people, Judge Hall; I'd received some letters from Texas from friends of mine encouraging me to support Lyndon Johnson. I didn't have anything against Mr. Johnson; I just was interested in Mr. Kennedy. And I was interested in him long before I ever knew that Mr. Johnson was seriously entertaining the thought of even running for President. And one of Mr. Johnson's closest friends and an associate of mine at the time was the Governor of Tennessee, Buford Ellington. Mr. Ellington and I are good friends and had a lot of business

together between our states when we were Governors. And, of course, I knew that Buford was doing everything that he could to help President Johnson. And I was doing everything I could to help Mr. Kennedy. And it was quite apparent that they would have liked for me to come on over. And they made that quite clear, but they didn't put any heat on me. But these delegates, now, even up to the night at the convention when they cast their ballots, would get telegrams from Alabama three or four yards long from ministers and everybody else threatening dire consequences against them, business-wise and every other way, if they supported a Catholic. This was a very bitter thing, and that pressure was primarily a religious pressure more than anything else. It took a lot of courage for a delegate, just an ordinary citizen, to go out there to California and stand up there and vote for John Kennedy for President of the United States. It took a lot of courage to do that.

STEWART: It's amazing, the intensity of religious feeling in many parts of the country. I don't know if anyone fully anticipated . . .

PATTERSON: I've lived here all my life, and I never had any idea it would ever be like that. I never had any idea about it. I hope that they've changed now. I think his election changed a lot of people's thinking along this line.

STEWART: Oh, I'm sure it would never become such a factor again.

PATTERSON: Kennedy ran very strong, you know, in the South. You know, his biggest state was Louisiana. That was his biggest state. And he ran very well in Georgia. And he ran very well here, as far as you can assess it. When you elect eleven electors and have six of them turn around after the thing's all over and vote for Harry Byrd and throw their vote away, I can't explain that. Mr. Kennedy asked me about that one time; all I could do was laugh.

STEWART: There was some mention of you as a possible vice presidential candidate. Was this ever serious, or were there many people talking about this?

PATTERSON: Well, this was never communicated to me. If there was any talk about this, it was in some other circles other than my circle.

STEWART: All right. There was also some mention of Governor [S. Ernest] Vandiver as a possible vice presidential candidate. Do you recall this, and what. . . .

PATTERSON: No, I've never heard that before.

STEWART: No?

PATTERSON: No.

STEWART: I guess just about everyone was mentioned as a possible vice presidential candidate.

PATTERSON: When they got around to deciding on who his running mate was going to be that night after he had been nominated--you see, they nominate the vice presidential candidate the next night--there was quite a huddle at Mr. Kennedy's hotel.

STEWART: There was a meeting the following morning of a number of governors from Southern states in Mr. Kennedy's suite.

PATTERSON: That's right.

STEWART: Were you at that meeting?

PATTERSON: I was not at that meeting.

STEWART: You weren't?

PATTERSON: No. I was not at that meeting.

STEWART: Did you have any discussion at all with . . .

PATTERSON: None at all.

STEWART: . . . Senator Kennedy or anyone in the Kennedy camp over the vice presidential nominee, for the selection of him?

PATTERSON: Now wait a minute. Someone either saw me and asked me or called me and asked me what I thought about Lyndon Johnson as a vice presidential candidate. This came as a surprise to me, because in my circle this had been a very bitter struggle, and I felt that some of the Johnson people had stirred up some bitter feeling in the thing. And it came as a surprise to me, but I was for it. And I did express myself to someone, I forget who it was, that I thought this was a good idea because I saw this as an opportunity to try to smooth over some very troubled waters here in Alabama for myself. And I thought it was a good idea, and it made it a lot easier for us to campaign for the Democratic ticket in Alabama. Although I was not at that meeting, had not been asked to attend that meeting, I was asked by someone (who, I can't remember) what I thought about it. I remember telling him that I thought it was a very good idea; I was all for it, a little surprised, but for it. Because this, of course, made these people who were out there from Alabama fighting me come back home with at least something. And it got all of their help, and we got all of their help in the general election as a result of that here in the state.

And then when Johnson came through Alabama on the train with his wife campaigning for he and Kennedy, then I traveled on the train with him and introduced him at the stops along the way, all the way through Alabama, from Pensacola to the Mississippi line. And this, of course, helped us tremendously in Alabama. Because at that time, you know, they were billing Johnson, the Johnson people in Alabama were billing Johnson, as a Southerner, saying, "He's one of us." You see? The implication being that he believed in all the things that they wanted down here at that time. But nothing could have been further from the

truth, and, of course, I knew it. Those of us in Alabama that fought this racial battle for many years in the courts knew all the time where we were heading. It was strictly a question of time and trying to get adjusted to it. At that time my thinking was that this battle would be fought out in the courts and the President had very little to do with it.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in efforts to get other Southern Governors, such as Governor Vandiver, to endorse the ticket? There was a period right after the convention in which people, I can't think of any other except Governor Vandiver, refused to endorse the Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

PATTERSON: No. I didn't get involved in that. They had a man in Atlanta who they were a lot closer to than they were me, and gee, I forget who.

STEWART: [Robert A., Jr.] Bobby Troutman, probably.

PATTERSON: Troutman, that's right. Troutman was the fellow that was sort of looking after their business over there. Now Troutman used to make periodic visits over here to see me and sort of acted as a coordinator, but it was essentially a campaign situation; it wasn't trying to get Ernie Vandiver to endorse anybody.

STEWART: How, you mentioned this before, but how, essentially, was the campaign organized here in Alabama? Who was the chairman of the campaign organization, and how did the organization differ from that of previous elections?

PATTERSON: Well, previously we haven't had many real well-organized, well-financed general elections because there has been no necessity for it. As I said, it's a one party state. When you win in the primary in May and June, you're in, if you're a Democrat. However, it was obvious that this wasn't going to be so easy.

So we used the state Democratic Committee, which is the party organization, and the chairman, Mr. Engelhart. We used the committee for the purpose of getting funds. And then we raised money. Now I was Governor then; an incumbent governor can raise money. And we raised money for the campaign. And we financed a general election campaign in Alabama, which was rather unusual at that time. I forget exactly how much money was spent, but a good bit for a general election.

Now we selected as chairman in charge of the campaign, Charles Adams, of Alexander City, Alabama, who at that time was probate judge of Tallapoosa County, Alabama, and had previously been the speaker of the house during part of my administration. Now, he is a loyal Democrat and has been all his life, and he was a leader in Alabama politics. Charlie's now in Atlanta; he's one of the directors over there with the Federal housing agency in Atlanta. Charles Cashion was the assistant to Adams in the campaign. Mr. Cashion is a businessman from Red Bay, Alabama, a loyal Democrat and very active in Alabama politics, has been for many years. And those are the two men that primarily ran it, with the help of our administration that was in office at that time, with the state Democratic machinery, and with Mr. Engelhart, chairman of the state Democratic Committee in Alabama.

And we had pretty well the support of the rank and file of the county and city officials all over the state. After all, they're all Democrats, too, except in one county, see, one county. The major opposition was in south Alabama in the area that we call the Black Belt, and the major support for Mr. Kennedy was in north Alabama, in the Tennessee Valley regions and in the heavy industrial areas where the people are essentially Democratic. So we felt pretty good about electing eleven electors. But in a big bunch of them it's hard to elect all of them that you want, so we wound up with six of them that voted for Harry Byrd.

STEWART: Excuse me, now, how did these electors appear on the ballot? Do they appear pledged to a candidate?

PATTERSON: No, just their names.

STEWART: They're all unpledged, essentially.

PATTERSON: That's right, essentially. They are all on the Democratic column of the ballot. Your ballot will have at the top the party name and emblem. It will have the elephant, and under there it will have the electors of the Republican Party and the other candidates, too. It will be a long thing. And then you'll have a Democratic column with a whole list of Democratic people, and then you might have some other parties, too. Well, under the law, you know, an elector can vote for anybody he wants to. And after they run on the Democratic ticket and get elected electors, they can go up there to the secretary of state's office when they're supposed to meet in December after the election and vote for anybody. This ought to be changed.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

STEWART: It hasn't been changed.

PATTERSON: No, but it ought to be. I think maybe the Supreme Court might change it, if Congress don't.

STEWART: To what extent were there congressional people involved in the campaign, the campaign organization as such, and to what extent did the congressional delegation support the ticket? Or did they all?

PATTERSON: Yes, I would say that they did. When Mr. Johnson came through on the train speaking at every stop through Alabama with his wife, Congressman [Frank William] Boykin was on board, Congressman Elliott, Congressman Rains, Congressman [George McInvale] Grant--I remember them particularly. I would say that all of the Democratic. . . . Congressman [Armistead Inge, Jr.] Selden was on there. Senator Hill, and later

[John J.] Sparkman joined the campaign, candidate. So I would say that the entire Alabama delegation supported the Democratic ticket in that campaign. Some maybe more active than others.

STEWART: Right. What contact, if any, did you have with either Robert Kennedy or the President or people in the headquarters in Washington during the campaign, do you recall?

PATTERSON: My contact primarily was with Steve Smith. I saw him numerous times. We saw him in Washington, also in New York on several occasions. We coordinated our activities with him. We raised some funds in Alabama for the Kennedy campaign. We dealt with him. I saw Robert on a couple of occasions, not much, a couple of times. Saw him several times at California during the convention. You know, he was sort of the man in charge of organizing the thing.

Now we helped in another way during the campaign. They had trouble with their television distribution. They had trouble where Mr. Kennedy would speak at one place and go on to another town, they had trouble getting the essential part of his speech they wanted to get across filmed and then reproduce that quick and then bicycled around to the various stations in the area to be used, to get the maximum amount out of what he said wherever he went through television. And they had trouble with that, and they told us they were having trouble with it, and we had a man here who was a real expert at that, Roy Marcato. Roy had done this for me during my campaign. Roy was a real professional. He knew how, he had the knack. He could put a TV thing together right quick and get it out. He knew what to film and how to edit it and cut it. He knew. He's good. And he was the head of our Bureau of Publicity and Information here, which is a tourist advertising agency in Alabama. We sort of had him side-tracked over there to give him a job. We offered Roy to them. And they jumped at it, so Roy Marcato went with the Kennedy campaign, traveled on one of his airplanes. He had two airplanes, and he went with them and worked with Mr. Kennedy in helping do some of these technical things that needed to be done to get better TV coverage.

He traveled with them and worked with them throughout the campaign. Roy Marcato is now employed as a public relations man with NASA, Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama.

They had trouble in New York with their film distribution problems, and they asked us if we had anybody that knew anything about that. And we did: Harry Cook. Harry Cook was my press secretary. And we loaned them Harry Cook. All of this was, of course, at our expense. And Harry Cook went to New York and worked in their distribution center there in New York to help with their film and TV film distribution. Harry Cook at the present time is Executive Director of the National Waterways Conference in Washington. So we assisted not only financially, but we assisted by furnishing them two men.

STEWART: What specific efforts, do you recall, were made to get at the whole religious problem? Was there much use made, for example, of the film of the appearance Kennedy made before the Houston ministers?

PATTERSON: Yes. And, of course, that statement he made out there in reference to what he would do if he were President?

STEWART: Right.

PATTERSON: Yes. We made wide use of that here in Alabama to try to counteract some of the adverse publicity.

STEWART: Did you take any polls at all, or do you think your efforts changed many people's minds on the religious problem?

PATTERSON: I don't know. I doubt it. I doubt it.

STEWART: But you did make extensive use of . . .

PATTERSON: Yes, we sure did. Yes

STEWART: . . . the film?

PATTERSON: Yes.

STEWART: Let's see now. What attempts were made after the election to insure that all of the electors, or to try to get all of the electors to back the Democratic ticket? First, did you--I assume you didn't know until election which of the electors was going to be elected and which would and would not support or vote for the Democratic ticket.

PATTERSON: That's correct. And, of course, we didn't know what they would do until after they were elected. And then we began to get some idea about things that we would read in the paper that they would say. Yes, I contacted every one of them and urged them to vote the Democratic ticket. And it was six to five.

STEWART: These others were just plain adamant against . . .

PATTERSON: Protest. Protest against what they call the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. They're against what they call centralization and bureaucracy. But they take all the Federal money, and then they give them hell. This group is what we call here the old Dixiecrats. That's the old Dixiecrat group. That's the same group that bolted the Party in 1940 . . .

STEWART: Eight.

PATTERSON: '48, and held that rump convention in Birmingham and nominated Strom Thurmond and Fielding Wright. And the Alabama citizen at that time didn't have a choice. He couldn't vote for [Harry S] Truman even if he'd wanted to, you see. We run the risk of this same thing next time.

STEWART: Would these people have voted for Kennedy if the election had been closer? If their votes really meant something? Or were they just determined not to?

PATTERSON: Well, what you're suggesting is something that I hope doesn't ever come to pass, but if it ever came down to a point where there were just three or four or five electoral votes separating the candidates, and I sure would have hated to have seen that happen with these five or six in Alabama having the swing vote, I suspect that it would be a terrible thing. I don't know what they'd do. I don't know how much patronage it would take to sway them one way or another. Even assuming that they would take patronage, you know. I suspect, knowing the people that did that, I suspect that they would vote for the Republican before they would have voted for Kennedy.

STEWART: [Richard M.] Nixon did campaign in Alabama, didn't he?

PATTERSON: I believe he made one appearance in Alabama, at Birmingham. Yes, he did. I remember he did. He spoke in Birmingham.

STEWART: Was there any fear that he would make substantial inroads in the state?

PATTERSON: No. At that time Alabama was a one party state and, I think, still is. I think this [Barry M.] Goldwater thing was a fluke. I think it still is a one party state. Everybody knew the Democrats were going to win, but they didn't know where the electoral vote would go. So this is the problem.

STEWART: After the election, were you consulted at all on any appointments of the Kennedy Administration? Were any of the people, for example, who had worked in the campaign, did any of them join the administration?

PATTERSON: Yes, Mr. Meriwether, who was my finance director, who previously had been my campaign manager, was offered a position by Mr. Kennedy as a director of the Export-Import Bank. And he accepted the position and served up there until just recently.

STEWART: There were no others that you can recall?

PATTERSON: No. That's the only major appointment. I didn't request that. In fact, I hated to see Charlie leave because he was essentially the leading member of my cabinet. Mr. Kennedy asked me at the Inauguration if I minded him taking Charlie to Washington, and I told him, no, I didn't mind. I hated to see him go, but I didn't mind. He asked me at the Governors' Reception. And I told him, no, I didn't mind, if he wanted him, to go ahead.

STEWART: Did you have any disputes with the administration over the appointments of any U.S. attorneys or judges, or was all this totally handled through the congressional people?

PATTERSON: No. I had one little dispute. I didn't work for Mr. Kennedy expecting anything. I never asked for anything. I never conditioned anything I ever did on that. But on one occasion he made some reference to--I forget where this was, but it was before he was inaugurated--he made some reference to whether or not I was interested in any appointments in Alabama. And I told him that I was, and that I was interested essentially in three appointments. I was interested in the FHA [Federal Housing Administration] Administrator and the appointment that has charge of the selling of government bonds (it's a Treasury Department appointment but it's a patronage appointment) and also the customs collector for the Port of Mobile. And the reason I was interested in those positions is that they weren't involved in the racial thing and you could get a top Democratic leader in those positions and you could use them when the time came to run again. It wouldn't be so hard to crank up the party machinery when you had the people there working all the time keeping it ready to go. And I was interested in the FHA appointment because I was interested in some of the legal business for my law firm.

Now I was told after the Inauguration to come on up to Washington about ten days after the Inauguration and bring a portfolio on the three people that I was interested in and that they would consider them. So I did. I went up to the White House and took my portfolios and left them, and everything was just as fine as it could be. And then months and months went by, and finally one morning I picked up the paper, and lo and behold, somebody else had been appointed to those three positions. And I got a little sore about it, and I went up to Washington, and I went to see the President about it, and he asked Larry O'Brien to set up an appointment with the two Alabama Senators to discuss some way of working out the situation. And me and Larry O'Brien and Senator Hill sat down--I think it was Hill; Sparkman was out of the country at the time--sat down and discussed patronage a little bit. And they were extremely nice to me and polite, but informed me that it was too late, of course, to do anything about it now, and that really the Senators were the ones that you had to clear Federal patronage through, and that the governor handled state matters and that was about it. I got brushed off. Of course, I reminded them about the convention and the fact that them folks that I was having to clear through now were nowhere around in 1960, but everybody had a good laugh, and I didn't feel too badly about it.

STEWART: Who had you dealt with initially? Do you recall? Who in the White House, on the White House staff, on these appointments?

PATTERSON: Yes.

STEWART: Someone in O'Brien's office, presumably. [Richard K.] Donahue, or. . . .

PATTERSON: Well, Charlie Meriwether and I both were in contact with them. I think that Dunnigan, it was Dunnigan. . . .

STEWART: Donahue. Or Dungan, Ralph Dungan.

PATTERSON: Dungan. Well, I think we had some conferences with Dungan and also with Larry O'Brien and also with Bailey, John Bailey. This was during that period of time before Bailey had got moved over and established in a new headquarters. Bailey was right close to them for a while, then after the thing was all over, they separated it, you know, put John over in another building. It was probably O'Brien. I don't know whether he'd remember it or not. He'll remember that meeting up in his office.

STEWART: I think this happened in a number of states, and, of course, the answer always was that they had such a difficult situation in Congress that they . . .

PATTERSON: That's the same thing that I used to tell the fellow from the county when he'd come up here wanting to know why I appointed a certain fellow. I said, "Well, I had to do that because I've got to get that legislative support for our program, and I hope you understand." Of course, I got the same treatment except on a higher level, and I understood it all right. I had no hard feelings about that.

STEWART: Let me ask you a few questions about your expectations in the area of civil rights as the Kennedy Administration took office. Did you anticipate that there would be legislation or legislative proposals immediately, or did you have any indication that they were going to put off any substantial legislation until 1963?

PATTERSON: During the campaign we didn't feel like we were going to be faced with any very severe legislation at that time. In fact, we didn't really have any idea about what they were after specifically or what they were going to propose. We had, at that time, the Civil Rights Act of '57, wasn't it?

STEWART: Right. And then one in 1960, a small one.

PATTERSON: You know, the thing was well on its way to coming to a head at that time, anyway. And it did finally culminate, though, in Mr. Kennedy calling out Federal troops and calling out the National Guard, federalizing it. And that was when Wallace, you know, stood in the door over at the University of Alabama. You see, Mr. Kennedy was President at that time. That was his last year in the office.

STEWART: That's right.

PATTERSON: That was the time that the thing came to a head in the State of Alabama. And, of course, one of the reasons why it came to a head at that time was because, in my opinion, of the change in policy of the administration here in Alabama. You see, our position had always been to fight a legal battle. We fought it legally in the courts, and our whole policy was to avoid confrontation, to avoid a decision. You see, when you know the decision is going to be against you in advance, then you're foolish to try to push it to a conclusion when you might be able to delay it another year or two, you see. This was our policy. The worst thing you can do in a fight like this, where you don't have the law nor the strength on your side, is to force the issue. And, of course, this is what this fellow did, and put the President in a position where he had to act otherwise he would lose the support of the whole country. And it became a confrontation, not only of the office, but of the man. And, of course, he had to act, and he had the power to act. When you get maneuvered into a situation like that, it's untenable. And that brought on the avalanche of integration that finished off the fight. That standing in the door, that was the greatest thing that George Wallace could have ever done for the Negroes.

STEWART: It opened the gates, so to speak?

PATTERSON: That's right.

STEWART: Did you have any contacts with the Attorney General prior to the problems in the spring of 1961 with the so-called Freedom Riders?

PATTERSON: Our relations with Mr. Robert Kennedy had never been as close as our relations were with President Kennedy. In fact, prior to the Inauguration, I'd never met Robert but a couple of times. He came down here one time and made a speech in Montgomery, and I introduced him and was out with him one evening here. But I never did know him very well. He always struck me as being energetic and impetuous and full of great ideas, but I wasn't as well acquainted with him as I was with Mr. Kennedy. Nor did I have as many contacts with him as I did Mr. Kennedy.

Now all the time I was attorney general and Governor, we had excellent relations with all Federal agencies but one. And that was the Justice Department. And when Mr. Robert Kennedy became Attorney General, the relations between the State of Alabama and the Justice Department became really bad. And it got so bad that we just had to avoid one another. And in my judgment, Mr. Robert Kennedy either did not care or he did not have any understanding to amount to anything of our problems down here. It was, "You see it my way or else." There was no room for any negotiation with him. He would ask me to do things which I conscientiously could not do and still be Governor of Alabama.

This Freedom Rider situation was very unfortunate. It really was. And it ceased quickly to be a protest civil rights demonstration. It became a law enforcement matter. And he failed, in my judgment, to recognize this. He failed to understand the problems that the police officer has in trying to maintain law and order. Nobody ever would have dreamed that a group of people would stop a bus on the highway outside of Anniston, Alabama, in the United States today and burn a bus.

We knew the Freedom Riders were coming, and we had been alerted to this. Mr. Floyd Mann, who was my director of public safety, knew this. And he and I had conferred about it. We sent a plainclothes detective to Atlanta by the name of Cowling, Eli L. Cowling. And Cowling bought a ticket and caught the bus that the Freedom Riders were on. And there was a big crowd waiting for them at the bus station in Anniston, and they had a little demonstration there. The police had trouble keeping them away from the bus. But the bus finally pulled out. Outside Anniston they were stopped by a group of cars, and someone pitched something in one of the back windows of the bus that set the bus on fire. To this day we don't know exactly what it was that they threw in the bus, and it was rather unusual that the bus caught fire. And then the crowd got around front and wouldn't let the people off. And Mr. Cowling, our state investigator who was on the bus, stepped in the door of the bus and pulled his gun and pointed it at the crowd and said, "Now you get back and let these people off, or some of you are going to die." So they got back, and he got the people off the bus. So it was a state investigator who saved, possibly saved, those people from serious injury or death on that occasion by getting them off the bus.

By this time Robert had got into the picture, and he was on the telephone calling down here, making demands that these people be guaranteed safe escort, be guaranteed this and guaranteed that. It was very difficult to guarantee the safety of someone who is not a bona fide traveler, who is buying a ticket from town to town within the state and getting off and going into the nearest restaurant or public place and trying to rub up against somebody and get a fight started. This is the type of thing that we were dealing with. And this was one of our first experiences with these kind of people. One of these people was a guy named [James D.] Peck, who at one time had chained himself to the fence in front of the White House. He's the guy that rowed a boat out in the Eniwetok Atoll in the Pacific and tried to stop the firing of the atomic bomb. They were the kind of people we were dealing with, you see. And finally got into Birmingham, and we had a series of riots

in Birmingham and disorders, and they couldn't get nobody to drive the bus out of Birmingham. Robert called up the manager of the bus station and ordered him to drive the bus. It was a serious thing.

And then finally they kept making demands on me to escort them. And the demand was that we escort them with state police and permit them to do what they wanted to do and then go on unmolested and unrestrained. And, of course, their sole purpose was to violate certain state laws, to get them tested in court. But I couldn't give a guarantee that I was going to have my police escort and permit and watch these people violate state laws and city ordinances that were then legal--and some of them still are--so I just kept telling them that I will give them all of the protection that we would give any other person, no more and no less. Well, they came on into Montgomery, and we were watching them. By this time, we were watching. We were really, in effect, escorting them, but they didn't know it.

So they got into Montgomery here, and the city, of course, gave indication that they were going to maintain order at the bus station. But all of a sudden, just like that, just out of nowhere a tremendous crowd appeared at that bus station, and we had a terrible riot at the bus station. We committed several hundred state police in here right quick. Floyd Mann, who is director of public safety, waded into the crowd down there, straddled a Negro that they were beating on--would have killed, I think if he hadn't have done it--straddled him, pulled out his gun, made them leave him alone, drug him out, saved his life, in my judgment.

By this time the situation had gotten very hot between here and Washington. And really, the administration in Washington, and Robert particularly, were doing everything they could to stir it up and to keep it going, rather than trying to calm the thing down. And the situation had gotten so bad that I had asked the White House and Mr. Kennedy's office not to call me on the telephone no more, that this thing was too sensitive to deal over the telephone about, there was too much room for misunderstanding, that they either communicate with me in writing by letter or wire or send a personal representative down here on the scene that

could make decisions. The White House sent [John L.] Seigenthaler down here. And he came in here the night before the bus station riot. And Mr. Seigenthaler checked into the motel up here near the Capitol with John Doar. John Doar later on became one of the leaders in the civil rights fight down here for the government.

The next morning Mr. Seigenthaler got up, rented a U-Drive-It, put on a sport shirt and some old pants, left his identification at the motel, and went down to the bus station. And in one of the incidents down there, there were some girls in the group, and a bunch of women were beating on the girls with pocketbooks. One of the girls was fleeing down the street there, and Mr. Seigenthaler pulled over in his car, ostensibly to protect this girl. He opened the door and tried to get her to get in the car with him. Well, nobody knew who he was, of course, and the girl sure didn't know, and here he had no identification, had a Montgomery County license plate on his car, and somebody hit him in the head and just left him laying there in the street for a while as the fighting raged. It was a terrible fight. And finally, when they picked him up and carried him to the hospital, at first he didn't want to identify himself. And finally he did identify himself and got on the telephone and called Washington. Then out of Washington came a series of statements from the White House and the Justice Department that the President's own representative had been knocked in the head and left in the street.

Well, I wouldn't have gone down there like that myself. We have police for that kind of work. And to be the President's representative and go down and get involved in the riot like that with no identification was foolhardy, at least. I thought that we came out very badly in that exchange of statements out of Montgomery and Washington about that thing because the truth was never told.

Well, they got mad, I think, after that up there, and then the next evening the Reverend Martin Luther King arrived on the scene. And in the meantime about seven hundred marshals had come into town. And about fifty marshals met King out at the airport and escorted him right through town, right over here to a Negro church, where he began to make speeches that were calculated to try to incite

trouble. And it did. And the people began to gather, and we committed more troops and more personnel in here. In the meantime, we had information that the administration had moved a company of the Second Infantry from Fort Benning in here and put them in a hangar out here at Maxwell Field. All this time I kept asking Robert and asking the White House representative too, "How about getting out some statement to the effect that everybody ought to go home and cool off now, and let's not get in no fight." No sir. "We're going to insist on the right of Mr. King to appear in a public place, and we're going to see that he has that right," and they did. And they rung that church with about three or four hundred marshals up there.

Well, when nightfall came, the crowd got their courage up, and they began an assault on the church, and the marshals did not attempt to defend the church. When the fight started, after giving all indications that they were in charge of the church, they didn't do anything. And when the crowd charged the marshals, the marshals' ranks broke. And they just didn't do nothing. And it took us about fifteen minutes to get our forces back into the immediate vicinity and restore order. And in the meantime, they burned a car, and two or three fellows got hit in the head with bricks. And then the fighting looked like it was going to get out of hand again, so I called out the National Guard and put the town under martial law and restored order immediately. The marshals pulled out immediately, and that was it. But we spent about a hundred thousand dollars of state money that night getting the Guard out here and restoring order. And although he'll violently disagree with this, I think the responsibility for the trouble that night can be laid right on Robert's doorstep. That's right.

STEWART: Do you . . .

PATTERSON: Another thing he did--it finally got to where he and I just couldn't communicate. So then when I asked them to communicate with me in writing or by personal representative, then Robert began to call people under me. He called Floyd Mann on the telephone. He'd call General [Henry V.] Graham my adjutant general, who were my appointees. This was an attempt to

undermine my control and authority over the situation. When you've got a state employee down here working for the state and he gets a call from the brother of the President who asks him to do something, well, he's in a hell of a fix, see?

This Mr. Robert Kennedy, in my judgment, did not understand the Federal-state relationship. I don't think he understands the problems of dual sovereignty. I don't think that he understands the legal things involved. I don't think that he understands that there is such a thing as a state-municipal relation. You see, if I were to say to the city of Montgomery, as Governor, "I don't like the way you all are enforcing the law in the city of Montgomery or Birmingham, and I'm going to take over," well, you're going to immediately have a breakdown in law enforcement because they're going to say, "Well, the hell with you." And they'll dump it on you and leave you with it. The city of Birmingham has more policemen than the State of Alabama has highway patrolmen, and they are better trained. There is such a thing as a state-municipal relation, which in many respects is just as sensitive as the state and Federal relation. This was a very unfortunate situation, and, of course, it didn't do us any good down here. And it didn't do them any good, either.

STEWART: Do you recall, in the initial stages of this thing, refusing to accept calls either from the Attorney General or the President, as has been reported?

PASTERSON: Well, I didn't refuse to accept any calls from Mr. Kennedy until that last day before the fight at the church. And he called me just a few minutes after I had called out the National Guard that night; he called me at the Governor's mansion. I told him, "Now you got what you wanted; you got yourself a fight; and you've got the National Guard called out and martial law, and that's what you wanted. We'll take charge of it now with the troops, and you can get on out and leave it alone." And that was the end of it as far as he was concerned. Now, of course, this situation with Seigenthaler was very unfortunate.

Every time that you would talk to any of them on the telephone from Washington, they would immediately get on the telephone up there or call in their press secretaries and issue some statement that would just cut you to pieces down here politically when it come out, see? They would not recognize that I was also concerned about my political career. Practically every move they made and every statement they made was calculated to enhance the administration's prestige politically. No thought was ever given to me. And so it got so bad that I just couldn't talk to them any more. Now I always figured that when it came right down to where it's either going to be a riot or not, or troops or not, that I'd get that call from the White House, and the way that it would be put to you would be in such a way that you could not give an answer without absolutely ruining yourself politically at home. "Can you, Governor, guarantee the safety of these people at all costs?" Well, if you say, "Yes," then the statement coming out of the White House will be that the Governor has capitulated, that he's now going to let these people violate the law and get by with it. This is what it would amount to. If you say, "No," then he puts in the Federal troops, and he says, "The Governor of the state admitted to me out of his own mouth that he couldn't maintain order in his own state, and so, therefore, I had no other choice but to send Federal troops." You're whipped again. Late that afternoon of the day of the riots, or the night of the riots at the church, I received a call from the White House. And they said the President was calling me, and I didn't take the call because I knew what that call was. This was the final appeal. This was the thing that would make or break me. And I didn't take that call, and that was one of the worst mistakes I ever made. That's right.

STEWART: What, specifically, did you feel that he was going to ask you?

PATTERSON: Just what I said; I think I'd have got the thing just exactly like that. I'd have got it just like Ross Barnett got it at Ole

Miss. When that thing was brewing at Ole Miss, I told Ross Barnett, "You're going to get that call, buddy, and it'll come that last minute, and then after that call, if you take it, after what they say in Washington, the folks will never know whether you made a deal or didn't." And that's what happened to him. He took it, and he had to take it. And to this day the average fellow in Mississippi, I think, firmly believes that Ross had him a deal.

STEWART: Did you talk to the President at all during this whole period?

PATTERSON: No. No.

STEWART: Did you talk to anyone other than Robert Kennedy in Washington? Do you recall?

PATTERSON: Yes, but I can't recall their names right now. I talked to a couple of people at the White House, and I talked to a couple of people in the Justice Department and, in addition to that, Seigenthaler. And, of course, they sent Byron White down here and put him in charge of the entire operation.

STEWART: Of the marshals, you mean?

PATTERSON: Yes. We had a conference up at the Governor's office, I believe it was on Sunday morning, in which I laid out Alabama's position to Mr. White and made it quite clear that we didn't want him in Alabama and didn't need him. You see, there's no constitutional basis for using Federal marshals to police a city street, none at all. And they were here purely because of the civil rights difficulties. There was never any breakdown of law and order in Alabama. We never were in a position where we couldn't enforce the law.

STEWART: Had they obtained a request from Mr. Mann for the use of marshals, to send the marshals in? Did someone in your administration specifically request the marshals?

PATTERSON: No, sir. In fact, my position from the very beginning, and laid down very clearly and publicly and with all of my people, was that we resented the sending of marshals in here, that we did not feel that they were necessary nor could they legally send them in here. And we didn't need them. I made this position very clear. Now if Mr. Mann did this, which I don't think he did, but if he did this, he did this without my instructions or authority, and if I'd known it at the time that he did it and had done it, I'd have fired him.

STEWART: Was any serious thought given to arresting any of the marshals?

PATTERSON: No.

STEWART: There was some discussion that this possibly could have been done?

PATTERSON: Well, once you declare martial law, then the executive who is the martial law under his authority would have the right to arrest anyone who violates the law, whether he be a marshal or not. But, no, there was never any intent on our part to do anything like that. Let me say again that the relationship between the State of Alabama and its agencies and the federal government all the time that I was Governor and attorney general, a period of eight years, was exceptionally good except for one agency, and that was the Department of Justice. We have always gotten along extremely well with the Federal marshals and with the Federal people here in Alabama. There was never any friction or any trouble at all.

Our relationship with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] was always good. But in my judgment, the policies of the Kennedy Administration in the Justice Department created a wider breach between us and the FBI, and us and the marshals and the Department of Justice than had ever been there before. You see, the Justice Department, the FBI, they want to cooperate with you and work with you, but under the policies that existed up there the last three years I was Governor, the FBI would want all the information you got, they'd want full cooperation on your part, but they will never divulge anything to you. They'll never give you a single paper or file. They'll give you no report on anybody whatsoever. But they insist on full disclosure from you. They, in effect, the Justice Department, in effect, wants you to let the FBI agents ride in the cars of your police and sort of look over their shoulder and pass judgment on their decision. And then if there's any disagreement along the way, particularly in the civil rights field, then they reserve a right to be a witness against the state official in state and Federal court, if he's brought into court because someone thinks he's made the wrong decision. Now cooperation must be a mutual thing. It runs both ways. But with the Department of Justice and the State of Alabama during the last years of my administration and today, that's not so; that's not so.

STEWART: One of the, of course, controversial aspects of this whole incident was the question as to whether or not the administration had either directly sent or encouraged these people to come on this Freedom Ride.

PATTERSON: Well, I don't believe that they went out and recruited them and got them up to come. I don't believe that. I think that the

administration in Washington would have liked to have had a very peaceful time of it, as far as this particular field was concerned. But I think that once they got committed, once they started this Freedom Ride with all the attendant publicity and advance warnings and threats and all this that came with it--I think that the Justice Department got involved in it after it got started, after they got on their way. I think they got involved in it, and then had to see it through, I guess, as they saw it. Robert Kennedy said to me one time, "Why, you can't consider political matters in a situation like this." Good Lord, about 90 percent of what he was doing was politics. It wasn't a question of maintaining law and order; we were never in a position where we couldn't maintain law and order. He injected himself into the thing, I think, because it was politically expedient to do so at that time.

STEWART: Politically expedient to . . .

PATTERSON: But for him, not for me.

STEWART: . . . see these rides through to the conclusion and to have these people test the constitutionality of your laws, is that what you mean?

PATTERSON: Well, that's what they said their purpose was, of course. But, you see, these were not really bona fide interstate travelers. There had been no segregation on interstate buses through this state for several years. And, gosh, integration on the airlines had been going on for ten or fifteen years. But we never had no trouble with our buses going and coming until this particular instance. And these people would get off the bus at a town in Alabama, and then they'd buy a ticket to another town in Alabama, and they'd get off. There were young white girls traveling with Negro boys. The whole thing was set up to inflame the local populace. They'd get off the bus and head for the nearest restaurant and places that were traditionally used by white people and go in and sit down. And if they couldn't start any trouble any other way, they'd rub up against the fellow on the stool next to them. You can start a fight

anywhere that way, and of course, this is what they were doing, with tremendous advance publicity.

And when Robert Kennedy got involved in it, and the White House got involved in it, man, every nut in the United States headed this way. We had [George Lincoln] Rockwell and the Nazis coming in, and we had nuts and cranks from all over the world coming in here just to see what was going on and to get involved in anything. The worst law enforcement problem you could possibly imagine. And we were very lucky that somebody didn't get seriously hurt. Luckily nobody got real seriously hurt, and nobody got killed. We're very fortunate.

STEWART: What was Mr. Meriwether's role in all of this, if anything?

PATTERSON: He'd gone to Washington by this point.

STEWART: He had gone to Washington?

PATTERSON: Yes.

STEWART: Was he at all involved, as in intermediary or anything?

PATTERSON: No. After he went to Washington, as far as having anything to do with operations of the government in Alabama, it was completely 100 per cent severed.

STEWART: Were any members of Congress used or involved in this whole situation?

PATTERSON: No. This was the hottest political potato that you could possibly imagine, and no one offered his good services to help get any of us out of the situation we were in.

STEWART: Let me just change this tape.

BEGIN TAPE II SIDE I

PATTERSON: Every Governor has the same problem, and I'm sure the President has it, too, and that's his staff and the group right around him. Sometimes it's very difficult to get the true picture. It's very hard sometimes to penetrate the palace guard that you hear a lot of people complaining about. It's very hard, sometimes, to do that. And lots of times if some fellow gets overly friendly with the executive, then the people that work for the executive invariably try to cut him out. They'll undermine him in some way. I think the President, more than anybody else, is in a position where it might be very difficult to get the true picture and the facts about things. I don't believe that there were many people around him that thoroughly understood the problems down there and the situation that we were faced with. I know Robert didn't. And I guess Robert probably would have had more influence over him than anybody else.

STEWART: Yes.

PATTERSON: But I know Robert didn't. And as far as I know, none of the rest of them ever came down here. Seigenthaler was from Nashville. But I feel that he was a newspaperman, and of course, he wasn't one of the top advisors of the President. The answer to your question is no. I don't think he had people around him who understood the problems here. And they probably considered this racial situation down here not as important as some of the other weighty problems that they were facing. And I don't think it was, either, frankly.

STEWART: Did you feel that you were thoroughly aware of all the pressures that were being brought to bear on the President by liberal and Negro leaders?

PATTERSON: Of course, I was aware of that. I don't know if I fully understand or comprehend how great they were, but I do know that they were there and that they were great. I understand the reasons for their position, and I had told the President that I thoroughly understood his position and knew why it must be that way. You can carry New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and California, and be President of the United States without carrying a single Southern state. That's been proven. And these minority groups control enough votes in those states to swing the election one way or another. Of course, that's the facts of life, and we must face them. Our problem down here is one of history. We used to lie behind the electoral college for protection, and now it's our greatest enemy. That's right.

STEWART: Did you, just a few scattered things here to cover everything. I don't know. Can you think of anything that we haven't covered?

PATTERSON: I think we've pretty well covered the situation, as far as I'm concerned.

STEWART: Well, just one general question about the overall power of the Federal government. Do you think did you feel generally that the trend toward centralization of power that many Southern politicians make a lot of was accelerated during the Kennedy Administration? Or did you feel this was a natural evolution of things that essentially had begun a long time ago and was continued on through the Kennedy Administration?

PATTERSON: Well, when I was attorney general, we had [Herbert, Jr.] Brownell in the Justice Department, and he was just as tough to

deal with as Robert Kennedy, in many respects, except that Mr. Brownell wasn't the kind of fellow that would go off half-cocked about something. But I don't think the Kennedys did anything that changed the pace. I think it's a gradual and steady trend. It's been going on now for a long, long time. I think the acceleration began shortly after World War II. And it's been getting more and more all the time. There's lots of reasons for it. I remember when I was attorney general and later as governor going to conferences in Washington to decide what things we could takeover from the Federal government and better administer ourselves to try to change this trend toward centralization. And we would just meet and discuss and discuss and discuss and finally come away with, maybe, one resolution that we would like to takeover everything the Federal government was doing in the field of automobile safety. Nothing ever accomplished. No one ever willing to give up a dime, you see. It's something you talk about, but you wouldn't dare do anything to risk a single Federal grant.

I think the trend has been here a long time. I don't think Mr. Kennedy had very much to do with it. I don't think that possibly there was much he could have done if he had felt the other way. It's growing more, it's more accelerated all the time. I think since the Johnson Administration came in it's even greater. I think it's a natural trend of things. I think it's coming, and I don't think there's much people are going to do to change its progress any. I think we're going to see the states--I hope I'm wrong about this--but I think we're going to see the states with less and less influence, because the world is shrinking, and the Federal government is getting more and more into business. And there are very few fields, now, they're not in. A lot of it is due to default of the states concerned.

But I don't think that's something to fear. I don't think you need to fear it so long as the people have the voice through our elected representatives in Congress. Anything that happens that takes away the power of Congress, that's what I'm opposed to. I don't like to see the Court amend the Constitution because I think that's the people's

priority. And I don't think we have to worry about big government and big programs and expansion as long as the people retain the right to make the policy.

STEWART: Were there any other meetings at the White House or meetings you had with the President that we haven't hit on?

PATTERSON: Not that I recall. I think that's about it. Most of my contacts with President Kennedy were prior to the time he went to the White House. I think we went out to Georgetown twice and several times in his office. And of course, I met him on the road several times: over at Warm Springs one time, and at LaGrange, Georgia, and then out in California, and I think I visited him at the White House twice. First time was the time we had lunch--no, that was the last time--and prior to that it was very brief, then he turned me over to Larry O'Brien, and we went up and talked to Senator Hill about patronage, [Laughter] I went away a much smarter man.

STEWART: Is there anything you want to say in conclusion or. . . .

PATTERSON: No. I believe that about does it, Mr. Stewart, I appreciate your time. I appreciate your coming down here, Mr. Stewart.

STEWART: Well, I want to thank you.