

Camille Gravel Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 05/23/1967
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(1915 - 2005) Louisiana political figure; Democratic National Committeeman (1954-1960), discusses campaigning for John F. Kennedy in Louisiana in 1960, civil rights issues, and the activities of the Democratic National Committee, among other issues.

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Camille Gravel – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

With

Camille Gravel

May 23, 1967

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Mr. Gravel, why don't we begin by my asking you when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and what your impressions were of him at that time?

GRAVEL: Well, I first met him in 1956 in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention as a result, as I recall it, of a visit, of an introductory meeting that was arranged by Judge John Fox [J. John Fox] of Boston, Massachusetts. At that time I was the chairman of the Louisiana delegation and I had been in Chicago about one week before the Convention opened. It seems to me—I don't recall the specific date but—during the course of the Convention and at least a couple of days before the balloting for the vice-presidential nomination, I met the then Senator Kennedy through John Fox.

STEWART: You, of course, were aware that he was going to make a race for the vice-presidency before that time.

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GRAVEL: Yes, I was aware that he was one of those who was being seriously considered, but the whole question at that particular time was whether or not the Democratic nominee for the presidency was going to select a

candidate for the vice-presidency or whether he was going to leave the Convention wide open. I don't think that I had any knowledge that the Convention would be left open and that the Convention would have the right to make a free choice until the nominee, Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], so stated at the Convention.

STEWART: What was the purpose of this first meeting or what were the circumstances?

GRAVEL: The purpose of the first meeting with Judge Fox was that Judge Fox felt that certainly Senator Kennedy was going to go places in politics and in governmental affairs in the United States. He felt that I should meet him and that we should get to be friends. I was on the Democratic National Committee at the time and I've always had great affection for Judge Fox; as a result of his feeling that this would be a good meeting, it was through his help that I first met Senator Kennedy.

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STEWART: Did you have any role at all in the selection of Senator Kennedy to narrate that film at the 1956 Convention?

GRAVEL: No, I did not. As a matter of fact I knew about the film because I had met with Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler] and Paul Ziffren and a few others to discuss some of the plans for the Convention and this particular film was discussed, but I didn't know that Senator Kennedy was going to be the narrator until after he had been selected.

STEWART: Someone told me just the other week that Senator Kennedy was actually responsible for financing this film and that this was part, his narration of it, was part of the whole arrangement. Do you know anything about this?

GRAVEL: No, I do not and I don't believe that that is correct. I was very, very close to Paul Butler and to Bill Gordon, now deceased, who was the liaison so to speak between the Democratic National Committee and Paul Butler and the Committee. I doubt very seriously whether that could have been the case without my knowing something about it but certainly I guess the only man living that would be able to lead into that discussion would be Dore Schary. I do know that Bill Gordon, Dore Schary, Paul Butler, and several others met to talk about the documentary, but I

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don't recall how the determination was made as to who would be the narrator and who made the selection. I was always under the impression that Governor Stevenson himself had selected the then Senator Kennedy.

STEWART: I think Senator Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] was the original choice. Then because he was running for the Senate that year and he had an early race, he decided it wouldn't be good for him to do it politically.

GRAVEL: That may be true. I don't know. That's one thing I can't say about it. I just don't know how the determination was reached. The only thing I can say is that I was under the assumption that the selection was made by Governor Stevenson. I have no recollection as to on what facts I based that assumption.

STEWART: You probably had been familiar with the so-called Bailey [John Moran Bailey] memorandum regarding the value of a Catholic on the ticket in 1956. Do you recall what your impressions were of that memorandum?

GRAVEL: Well, I don't think I had any specific knowledge of the Bailey memorandum but I did have my own views about Senator Kennedy being a nominee for the presidency and a Catholic. But I think that this view was developmental and came about sometime between the period '56 and '60. As a matter of

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fact, I recall that I was specifically quoted in kind of a round-up article in Newsweek Magazine probably around '58 or '59 where I said that I felt that it might very well turn out to be one of the assets that Senator Kennedy had rather than one of his liabilities. My feeling began to grow that Senator Kennedy could handle his Catholicism very well.

STEWART: But wasn't this a big factor in 1956 at the Convention?

GRAVEL: No, I didn't think so at all. As a matter of fact, in 1956, at the Convention his Catholicism was subordinated to some extent among the Southern delegations in the vice-presidential race, let's call it, to the opposition that most of the Southern delegations had to Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver].

STEWART: Let me ask you. Were you people at all aware of the fight that the then Senator Kennedy had had in Massachusetts to gain control of the Massachusetts State Committee? The reason I ask is that it's always been said that this fight—and of course it developed into a Kennedy-McCormack [John W. McCormack] thing—one of the purposes of it was to present Senator Kennedy as a person within his own state who had a certain control over his own committee. Do you recall that?

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GRAVEL: I recall that there was some realization on the part of many of us that there had been some rather bitter fights in the party organization in Massachusetts. As I recall it at that time, perhaps up to 1956, the

Democratic National Committeewoman was a Mrs. Margaret O'Riordan [Margaret M. O'Riordan]. I do remember after telling her how impressed I was with Senator Kennedy that she sought to dampen my enthusiasm a little bit, and I just got the impression that in one way or the other she was involved in the controversy there. I don't recall too much of the details about it. Specifically we weren't too concerned with that. We were looking, I guess, at the Massachusetts delegation. Again I'm talking about 1956. It was right across the aisle from us with a bunch of very fine, attractive young people apparently becoming deeply involved in national affairs and national politics and in party politics. I think we recognized rather quickly a kind of affinity between the Louisiana delegation and the Massachusetts delegation, and we recognized the political affinity of controversy that seemed to exist, because we in Louisiana have always had somewhat serious problems in our own Democratic Party. We were the winners there at the Convention in '56, and I think we looked on the Massachusetts

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delegation as being the winning group there in that their chief candidate for consideration by other delegations and by other people at the convention was this very fresh, attractive senator from Massachusetts.

STEWART: Do you recall your reactions to the announcement that there would be an open fight for the vice-presidential nomination?

GRAVEL: I recall it very, very well for a number of reasons. By that particular time I had begun to feel very, very strongly about wanting to support Senator Kennedy for the vice-presidential nomination, but the Louisiana delegation itself was principally committed before any caucus was held to Frank Clement of Tennessee, who was the keynote speaker at that Convention. Of course there was substantial support for Senator Kefauver who was more or less the choice of Governor Earl Long [Earl Kemp Long] who was a member of the delegation. After the keynote address by Frank Clement and, before the indication was given that the Convention would be wide open, I had personally received some information from Governor Clement that he was not going to be a candidate for the vice-presidential nomination. After we more or less were released from a kind of loose, hazy commitment, I went to

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see Frank Clement and told him that many of us were beginning to feel very strongly towards Senator Kennedy but that Governor Long was still for Senator Kefauver. I remember, of course, a good bit went on before this particular caucus that we had the morning after Stevenson announced that the Convention would be open as far as the vice-presidential nominee was concerned, but I remember asking Frank Clement if he would come before our delegation to say that he was not going to be a candidate, and also to pitch his remarks in such a way that they could at least be considered some sort of an indirect support to Kennedy, to go as far as he could without offending Kefauver who was a senator from his

own state. He really did that, and made a very fine speech before our caucus and the upshot of it was that even though Governor Long was for Kefauver, the delegation voted something like thirty-six to thirteen, or thirty-six to twelve—thirty-five to thirteen I believe is what it was—in favor of Kennedy. Of course I had been working then at that particular point about twenty-four to thirty-six hours—whatever period of time it was that we knew that the Convention was going to be wide open—with some of the Kennedy people. As a matter of fact the first two people from the South that I know of, that really got into the

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swing of the activity for Senator Kennedy for the vice-presidential nomination were Frank Smith [Frank E. Smith], who was then the congressman from the Third Congressional District of Mississippi, and myself. I know that after Stevenson more or less told everybody to just scatter and do whatever they wanted to do we started having meetings up in some of the rooms that were occupied by the Kennedy staff. We were the only Southerners there for a long, long time. I remember...

STEWART: Did you attend that late evening session, the original session, when they more or less determined some strategy or some division of responsibility?

GRAVEL: Yes. Frank Smith was assigned principally the South and I was working with and helping him. I recall very vividly too that the next morning after Louisiana had had its caucus—and we had a rather bitter fight in this caucus about whom we would support. When we did decide to support Senator Kennedy, I called in to John Bailey to report to him about what we had done but before I could say much to him—I've forgotten whom I talked to but—somebody other than John Bailey, who indicated that Senator Kennedy was kind of wavering about whether he was going to go ahead and seek the nomination.

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STEWART: That was going to be my next question.

GRAVEL: Then I related to them the story about how we had battled Earl Long and defeated an effort in the Louisiana delegation at the risk of getting into some serious political troubles with our own governor in order to support him (Kennedy) and that we ought to go ahead and try for it.

STEWART: Did he say why he was thinking of getting out?

GRAVEL: No, he didn't. I don't know whether they were getting the kind of encouragement that they felt they should be getting, and that maybe the possibilities at that time indicated that perhaps there might be a humiliating defeat, which was something that they certainly didn't want when they were just, I guess, starting into the national picture. I've seen some reference made in a publication or

so about this particular situation that I've just mentioned to you, about a southern delegation, and I think in one instance it was referred to as another delegation, but it was our delegation, the Louisiana delegation, that really did battle with our own governor, with a number of the delegates feeling that they felt so strongly about Senator Kennedy that they were willing to incur to some extent the political wrath of Earl Long. I think we made it pretty strong to the Kennedy

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people that—look, if we can do this in Louisiana and with our delegation and with a lot of work, the same thing probably can be done with other groups, so we've got a real salable product here and let's go ahead. I think that did have some, you know, impact as part of the overall thinking that was taking place. Now, I didn't talk to Senator Kennedy himself about—maybe he was getting reluctant to run but...

STEWART: What were the chief arguments against Senator Kennedy that people were presenting?

GRAVEL: The principal one was that he was a political unknown. Another one was that he was, you know, too young. There was some anti-Kennedy sentiment among the labor people. Now, whether it was as much anti-Kennedy as it was pro-Kefauver I don't know. But, for example, the labor people on our delegation—some eight or ten of them—voted for Kefauver. Then there was some contentions made that Senator Kennedy, of course, was not acceptable to the rural and farming people of the country and that he didn't have a particularly good record as far as they were concerned. Those were the things that emerged and emerged rather quickly because they were arguments that had to be developed

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almost overnight. Very little of that of course was making any difference to those who became, you know, really sold on the personality of Senator Kennedy. That's what we had to go with at first. Very few of us really knew much about his record and very few of us cared at that particular point.

STEWART: You mean that you knew really little of his record and it really didn't matter that much?

GRAVEL: That is, his specific voting record. We knew he wasn't anti-labor. We knew he wasn't against the farmers and we knew that other persons who aspired to the nomination might have a better record in a specific area but I think many of us were just pretty much enchanted with him from the very beginning. I think the narration of the film had an awful lot to do with it, but to meet him and to talk to him and to visit with him of course was to almost get captured, certainly at that time by the younger people who were pretty much in control of our particular delegation.

STEWART: Did you have any contact with him personally during this whole period before the balloting took place?

GRAVEL: Well, some, the night before the balloting took place, you know, in making I think some suggestions. I don't recall

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whether—certainly we weren't sitting down just talking head and head as you and I are talking now, but I do know that generally we were talking about key people that might be contacted with respect to particular delegations. Now I was not all that knowledgeable about the various delegations but I did know something about a few of them because I had been working, as I believe I mentioned earlier, for about a week before the Convention started with an unofficial group that actually was writing the civil rights plank in the party's platform. That's when I really got to know Judge Fox, Governor Dever [Paul A. Dever], Governor Roberts [Dennis Joseph Roberts], John Bailey, and we had Governor Battle [William Cullen Battle] in that group and many others. So I had just been on the National Committee a little less than two years but I had gotten to the point at that time where I was able to make some suggestions. Not necessarily all were accepted but I did have some few things that I could contribute to them as to what might be a way to contact some of the people that would be helpful to them.

STEWART: Were they enthusiastic about picking up support in the South? Was there any talk that this might later come to haunt them as I think it did to a certain extent?

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GRAVEL: No, there was no question but that they wanted to try to get as many votes as they could from all sections, and they were conscious of the fact that the South was a pretty productive area, and much, I think, was done to try to get as many of the Southern delegations as possible because I believe the feeling developed that the principal candidate would be Senator Kefauver and it was generally known that he was not too acceptable in the South. I can remember how amazed I was to talk to some of the key people in delegations outside the South to find that they were for Kefauver instead of for Kennedy. I remember specifically talking with Jim Finnegan [James A. Finnegan] with the Pennsylvania delegation and telling him that I just couldn't understand a substantial part of the Pennsylvania delegation being for Kefauver over Kennedy. His response was that Kefauver on the ticket would help unquestionably to elect a lot more local candidates in Pennsylvania than Kennedy on the ticket, I guess because of Kefauver's liberality and because of some of the positions that he had taken and because of his recognizability as a campaigner. But Finnegan let me know very quickly that his choice was Kefauver and not Kennedy, yet he didn't say anything about Senator Kennedy. But this was the feeling that permeated the larger delegations, the big state

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delegations, that, regardless of anything else, Kefauver was going to do more for the local candidates on the ticket than Kennedy.

STEWART: What was Paul Butler's position? Do you recall?

GRAVEL: At that time?

STEWART: Yes.

GRAVEL: I'd say at that time Paul Butler, at that particular time, was completely neutral. You see, Paul was on his way, presumably, out as Chairman of the National Committee. Stevenson had already made up his mind that Finnegan was going to take Paul Butler's place. Rather ironically the feeling began to grow that to take Paul Butler out of the chairmanship and to replace him with Finnegan would probably do serious hurt and damage to the party in the South. Paul Butler had been elected Chairman of the National Committee in the latter part of 1954 and I think with almost every southern vote with very, very few exceptions on the National Committee. That's another story in itself, that we organized a little, a real little push to get Stevenson to reconsider and keep Butler on as National Chairman. The principal people that worked on that were Sam Rayburn, Hale Boggs [Thomas Hale Boggs] and myself. I talked with Governor Stevenson at length about it

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and I know Sam Rayburn did. Actually after the Convention was over Paul Butler offered his resignation and I don't think really realized what had been done in his behalf. I personally had made the motion at that particular time that we not accept his resignation. I had talked to Governor Stevenson within an hour or two before that in his room at the Blackstone Hotel when he said that he would go along. Now how much conversation he had had with other people besides the ones I've mentioned, I don't know but I do know that that was done. At that particular time I would say that Paul Butler was completely neutral and I know of nothing that Paul Butler did in the '56 Convention to try to help Kennedy get the nomination. I think he took the position that he was completely "hands off." He liked Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] very much. He liked Kefauver. He liked Kennedy. All three of those were Paul Butler's kind of people. He wasn't going to take one against the other at that particular moment. And I think at that time too it can probably be said that he had a close relationship with Sam Rayburn and probably liked Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.], you know, in Tennessee. There were others that were aspirants also so he just had a lot of friends and Paul had not by then, you know, gotten into any deep water with too many people.

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STEWART: Is there anything different from what has commonly been said to be the reasons why Senator Kennedy was defeated that you were aware of?

GRAVEL: No. I was shocked when he was defeated because it looked to me as though things were going really well. I don't know what switches or changes and things took place at the rostrum and all that but, all of a sudden, I began to realize that there were some things that had occurred that, well, occurred so fast that one couldn't stop them. I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know about the Tennessee waltzing that went on around the rostrum that caused some changes and some shifts.

STEWART: I don't know where I saw this but hadn't you met with Kennedy and gone over his nominating speech for Stevenson before the...

GRAVEL: No, I'm afraid not. What I did was meet with Frank Clement both in Nashville and in Chicago and I had gone over his keynote address. But I think I was—if I understand you correctly—I think I was in a room at one time with Senator Kennedy and he was just discussing his speech with a number of people—it was going to be short. But I had nothing to do with writing it nor did I make any suggestions, anything at all like that.

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STEWART: What generally were your impressions of the people around Kennedy at that time? Do you recall?

GRAVEL: Well, I was impressed very much with them. As I mentioned a little bit earlier, it seemed to me that there was a real affinity between the Massachusetts delegation and the Louisiana delegation. By that I mean the activists in the two delegations. We had a lot of young, aggressive people in our delegation who had a lot of political promise, I thought, and a lot of political ability and I think they did too. We began to have some ties with them as you do at a Convention. And we were right next to the Massachusetts delegation. I think that spot perhaps helped some too. We did a lot of visiting together and it was just a good, warm relationship between the two delegations.

STEWART: Senator Kennedy came to Louisiana during the 1956 campaign, didn't he?

GRAVEL: Yes.

STEWART: Do you recall...

GRAVEL: In October.

STEWART: ...any of the specifics of this trip? Was the reaction to him generally favorable?

GRAVEL: Very much, very favorable. He came to Louisiana and he addressed the fund raising dinner - came to New Orleans.

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As I recall it Senator Long, Russell Long [Russell B. Long], introduced him. We had a good program. We had a statewide television program. As a matter of fact it was the first statewide television program in Louisiana that had been tied together at any time for any purpose. I remember we had a lot of trouble with the telephone lines and all that. But he did speak on a statewide Louisiana network. He came down, of course, to speak in behalf of the Democratic ticket.

STEWART: Was there any indication at that time that he was thinking forward to 1960—or what were his attitudes?

GRAVEL: I think... My own feeling was that, about that time, October, after we had recovered from the defeat for the vice-presidential nomination, by that time we had concluded that it very well might have been a blessing in disguise. Of course, that conclusion was fortified after the election. But at that particular time I think there were several of us who were thinking about Senator Kennedy then as the nominee for the presidency.

STEWART: Did you mention this to him when he came here? Do you recall?

GRAVEL: I doubt that... We probably mentioned it to him but he, in all likelihood—I couldn't remember specifically what he might have said but—in all likelihood, you know, "Well,

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we'll see" and "We're going to stay together in this thing and work together" and all that, which we did. He adopted a typical attitude I guess. But there wasn't much question in anybody's mind but that he was headed for higher places in party affairs and in national politics.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in the invitation that was extended to him to join the Democratic Advisory Council?

GRAVEL: Yes, I was on the Advisory Council.

STEWART: What were his reasons for declining it originally?

GRAVEL: Well, I think originally he declined it because the leadership in the House and in the Senate, Speaker Rayburn and Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], were really boycotting it. I think it took some time before he could overcome their strong opposition to the Advisory Council. Finally he began, I guess, to realize that, you know, the Advisory Council was not trying to take away from the Democrats in the Senate and the Democrats in the House, any of their prerogatives, but that we did need to have some official voice for the party other than the Democratic National Committee and that the leadership of the party should participate in the Council and that it could be a very effective part of our effort. I think that realization began to grow with him as it did with others who finally came in and became part of the Democratic Advisory Council.

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STEWART: Do you think he personally was somewhat opposed to the idea in the beginning?

GRAVEL: Well, I think, I don't believe he was opposed to the idea. As a matter of fact I have a hazy recollection of discussing it with him. But he felt that he didn't want to immediately run counter to the strong opposition to the Council that was typified by Johnson and Rayburn. Johnson and Rayburn got the idea that the Council, of course, was to try to supplant them as spokesman for the Democratic Party. The truth of the matter about it is that the Democratic Advisory Council was more the brainchild of Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] to try to dilute some of the power of Paul Butler. That's really the way the Advisory Council started and that was the thinking initially. Then when they started discussing the Advisory Council and how it would be structured, the idea developed and the first thing you know it became really as much Paul Butler's vehicle as it was anyone else's. But I think the Advisory Council was a very effective force for the Democratic Party. I think it was good for all of those who participated in it. Certainly it didn't do any harm to either Speaker Rayburn's position as Speaker of the House nor did it do any harm to the Majority Leader's position.

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STEWART: Senator Kennedy later joined, I think, in 1959 or somewhere around there.

GRAVEL: That's correct. But it was awfully hard to get the Senators to come into it. Invitations were extended to a number of them. Senator Humphrey, Senator Kennedy, one or two other incumbent senators were on the Council—I don't recall exactly—but those were the principal ones that finally did come in.

STEWART: Did your difficulties that originated in the '56 Convention within Louisiana continue on? Was this a lasting thing? Did this have any direct relationship, for example, to the problems in 1958 when they tried to unseat you?

GRAVEL: I wouldn't think so. I think that Earl Long always remembered that I had pretty much opposed him there. While he was out at the races having a good time, we were working on key members of the delegation. I think in the back of his mind he realized that, although I had been a political ally of his and a supporter of his, that I wasn't subject to his domination and control. Maybe a little bit later on that may have had something to do with his ultimate decision to assist in the effort to remove me as Democratic National Committeeman but that wasn't the principal reason why he assisted in that effort.

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STEWART: Was this effort at all connected with the oncoming 1960 race?

GRAVEL: You mean to remove me?

STEWART: Right.

GRAVEL: Well, I would say that yes, that the effort to remove me as Democratic National Committeeman was just a part of the fight by those in Louisiana who don't want the Democratic National Party to be successful or even to be operative. I think that that's just part of that continuing fight that we've had since 1948. This was something rather symbolic that they could do that would perhaps dilute the strength of the loyalists in the State of Louisiana. It was quite obvious that with Kennedy as the probable candidate, or as a probable candidate, that the Democratic National Party loyalists in Louisiana were on the rise. We were gaining, so I would think that to that extent anything that could be done against anybody who supported the national Democratic Party was one of the goals that the anti-Democrats, of course, would like to see reached.

STEWART: Then to a certain extent the United Democrats of Louisiana was primarily a Kennedy oriented group?

GRAVEL: No question about that. That's why it was set up.

STEWART: This was totally the...

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GRAVEL: See, the United Democrats was set up because you couldn't really, without a fight, support the national Democratic Party within the framework of the Democratic State Central Committee because a good 35, 40 per cent at least of the members of the State Central Committee were really not Democrats. They were registered as Democrats but they didn't support the Democratic Party and wouldn't support its nominees. So the idea of the United Democrats was to get the loyal members of the Democratic State Central Committee into an organization with other Democrats who were not members of the State Central Committee and who did want to work in support of the

Democratic Party. Ralph Jackson and Victor Bussie and people like that became leaders in that movement. Now it served a very good purpose but even at that, we had a situation where it was rather difficult to get public and enthusiastic support from the congressmen and the senators because their constituency, of course, included many people who didn't support the national Democratic Party. So we were dealing, of course, when we talk about the United Democrats, we were dealing with the second rate or at least second echelon of political people in the State of Louisiana.

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STEWART: Do you recall people paying much attention to the size of Kennedy's senatorial victory in 1958 in Massachusetts?

GRAVEL: Well, I think we did. I think those of us that, you know, were interested in him. Keep in mind that in Louisiana from 1956 to 1960 there was a continuing effort to work for and to build up Senator Kennedy by a number of people in this state, not elected officials necessarily but a bunch of people who felt that that was the wagon to which they wanted to hitch their star or vice versa because we were all pretty much sold on him. For example, I remember, you know, on one occasion—I guess this was in '5-; I don't remember whether it was '57 or '58—about ten or twelve of us flew up to visit with him on a Sunday afternoon to talk with him about Louisiana and Louisiana politics and what he could do down here. I think he began to realize that certainly this was one southern state that he had a real good chance of carrying. He had a lot of friends down here and a lot of people wanted to work for him. Of course, he had things going for him, I think, that helped him in Louisiana. Certainly his Catholicism didn't hurt him in Louisiana. If it did, not very much, only to the extent that maybe a fellow like Chep Morrison's [DeLesseps S. Morrison] Catholicism, they say, had something to do with his defeat

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as a statewide candidate for governor. I don't agree necessarily that that conclusion is a valid one but nevertheless it was said. But Kennedy was very well liked in Louisiana and he gave Louisiana some very good consideration in the four years before his nomination.

STEWART: That Morrison race was when? In 1959?

GRAVEL: Right, in the fall of '5- ... Yes, in '59—the last of '59, the early part of '60.

STEWART: The election was actually...

GRAVEL: That is the first primary and the second primary, you see. As I recall it it was either in the last of '59 and the early part of '60 or the early part of '60. We're talking about two primaries.

STEWART: Yes, and you said that Morrison was definitely committed to Kennedy as...

GRAVEL: Yes, I supported Morrison and Morrison had agreed—and I don't think that this was anything that we had to really extract from him—that if he was elected governor that he would see to it that the delegation that went to the Convention would be a pro-Kennedy delegation.

STEWART: And Davis's [James H. Davis] position was what?

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GRAVEL: Well, now Davis's position with Reggie [Edmund M. Reggie], according to Reggie, was the same thing but how he got out of it I just don't know. Reggie is supposed to have had that understanding with Davis before he, Reggie, agreed to support Davis for governor.

STEWART: Let's get into this trip that he made in October of 1959. Were you confident that enough exposure would really do him a world of good here and who was primarily responsible for arranging the trip?

GRAVEL: Well, we were. Reggie and, well, Eddie Carmouche [Edward M. Carmouche] in Lake Charles and Ralph Jackson - this younger group that had been working with Kennedy was responsible for arranging the trip and had charge of it. What we did there was to try to get him as much exposure as we could in the day and a half that he was going to be in Louisiana. We made some special arrangements whereby in different parts of the trip he would get exposed to key people in Louisiana. As I recall it Jimmie Davis, Jimmie Noe [James A. Noe], who was a candidate for governor, Chep Morrison, Bill Dodd [William J. Dodd], all of the principal political people in the state were brought into the picture in one way or another without too much subtlety but with a little bit of it. As a result, he had pretty full exposure on that particular trip, not only to the politicians but to the populace areas in the part of

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the state where we felt confident that he would make a real strong showing. We were plowing the fertile field. We weren't trying to break any new ground in areas where it was real tough. Therefore, when he went to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Crowley and Lake Charles, he was doing a pretty good job of covering the southern part of the state where he could be expected to develop the most strength.

STEWART: Phil DesMarais [Philip H. DesMarais] had gone over the details of that trip in some detail so I don't think there's any need to go over them. Just one thing I want to ask you. Was there any problem of going overboard

with the arrangements? You had the caravan of white Cadillacs and red carpets and all the rest. Was there any fear that possibly you had gone too far in this?

GRAVEL: No, I don't think so. I think it was a real spectacle and we had a real star and it was a really good production. It really was. It was a very successful production that went on. At every stage it just did us some good. We had some good arrangements with the press people and we had a certain number of them on each leg of the trip and all that. Therefore, I don't recall our getting any reaction...

STEWART: I think he mentioned that Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] was a little nervous that possibly it was a little too much of a show.

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GRAVEL: Yes, I think that reaction... (End of Side I, Tape I)...could have come from some people but I don't think that it's a valid assessment. I don't believe that we had any problem on it.

STEWART: Do you recall any...

GRAVEL: Certainly if you look at the returns in the white Cadillac areas you find out that it surely didn't make any difference because, in most of those areas, he got somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of the vote.

STEWART: Is that right? Do you recall anything specific about the response he got from the Negro leaders? I think he had a meeting in New Orleans with...

GRAVEL: We went and had a special meeting with them. That's the way we used to do that and that was entirely satisfactory with them. They'd arrange a meeting of maybe forty or fifty of the leaders at the Peter Claver Hall down there, and then the visitor would go around there and visit with them and that was all right.

STEWART: They had been fairly enthusiastic with Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], I think, hadn't they?

GRAVEL: Well, they had been fairly enthusiastic with Nixon because in '56 a good substantial part of the Negro vote went for Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] and the then Republican National

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Committeeman had done a doggone good job of helping some of the key Negroes in getting jobs and doing some sort of favors. Because of this, there was a spill-over in favor of Nixon

but I'm confident that the Negro vote ended up going 85 per cent in this state for Kennedy. We had some undoing to do.

STEWART: The squabble over the Butler resolution in 1958, was Kennedy at all involved in this to your recollection or did this have any...

GRAVEL: Which Butler resolution?

STEWART: There was a resolution in the Democratic National Committee of support and expressing the gratitude of the Committee for the work that Butler had done. There was quite a squabble over it, if you recall.

GRAVEL: Yes, I recall that. I remember.

STEWART: Did that have any relationship to the 1960 election?

GRAVEL: No, not that I know of. Not that I know of.

STEWART: Let me ask you a couple of...

GRAVEL: Even at that time—we're talking about '58—even at that time and I was very, very close to Paul Butler. Paul had gone to Notre Dame; I had gone to Notre Dame. After I got on the Committee he, in a manner, took me under his wing, you know, and did a lot of things for me. He really

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projected me a whole lot. I was very fond of him. Even in 1958, as far as I knew, Paul Butler was strictly neutral as far as the 1960 Convention and nomination were concerned at that particular time.

STEWART: Why don't we continue? When did his feelings start to change, or did they change?

GRAVEL: Yes, I remember in the early part—I think I'm right—in '60 it seems to me we had a national committee meeting in the early part of 1960. I think Paul Butler was inclined to want to be for Kennedy yet he didn't feel as though he should do too much one way or another. I remember one night—he was staying at the, it used to be the Wardman Park, it's a Sheraton Hotel now, the Sheraton Park—he was staying at the Sheraton Park and so was I—and one night after a committee meeting we walked around that big long block and I gave him unshirted hell because I told him that I thought that he found himself pretty much in the position of the man who's elected judge and then starts deciding cases against his law partner to show how fair he is, even though his law partner's got a good case. Now I thought Paul was being, was overworking the idea of Kennedy's Catholicism in his mind. I remember talking to him much

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along this line as we were exchanging this kind of thinking that really that he should be doing something to help; that was one of the reasons he should be for Kennedy and not adopt that attitude that he should be against him to show, you know, that he was impartial; that he wasn't really being impartial; that he was actually, although he would probably like to see Kennedy president, doing him a disservice and wasn't treating the approach properly. Anyway we talked a long, long time. I said, "Paul, you may just be in the spot because you have the opportunity to do some things that might elect Jack Kennedy and, if you don't do them might defeat him." From there on he didn't say too much but, from then on, I remember noticing that in the selection of committees and in making some determinations that he would either leave some decisions to some key people whom he knew were going to decide generally in favor of the Kennedy campaign or else he did something that was perfectly all right. I noticed a shift in his thinking a little bit. Maybe he had already reached that determination in his own mind. I don't know but I do know that, beginning then, we didn't have any more problems with Paul Butler and that there were a few key people on the Committee who were principally Kennedy people that he let go pretty good on

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what they wanted to do—you know, like on the Arrangements Committee and then we had some very interesting things develop with respect to the selection of the keynote speaker and the chairman of the Platform Committee and the permanent chairmen and all that. I never knew a bad thing that he did after that that was to Kennedy's disadvantage.

STEWART: Was he personally compatible or in favor of Kennedy?

GRAVEL: I think he was from... During the year 1960 I think he was pro-Kennedy without being, I don't think he was particularly unfair with, or tried to be unfair with anybody, but I do think that he was willing to let the Kennedy people on the National Committee go. And then there were a lot of them on there, too.

STEWART: Did the Kennedy people recognize this or appreciate it?

GRAVEL: Paul Butler didn't think so. I don't think Paul Butler thought that they knew about it but in my own opinion—I want to say this because I feel very strongly about it—I don't believe that Jack Kennedy would have gotten the nomination if Paul Butler had not done some of the things that were done or permitted them to be done. I think you could say that about, you know, maybe a number of people.

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STEWART: For example?

GRAVEL: Well, for example, on the selection of the permanent chairman, LeRoy Collins. Without going into all of the background about that, there were a couple of rules that LeRoy Collins had to recognize before he was permanent chairman and they were rules that were favorable to Kennedy. Now I don't mean by that that there was a trade-out but there was an understanding as to how he felt about these particular rules before he was made permanent chairman. There were probably a number of instances in connection with committee arrangements, you know. An example would be the Credentials Committee, I know this, that Cal Rawlings [Calvin W. Rawlings] had been chairman of the Credentials Committee for a number of years, probably still is. Well, Paul made me the co-chairman of the Credentials Committee because it looked like there were going to be some problems that came up with regard to Puerto Rico. That was the principal thing as it developed. There were two or three credentials problems which came up and there were some questions that were going to come up as to whether we were going to seat some of the delegates, one of them, for example, being Leander Perez [Leander H. Perez]. Knowing that these credentials problems were

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going to come up—now whether this is right or wrong I don't know but—I think Paul Butler had the feeling and I had the feeling that Cal Rawlings was for Lyndon Johnson. As a result, he creates an unprecedented co-chairmanship to put me in a position to be of some help to the Kennedys. There were some developments there that I know helped Jack Kennedy. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and I worked from 11 o'clock one night until about 4 o'clock in the morning on the two conflicting factions from Puerto Rico. I remember too that some of us were really out to get people like Perez, you know. We were just going to make a real show and all of a sudden Jack Kennedy decided, and correctly so, "Look, let's don't rock the boat. I don't want any floor fight on anything. So where we've got to give, let's give. Let's just keep this thing as quiet and peaceful as we can. If we don't win on that first ballot we're going to start having troubles. Therefore, let's don't get the people stirred up about anything. Let's do all the compromising. Do everything that we can do to keep a fight from developing." Now this wasn't weakness. This was just good strategy. This developed afterwards and

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I was in a position to be of some help to the Kennedy people by virtue of that particular appointment. I mention that as two instances. Now there were other instances where things were done that I believe inured to the benefit of the nomination of Kennedy. I think probably my own view, and I say this because I have strong feeling about what he did, is that no man prior to the Convention made a greater contribution in the things that were done to the Kennedy cause than did Paul Butler.

STEWART: Was he genuinely bitter after the Convention adjourned?

GRAVEL: No, I don't think he was bitter. I was with Paul a couple of weeks before he died. I don't think he was bitter. I think he was extremely hurt for a while and yet the President had indicated to him that he was going to give him some kind of appointment. It seems to me that just that recognition—I believe it had something to do with the... What's that waterway up there in...

STEWART: The St. Lawrence Seaway?

GRAVEL: Yes. Paul Butler told me that the President had called him over to the White House and that he had had a very nice talk with him. It seemed to me he had offered him some position like that and had indicated to him at that time that he was, you know, very grateful to him for all that he had done and

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that he himself, the President, recognized that he had been extremely helpful to him. At that particular time Paul Butler was very contented, I believe. I think after the election for several months, for some time, he was very much worried about the fact that he was disregarded and not given any particular attention. Of course, I think he began to know that it just takes a while for people to get around to recognizing some of the acts of friendship. But Paul was a... I think Paul Butler died knowing that President Kennedy recognized that he had been extremely helpful to him. I'm confident of that.

STEWART: What were your feelings on the whole religious problem, especially in late 1959, early 1960? Kennedy had had an interview that appeared in Look Magazine which a lot of Catholic people objected to because they felt he had gone overboard. Did you agree that in fact he had gone too far in making the distinction between matters of religion and how this affected his outlook on social problems and political problems?

GRAVEL: Well, I thought that some of the statements that he had made—he made at that time—probably caused some reaction in Catholic circles but not of any particular

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consequence. I personally don't recall ever having been particularly disturbed about the fact that here was a candidate for the presidency who was making some rather definite statements that could be construed by some as being even anti-Catholic and yet he was saying what anyone would have to expect a candidate for the presidency to say, whether he be a Catholic or Protestant. I thought he was being pretty forthright, direct, and honest. I do think that maybe some Catholics would have preferred for Jack Kennedy to genuflect as he was campaigning but nevertheless he had been making his position clear and I don't think that he left any doubts as to what his role would be, what his positions would be where questions of

religion would be involved in the event that he was elected president. I think he had to do that. I think he did it and I think he did it in the proper manner.

STEWART: Do you recall discussing this with him or with Ted Sorensen in early 1960, before the primary?

GRAVEL: I don't think I did.

STEWART: Moving on, to your work on the Site Committee. Was Kennedy primarily interested in Chicago? If so, why?

GRAVEL: Yes. Yes, he was primarily interested in Chicago. Well, the reason he was primarily interested in Chicago was because

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he felt that, with Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley] in Chicago, there he was in friendlier territory than he would be in Los Angeles. As a matter of fact, I was the chairman of the Site Selection Committee and I can recall that, while we were having our hearings and discussions, I talked with Ted Sorensen in either October or November from Baton Rouge here on the telephone. I called him and told him that if they were interested in having the Convention in Chicago, that something better be done because Chicago just wasn't responding the way the other cities were and that we were going to have a meeting in New Orleans in January and make our final determination, but that something was going to have to be done to really activate the Chicago people because they were just not making the kind of a bid that the Site Selection Committee was going to respond to. I remember Ted saying that he was going to talk to Mayor Daley about it. This was giving him real advance notice. Therefore, in January when we met down in New Orleans, it began to get out that the choice of the Convention site had just about narrowed down to Los Angeles and Philadelphia. I began getting, while we were having some hearings, some telephone calls. I talked to Kennedy at least on two occasions—it

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might have been three—and he was insistent that I call Mayor Daley and talk to him and see what, if anything, could be done, if the fat could be pulled out of the fire. I did call Mayor Daley. It was really too late. But, even if it hadn't been too late, Mayor Daley's response wasn't such that permitted us to really consider Chicago. There were some problems about whether or not McCormack Place would be ready in time and there was a very serious question as to whether or not Chicago was trying to meet the bids of the other cities to help us carry out our financial commitments and obligations. I remember very, very clearly two things in connection with that. I'm rather glad you brought that up. I had sort of halfway forgotten it. I finally called Senator Kennedy back before we adopted, before we selected Los Angeles. I told him, I said, "Look, this thing's just a question of... It's going to go to Los Angeles. That's all there is to it. There isn't much I can do now." "Oh," he answered, "I don't

know." No, he had told me this earlier when I first called, when he first asked me to call Daley but it was the same day or the day before. He said he just didn't know what would happen out there in Los Angeles. He stated he didn't have any, you know, real base out there and

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there wasn't any political organization out there that he could tie in to; he was in excellent shape in Chicago, pretty good shape in Philadelphia even, but that Los Angeles was the place of which he was the most afraid. Not that he didn't like California or the people in Los Angeles but he was just afraid of that city as the Convention site. Anyway, I replied, "You don't have to worry about that. You're going to be in good shape wherever you go." I, in a manner, shrugged off his real fears. I can remember at the Convention in 1960, that, before McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] nominated Stevenson, I went and sat up in the balcony. I got off the floor and went up, by myself, up in a vacant place in the balcony because I knew McCarthy was going to nominate Stevenson and I was worried about what might happen as far as Stevenson was concerned. Of course, McCarthy made a great nominating speech out there and then the demonstration started for Stevenson. Man, all hell was breaking loose on that Convention floor. I really started to remember word for word that telephone conversation about Kennedy's fears about what might happen in Los Angeles. From that time until the balloting ended I really kind of steered clear of the people that had talked to me about the selection of the site, [Laughter] But the thing that was

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amazing to me was that he had pictured, looking back over it, in his own mind what very well could happen and what did happen. But they had done their homework so well that the first ballot votes for Kennedy were there. They weren't going to change. There wasn't any way to dynamite them away, the first ballot votes. Therefore, all I do know is that I had some real worries and concerns about the selection of Los Angeles when I saw the Stevenson demonstration and then actually Stevenson got fifty, sixty, votes—something like that, not a whole lot.

STEWART: Do you really think the matter of a site would make that much of a difference—for example, in the Kennedy campaign as it was going on?

GRAVEL: Well, I think this. I think that the candidate who has committed delegate strength could run into some problems in an area where pressures are put on the delegates and where demonstrations, of course, make things appear to be what they're not, but not in instances where the work was done as well as it was done in the pre-convention stages by the Kennedy people. In other words, their votes were tied down. There were good knots and they were tied down. But it was possible. I would think so.

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STEWART: But you say the local people do have that much of a...

GRAVEL: Yes, I think it's possible to have something to do with it. Now I'm not saying, you know, that necessarily it would make a great deal of difference but it could make the difference in a very close situation where some of the delegations might get a false picture of the popularity of a candidate or of the support that he has. I think less and less, and we're getting away from that. I think we're much more sophisticated now than they were in years gone by. But I know I had that fear in 1960 that, good night, maybe... I knew how many votes we were supposed to have, within three or four votes. So if we lost twenty-five and went into the second ballot and states like Indiana that were statutorily committed but that, once they got past that first ballot, might switch against us, we could have been in trouble. I was always personally afraid of the second ballot because we had statutory commitments from a number of states that maybe wouldn't have held on the second ballot.

STEWART: You don't think they would have picked up that much second ballot strength in the South to anywhere near offset it?

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GRAVEL: Well, we might have. We might have but my own feeling was that we really needed to do all we could to win on the first ballot. That the second ballot was still a good chance, would have been a problem, but, beyond that, we could have really been in trouble. In other words, I don't know. You had people there that were playing pretty cute there, like Governor Meyner [Robert B. Meyner], for example. Now, there was an indication that Iowa was going to hold out. I don't know. They finally tied themselves down the first ballot. But you had one or two wheelers and dealers there that really wanted to be coy and, if it had gotten into the second or even into the third ballot, it could have been some trouble for Jack Kennedy. The only other place that the Convention could possibly have gone in my view would have been to Stevenson. I don't think Lyndon Johnson could ever have gotten the nomination out there. But the advantage, of course, which we had on the first ballot was that there were some states that were committed because of the primaries.

STEWART: Was money the only factor in the selection of Los Angeles?

GRAVEL: No, I don't think so. Paul Butler really wanted Los Angeles from the very beginning but he could have been changed. The principal reason, I think, why we wanted to go

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to Los Angeles was because it really was an area where the Democrats were making gains. We had made some gains out there in '58, you know, in the senatorial race and the congressional races. This was—at that particular time we were thinking that this was the new

area that we could go to and get strong support and that we needed to look to the West for the activists in the Democratic Party. Then we had good people out there, too, on the National Committee like Jebby Davidson [C. Girard Davidson] from Oregon and Paul Ziffren from California. We had some, you know, strong people on the Committee that were pushing for the West. Of course, you had the West and the South and some places in the Middle West that were pretty much banding together to get away from the big city boss idea too of the people from the East and, of course, from Illinois. We thought it would give the party just a better look to go out to Los Angeles.

STEWART: I read some place where it wasn't financially as advantageous as you people had thought, that you in fact didn't come out as well as you hoped to.

GRAVEL: And actually Philadelphia was just as good financially, made just as good an offer, but it's a fact that at that particular time many of us thought—I was one of them—

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that that was the growing area as far as party expansion possibilities were concerned. Paul Ziffren was a strong man on the Committee, getting away from the traditional metropolitan areas, your machine areas. You don't consider Los Angeles as a machine politics area. I guess Paul Ziffren was about as influential as anybody. We had a pretty good understanding. Paul Ziffren was very active and very effective in making a strong case for the west coast and for Los Angeles.

STEWART: You mentioned the Credentials Committee a while ago. How, other than by Senator Kennedy's desires, were all of the problems relating to the loyalty oaths and all the rest of it resolved before the Convention started? Resolved some time before, I guess.

GRAVEL: Well, not too much before, within a month before, because I know that we had a meeting in Washington two or three months before the Convention and we were then preparing the cases against Perez and, it seems to me, Bull Connor [Theophilus Eugene Connor] and somebody else as individuals. Then there were going to be some questions, it seems to me, about the Mississippi delegation. I think that initially maybe Paul wanted me on the Credentials Committee so that we could go ahead with this exposure of some of these people and even...

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I personally was very anxious not to seat Perez. I thought that symbolically we would come out ahead on it. Then I could see, as a supporter of Kennedy, the problems that would arise if we started shaking up the Convention and causing some floor fights. I don't think there's any question but that the judgment that they made on that was right. You don't rock the boat

when you're sailing along pretty smoothly, as they apparently were going. Therefore, I would guess that the determination—that was strictly a decision I think Kennedy made and passed it on down to his friends and they went to work at it on the National Committee and on the Credentials Committee too.

STEWART: Then it was just generally understood that there would be no...

GRAVEL: That's right. We ended up, when we got away from these individuals and got away from Mississippi, we ended up where the only really serious thing that looked like it might come up—serious to the extent that it could have caused a floor fight over some very difficult to understand controversies between the two delegations from Puerto Rico. It looked like Jose Benitez and his group were not going to give in. Then there was a man named Durham [Richard C. Durham] and his group—of course were contesting the right of Jose Benitez's group to serve as delegates.

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STEWART: Was this a Kennedy-Johnson split?

GRAVEL: No. They ended up both being for Kennedy. But there again it was just a question of not having any troubles on the Convention floor. So it ended up where we couldn't untie the knot so we cut the rope and both sides reluctantly agreed to let the situation alone until after the Convention and then there would be some determination made by an inquiry of a task force set up by the National Committee. There would be some determination made as to which group down there properly represented the Democratic Party. What happened after that I don't recall. I don't know if anything happened. But I wasn't on the Committee anymore after that.

STEWART: Did Kennedy's people make much of an effort with the Louisiana delegation at the Convention?

GRAVEL: No, it was conceded that they were not going to get it. No effort of any consequence was made after we realized that, you know, on the basis of the composition of the delegation that we were not going to get them. I had made an analysis, for example, of the delegates. It was obvious that the delegation was going to be for Johnson and there wasn't any way, really, to change it so there was no real effort made to try to get the Louisiana delegation for Kennedy.

STEWART: Were people enthusiastic for Johnson within the Louisiana delegation?

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GRAVEL: I think the Louisiana delegation was principally, well, it was just as much anti-Kennedy as it was pro-Johnson. These were Governor Davis's people and Davis had just had a bitter fight with Chep Morrison who had been the

Kennedy ambassador to the OAS [Organization of American States]. They just didn't have much of a feeling for President Kennedy.

STEWART: What involvement, if any, did you have in the platform and particularly in the civil rights plank of the platform?

GRAVEL: In 1960?

STEWART: Right.

GRAVEL: I didn't have very much to do with the actual writing of the platform in 1960. My position had been pretty well stated at different times in resolutions that had been adopted by the Advisory Council and actually the resolutions that were adopted by the Advisory Council were more or less recast and redrafted by the Platform Committee and made the civil rights plank in the '60 platform. I had a great deal to do with helping to draft the civil rights plank in the party's platform in '56 but not in '60, except to the extent that it, I think, involved a development of the pronouncements and the positions of the Advisory Council.

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STEWART: Were you at all involved in the arrangements that were made to allow—what's his name—Gray [James H. Gray] from Georgia to present the minority report to the Convention?

GRAVEL: No.

STEWART: He had a very terrible time.

GRAVEL: Georgia Neese Gray?

STEWART: Pardon?

GRAVEL: Georgia Gray?

STEWART: No, from Georgia.

GRAVEL: Oh, from Georgia. No, oh no.

STEWART: His name is... I don't know his name.

GRAVEL: No, I know who you're talking about. His name is Denmark Groover [Denmark Groover, Jr.], wasn't it?

STEWART: No, a fellow named Gray.

GRAVEL: Yes, I guess that's right. '60, huh? No.

STEWART: And there apparently... Well, all right. There's no reason...

GRAVEL: I think that, as I recall it rather vaguely, I think there too, there was the question as to whether there should be anything much done and the idea was to let them go ahead with the minority report and nobody would say or do too much about it. I think that determination was made. I wasn't involved in it but I knew about it.

(End Tape I; Side II)

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STEWART: Could you generally describe how you spent most of your time at the 1960 Convention?

GRAVEL: Well, actually as far as being able to do much with the Louisiana delegation there wasn't anything that could be done. The main thing that I did out at the '60 Convention, of course, was to work with the Credentials Committee and to help to get the idea across to as many peoples as possible that were friendly to the Kennedy candidacy that—let's try not to have any floor fights of any kind, anything that would cause any real concern by any people in the Convention and try to keep it as peaceful and as quiet as possible. There wasn't much necessity to try to get people to vote. The votes were pretty well lined up and committed as it turned out. People that came to the Convention pretty well knew how they were going to vote when they got there. So it became a question of coordination and of working with different people. I think I probably worked to some extent with Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman], as I recall it. Mainly this was done through the Credentials Committee before the Convention and then during the course of the Convention just whatever contacts needed to be made that I was capable of making and within an area that I was able to operate. I worked with all of the Kennedy principal workers, Ted Sorensen and Mike Feldman, in many things.

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STEWART: Could you briefly describe—you mentioned before this group that met periodically in the months before the Convention to go over the political situation.

GRAVEL: In the months before the Convention there were a number of people who met together informally, more or less as a committee interested in the candidacy of Senator Kennedy. Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] was one of them. Ted Sorensen, Mike Feldman, Paul Ziffren, Jebby Davidson, Tom Quimby [Thomas H.E. Quimby] from Michigan—from time to time there were others. But we

discussed mainly Convention rules and procedures, the various possibilities for some of the key spots at the Convention, such as permanent chairman, keynote speaker, chairman of the Platform Committee. This particular group was perhaps a kind of cell group that was to try to reach some conclusions and some ideas that were in the best interests of the efforts that were being made by Senator Kennedy and then, wherever we could best work, whether it be in the National Committee or with delegates or with both, that's what we did do. So we, I think, accomplished a whole lot by kicking around different ideas and different approaches and having the benefit and the counsel of the people that were closest to Senator Kennedy.

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STEWART: Did Senator Kennedy sit in on many, or any of these?

GRAVEL: No, he didn't sit in on any of them.

STEWART: Not at all?

GRAVEL: He didn't sit in on any of these big meetings. But we had some information from him and his representatives at the meetings were principally Ted Sorensen and Mike Feldman.

STEWART: To what extent, to your knowledge, were people supporting Lyndon Johnson and possibly Stevenson, doing the same thing, and also Symington [Stuart Symington II]? Did they look into the Convention in such detail or in any detail at all?

GRAVEL: I don't think there was anything like that kind of look at what was going on. The Kennedy people just impressed me as being those that knew where they were going, those that knew what steps should be taken after the occurrences took place. There was some excellent planning, some excellent thinking. Where a future situation as it developed called for alternative courses of action, plans were made to go in either one or two or more directions if it became necessary. This was particularly true with respect to the possibilities, for example, as to how the rules of the Convention would be interpreted under certain circumstances. Very little, if anything, was left to the imagination or to guesswork. Everything was pretty well thought out and pretty well planned by Senator Kennedy and his staff.

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STEWART: With what particular rulings were they concerned?

GRAVEL: Well, for example, it was rather important—there were a number of rules but one in particular that I can remember—to require that voting on the first ballot that would be recorded for each delegation be determined as

much as possible throughout the course of the ballot and as few states as possible left to the very end of the balloting in order to shift or to change their minds. Now the rule was put into effect, as I recall it, that a delegation could change its vote up until such time as the vote was announced by the permanent chairman. There was a number of possibilities that could have occurred in the event a number of states passed during the roll call and withheld their votes. So, when it became pretty well known that there might be a reasonably good possibility that Kennedy could win on the first ballot and some of the states would not act affirmatively by voting on the first ballot, that they might end up a little bit chagrined. I think that that actually did develop in the case of at least one, perhaps more, states. I don't recall right now, but certainly New Jersey, as I recall it, passed.

STEWART: No, Kansas passed.

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GRAVEL: I think New Jersey did too.

STEWART: New Jersey voted for Meyner.

GRAVEL: Perhaps so. I think that's correct. I think you're right about that.

STEWART: It wasn't Kansas but...

GRAVEL: Was it Iowa that passed?

STEWART: Yes, it was Iowa.

GRAVEL: It was Iowa. But Iowa got in a real big hurry to get on the record after Wyoming had voted and indicated that Kennedy would be nominated on the first ballot. But Meyner, that's correct, New Jersey went for Meyner and was going to go for Kennedy on the second ballot. At least that was the indication that we felt... We thought that would be the case but there was some real concern about the possibility that, if Kennedy wasn't nominated on the first ballot, we might have some troubles on the second ballot. I believe I mentioned earlier our reasons for that.

STEWART: Right. Moving on, then, could you describe the problems involved in setting up the organization in Louisiana after the Convention and getting the campaign rolling?

GRAVEL: That was principally handled through the congressional delegation, or at least a majority of the, and Frank Ellis who was appointed campaign coordinator. My term as

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National Committeeman had expired and I actually - I personally handled the campaign in the Eighth Congressional District. There was a very loose organization. Most of the effort that was made in behalf of the Democratic ticket in 1960 was made in south Louisiana. Any funds that were available were used in New Orleans and in the southern part of the state. I think that, without taking anything away from those, that all of us that worked in the two or three months before the election, I think that Senator Kennedy had carried Louisiana prior to his nomination because he was immensely popular in this state. He had visited the state. He had a lot of friends among the rank and file throughout the state. He was just an ideal candidate for Louisiana and appeared to really work for and did get the support of the people in Louisiana.

STEWART: Was it generally these same people who held official roles in the campaign itself, in the campaign organization—the same people who had been active before?

GRAVEL: Well, it was the same people who had been active on behalf of the Democratic Party, who had been the loyalists in the state, who did the pick and shovel work. But in addition to that we saw some of the congressmen get active in a

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national election which is somewhat unusual for Louisiana. Senator Long, Senator Russell Long, was very active in behalf of the ticket. The campaign activity as such just developed as a result of just those that wanted to take part in it all of a sudden coming together and doing whatever they could in their own areas, not coming together but doing what they could in their own areas. What I'm saying is there was no organization as such, statewide organization that was set up after the Convention in order to accommodate the nomination of Kennedy. It wasn't really necessary because Kennedy had good support in the Third Congressional District—that's the area around Lafayette, Louisiana—and the Seventh, around Lake Charles area, and the Baton Rouge area—that's the Sixth Congressional District—and in the First and Second Congressional Districts which was the New Orleans area. He had a lot of friends, of course, because there were a lot of people in those areas that were working for him.

STEWART: What contacts did you have with people in Washington, with Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] or Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] or any of those people, if at all during the campaign?

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GRAVEL: During the campaign I had very little direct contact with Steve Smith or Bobby Kennedy, maybe a half a dozen phone calls. I don't believe that there was any real concern or worry or effort that was made to try to do anything spectacular or unusual in Louisiana. I think it was generally understood that, in this state too the homework had been done and it was just a question of doing whatever was

necessary to pull together as many people as we could who would become interested in the campaign. It sounds a little bit unusual but that's exactly the way it was. I don't mean by that that we didn't have—some of the congressmen of course made speeches on television and on radio. There wasn't a lot of money to spend in order to set up a party organization. Of course, we had the advantage of an additional set of electors on the tickets that diluted the anti-Kennedy vote. See, we had three sets of electors.

STEWART: Yes, you had a states' rights party.

GRAVEL: That's right, we had an independent states' rights set of electors. We had the Republican set of electors and, of course, the Kennedy electors. That really worked and it was obvious it was going to work to the advantage of the

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the Kennedy slate of the Democratic Party's electors. But, you see, we only really had about two and a half months in which to do anything and, if we had been starting from the very beginning for some other candidate other than Kennedy, it might have been an entirely different story. But Kennedy, the candidate, had been campaigning in Louisiana effectively on other occasions and we didn't have to start anew for him.

STEWART: Did Johnson come to Louisiana at all?

GRAVEL: Yes, he did.

STEWART: Was he...

GRAVEL: He came during the campaign to New Orleans and spoke down there, you know, in connection with this trip he took throughout the South and did a very effective job. It was a good pitch for Kennedy for Johnson to come into Louisiana. Johnson, at that time, was, of course, a real asset to the Kennedy ticket in this state as he was in many of the other southern states.

STEWART: Probably was a key factor.

GRAVEL: The main thing about it, of course, was that Johnson was the one mainly responsible for activating those senators and congressmen throughout the South who did participate in the campaign for Kennedy.

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STEWART: Did you have any contact with any other southern states, with anyone outside of Louisiana on any situations?

GRAVEL: Oh yes, both before and after the Convention, I had contacts with Terry Sanford [J. Terry Sanford] in North Carolina, with Fritz Hollings [Ernest F. Hollings] in South Carolina, with LeRoy Collins who was governor of Florida, and several others in coordinating some of the things that were being done for Kennedy. But I don't want to leave the impression that, during the period after the Convention and up to the time of the election, I did a whole lot individually because I didn't, except in the Eighth Congressional District of Louisiana which I undertook as the area that I would try to help organize in order to get our vote out on election day.

STEWART: Did he carry that?

GRAVEL: No, we didn't. We got a very good vote for that district which is getting into north Louisiana but he did not carry the Eighth Congressional District. I think I may be wrong about that. I think he probably got a plurality of votes but he didn't get a majority of the votes. I know he did in one of the parishes. But it was pretty close. He did real well in that area.

STEWART: Okay, moving on, I guess I asked you before, did you ever give any thoughts to joining the Administration. Was there any consideration of your going to Washington?

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GRAVEL: No. I do recall that, after the election, I had a rather brief visit, a social visit, with Ted Sorensen in his office and Ted asked me whether I was interested in coming to Washington or interested in any particular job or appointment. I told him that I was not and we didn't talk very long about it. This was just a rather casual statement on his part. I don't think he was trying to find out anything other than whether I had any desires in that connection.

STEWART: Did you have any role in any other appointments either at that time or later?

GRAVEL: Well, not very much. No, I did not. I do remember specifically talking with Larry O'Brien about Phil Des Marais. I remember exactly what Larry said about Phil. I told Larry that Phil was interested in coming to Washington and being part of the Administration. He said, "We're looking for men like Des Marais. We need him. He doesn't really need us. We'd like to have him very, very much." I did try to talk—I did talk—a number of times after the election with Bobby Kennedy, with Larry O'Brien, with Bailey. I was talking with Ralph Dungan, about the necessity to give consideration to some of these loyal Democrats in Louisiana

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together with the congressional delegation in the recommendations that would be made for appointments, but, after a few months, it became rather obvious that the congressional delegation was going to reserve unto itself the right to make recommendations for almost all the appointments. As a consequence, I think that quite a few people in Louisiana who were extremely deserving did not get credit for what they had done in behalf of Kennedy's successful effort to be elected President of the United States. People like Ralph Jackson, for example, who devoted as much time, talent and effort to the Kennedy campaign as anybody in this state that I know of, couldn't be considered even for an appointment to a federal judgeship because some of the members of the Louisiana delegation who had been anti-Kennedy were opposed to him. Even though the Department of Justice highly recommended and wanted Jackson, he couldn't break through the situation that developed whereby the selections of the senators and the congressmen who were there voting had to be given prime consideration. I really do think that a lot of people in Louisiana should have been considered by appointments and positions in the Kennedy Administration and they were not considered.

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STEWART: Did you people have an alternative candidate for the U.S. attorney? It was probably the...

GRAVEL: Well, Eddie Shaheen [Edward L. Shaheen] who was made the United States Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana deserved the appointment.

STEWART: Well, it must have been the Eastern—LaCour [Louis Charles LaCour].

GRAVEL: In the Eastern District, LaCour got the appointment mainly because of the political relationship between his father-in-law and, I guess, Hale Boggs, Hébert [F. Edward Hébert] and Russell Long. I think that LaCour's a good man and all that but I didn't know of any active part that he himself had taken of any consequence on behalf of Kennedy at any time. But his father-in-law is a rather prominent man in politics down there. He's one of the assessors. That appointment was not one that I would have recommended, although I think LaCour's a good attorney, but I could think of a dozen capable lawyers who could have been appointed United States Attorney and been rewarded for their efforts.

STEWART: Were O'Brien and these people fairly sympathetic to this problem and did they indicate that it existed in many other states?

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GRAVEL: Well, they were sympathetic to it to the extent that they recognized it and we talked about it but they never did anything, to my knowledge, of any consequence about it. I say this. I think that that was one of the failings as

I could see it, and maybe it didn't exist all over the country, but that was one of the failings of the Administration in that some of the people who should have been considered for appointments and for employment were not so considered and are not so employed. Now, I'm a realist in politics and I recognize the fact that President Kennedy was working with a very thin margin there in the Congress of the United States and he couldn't afford to anger too many of the people that he had to count on to help him get his program through. But I think more could have been done and still accommodated the situation as far as the congressional delegation was concerned.

STEWART: What involvement, if any, did you have in the various civil rights problems that came up during the Kennedy Administration?

GRAVEL: I personally had been on the Louisiana Advisory Commission on Civil Rights. I've also been on the Community Relations Committee since it was created. However, that was after the death of President Kennedy. I've been actively involved, in one way or another, you know, with many civil rights programs.

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STEWART: No, I was thinking more in terms of involvement in any of the integration problems or the demonstration problems in which the Justice Department or the Administration had been involved.

GRAVEL: Well, I'm trying to see if I understand. You mean, between 1960 and 1963?

STEWART: Right, or '61 and '63.

GRAVEL: Well, actually, in '61 and '63 I don't think that I had any particular role in any civil rights activity other than the fact that I had been identified in political affairs, and I think correctly so, as a southern liberal and as a member of the Democratic National Committee up until 1960, I think I probably was as liberal on the Committee as any southerner. I would say, I guess, for that particular period from '61 to '63 that I had no particular identification with civil rights activity other than maybe to talk to groups about voting and registration and things of that nature.

STEWART: What other contacts, if any, did you have with either the President or the Attorney General or anyone else in the Administration?

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GRAVEL: I visited with the Attorney General probably half a dozen times during his tenure of office there and, I think, with the President on three occasions. Most of the visits were just social and, outside of the plea that I made on

many occasions, at least eight or ten occasions, to key people including Bobby Kennedy and Larry O'Brien, as I mentioned before, outside of the plea that I made to give consideration to a lot of these people that had been helping them, I don't think I had any other situations where I was trying to get anything for anybody or to try to get any appointments for anyone.

STEWART: Were they seeking information from you, for example, regarding any of the civil rights problems or any other problems?

GRAVEL: The only time I recall anything along that line is perhaps a couple of telephone conversations that I had with Whizzer White [Byron R. White] when he was Deputy Attorney General with respect to voting patterns in Louisiana and particularly with respect to voting in Rapides Parish - by that I mean registration, too—and to indicate to them that I thought that in certain areas there were no particular problems anymore with respect to registration and that in other

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areas that there were. But it arose as a result of some litigation in Rapides Parish in which the Registrar of Voters was involved and I felt that, in that particular area we were having no problems with respect to the registration of Negro voters and I thought the Department of Justice should know about it. Now, other than that, no. We didn't have any... Strangely enough, from '60 through about '63, we didn't have any real problems in Louisiana that were related to civil rights demonstrations and situations such as developed in Mississippi and Alabama. Our problems came more a little bit later. The Bogalusa and Jonesboro problems came during the administration of the present governor. Governor McKeithen [John Julian McKeithen], and after the assassination of President Kennedy. I got rather deeply involved in those but that's another story.

STEWART: Could you describe generally the types of conversations you had with the President on the three or four times you saw him in the White House?

GRAVEL: I saw him on three different occasions. They were just ten, fifteen minute social visits, very brief to talk about what was going on in Louisiana. These were not at his invitation. Usually it was because I was in Washington and just wanted to visit with him. I remember on one occasion my law

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partner and his wife wanted to meet him and we went by there. As a matter of fact, it was in September of 1963, just about two months before the assassination. Therefore, they were not of great significance in that we had any particular problem to discuss, anything else. He was very cordial, very busy, and, of course, the three short meetings were arranged just for that purpose, just to say hello. That's about all.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in any plans for 1964?

GRAVEL: No.

STEWART: Either in in Louisiana or nationally?

GRAVEL: No, there had been hardly any discussion or any planning about 1964. I do recall, when we talked in September of 1963, that I said something to the effect that it looked pretty much to me as though Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] was going to get the Republican nomination. President Kennedy said, "Well, I certainly hope so." So I recall that.

STEWART: He hoped quite fervently for that.

GRAVEL: Yes, I didn't end up being a key person in his Administration. I still maintained the friendship and, as far as I know, the relationships. Anything that I could have done in Louisiana that he would have wanted me to do in his campaign I would have been delighted to do in '64.

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STEWART: Well, that's about all the questions I have. Is there anything else?

GRAVEL: No, I think, you know, after I look this over, I might have a thought or two. It occurred to me that I get to Washington about once every sixty days or so. If there's something I might want to add to it, and I very likely will have a few, I might talk to you a little bit up there.

STEWART: Sure, either that or just add it, type an appendix onto it or something.

GRAVEL: I don't know. I think maybe some thoughts will come to my mind that I may think would be of value to this discussion and I could add them to it.

STEWART: Okay. Very good. (Tape off...resumes)

GRAVEL: In 1960 we had a real fight in the Democratic State Central Committee. I think one of the turning points in favor of President Kennedy in this state, and for that matter, in the South was the fact that the Democratic State Central Committee of Louisiana voted to put Kennedy electors, pledged to support him on the ballot, that is, electors pledged to support the nominees of the party. But, even at that, that vote by which this determination was made, passed by only a one vote majority. As I recall it, the

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vote was fifty-two to fifty-one and it's very possible that, if the Louisiana Democratic State Central Committee had done just the opposite and had kept the electors pledged to support the nominees off the ballot, it could have started some reaction in other areas of the South that might have been very harmful to the candidacy of Senator Kennedy.

STEWART: Was it a hard job to get these fifty-two people?

GRAVEL: Oh, it was nip and tuck. The whole session was one of stress and strain where we just had to exert every bit of influence and every bit of activity that we could in order to keep the votes that we had and then try to develop enough to offset the votes that we were losing. It was a hard job and I think then Senator Kennedy realized it was a hard job and appreciated very much the fact that it had been done.

STEWART: What kind of leverage primarily do you have in a fight like this?

GRAVEL: Well, you get the support of labor, of course, AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organization], and generally speaking, you would get the support of a substantial number of the committee who come from the traditionally Democratic areas of the state.

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But I'd say approximately 20 to 25 per cent of the Democratic State Central Committee in Louisiana is a changeable vote and there you have to use whatever influences can be brought to bear on the particular individuals that are involved. After awhile you get to making a study of these particular people and begin to know how you can approach them and how difficult it might be to get them to go along. A lot depends on whether the governor is for or against the position that you're for and, in 1960, there's no doubt in my mind but that Governor Davis was trying to get people on the Committee to vote against the interests of the National Democratic Party. But I don't think we could have done what we did with any candidate other than Kennedy.

STEWART: Did many of these unpledged people and, well, even, for example, the Governor have any direct links to the Republican National Committee or Republican headquarters in Washington?

GRAVEL: No, I think principally that they are against the national Democratic Party—people like Leander Perez and former state senator Rainach [William M. Rainach] who are leaders in the

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Citizens' Council movement and the arch segregationists. I call them the anti-Democrats because they're really not Republicans. They might be Goldwater Republicans but they're

really not Republicans at heart and they wouldn't stay with the Republican Party very long if some moderate were at the head of the Republican ticket. They're the ultra-conservatives.

STEWART: But they never had any real links with the Republican Party?

GRAVEL: No, I wouldn't think so. I wouldn't think the Republican Party would much want them. They might want them for a particular purpose in a particular election but the Republican Party would not want to be identified with them as a long range proposition.

STEWART: No, but certainly in a particular election...

GRAVEL: Oh yes. Then they would want their support.

STEWART: ...no one is too fussy about where their supporters or votes really come from.

GRAVEL: That is correct. The Republican Party, for example, would never come to the defense of a Leander Perez.

STEWART: No, no.

GRAVEL: That's the point I'm trying to make. And yet Perez would support the Republican Goldwater, of course, easily and quickly as against the Democratic Kennedy.

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STEWART: Did Kennedy's race and his career have any lasting impact on this whole situation or has it in effect reverted to what it was in '58 and '59?

GRAVEL: Well, I think that there are a lot of people in Louisiana who still have influence and capacity in politics who consider themselves, if you want to start with a new label as far as Louisiana is concerned, as Kennedy Democrats whose ties with the Democratic Party have been strengthened because of the relationship that these people have had either directly or indirectly with Kennedy or because of the fact that Kennedy was elected President of the United States. I don't think there's any question but that Kennedy's being President of the United States brought back to the Democratic Party some of the Catholic people who voted for Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and voted for Eisenhower in 1956. I think that, in this state which is 40 per cent Catholic, we can see some lasting impact and effect of the Kennedy election still in Louisiana.

STEWART: Can you think of any specific examples of situations in which the state of Louisiana lost out because the

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Administration, from a congressional point of view, wasn't that enthused with the people up there?

GRAVEL: Well, I think that the congressional administration, the congressional delegation, after Kennedy's election, became generally very pleased with the Administration.

STEWART: Oh, did they?

GRAVEL: Yes. I don't think there were any major problems, for example, between the Kennedy Administration and Senator Ellender [Allen J. Ellender] and Russell Long nor were there any real problems with the Administration insofar as Congressman Boggs, Congressman Willis [Edwin E. Willis], Congressman Morrison [James H. Morrison], Congressman Thompson [Theo Ashton Thompson] were concerned. So by and large our congressional delegation got along well with the Kennedy Administration. I don't believe that there were any particular problems at all which arose.

STEWART: The only problem that... You may recall...

GRAVEL: Passman [Otto Ernest Passman], of course, from the Fifth Congressional District...

STEWART: Yes.

GRAVEL: ...wanted to reduce a foreign aid appropriation and didn't have too much of a problem with the Kennedys. Actually Kennedy treated Passman better than Lyndon

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Johnson did a little bit later on. There were some feelings, of course, against Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General, as a result of some of the race problems that we had in the South but those are the problems that any Attorney General is going to be faced with if he does his job. It doesn't make much difference whether it's a Republican or a Democratic Attorney General. He's going to have problems with southerners whenever he has to act in the civil rights field.

STEWART: That was, of course, precisely their viewpoint—that they had to act; it was their responsibility. There were no two ways about it.

GRAVEL: I remember talking with Bobby Kennedy at one time early in the Administration and my feeling was then that it was imperative that strong, decisive action be taken and the quicker and earlier it was taken the better off the Administration was going to be and that some things just had to be done.

STEWART: I think so many civil rights people got upset with both the Attorney General and the President because they didn't see a real quick reaction, a real emotional reaction to this, when in fact their whole approach always was that these things had to be done, the Supreme Court had decided, the laws had been passed and they just had to be done.

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GRAVEL: I noticed something rather interesting today. I told you Passman—Congressman Passman from the Fifth Congressional District of Louisiana—was in the coffee shop. He began to talk a little bit about foreign aid to a group of people that were around him. He made his same old speech about the fact that we were spending too much to help these foreign countries and he had a receptive audience listening to him. Then he said something that occurred to me to be a rather strange statement coming from him and that was that, well, as far as this integration question was concerned, that was all over with, that the guidelines were going to stay into effect and he wasn't going to try to do battle about civil rights any more, that that was a *fait accompli* and there wasn't any use to try to battle it out, and that he was not going to take part in any sort of opposition to civil rights programs and so forth in the future. All of a sudden, it occurred to me that, with the Voting Rights Act fully implemented, as we can expect that it will be in the next two, three, four years, that about 40 per cent of his constituency is going to be Negro. I think that perhaps is what's changing a fellow like Passman, for example, at least in that area.

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STEWART: This was always uppermost, I think, in President Kennedy's mind, that if they could ever push voting rights enough to ever make it a political thing that...

GRAVEL: No question about it. I can recall talking at some time in the late '50's with Senator Humphrey. A group of us were just having a drink at the Sheraton Park Hotel after one of the National Committee meetings. I can recall him making the statement that if we had a law that would, or rather that, if we would permit the Negroes to register and vote and they would be able to and would exercise their right to vote, 90 per cent of the civil rights problems would be solved and I think that's right. I think, if the eligible Negroes in Louisiana would register and would vote, that we wouldn't even hear any discussions about civil rights in political campaigns.

STEWART: But they so often did not want to push it because it is not that dramatic a thing. The process is so slow sometimes, to bring these suits and register and so forth.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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