

Pierre E. G. Salinger Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 05/26/1969
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Biographical Note

Pierre E. Salinger was an investigator, U.S. Senate Select Committee to Investigate Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field, 1957 – 1959 and Press Secretary, Senator John F. Kennedy, 1959 - 1960. This interview focuses on Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] political moves after 1963, RFK's relationship with President Lyndon Johnson, and RFK's decision to run for president in 1968, among other issues.

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Pierre E. G. Salinger – RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

PIERRE SALINGER

May 26, 1969
New York City

By Larry J. Hackman

HACKMAN: I thought maybe you ~~could~~ go back and begin by recalling^s in the period just after the assassination, your conversations with Robert Kennedy during the period when you were still in the White House, particularly his reaction to your decision to stay in the White House.

SALINGER: Well, first I think what I remember most vividly is the days immediately after the assassination of President [John F.] Kennedy.

[Robert F. Kennedy]

lb
I went down to Hope Sound with Bob over the,
I think it was the Thanksgiving weekend in
1963. I mean he was the most shattered man
I had ever seen in my life. He was virtually
nonfunctioning. He would walk for hours by
himself. About the only thing. . . . From
time to time he'd organize a touch football
game. As I recall Walter Sheridan was there,
and there were a couple of other people there.
But they were really vicious games. I mean
it seemed to me the way he was getting his
feelings out was in, you know, in knocking
people down. Somebody, in fact, I think
either [Edwin D.] Ed Guthman or somebody
broke a leg during one of those games. I
mean they were really, really tough. But
he didn't talk much about it at that time.
And then when we went back to Washington,
I did have a conversation with him about my
stay in the White House. And his view was
that, I mean, I had to stay. I mean, that

there was no choice in the matter, and that really everybody should stay for a period of time, and that they owed it to President [Lyndon B.] Johnson at least to help him get through that period. I had actually submitted my resignation to President Johnson immediately after the assassination. And the President asked me to stay on. But, you know, it was clear that I wasn't going to be able. . . . You know, I just didn't. . . . It didn't work out for me. And along about February of '64, I began to think seriously about running for the United States Senate. And I had some long conversations with Bob about that. And his general view was. . . . I don't think he was terribly enthusiastic about my running for the Senate. But his view was, all right if you think you can win. He arranged for me to see Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] one night. In fact, the three of us met at I think it was the

Harriman House. And Jackie was much more enthusiastic about my running than Bob was. At least she made me feel^{ed} that she really thought it was a great idea for me to run, she'd do anything she could to help me. And Bob still had some reservations about my running, but less^s it seemed at that time. There'd been a poll taken by that time, which showed that I ran . . .

Excuse me. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: You were talking about February and the discussion with Mrs. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy.

SALINGER: But at least Bob was friendly enough to the idea^{ed} that he said^{ed} that the family would give me some financial support if I decided to run. And I finally did decide to run^s. I think it was the 19th of March, because the filing had to close on the 20th of March. And I called him^s and I told him that I was going to run. And he wished me the best. And then I flew

out to California. During the primary campaign I didn't have a great deal of contact with him. I mean, I talked to him two or three times. He'd call and ask how I was doing, and I'd, you know, give him the latest polls. He arranged with [Stephen E.] Steve Smith to make a contribution to the campaign. When it got really tough in the last ten days. . . . Actually the major charge that was being made against me that time was that I'd just been a press agent for John Kennedy. My people thought the best way to counteract that would be to have Mrs. Kennedy make a statement of some kind. So I talked to Bob about that, and he talked to Mrs. Kennedy. And Mrs. Kennedy was not willing to make a statement, but she was willing to be interviewed by some mutually acceptable reporter. So finally we hit upon the idea of having her interviewed by [Robert E.] Bob Thompson, because Bob Thompson had been a press

secretary to John Kennedy during the 1958 Senate race, and he was then working for the L. A. Times. So Bob Thompson did an interview with her, in which she said some very kind things about me. And that made all the papers in California, and, I'm sure, played a major role in my victory. So then I won the primary by a hand~~y~~ majority--a little more than two hundred thousand votes. And I was ahead in the polls by about sixteen points against [George L.] Murphy. And so I went back to Washington. Then I spent accopple of days with Bob. We talked about the campaign and what I should do in between. And his suggestion was that I make a trip around the world, the idea being, you know, to give the impression of picking up on current issues and so on. So I planned a rather extensive trip, which was supposed to take me to Japan, to the Philippines, to Vietnam, to India, to Israel, and then

behind the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia and Poland. I started out on the trip, and I got as far as Vietnam. In fact, I was having a meeting with the Prime Minister at that time, whose name was *Khank [Nguy]* when I got a call from the White House, saying that Clair Engle had died, and that they wanted ~~me~~ to come home. So I came back, and then forty^E-~~eight~~ hours later on I was ^{appointed} on the plane to the Senate. I happened to arrive in Washington^S to take up my job in the Senate just about the time that Bob was seriously considering announcing candidacy for the Senate himself. And I went out. . . .

I remember we spent a day by the pool. I was very much for him ~~funning~~. I thought that. . . . First of all, I thought he could win. He talked to me about the carpetbagger issue, because that had ^{obviously} been a problem with me, and it was going to be a problem with him. Of course I felt that. . . .

I told him³ that I thought that the issue was a more spurious issue with me than it was with him. He was going to have a tougher time with it. He asked me if I thought that his running would have any effect on my campaign. And I told him I didn't think it would. I must say that all my campaign advisors were firm against Bob running. They thought it would really kill me in the race. But I thought it was important for him to run. I can't remember specifically when, but it wasn't very much longer after that, a couple or three days later, that he called me and said he was going to run. During the campaign, when he was running, and I was running, we were in touch sporadically, mostly in the form of calls from him. He was starting to read things out of the press. And there were press guys coming back from trips with Johnson, telling him I was in real trouble. And he wanted to know if there was anything

he could do. And there really wasn't at that point, because one of the issues in the campaign was that the Kennedy's were trying to establish a nationwide syndicate, you know, to run the country, and I was part of this overall conspiracy, and we had all been sent to various places to run. I personally don't think that that was the issue, that beat me in the race. There are people who think that was, but I think probably it was a combination of a couple things. One, I think the biggest mistake I made, I think, was in allowing myself to be appointed. I think if I had just said, "I'm going to leave this up to the decision of the voters," I think that would have been more helpful. And then, of course, Proposition 14--it was a murderous issue, and I went all out on it, and knowing full well what the consequences were going to be. But I think those two issues. . . . I ~~th~~ carpetbagger issue was

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used, in fact, I think the last week of the campaign they were running full page ads every day saying "Don't vote for a man who can't vote for himself." And there were overtones, of course, of the Bob Kennedy in New York and me in California-type thing. So at any rate, I would say the conversations were pretty much that during that period. And then, of course, the night of the election, when I lost, I got a very nice call from Bob during the night, saying that he was really quite upset that I'd lost. And he said he was very proud of the way I'd lost. And it was a very warm and typical Bob Kennedy ^{conv} ~~conv~~ conversation.

Then after that, of course, I went back to Washington. And I really was at kind of loose ends. I didn't know what to do. And I went out to see Bob, and he said, "How would you like to go to Europe?" So he organized this trip for me, where I would

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represent the Kennedy family with this
Exhibit of 19 12
traveling zoo to the Kennedy Library. I
was to represent them in Zurich, and in Milan.
I took my son with me, and I made that trip
for about two weeks, which had the side angle
of it that that's where I proposed to my
wife on that trip.

And I came back and I went to work on
the west coast. I would say the period of
'65-'66, I'd be occasionally in Washington
or New York and see Bob, but we never really
had any discussions of anything fundamental.
I think that really the next time when we
started getting into serious discussions
once was in the summer of '67.

HACKMAN: Can I run back over a few things before we
do this? When you were considering going
into California, and he was reluctant at
first, did he give solid reasons? Did he
ever say, "You can't put this together
in California." And did he talk solid

politics about governor [Edmund G. Pate] Beau

SALINGER: No, I think it was mostly on the basis that he thought it would be bad for somebody to come out of the Kennedy White House, and get killed in an election immediately. Now whether he was thinking in terms of the long-term considerations for himself, or whether he just thought it was a bad idea for me personally, we never really went into. But I got the idea that he felt it would be helpful, overall, if I could win, but it would be very unhelpful if I lost.

HACKMAN: During this period while you were still in the White House as Johnson's press secretary, what could you see developing in the whole Johnson-Kennedy relationship in this period? Were you the go-between or ^N any back and forth on this at that time?

SALINGER: I was to a certain extent the go-between, because Johnson had long and involved conversations with me about Bob Kennedy and

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about Jackie Kennedy. And I'm sure these conversations were held for the purpose of my conveying these attitudes to them. And I did convey these attitudes to them. It was clear to me that he was convinced that Bob Kennedy had been the man who had tried to stop his nomination for Vice President. He repeated that to me over a period of weeks. And I told him my own understanding of the Vice Presidential nomination, which is set out in my book--the fact that I was convinced from my conversation with Bob Kennedy in the Biltmore Hotel the morning after the nomination of John Kennedy, that Bob Kennedy was indeed not only not against his nomination, but had been one of the people who had suggested it. But he refused to believe that. And it was clear that he harbored a real grudge against Bob Kennedy for what he thought was his role in that affair. He also was rather uncomplimentary

about a number of people who had worked in the White House during John Kennedy's Administration, and that were carried ^{ying} over during his administration. He felt they'd snubbed him during the time that he'd been Vice President.

HACKMAN: This would be [McGeorge] Bundy or [P. Kenneth] O'Donnell or. . . .

SLAINGER: This would be I think [Theodore C.] Sorensen to some extent, O'Donnell to some extent. He always seemed to have a pretty good relationship with [Myer] Mike Feldman. He seemed to have a good relationship with Mac Bundy. He felt that I had gone out of my way to be nice to him during the time that he was Vice President, so that we had a pretty good relationship during the time that I was there. But I could see in those conversations the start of a real, you know. . . . He would do anything to prevent Bob Kennedy from becoming President.

And I'm convinced, that if he could have figured out a way not to run for President in 1964 without giving the nomination to Bob Kennedy, that he would not have run in 1964.

HACKMAN: Really?

SALINGER: Yeah, because, you know, *L* I was one of the people that was going around the country, in fact, saying to Bob Kennedy in 1967, that Johnson will never be a candidate for President in 1967. That was one of the reasons why whatever I said was not really not too effective in these meetings, because people thought I was off my rocker, because I was saying, you know, "The problem is not how you're going to beat Johnson. The problem is not Johnson. He's not going to be a candidate." Because Johnson said to me at least fifteen *184* times how much he hated the White House, how he'd much rather be down on his ranch, he couldn't understand

why he had ever thought the responsibility. . . . ①
he didn't like it. And of course, the first
couple ^{of} times that he said it, I didn't
believe him. But I must say I began to
believe him after a while ^{of}. And it's interesting--
I noticed a little interview, that didn't get
a lot of attention, with Mrs. ^[Ladybird] Johnson,
which said that she believed he wouldn't
have been ~~h~~ a candidate in 1964, if he could
have figured an honorable way out. So I'm
convinced that Bob Kennedy's strength at that
position was the only thing that prevented
Johnson from pulling out of the race in 1964.
This ~~has nothing~~ doesn't have anything to do with Bob,
but Johnson was ~~toying~~ toying with the idea of making
Mrs. Kennedy ambassador to France, or to
Mexico. I discussed those things with Bob
Kennedy, not in a serious way, but just to
pass it on. And I remember he told me not
to even to talk to Jackie about it, ^{that} because
it was a total waste of time. She wasn't

interested, and she wasn't going to do it. Johnson was also bitter about his inability to get Mrs. Kennedy to come to the White House and participate in various ceremonies during that time, although he maintained, or at least outwardly, a rather warm feeling for her. He couldn't understand after all his kindness to her, why she wouldn't come down and appear at these various ceremonies. I'm trying to think of other. . . . I felt myself in a rather uncomfortable position. I didn't want to get into a thing where I was considered to be selling out by the Kennedy's. And at the same time I really did feel I ought to stay for a while. As it finally emerged when I left in March, it worked out well with everybody considered.

HACKMAN:

Do you feel there was more feeling against people staying on from other members of the family, than there was ^{FROM} for Robert Kennedy

? WAS ANYONE UNreasonable?

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SALINGER: Yes, I'm not sure. . . . I never really felt any hostility from anybody in the family about ^{my} staying on. But I know that there was hostility towards some other people who stayed on. But I think that ~~af~~ all the people, that Bob Kennedy understood it better than anybody. I mean, I think that he was a realist, and that he understood the situation. He, as far as I know, made no effort to pull people out of the White House. Did you ever

HACKMAN: ^{Did} ~~Did~~ you ever discuss with him, or can you remember his comments about, Johnson's relations with the press in this period, what he was trying to do, your problems with him?

SALINGER: Well, I didn't have any basic problems during this period. This is what you would call Johnson's golden period with the press. It was a period when he was accepting advice, when he was accessible, not only to the press, but to me. But that dried up around

February or March of 1964. And of course, in the conversations I was having with Bob while running for the Senate, I was also telling him it was impossible for me to stay, and it was just a question of how I figure out how to get out of the White House.

HACKMAN: You don't remember any of his comments, or if he made any comments, about Johnson's performance during ²⁻¹¹⁻⁶⁴ this several months?

SALINGER: No, I don't.

HACKMAN: What about the Vice Presidency, ^{for} ~~for~~ Robert Kennedy for the Vice President, then in '64? Did you get involved in this at all, or discuss that with him? There's always sort of been a disagreement on how interested he really was.

SALINGER: I never discussed the Vice Presidency with him. I was, well, I was one of those that never felt that it would be a great idea for him to be Vice President in the Johnson Administration. This subject came up quite

actively in the '67, early '68 period. We can get into that later. I'm trying to remember now ^{whether I'm the guy} though, that made the announcement that no member of the Cabinet was going to be . . .

HACKMAN: You were gone by that time . . .

SALINGER: When was that announcement made?

HACKMAN: . . . because that's at least in April, if not May.

SALINGER: Oh. Well then, I wasn't there.

HACKMAN: A number of people have said that Robert Kennedy became very involved in the personal lives of ~~the~~ people who were around him. At the time when you were in the midst of getting your divorce and remarrying, did he take any interest in this, or try to give advice on personal things like this? I know he did with some people.

SALINGER: Well, to a certain extent he did. Bob did not like my wife ^S during the time that I was in the White House. In fact, he was

rather hostile towards her. And she was very hostile towards him. So it did not make for a good relationship. He immediately took an extreme liking to my girl I was going to marry, and eventually did marry. And that turned into a very wonderful and very beautiful relationship. They became great friends, and she did a lot of things for him when he was running, and I'd be some other place in the country, and he'd come to California. We can get into that. At the time of the assassination, she was the one that Ethel sent out to tell the children. On a social basis, even though my own relationship with Bob Kennedy had always been terrific, I was never very comfortable in the total social relationship with him with my other wife, because she just didn't fit into the group at all. And of course, that was helped a great deal after I got remarried. And then during

the winters of '66 and '67 we went up to Sun Valley and spent the New Year's holidays with Bob and Ethel and the children and the rest of the family. So there was much more of a social relationship there than there had been in the past.

Well, Bob's principal advice to me was always was on the subject of weight. He would raise ^{hell} ~~hell~~ with me about gaining weight. We periodically had. . . . Oh, we had contests from time. . . . He would devise contests to make me lose weight, starting back as early as when I was working for the Senate Rackets Committee. One ^{time} ~~night~~ he bet me fifty dollars I couldn't lose twenty [^] pounds in a week. He was always on me about my weight.

HACKMAN: One thing I'd skipped over. I don't know if you recall [^] in the period when you were still in the White House, this thing with the New Hampshire primary. Paul Corbin

was up in New Hampshire, apparently organizing a write-in. This is back in '64. Do you remember getting involved in that?

SALINGER: I didn't get involved in it. Now that I think about it, I remember Johnson did talk about Corbin. He kept saying, you know, it was awful for Corbin to be up without Bob Kennedy's personal approval, because he knew how close Corbin was to Bob Kennedy. Didn't Johnson have Corbin fired off the Democratic National Committee at that time?

HACKMAN: I think he fired him a couple times, and he sent K back in on something.

SALINGER: It was a direct relationship apparently of that event. I think he was genuinely worried that Bob might try to run against him for the nomination. Excuse me. I've got to talk. . . . [Interruption]

HACKMAN: You were ~~the~~ talking about Corbin. A number of people have had trouble really explaining

the relationship between Robert Kennedy
and Corbin.

SALINGER: And I'm among those people.

HACKMAN: How do you figure this?

SALINGER: I've never really clearly understood that
relationship. I'm not one of the Corbin
trait^{trade} admirers. I never quite figured out
what Bob saw in him. But there was no
question, that relationship existed, and
Bob liked him. I never discussed Corbin
with Bob. I know that Kenny O'DONNELL did,
at some length, on a couple of occasions,
because he was one of the people that was
really out to get Corbin. But I can't
explain it.

HACKMAN: Do you remember the beginnings back in
Wisconsin, when he came in?

SALINGER: Well, I was in Wisconsin. I remember
vividly meeting Corbin, because. . . .
I'm trying to think how Corbin also met my
sister at that time. I have a half]sister,

who was at that time living in Rockford, Illinois, which is not far from Janesville, Wisconsin, where Corbin lived. And they got to know each other, and so that's how Corbin came into my life kind of, through my half sister. And of course, he was damn effective in what he did out there in that part of the thing, and I think that's what attracted Bob to him in the first place, was that he was a very, very effective fellow. But then of course, as it went on through history and, the number of screw-ups that Corbin was involved in were monumental. It was hard to figure out how Bob stayed with him. But Bob was very loyal to people. And, you know, there were guys that JFK was loyal to, that you sometimes wondered what the hell their contribution was. But that's affect of ^{life} ~~life~~ in the Kennedy family. And there's nothing you can do about it.

HACKMAN: You talked about discussing with Robert

Kennedy ~~has~~ decision to enter the New York Senate race in '64. Is this something he was at all excited about, or was he reluctant to go in, or couldn't find anything else to do . . . ?

SALINGER: I don't think he was excited about it, but I think he felt that he needed a base to operate from. I don't recall him having any particular enthusiasm for it. And I think he thought there would be a tough and long campaign. And ^Bob was not, in my opinion, at that time of his life, psychologically tuned to be a candidate for public office. He didn't meet people easily. He was not the back-slapping, handshaking type and, in fact, he looked upon that with a great deal of horror ~~the~~ ^{the} idea of having to do that. I'm trying to think of some of the alternatives we discussed at the time. I'm not sure that we didn't discuss, at one time, the possibility of going back to Massachusetts and running

for Governor. I think he felt that that would be unfair to [Edward M. Kennedy] Teddy in a way. It would carve down his own thing. I think he wanted to stay in government and public service. There was nothing in business that interested him. So he finally came down to the Senate, but it really is the only available choice.

HACKMAN: What kind of attitude did he have towards someone like yourself, then, going into business ^y in an area which he had no interest in at all? Do you think that was easy for him to understand, or difficult, or ^{y did} ~~didn't~~ ever ^{y about it?} he make any comments at all?

SALINGER: No. The only time we ever discussed it ^y at any length ^y was when we organized this mutual fund, the one I'm now helping to run, back in late '66. And the first ~~studies~~ came out ^y which indicated that it was a number of Kennedy people that were involved in this. And of course, he was quite concerned

about whether this thing might achieve a bad reputation, which would rub off on the Kennedy's. And he kept talking to me about it. ^y~~you~~ know, how's it doing, and be careful.

As a matter of fact, it turned out to be a huge success, and there was never a minute of worry for him ^y~~with~~ ⁱⁿ it. But from that standpoint [^] he was very, very aware of the fact, that if anything had gone wrong in that particular business enterprise, that somehow or other it would have lapped over to the Kennedy's. I don't know if you remember that [Paul A.] Paul Fino, a Congressman, attacked the fund on the floor of the House, using the Kennedy thing. So it was a vulnerable thing from that standpoint, and he was concerned, and, I don't think, very enthusiastic about it.

HACKMAN: As time passed, when he was in the Senate, did you ever hear him talk about what he thought of the Senate? Do you think he began to like it more after a while?

SALINGER: I don't remember him being greatly enthusiastic about the Senate either. He thought that the way the Senate ran was archaic. He didn't see it as a real action place. And I think he was rather restless with the Senate. We didn't discuss it in any specific terms. This was just the kind of impression I had. I'd go up and sit in the Senate office for four or five hours at a time. And he would spend most of his time talking to people and on problems, which were not at all directly related to his Senate duties. You know, he had a constant stream of foreign visitors. I arranged for a lot of people to see him. French politicians like Pierre Mendes-France and Francois Mitterrand wanted to see him. And he was interested in talking to those kind of people. He was much more interested in doing that than in talking to you know, people from Mississippi and things like that, than he was. . . . He also, you

know ~~.....~~ I think he felt that he was able to use the Senate to highlight problems. He was very keenly interested in the ~~old~~ ^{whole} Indian thing. He really got hooked on the Indian thing in a big way! In fact, he ^{of} kind ^y used to sometimes exasperate me ^y because he'd talk about Indians in places where there were no Indians, [^] there hadn't been Indians for a hundred years, and people didn't care about Indians. It was just not a moving issue for these people. My wife went with him one day to an Indian reservation, or an Indian school in California. This is in the early '68, actually. She came back, I mean, just terribly impressed with how he got down to the center of the problem, despite the efforts of the administration of the school to kind of keep it as a kind of placid visit, you know.

HACKMAN: How did people like Mitterrand and the other [^] particularly the French people, that you

brought in to see him, react to him. Did he communicate easily with people like this, or did he have a real problem?

SALINGER: No, he did. . . . Both Francois Mitterrand and Pierre Mendes-France were enormously impressed with Bob Kennedy. They thought he was a terrific. . . . And they thought he would make a great President of the United States. Both of them were very, very much affected by his death. You know, they're both friends of mine, and I've talked to them a great deal since then. Pierre Mendes-France particularly, because of his own involvement in Vietnam. He was very sympathetic to Bob's efforts to try to extricate the United States from Vietnam. Talking of France, his visit to France in '67 was pretty much of a disaster. It was badly organized. He saw the wrong people when he was there. He was badly handled from the press standpoint. And he did not

make a very favorable impression in France at that time. A fellow like [Hubert] Beuve-Mery who's a very important fellow, the editor of Le Monde, a considerable playboy. All that was really based on the fact that he hadn't gone to see him. ^{You know} ~~if~~ he'd spent a half hour with him, you wouldn't have had that problem. But he didn't see those type of people. Instead he went around and saw politicians.

HACKMAN: Who was respon. . . . What, poor advancing of the trip, or what was responsible for this state?

KELINGER: I don't think the trip was really advanced, to tell you the truth.

HACKMAN: No one came with. . . . Did anybody . . .

SALINGER: Well, he had vanden Heuvel but Bill, I mean, I like Bill, but Bill was not the right fellow to send to France with him. Bill didn't speak any French, to begin with. So it did not create an overall favorable

impression. That was manifested, to some extent, in the reporting in the French press on his assassination, which was very sympathetic to him, but did not give him great marks on what he had accomplished ⁱⁿ during his lifetime.

HACKMAN: Why the problems with the press, particularly, other than the Le Monde editor? What other . . .

SALINGER: Well, I think generally across the board he didn't see any of the important editors in France. He didn't see any of the important writers in France when he was there. I understand his reason was that he was trying to really stay out of the press. But then, on the other hand, he had this backgrounder in Paris, which was a total disaster. After he had met [Etienne] Manach, who's now the French ambassador to Peking, and who had briefed him on some stuff, that apparently the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese

had specifically intended him to tell Bob^o and he came out of the thing appearing to try to take political advantage out of that thing, which I think was a mistake.

HACKMAN: Did you discuss this with him at the time?

SALINGER: I discussed it with him afterwards. I was very upset by the trip. And of course, as far as France was concerned he always figured I had some bias because of my French wife. I just said, you know, "Next time you go to France, let's organize it a different way." And in fact, we were talking about it on the trip to France. "Well, we'll do it a different way."

HACKMAN: Can you remember discussing [Charles ^{yeo} de Gaulle] with him?

SALINGER: Yeah. He was impressed with de Gaulle. He thought de Gaulle was a rather impressive man.

HACKMAN: Policy-wise, though, can you remember any. . . .

SALINGER: No, I don't remember any discussion of policy.

HACKMAN: During the, say, '64 - '67 period, can you remember discussing his own future with him ^{and} ~~his~~ political future ^{and} whether he would stay in the Senate?

SALINGER: Well, it was ~~definitely~~ ^{to} discuss with him. I mean, he really wasn't focusing on his own future. You'd start a discussion with him, and you'd quickly ^{would} go off the track into something else. Really the first time that I was able to get him to sit down and talk about it was about the summer of '67. But I would say, between the assassination of John Kennedy and the middle of '67, that he was really not convinced in his own mind, and he really didn't have a ^{full} grasp of ~~his~~ ^{his} own future, and he didn't realize ^{you} because he didn't know what he wanted to do. Now, of course, people were talking about him as a potential presidential candidate, but unless ^{you} ~~he~~ finds somebody that had any. . . . I would be very surprised if you find anybody

that had a serious discussion with him about it during that time.

HACKMAN: well, someone has said that in '66 they thought that he was. . . . Johnson's popularity was going way down in this period, and his was going way up. And they thought that at that point he probably would have been ready to go in '68. But then in '67 he came back off of it. You don't have that impression at all?

SALINGER: No. You may get a somewhat different view from fellows who were with him on a ⁷⁷day to day basis, like Adam [Adam Walinsky] and Peter [Peter Edelman] and people like that. And of course, they were very much activists for him running for President during this period of time. And they probably were needling him about it ⁷⁷and talking to him about it. I was more in and out during those days, and not in touch with him on a daily basis. But I did not get the

impression that he was giving any serious thought to it.

HACKMAN: Before we start discussing the October Regency meeting, and the things leading up to this, are there other things you can think of in that '64 - '67 period? you talked with him about?

SALINGER: No, not anything specific. I'm going to go back and look through my correspondence, and see if I have some letters back and forth ^{with} ~~with~~ him and things like that, that might be helpful here.

HACKMAN: Okay. Maybe we can talk just about ~~the~~ how, you said, by the summer then of '67 maybe you got . . .

SALINGER: In the late summer of '67, I think it could have been as late as ~~September~~, I went and spent the day with him at Hickory Hill. And I said, "You know, now, I haven't discussed this with you at any great length, but I mean, I think we got to face up to '68. I

think that there's a real chance that you're going to have to make a decision about running for President in '68. I think you've got to focus on it, and I think you have to start having some people think for you in those terms, ^y and give you their best ideas as to what to do." And he said, "Well, what do you suggest?" And I said, "Well, I think a meeting should be organized, and I think it's a meeting you should ^{it} be at, and ^{it} should be a meeting under another guise, but a meeting where we got together some of the people in whom you have confidence, and ^y ~~to~~ let them just bat it around for a couple of hours, and then come back to you and tell you what they say." So he said, "Well, I think that's a good idea." So he said, "Why don't you proceed and organize it." And we decided that the cover for it would be a visit I was going to make ^{to New York} in October [^] '67 [^] for the publication of the paperback

edition of my book. I worked up a list. I went back to California, and I worked up a list. And I called them. I think the only name that I did not have on my own first list, that he added, was [Frederick G.] Fred Dutton. But I had Kenny, and I had put [Charles] Chuck Daley in, and Ivan Nestingen. Anyway about twenty-four hours before the meeting, he began to think maybe he should come to the meeting himself. We talked about that, and I thought it would be a bad idea. I thought, you know, if you showed up at the meeting, it's sure to leak out. And this way it's got some chance of not leaking out. We had [Richard N.] Goodwin and [Arthur M., Jr.] Schlesinger. But then he said, "All right, well suppose I send a few other people anyway." So then he suggested sending Steve, [Stephen E. Smith] [Thomas F.] Tom Johnston, [Joseph F.] Joe Dolan, and the Senator himself. Ted.

So they all came to the Regency. I would

say that the reports that indicate that the meeting was generally against his running is a fairly accurate account of that meeting. The only people who were really articulately for him running at that point were Dick Goodwin and Arthur Schlesinger. Teddy was very much against his running. Ted Sorensen was very much against his running. [William Vanden] Bill Vanden Heuvel was against his running. Kenny O'Donnell was totally non-committal at that point. And I think in later discussions I had with Kenny, he was noncommittal because he didn't believe Bobby'd run. The only decision that was taken at that meeting, of any effectiveness, was that we would run a poll in the state of New Hampshire, to see how he would run against Johnson in the New Hampshire primary. I never saw that poll, but I'm told that it showed that he ran very badly against Johnson. Knowing what we know now, it was a mistake

to rely on that poll, because he showed a lot better than, of course, [Eugene J.] McCarthy was showing at that time. And he would have come on strong, I think, in the New Hampshire primary. So I reported back to Bobby on this. And then, of course, the story leaked about the meeting. Somebody leaked it to [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak [Evans] Evans Novak.

HACKMAN: Did you ever track that down?

SALINGER: Well, I have three suspects. My leading suspect was Vanden Heuvel, followed closely by Schlesinger and Goodwin. Somebody leaked it to them. But it leaked, actually, not in a very bad way. I mean, if I was Johnson sitting in the White House, I wouldn't have been too upset with that meeting because the way the story read was all these fellows who were great advisors of Bob Kennedy were urging him not to run for President. Then it was suggested we have a second meeting. I suggested we have

a second meeting, and that we compartmentalize the meeting, in order to have some idea who might be leaking it, ⁷⁻ that we have one group with all the potential leakers in it, and then a second group without them. And that's how we set up the second meeting we had.

I don't remember precisely the date but . . .

HACKMAN:

I think it's December 14 or something. Let me go back just a couple things on this first one. One, I've talked to three people, and they've all given me different dates for the meeting. Now you probably don't remember the exact date, but one person said that first meeting was late October. Sorensen says it's October eighth. He has it in his notebook. Another book says it's early in November. It must be October from what you say.

SALINGER:

Well, I've got a book, and I've got it out on the coast, and I'll have my secretary look at it. But it strikes me it was early

October.

HACKMAN: Okay. What were Robert Kennedy's. . . .
When he suggested also that Steve Smith,
and Johnston, and Dolan come, what reasons
did he have to get these people in on it,
and how did that change the character of the
meeting, if at all?

SALINGER: Well, it changed the character of the
extent that it was much more personal
involvement ^{by himself} in the meeting. It was to
be originally. . . . Under the original
concept, it was to be a meeting of people
who had no current connection with Bob Kennedy,
except they were friends of his. And when
you added Steve and Ted, of course, you added
family. And when you added Joe, you added
a member of the staff. And I was not very
enthusiastic about that at the moment, because
I thought that having a member of the staff
there was much too close to home, if the
story should ever leak. Now the story did

appear. I don't think that ^{Dolan's} ~~Boban's~~ name
ever appeared among those who were there.
But Bob insisted on them coming, you know.
I made my objections known to him on the
phone, and he insisted on them coming. And
I think that way he felt he could get a
double reading on it, a more personalized
reading. So that's how the meeting took
place, and that's what happened.

HACKMAN: ~~Were~~ there other people that you had on
your list of people to invite, that refused
to come and get involved . . .

SALINGER: Nobody refused to come. I think there were
a couple names taken off.

HACKMAN: Yeah, I heard that. I wondered if . . .

SALINGER: [Richard K.] Dick Donahue, I think, that
was on my list. Kenny O'Donnell said that
he didn't want Dick Donahue there, as I
recall. The list was checked with Bob and
with Ken O'Donnell. Bob told me ^{that} many list
that Ken and I could agree on would probably

be all right for him, 'cause he had a lot of faith in Kenny's political judgment. I'm trying to think. Somewhere I must have a file that's got some jottings of my own on who was invited to this meeting. I'll try to track it down.

HACKMAN: Okay. When you say that Sorensen, and Edward Kennedy and several of the others were very much against it, was this in terms of going into one of the early primaries ^z New Hampshire, or Wisconsin, or is this in terms of making any kind of effort to . . .

SALINGER: Ted Sorensen was against making any kind of effort in 1968. I remember his speech very clearly. He was talking in terms of . . . He said, "You've got to preserve Bob's position for '72. '72's his year and '68 is not." And he was very adamant on that point. And I think that Ted Kennedy kind of agreed with him on that ^{y-} that it was a bad idea to burn Bob up in '68 on a campaign

that he'd probably lose. You know, a sitting President had never been defeated at a convention. You know, these kind of arguments were coming forward. So the argument was not in terms that he shouldn't enter the primaries, and just kind of sit back and wait and see what happened. That was not the ~~central~~ ^{specific} argument. We got into that a little later. But at this time there was an overall discussion of whether he should even run in 1968.

HACKMAN: You'd said earlier that you started to say somewhere in this time period, that Johnson probably would not run in '68.

SALINGER: I said that at that meeting.

HACKMAN: At that meeting. Did anybody else feel this way?

SALINGER: Nobody else agreed with me. Nobody else agreed with me. I was ~~locked~~ ^{Mad....} I did not say at that time, ^{to} that I thought Bob should run, but I said I thought we should thing

in terms of the situation, if Johnson would not be a candidate. And nobody really accepted that theory.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about Steve Smith's viewpoint? Did he express anything strongly?

SALINGER: Steve is the one, that suggested, I think, that we take the poll in New Hampshire. But I think other than that he was more of an observer at the meeting^y and didn't really say very much. It was his idea that the poll be taken, and everybody agreed to that. Then he said he would ~~arrange~~ it.

HACKMAN: Any discussion at that point of doing something other than a Robert Kennedy candidacy in terms of changing the course of the war, or trying to dump Johnson, or something? Any talk?

SALINGER: Well, no, not really. I mean, this was all in terms of. . . . As I said, these kind of discussions got much more precise at the second set of meetings. And I think

if the second set of meetings had been handled better, that Bob Kennedy's decision might have been materially affected. But the second set of meetings was an even greater disaster than the first.

HACKMAN: Could you get any feeling at all for his feeling just about holding meetings like that, because, at least, the President, from what we understand, didn't make decisions ~~in~~ large meetings, or wasn't really that fond of discussing things in large meetings?

SALINGER: You see, he wasn't at these first few meetings, so that you don't get a real idea of how he felt about large meetings being. . . . Well, they weren't that large. I think there were about twelve or fourteen people at the Regency [^], which is reasonably large. The second meeting was much, much larger, well the second part of the second meeting. And I think after that meeting [^] that Bob decided it really was not worthwhile to have large

types of meetings like that, particularly when he started getting involved in the meetings himself.

HACKMAN: I had read somewhere that ^[Patrick Jo] Pat Lucey was at that October meeting. I don't think that's so.

SALINGER: That's not true. Ivan Nestingen was. I don't think that Pat Lucey would come to a meeting, that Ivan Nestingen was at.

HACKMAN: What were your ~~own~~ feelings about Dutton? Dutton was also someone, you said, who was added to the list. He was not on the original one?

SALINGER: Yeah. Well, I must say I had not realized at that time, that Dutton had become that close to Bob. So I hadn't included him on the list, and Bob wanted to put him in. You see, my own relation with Dutton is somewhat clouded by my association with him in California politics, which was not a totally ^{While} happy association. [^]I liked Fred, I don't have

as much faith in his judgment, as I would have in some other people's. But Bob had a great deal of faith in his judgment.

HACKMAN: Did anything at all come out of that October meeting, other than the poll, over the next six weeks before . . .

SALINGER: Well, it was agreed that we would have another meeting before the year was over, and probably in December. And the poll was the only other thing that was decided of a concrete nature.

HACKMAN: Can you remember in . . . Did you maintain contacts with the other people who'd been at the first meeting before the second meeting come. . . . Did you see any movement in anybody's mind?

SALINGER: I did not maintain contact with anybody within the first meeting, except Ken O'Donnell. I had a series of conversations with Ken O'Donnell during the period between the first and second meeting. It was during that time

that it became clear to me that Kenny probably wanted Bob to run, but didn't want to recommend that he run, unless he was sure that he was going to run. And that was not in any way an ^Poportunistic thing_A but he didn't feel that anybody should really urge it on him. It had to come from him himself. And he was ready to go down the line and do anything that was necessary to elect him, but he wanted really Bob to take the initiative and decided to run for himself. And he thought the idea of having meetings to recommend to his running were kind of a waste of time, that Bob himself would have to, you know, work the decision up in his own mind_A and it really was going to come through that fashion, you know, thinking. And he was right about that, that eventually when Bob did decide to run, it had nothing to do with these meetings.

HACKMAN: Did any other people feel that way? I mean,

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do you think people held off from giving a clear viewpoint because of this, or was it . . .

SALINGER: That was the only person that I felt had that specific a view on giving advice.

HACKMAN: Okay. Why don't we talk about, then, setting up that, ^{what?} well I guess the December brunch at Vanden Heuvel's apartment.

SALINGER: So we decided that we would do it in two segments. We'd have the brunch at Vanden Heuvel's, which included Vanden Heuvel, Schlesinger, Goodwin, myself, Button, and Bob. I think that ~~that~~ was all that was there. And then the meeting, which was to be held in some shipping office that Vanden Heuvel had arranged for ~~it~~ it was a much larger meeting. Teddy came with his entire staff. That was Dave ^[DAVID] Burke, and [Milton] Milt Gwirtzman was there. I think [K. Dun] Dun Gifford was there. A lot of other people had been added to the

second meeting. I couldn't even begin to tell you who was there. It was a huge room full of people. At the large, which was the most significant part of it, because the other meeting, it was a total disaster, Schlesinger and Goodwin again pressed on Bob the fact that he really should run. And I had now come to the conclusion that he should run, and also said I thought '68 was the year. He shouldn't look at '72, couldn't wait for '72. Vanden Heuvel wanted him to run for ~~Vice-President~~. He was very strong on his running for ~~Vice-President~~. And, finally, at this This is the meeting at which Bob Kennedy said. . . . It's the meeting where I became absolutely convinced he was going to run, because he just interrupted. . . . Dutton was being very, very cautious at the meeting. He still felt he shouldn't run. And Bob looked across the table at him, and said, you know, "This

country can't stand another four years of Lyndon Johnson. I mean it's not a question of my political future. It's a question of the country, and the country can't stand another four years of this man." I think he was very, very tough on that point. I remember walking away from that meeting convinced that he was going to run. Well, of course, then we went to the second meeting. And Teddy started out the second meeting by saying, "We're all going to agree that he shouldn't run, so what we have to decide is what to do in the meantime to hold the fort for him." The idea that we would send some people out to various parts of the country, and make some contacts-- that was the general thing and maybe they'd get Jesse Unruh to go around and see some of the political leaders. It was a kind of a holding operation was what came out of the second meeting. But the second meeting

never really got a chance to discuss whether he was going to run or not, because Ted started out the thing in such a negative way--that he shouldn't run at all, and *THAT* everybody agreed he shouldn't run. And so that meeting lasted about an hour. And, as I say, everybody walked out of it terribly disgusted. And Kenny O'Donnell was really mad about the second meeting. He thought it was just a total waste of time, and said he wouldn't go to any more meetings. So I reported back to Bobby the next day that I thought the second meeting had been a real waste. No, I don't think it was even the next day. I think we had dinner afterwards. So he was a little upset by that. I'm just trying to think what he said. He didn't really say too much, though. I mean, I just reported to him. I was going to see him again anyway, in about two weeks, because he was going out to Sun Valley, and

the reason that we held that meeting, that particular day, is that he was going out to Sun Valley about two or three days later for the Christmas holidays, and I joined him in Sun Valley on Christmas day in 1967. And I was with Bob almost continuously then, from that day until about the sixth of January, because when I left Sun Valley to fly to California, he stopped just a day at Pokotom Pocatello for to conduct an Indian hearing. And then he came to California and stayed at my house for four days. And we carried on an almost nonstop discussion on this subject. The major lines that emerged from these conversations was this, that he was weighing it very seriously. He was thinking of running. He was terribly concerned about what his running might do to a number of very good senators around the country, who he felt, because he was a national figure, might have to choose up sides early in the game, and endanger

their own political futures.

HACKMAN: Had he talked to any of these people, did he say at that time? Had he discussed it with [George S.] McGovern . . .

SALINGER: He did not discuss with me that aspect of it. I'm sure he had discussed it with McGovern, and we know he had discussed it with McCarthy. But I was not privy to those conversations, so I don't know what was said in those conversations. And he didn't mention those to me. He just mentioned in a general way that he was concerned about what he would do to these senators. And he kept, saying, you know, "Give me a good excuse for running." I mean, you know, "Tell ^e me why I've got to run." And all I could do is just give him the general thing that I thought he was the only man who had a possibility of winning, and that he owed it to the country to run. I really was picking up his own theme from the . . .

You know, I kept throwing back at him what he ^{had} said at Vanden Heuvel's house. And he agreed, you know, he agreed that was the central point. He was vacillating at that point.

HACKMAN: You never saw, in this period, that he resented people putting pressure on him?

SALINGER: Well, he got irritated sometimes in these discussions. I don't think he felt I was putting pressure on him, but he got irritated that he felt I wasn't able to go beyond the general need for him to run, and give him specific reasons that he could outline as he ran. Generally, when he finally announced, he had specific reasons, in you know, the Kerner Reports, and some other things, that he was able to use as specific reasons for running. He seemed to be groping for those specific reasons at the time that we were having these discussions. He was talking to a . . . He was getting a lot of calls

while he was at my house. He was talking to a lot of people. I also. . . . There was one meeting there, which really kind of shook him up. When we got back to Los Angeles, I organized a breakfast meeting for him one morning with a group of experts from the Rand Corporation on Vietnam. And they just laid out such a horror story of the mistakes that the administration was making in Vietnam, that he was really disturbed by that. And these were very bright, smart people. And the meeting went on much longer than we had anticipated. It went on for something like three hours because Bob Kennedy got so engrossed in what these people were saying to him about Vietnam.

HACKMAN: And he was asking a lot of questions.

SALINGER: He was asking a lot of questions. We can get the list of people who were there, if you want. I'm trying to think of the guy's

name, who was the Indonesian expert. He's the guy who set it up for me at the Rand Corporation, ^{with} ~~with~~ whom I'd done some work at Continental. This wa

HACKMAN: This was something that was kept out of the press, or was . . .

SALINGER: Yeah. There was nothing in the press about it. It was a totally private meeting. And they were pointing out errors in military strategy. They were pointing out the fact that the pacification program was a total disaster, was not working. I mean, they really laid out a very, very pessimistic picture of the future of Vietnam, particularly of the continued American policy along the lines that we were doing at that time. And I know that Bob was both impressed by the caliber of the information he was getting, and depressed by the character of the information. I guess he left about the fifth or sixth of January. We had one, or two, or

three conversations by telephone between that time and the famous telethon. And it was there, again, that the whole subject again came to light. I went to New York for the tele⁺phon. I was in New York, and I got information^{rim} that a poll had been taken . . .

HACKMAN: This is the ^{HOWARD} ~~Howard~~ Stein thing. You put that in . . .

SALINGER: Where'd I put that in?

HACKMAN: In the [Theodore H.] Teddy White thing.

SALINGER: Yeah. Because I was, at that time, meeting with ^{HOWARD} ~~Harold~~ Stein, because our fund had . . .

~~had~~ organized a mutual fund that was a partner with Dreyfus^S. And ^{HOWARD} ~~Harold~~ Stein told me they had a poll, which showed that McCarthy was going to get 40 per cent of the vote in New Hampshire. So I went down the next day. The tele⁺phon was that night, I think. I went down the day of the telethon. And then the next morning there was a brunch at ~~Bobby~~ Bobby's place, the Sunday morning

after the telethon. I got Bobby aside, and I said, "I have this information." And, I said, "if it's true," I said, "you've got to announce before the New Hampshire primary, because if you don't, you're going to get crucified for just coming in on the back of McCarthy." And he was disturbed by that. We went outside, I remember, on the patio, and he picked up the phone, and he called ^{William L. J.} Bill Dupphey. Now this is a name, which we don't want to get out for some time to come, because Bill was working for Johnson at that time. But he's an old Kennedy hand, and he worked for us in the 1960 primary. And he said, you know, "Is that possible that McCarthy's going to get 40 per cent of the vote in New Hampshire?" And Dupphey told him it was possible. The other thing, of course, was that . . . I think I spent the night of the telethon at Bob's house. I'd just gotten there. I'd

been there like five or ten minutes when he reached in his pocket and pulled out a letter. This is the famous Pete ^{HAMILL} ~~Hammel~~ letter. And I think that that had a tremendous impact on him ~~that~~ that letter. Has anybody ever found the copy of that letter?

HACKMAN: Not that I know of. I don't know..... . . .

SALINGER: I tried like hell to find it to put it in our book. But it was a highly moving letter written from Ireland, saying he understood Bob's decision not to run, but then went on just to lay out the reasons why it was absolutely imperative that he run. The fact that Bob was carrying it around in his pocket and showing it to various people indicated to me that it was having a great deal of impact on him ~~that~~ that letter. Again I felt very sure ^{after} after that particular meeting that Bob was going to run. The question now was just the timing. I don't remember his conversations with other people about

the timing. I don't remember even being in on that conversation, but apparently he decided not to announce before the New Hampshire primary. And I think the next thing I knew, I was in New York the Monday before the New Hampshire primary. It could have been exactly the day of the New Hampshire primary. I was here in the hotel, and I got a call from Pauline Fluet, who was Steve Smith's secretary, saying there'll be a meeting.

HACKMAN: Right. That was on a Tuesday. I think you also mentioned that in the thing with Teddy White, and it was on a Tuesday and then Wednesday you were doing a TV show, and there was a meeting that night, and you went and came back.

SALINGER: Yeah. Well, anyway, I think Pauline called me on Monday and said there'll be a meeting tomorrow night at 6 o'clock at Steve's house, or 4 o'clock. I think it was 4 o'clock.

I got to Steve's house, and the meeting was, how do we launch this campaign? It was no longer a question, "is he running?" it was, you know, who does what, and ~~what~~ are we going to do?

I'll try to bring into context here Jesse Unruh's part in this thing, because he played a major part in it, too. ^{Again!} This goes back to California. The day that Bob arrived in California to come to my house, a meeting was set up with Jess Unruh at the in a suite at the International Hotel at the airport. Bob sent a car to the airport for ^{him} them. And Bob and Peter Edelman went directly to that meeting, and then came and joined me at a restaurant where I was having dinner. Jesse had been very, very tough with Bob during that meeting. He just said, "You've got to run," and really laid it on him very, very hard. Bob had a rather mixed reaction from that meeting.

He commented, of course, that he understood Jesse's personal political motives for wanting to get him in the race, that really he needed a power position in the party, and that he was using Bob for that purpose. He understood that part of it. And he also, I think, he also felt that he ^{really} had to make a decision very rapidly, that that meeting highlighted that particular need, more than some of the other meetings ^{that he'd had} we'd had in the past.

HACKMAN: What did he think of Unruh personally? Can you recall discussions with him on that?

SALINGER: I think he liked him very much personally. I think that he considered him a very cold, tough political person, who really had his own interests at heart more than anybody else's.

HACKMAN: But that didn't bother him?

SALINGER: That didn't bother him. That didn't bother him.

HACKMAN: him. ^{We ought to} Maybe I'll go ahead and break right now.

SALINGER: Okay. Let me just see what . . .

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

HACKMAN: I'd like to go back and pick up a few things. On that December meeting, was Robert Kennedy pressing people to take a position or not ¹ to come out or. . . . Didn't fence sitting upset him?

SALINGER: No. No. I don't think he was pressing anybody to take a position at that time. He was very incisive, at the lunch, about the question. So the record's straight, he was not at all in accord with Vanden Heuvel's idea that he should run for Vice - President. He just saw absolutely no use in running for Vice-President with Johnson, although Vanden Heuvel's view was that being Johnson's Vice President during his second term would give you a great deal of mobility, and you know, you really wouldn't have to be submerged by the President, and you could even take different positions from him. *he thought that, you know,* But, his views

were so different from Johnson, that people would really think he was a whore if ran for Vice-President with Johnson.

HACKMAN: Was anybody else supporting Vanden Heuvel at all?

SALINGER: No, there was no. . . . In fact, everybody else was bitterly opposed to that idea.

HACKMAN: You said he was sort of your leading suspect on the leak at the first meeting. How did he then. . . . If I'm correct. . . . He did go to the second meeting, I believe, did he not?

SALINGER: ~~YEAH.~~

HACKMAN: That doesn't seem. . . .

SALINGER: Well, you know, because we discussed certain things at one meeting, and certain things at another, it could be a lot easier to tell who had discussed what. The second meeting did not leak, as I recall.

HACKMAN: No. Was there any discussion at the second meeting of the first meeting at all, or ~~did~~

did the people play that?

SLAINGER: There was no discussion of the first meeting at the second meeting. It was just as though it had never taken place. Now Schlesinger and Goodwin did not come to the second meeting.

HACKMAN: And I believe Dutton maybe. I mean, that's the name I have. I'm not sure. Do you remember that?

SALINGER: I don't remember whether Dutton was there or not. I think it's possible. . . . As a matter of fact, it's a fact, I think, that Vanden Heuvel and I were the only duplicates.

HACKMAN: Sorensen.

SALINGER: Sorensen wasn't at the lunch, was he?

HACKMAN: I had the impression he was, but I may be wrong.

SALINGER: Maybe he was. I don't know.

HACKMAN: And O'Donnell wasn't at the brunch, either?

SALINGER: No.

HACKMAN: Can you recall at that brunch any discussion

of the McCarthy campaign, which was in its birth? [Interruption] I was asking you if at that December meeting, that Robert Kennedy attended, whether there was any discussion of the McCarthy campaign, which was just getting off the ground at that time or anything earlier?

SALINGER: No. There was no discussion of the McCarthy campaign at that time, but I did have some discussion with him about the McCarthy campaign over the holidays, and the general feeling was that the McCarthy campaign wasn't getting off the ground at that time. That's why, when I later ^{told him} that I had the information McCarthy was going to get 40 per cent, it was pretty much of a surprise, because everybody had concluded, and I think the press was coming back and saying, that McCarthy wasn't making any movement. Actually, I think that probably the McCarthy campaign began to make some movement from

the time Dick Goodwin joined it and put some pazzaz in it. But up to that point it really was going nowhere. The guy was likely to end up with 10, 12 per cent of the vote.

HACKMAN: Did you discuss the poll that ^{HOWARD} Harold Stein had told you about with any of the other people the weekend of the telephone? And do you remember if anyone ^{ACCEPTED} intercepted it?

SALINGER: No, I just discussed it with him, as far as I can recall. I may have mentioned it to Ken O'Donnell, but I don't remember discussing it with anybody else.

HACKMAN: What can you recall about the Robert Kennedy-McCarthy relationship over the years, and I guess the John Kennedy relationship with McCarthy, which sort of becomes important to the whole thing?

SALINGER: Well, there was no love lost between John Kennedy and McCarthy. And I was not aware of any bitter feeling between Bob Kennedy

and McCarthy in the period up to the time that Bob announced. I don't think that there was any built-in dislike for McCarthy ⁱⁿ for Bob Kennedy. And I don't know--I can't speak for McCarthy because I don't know him that much, and he's a very complicated man. But I would say that by the ^{time the} campaign came to a close, that Bob Kennedy was very bitter towards McCarthy, and that had been built up over the weeks of the campaign. But I don't think that he went into the campaign with any bitter feelings towards him.

HACKMAN: What do you know about discussion that Robert Kennedy might have had with McCarthy either before or after McCarthy announced?

SALINGER: Nothing.

HACKMAN: Nothing. At that second meeting, Jules Witcover, in that book he's written, says that Edelman and Walinsky were present. Can you remember those people being there?

SALINGER: Yes, they were there. They were there.
And John No^{IAN}an was there. There were an
awful lot of people at the second meeting
that weren't at the first meeting. I think that
what he reports in 85 Days is pretty much
what happened at the second meeting.

HACKMAN: Can you recall a discussion ^{of} on Vietnam
taking place, particularly back and forth
between Edward Kennedy and Ken O'Donnell?
Does that stand out in your mind at all?

SALINGER: There was a back-and-forth between Edward
Kennedy and Ken O'Donnell. . . . I'm afraid
that's. . . .

HACKMAN: Something to do with sentiment on the war
in Massachusetts.

SALINGER: I think that's very possible. But I don't
have it that clearly in my mind. Ken, I
think, would remember it, though.

HACKMAN: ^{YES} Yeah he does. I just wondered if it stood
out in your mind. [#] At the time he was in
California, other than the discussion with

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Unruh, did he have discussions with any other political figures in California, or was Unruh the . . .

SALINGER: Yeah. I gave him a list of people to call while he was in California. And he called some of them. I remember he talked to [Edmund G.] Pat Brown. He called [Paul F.] Paul Ziffran. I think he called Mrs. [Carmen] Warshaw. He may have talked to [Thomas] Tom Bradley. I think he called Billy Mills, who was a councilman out there.

HACKMAN: Tom Bradley, not ^[Donald L.] Don Bradley?

SALINGER: Tom Bradley³¹—the fellow that was running for mayor. But he didn't talk to Don Bradley. ^{Oh} I know he talked to [Thomas C.] Tom Lynch. He made about a dozen calls to political people around the state, ³¹ while saying he was in the state; he just wanted to say "hello," and, you know, what are their view on the election, and so on³¹—getting their views.

HACKMAN: You don't remember any particular important feedback he got back from those . . .

SALINGER: No, I don't think he got any important feedback from those calls.

HACKMAN: Were you doing checking on your own in California, or did you get the feeling that he didn't want anyone really trying to line anything up at this point?

SALINGER: Well, he didn't really want to, but in the last ten days for so before the New Hampshire primary, I did take a personal initiative, not knowing that Jesse was doing the same thing. . . . I got together a group of young lawyers, and we discussed the possibility of their filing a Bob Kennedy slate, so that he'd be in the primary if he had to be. I had a group ready to go on that. I'm trying to think of the names of those kids. They were all guys who had been advance men in my campaign. And they in turn went out and got a group of people who were not

connected with us in any way, so it didn't look like I'd put it up. The idea was that they would just be the organizers of it, and they would get a group of people who would file a slate. And they were ready to do that. And I think I did report that to Bob at the time, ^{of --} it might have been as early as the time of the telethon. And I think he said, "Well, I don't want to know anything about it. But don't get caught." I was thinking in those terms, and then, of course, obviously Jesse was, because then he got that woman Mrs. [JUSTINE] KIM ^{Reardon} Reardon and somebody else also to start getting the papers together, so they had to get the slate.

HACKMAN: ¹² In one of the books reports that ^[Frank F.] Mankiewicz and Dolan were also in on this. Were they in this with you?

SALINGER: Yeah. They were in it with me. That's right. Now, you just triggered my memory.

I had lunch with Mankiewicz and Dolan. This is how it came about, in fact. I had lunch with Mankiewicz and Dolan at the Plaza Hotel. And I said I thought that we should keep the option open in the California primary, that if he was going to run, it was essential for him to run in the California primary. So they said, "Well, don't say anything to the Senator, but just go on out and organize something." And that's when I went out and organized it. That's right. It was on the basis of that conversation.

HACKMAN: Can you remember where Mankiewicz and Dolan stood at that point?

SALINGER: They were all for him running at that point. They really wanted him to run.

HACKMAN: Was there anyone within the McCarthy camp-- [Allard K.] Lowenstein, or Goodwin, or even Mrs. McCarthy, that you know of, who wanted Robert Kennedy to come in? Have you ever heard anything like this?

SALINGER:

I heard offhand that Lowenstein wanted ~~him~~ to come in. But I never had any discussions myself, which would indicate whether, you know, he did anything about it. I know they were having conversations with Lowenstein during the night of the New Hampshire primary, when we were organizing Bob's campaign. There was a definite discussion with him. Somebody was calling him. I think Steve was talking to him.

HACKMAN:

In the transcript of your conversation with Teddy White, when you were talking about ^{Howard} Harold Stein telling you about the poll, you said that he said that the worst thing that could happen was that McCarthy won a majority, because that would bring your candidate in. Can you remember him discussing really what they wanted to happen in New Hampshire percentage-wise, what they were hoping for or . . .

SALINGER:

Yeah. They were hoping for ^{around} about forty-five.

They were hoping for ^{around} ~~about~~ forty-five. And he said say that to me.

HACKMAN: Do you ever remember discussing with Robert Kennedy [Robert S.] McNamara's resignation? Does this stand out as having any impact?

SALINGER: Yeah. I did discuss that with him. I discussed that with him at some length. You know, Bob had gone over to see McNamara the day he resigned. I think I was in Washington that day, or else I had a phone conversation with Bob that day. The point I wanted to find out was, was the McNamara resignation quite as simple as the press things. And he told me that it wasn't, and that he had been pushed. He said that he was convinced that there had been a series of circumstances set up by Johnson to make it where McNamara had had to resign. In other words he pushed him out of there.

HACKMAN: Did you ever discuss [Clark M.] Clifford with him? Do you know what his opinion

of Clifford is?

SALINGER: No. Clifford had always been close to John Kennedy. I don't think he'd been particularly close to Bob.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any other events in February, rearily March, that seemed to move him ⁱⁿ on one direction or another?

SALINGER: During that period we were having almost daily conversations, you know. And one day I'd put down the phone, and I'd called up ^{my} me wife, and I'd say, "He's going to run." And the next day I'd put the phone down and call her and say, ^{HE} ~~HE~~ wasn't going to run. I mean, he was really up and down on the thing during those last few days.

^{Hackman}
SALINGER: Why do you think so much undecision from a guy who's usually pretty decisive?

salinger; Well, I think the central thing was really that he felt he was going to tear the party apart. I think he finally got convinced that the only way he could change

the direction of the war was to become a candidate. Obviously he was influenced some by McCarthy's success. He was getting so much conflicting advice in those days that he had to be a pretty tough person to withstand the really wide ranges of advice he was getting about whether he should run or not. I remember Teddy saying to me. . . . I remember a conversation I had with Teddy. He took me aside at the brunch and said, you know, "if Bobby really wanted to go, I'm not going to stand in the way of his going. I just don't happen to think he should, but I mean, if it's the decision," he said, "I'll go all out. So don't feel that I'm an impediment to his running." I don't know why he chose to say that to me, but I remember him saying that to me.

HACKMAN: Did Sorensen ever come around at all?

SALINGER: No.

HACKMAN: Do you know if O'Donnell ever openly came out . . .

SALINGER: Yes. O'Donnell did finally fly down to Washington and say to Bob he had to run. And I think that was also a major factor of Bob's final decision.

HACKMAN: At that meeting at Steve Smith's, I think it's the 13th of March, the day after the New Hampshire primary, you said in the Teddy White thing, that there was some discussion of the Vietnam Commission proposal. Do you remember how many people were in on that? Was it closely held, or was it discussed generally . . .

SALINGER: Very closely, no, it was very closely held. And I came upon it by accident. I happened to walk into a group of guys that were discussing it. I think Sorensen was in the group, and a couple of other people, and I just got pieces of it at that time. Of course I got very heavily involved in it ten days later, when the thing broke. In fact, I think I wrote the basic statement that Bob

put out at that time. But I was aware of the fact that there had been some conversation.

HACKMAN: At the point of it ^{TIME of} in the Teddy White thing [^] you said you were waiting for a briefing from Sorensen on it. Maybe we can just go through and ask you what kind of briefing you did get on several of the things, because there are inconsistencies. How did Sorensen explain where the initiative came on this--the initiative in terms of why he went to the White House in the first place?

SALINGER: His story was the initiative was totally with the White House. He came at their invitation. And it was a follow-up of the meeting that they had had with Clifford, if I remember correctly. In other words, they had had a meeting with Clifford, or somebody had a meeting with Clifford.

HACKMAN: The meeting with Clifford is after Sorensen's

meeting . . .

SALINGER: At the White House.

HACKMAN: With the president. At the White House.

~~SALINGER~~: All right. Let me just say this. I'm trying to clear my memory. But as I recall, Sorensen was down for the Gridiron, or something like that. And he ran into somebody from the White House at that dinner. And he mentioned it was too bad that he was never invited to go around and see the President anymore. And the guy said, "Well, if you want to see the President, stay over tomorrow.. I'm sure I can arrange it." So to that extent it was Sorensen's initiative. And then I think during the meeting with Johnson, the subject of the commission came up. Remember, I have to rely on what Sorensen told me was the story.

HACKMAN: Right. And what I'm really trying to get is your reading of Sorensen's role in this whole thing, and really how much confidence

he had that something like this might work out.

SALINGER: Well. I think, if I recall correctly, Sorensen told me that after he knew he was going to see the President, he talked to Bobby, to see what Bobby, if anything, wanted him to say to the President. It's not clear to me whether Bobby thought up the idea of the commission, or whether Sorensen volunteered that, or whether Johnson volunteered that. That is not clear to me. I'd like to look at the statement that I wrote, because I think that that reflected my current understanding of the situation. I don't think I ^{changed} truncated anything in that statement from what I'd been told by Bobby and by Sorensen. And I remember having some conversations with Mayor [Richard J.] Daley. Now wait; he's in this thing too. Bobby'd had a conversation with Mayor Daley. The commission idea'd ^{had}

come up in that conversation. That's clear. Daley, then, I think, called Johnson and told him about it. But I remember in the conversation with Daley that he clearly did not want to be identified as having played any role in it whatever. And Bobby was saying to him, you know, "Okay, I can't. I mean, you have to be in it." And Daley was adamant that he didn't want to be. And I had a couple conversations with Daley, in which I said it was very difficult not to identify him. I think eventually in the statement we didn't name him by name. We just said the mayor of a large midwestern city.

HACKMAN: Did you ever discuss with Robert Kennedy what his thoughts really were on this idea, whether it had any chance of being workable?

SLAINGER: By the time I got into it in a big way, which was the night the story broke, there really was not a chance to have a discussion of motivation. I mean, it was more a question

of getting the facts out, and trying to bury the story as rapidly as possible. I saw it as a bad story, but I thought it could be handled as a ¹⁸one-day story, which is really the way it eventually came out. It never really became an issue in the campaign after that one day.

HACKMAN: Did other people, ¹¹sort of within the Kennedy camp have the feeling that this was something that Sorensen was pushing in an attempt to keep Robert Kennedy out, or do you think people read it that way?

SALINGER: I think there were some people who read it that way. I remember getting that impression but I can't tell you precisely who.

HACKMAN: Have you ever heard anything about a visit by Edward Kennedy to the White House during the last week of the campaign, ~~before~~ before Robert Kennedy announced? I mean during the week before Robert Kennedy announced? As far as I know this has never been written

about in the press. I've only met one person who's talked about this.

SALINGER: No, I don't. The only meeting I know, I believe, that Ted Kennedy went to see the President after the assassination of Robert Kennedy. That meeting I'm sure took place. But I don't know of any meeting before.

HACKMAN: At that meeting at Steve Smith's you said you sat in on a discussion of sort of a California task force. Can you recall what, if any, kinds of decisions were made at that point, or really what the discussion . . .

SALINGER: Well, the idea was that, as I recall, that Dutton and I should go to California and sit with Jesse Unruh during the selection process of the delegation to make sure it wasn't all just Jesse Unruh people, that there be as wide a representation in that delegation as possible. And as I recall the day after this meeting at Steve's we

had a meeting in Teddy's office in Washington where they parceled out various assignments. And then I headed straight out to California and stayed for three days in that room at the International Hotel while we chose a delegation. And I was during that time getting calls from John Nolan, and I was getting calls from Bob, and I was getting calls from various people with suggestions and names that should be put on the delegation, and we were trying to put as many of identifiable Bob Kennedy people in that delegation as possible.

HACKMAN: Was Nolan out at that point or was he back in Washington, or where was he?

SALINGER: Nolan may have been in California at that point. I think probably he was. Yeah, I think he was.

HACKMAN: Can you remember, then, how this worked out? Were there real problems with Unruh

in putting this together, or . . .

SALINGER: No as I recall it was actually handled rather harmoniously. The original list that he had did have an awful lot of hacks on it, but he didn't resist very much taking a lot of people off and putting on other people. I would say ^{that} the Bob was generally satisfied with the composition of that delegation. There were a couple of ideas. I had ~~the~~ idea that we should have student representation on it. Jesse bought that in a minute, and we had twelve great students on the delegation. We had a flurry with the black community. Merv Dimly came down and said that he hadn't been consulted on the original list, and raised hell. We eventually solved that problem, added a couple of his people to the delegation. Those are the principle problems I can recall.

HACKMAN: Do you remember anyone you wanted to get

on that you just couldn't bring on? Any attempts to break people loose, at that point, from the Lynch slate or from, or who were committed . . .

SALINGER: I was working on that problem, and we did break loose about ten or twelve people from the ^[Thomas] Lynch slate as I recall. In all cases we put their wives or husbands on our slate so that we'd leave room for them. And they announced as a group that they were really for Bob Kennedy even though they were on the Lynch slate. I was one of the people running that operation of calling people and try to break them away from the Lynch slate.

HACKMAN: Any possibility at all of moving Pat Brown away from Johnson, can you remember?

SALINGER: Pat Brown, you know, who had said to Bobby in that meeting, "Anything I can do for you, just let me know. I'm ready to help you at the drop of a hat," was unmoveable and eventually came out for McCarthy. But that was a typical . . . I mean, that was 1960

all over again, because Pat Brown was a
unfortunate figure in the 1960 situation
as well.

HACKMAN: Did people have in their minds, at least
the people that went back to 1960, that 1960
had really been screwed up in California?

SALINGER: Oh, sure.

HACKMAN: Okay. Can you remember things being clearly
established: we won't do it this way again?
What were the lessons learned if . . .

SALINGER: Well, the lessons may have been learned,
but we had the some problems all over again.
In other words in California you're just
captured by one organization, and it's pretty
hard to move anybody else.in. And the
major problem that we had in the primary
in California was involvement of people
who didn't like Jesse Unruh and felt that
this whole operation was his. And then
Jesse compounded that some by taking long
trips out of state at various times when

Bob was going to be in state, and not even being there. And I know that irritated Bob quite a bit. And then Jesse's people were always complaining that we were dealing with people who were unfriendly to Jesse.

And it was the typical California warfare.

Bob kept me out of it, because ~~Sarge~~ [Theodore.] SORENSEN [Robert S., Jr.]

Shriver, Jr.] and some other people con-

vinced him that I was a divisive influence

in California politics, which was not true

at all, because I happened to be at that

point ~~about~~ about the only guy that was

really on good terms with Jesse and also

had some communication with the people

who were not on good terms with Jesse. So

that after helping put the delegation

together, the only other time I spent in

California was the last ten days of the

campaign after Oregon.

HACKMAN: In that early period when you were putting the delegation together, can you remember

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any possibility of really doing something on the CDC [California Democratic Club] side, or anybody giving you help at that point with the CDC people?

SALINGER:

Well, yes. Joe Wyatt, who was a former president of the CDC who was for Bob. I sent him down to the CDC convention to see if I could get them to withhold endorsement of McCarthy on the grounds that you had two ^{great anti-war} ~~grade A~~ candidates, and why should the CDC go all out for one? But he was unsuccessful in that endeavor, although he did find a lot of CDC people who were not totally unsympathetic to Bob. I mean, I think he neutralized a lot of people.

HACKMAN:

Was Lowenstein of any help in something like this at all, or did he get in this?

SALINGER:

I don't remember him being in it. I remember Bobby calling me one morning and telling me to get a hold of Schlesinger, who was in Cleveland at the time, and having him

go out to California and try to neutralize some of the liberal ~~gou~~ groups that were overboard on McCarthy. And I think Schlesinger did go out there for a week or so. And then we had some other professor types, you know, people like Abba P. Schwartz and people like that, go out ~~at~~ there and work in these groups.

HACKMAN: Going back to the Steve Smith meeting the Wednesday after New Hampshire . . .

SALINGER: Well, the original meeting was Tuesday night, the night of the primary, wasn't it?

HACKMAN: Tuesday? Well, I know there was one Tuesday and I think there was another one on Wednesday.

SALINGER: The second on Wednesday, right?

HACKMAN: Okay. Tuesday. Well, at either one. Can you remember discussion at that time of what you do about McCarthy, how do you get him out or talk of trying to deal with him on this? I think you said in the Teddy White thing . . .

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SALINGER: Yeah, I think I did. Excuse me a minute.

HACKMAN: In that Teddy White thing you talked about Schlesinger's proposal to work something out with McCarthy. Can you remember the specifics of what he was proposing?

SALINGER: Unhuh.

HACKMAN: Anything anyone else was talking about in this?

SALINGER: Well, I don't remember any. . . . I think the general idea was that it would be very tough to get McCarthy out, that McCarthy's people could get their back up about Bobby running, and that he would be very, very tough to get out, being the kind of fellow he was. And the only thing possible was to really beat him decisively in a couple of early primaries in the hope that that would convince him to get out. And of course, as it became increasingly evident that nothing was going to get him out, even getting defeated in the California

primary, he was going to go on, that's when the bitterness really came up about McCarthy. And ~~of~~ course, they got very bitter about me, because I said the night of the Nebraska primary, that he was no longer a viable candidate, and that really turned them on to me, and I became a target of McCarthy ~~as an organ in~~ ^{in Oregon and} California. Interestingly enough, when McCarthy came to the hospital, after the assassination, he said to me at that time, that he had decided not to run in the New York primary, that he was going to walk away from it. I've never seen that published before, but he was very. . . . Goodwin would remember that conversation also, because he was in that conversation as well as Blair Clark. He said that he was going to fold up his tent and let his people run his campaign, but he wasn't going to go in and campaign actively himself. If they wanted to keep

his campaign going that was up to them, but he was not going to give them any active support or try to raise any money for it.

HACKMAN: No, I've never seen that.

SALINGER: Listen, I've got to stop this in a few minutes and start picking up with some of this work I've got to do. How late are you staying in New York?

HACKMAN: I was going back this afternoon.

SALINGER: Are you.

HACKMAN: And I've got a couple other interviews coming up.

SALINGER: Do you want to send me a list of questions and have me answer them on tapes?

HACKMAN: I'd rather talk if you *can do it that way.* . . .

SALINGER: You'd rather talk. Well then, why don't we plan on. . . . I'll get back here about the sixth or seventh of June.

~~HACKMAN:~~ And the sixth of June I leave. . . .