

Milton S. Gwirtzman Oral History Interview – RFK#3, 03/16/1972
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

(1933 - 2011). Chief speech writer, Robert F. Kennedy Senate Campaign, 1964; director or public affairs, Robert F. Kennedy for President, 1968; author (with William vanden Heuvel), *On His Own: Robert F. Kennedy, 1964-1968* (1970), discusses the 1966 New York gubernatorial race and the early stages of RFK's 1968 presidential campaign, among other issues.

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Milton S. Gwartzman – RFK#3

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Third Oral History Interview

With

Milton S. Gwartzman

March 16, 1972
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: Why don't you begin describing your involvement in the gubernatorial race in '66, at what point you came in and in what capacity.

GWIRTZMAN: Not until the nomination was almost decided. It might be better if we backed up to how I saw Robert Kennedy's [Robert F. Kennedy] position toward that race evolving beginning with the end of the Silverman [Samuel J. Silverman] campaign. Or do you want to go back to before the campaign?

GREENE: Well, at whatever point you think something of significance....

GWIRTZMAN: As senator he was, of course, the leader of the Democratic party in the state. Many factions of the party in the state were looking to him for leadership in helping to choose a gubernatorial nominee that could win back the governorship after eight years of rule by Governor Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]. It was an obligation that they felt he had, but he didn't—at least, not to the same extent. When he would talk with political leaders in the state, they both urged him to make a decision and urged their favorite candidate on him. He was reluctant to choose between the candidates. It's always been a political tradition in the Kennedy family to stay

out of intra-party contests in which they themselves are not personally involved. He felt that the best thing he could do was to try to bring new people, new names before the Democratic leaders for their consideration.

At the time, early 1966, the people being considered were—whom?—

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O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor].

GREENE: FDR, Jr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.].

GWIRTZMAN: FDR, Jr. Howard Samuels [Howard J. Samuels].

GREENE: And Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson].

GWIRTZMAN: Nickerson.

GREENE: Later Robert Kennedy raised a number of other names, but those are the main ones.

GWIRTZMAN: Let me get before that. He admired Nickerson, but he didn't think he had much ability as a campaigner. He thought he was too stiff, too patrician. I don't know what his attitude was toward Roosevelt, Jr. He didn't know O'Connor, but there was nothing about O'Connor's public career that especially appealed to him. Howard Samuels, we've discussed; he was not a party man. Whether he decided by himself, or whether others suggested, that he try to get others to run, I don't know. But he did approach two or three people and asked them whether they would be interested in running: one was the president of Cornell University; another was Sol Linowitz [Sol M. Linowitz]. There may have been others.

GREENE: Hogan [Frank S. Hogan], I think, was one.

GWIRTZMAN: Hogan might have been. But, you see, he tried to interest them, but he was not willing to say, "if you run, I'll support you." I know what happened with Linowitz. We can discuss that. I don't know what happened with the others. With Linowitz, he felt that Linowitz was a naturally attractive candidate; he was an upstater but he was Jewish so he could be potentially attractive in New York City. He had had his own television program in Rochester for a long time and was good on television; he had sufficient funds to finance a large part of his own campaign. He was a successful lawyer and businessman, and was able and honest. So he had a lot of attractive qualities, on paper. He approached him, and Linowitz was interested; he wanted to be governor of New York. What he didn't want to do was go through the process of asking delegates for support, because that was something he had had no previous experience in doing. Also, the people at Xerox [Corporation] to whom he had looked for career advice and

guidance for a long time and whom he had great respect for, especially Joe Wilson [Joseph C. Wilson], said that, by getting involved in partisan politics, he would tarnish what was a growing image nationally, and actually set back the goals for public service that he had in mind for himself. Between Linowitz and Kennedy there was sort of a dance for a long time. Robert Kennedy wouldn't offer him what he felt he needed to run, i.e. his pledged support; and he wouldn't make the kind of commitment to a preconvention campaign that Robert Kennedy felt was necessary. In fact, at the same time Linowitz was talking to him, he was interested in

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a job in the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] administration, and was talking to them. Kennedy learned about that. He felt that Linowitz was playing both sides of the street. Linowitz didn't realize the full extent of the antagonism that had developed between Kennedy and Johnson at that point. He felt it would be perfectly all right to be in touch with the people in the Johnson administration about an appointive job, and at the same time be in touch with Kennedy about the possibilities for running for governor of New York. That was a perfectly legitimate position, except that it did not take into account what was at that time a growing feeling, at least in Robert Kennedy's mind, of "us against them" as regards the Johnson administration.

GREENE: Do you know anything about his purpose in suggesting the forums as a means of.... Did he hope a candidate would emerge or....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I think there were two purposes. I think he realized that a candidate wouldn't emerge until some of the important county leaders had made their decisions. There was no primary at that time.

Rockefeller had vetoed a bill creating a primary. I think Kennedy saw the forums as a delaying tactic, to take the pressure off him to make a selection. Leaders said, "Well, we want to know," and "Who are you for?" and he said, "Well, let's see who comes out well in the forums." Who knows, someone might have done particularly well in the forum and by doing so increased his standing in the polls, and therefore become more attractive to the county leaders as a potential nominee.

GREENE: You didn't have any feeling that he did it as a means of helping Nickerson to gain attention and strength.

GWIRTZMAN: No, because there was no certainty at all that Nickerson would come out best in the forums. As it turned out, the forums were.... Five-man forums are like five-man debates: nobody really stood out; most of them held the same views on the issues.

GREENE: Some people had said that Nickerson did emerge sort of the best of them.

GWIRTZMAN: Perhaps. But it wasn't by a dominant margin. After the Silverman victory, the pressure on Kennedy became more intense, because at that point he had strengthened his own political position to the point where he probably could have dictated the nominee. He still didn't want to, but he could have. And because he didn't, because of the two candidates whom he possibly could have given his endorsement to: Nickerson didn't seem to be moving well; the other, Linowitz, he had the problem of not being on the same wavelength with, and not arriving at a political understanding about how Linowitz would proceed. And he didn't feel he wanted to endorse any of the others. In that vacuum, O'Connor started coming up in delegate support, because of the arrangement that had been made during the mayoral election in 1965.

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GREENE: When FDR, Jr., presented that memo to Robert Kennedy, as far as you know, is that the first time that he was aware that there was a deal of some kind?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know the circumstances of the memo. My only contact in that connection was after the memo became public. Robert Kennedy, in talking with leaders of the Liberal Party such as Alex Rose and David Dubinsky, became convinced that Roosevelt would run as the liberal candidate, and he came to the conclusion that under those circumstances, O'Connor would lose because Roosevelt would draw away a substantial Democrat vote to the liberal line. Just like what had happened in 1942 and 1950.

GREENE: He didn't make any effort, that you know of, to influence the liberals to go with O'Connor and not force it into a three-party race.

GWIRTZMAN: Not that I know of, but, as I say, I wasn't involved. Bill [William J. vanden Heuvel] might know.

GREENE: I know you mentioned in the book their interest in maintaining their third-line spot. Was that really as big a factor, do you think?

GWIRTZMAN: I think that you'd have to talk to Bill about that.

GREENE: Do you think Robert Kennedy kind of enjoyed this position—well, I would imagine he did—of power and the sense that everyone thought he could name the candidate?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes and no. On the one hand he felt that there was no benefit to him in getting involved. On the other hand, as a natural politician, he couldn't keep himself completely away from the situation. That was dramatically illustrated at the convention itself. He went there intending to be completely neutral. Once he was there he got more and more involved in it, but he found he'd involved himself much too late as he should have known. Commitments had already been made. You can't influence a decision like that on the day of a convention. So he just dropped it and flew away on his airplane.

GREENE: Did you have any real role or contact with him prior to this convention?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, we had a conversation at the time when he first became sure that Roosevelt was going to run. We were talking at that time about whether he should nominate O'Connor or endorse O'Connor at the convention. It turned out he introduced O'Connor before O'Connor gave his acceptance speech. While we were having that conversation, Joe Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle] called on the phone and I overheard Robert Kennedy's portion of the conversation with Crangle in which he said to Crangle, "We're

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going to take a bath in the fall," which is his way of saying that the Democrats were going to lose because Roosevelt was going to run as a third-party candidate. And while he didn't say so, I think that by offering that opinion he was trying to get Crangle and the other leaders to rethink their position on O'Connor. But it was too late. They had already made strong commitments to O'Connor so they wouldn't do so.

GREENE: Did he discuss at that time the problem it would present to him of once more supporting what looks like a losing candidacy and to what extent he would try to be as, you know....

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. He knew that his new allies in the Democratic Reform movement would not like to see him going around supporting O'Connor. He knew that those people who were in liberal circles nationally, who had stopped thinking and talking about him as a ruthless opportunist and a straight party man, and started thinking and talking about him as an idealistic leader wouldn't like the idea that he was campaigning with O'Connor. But yet he had the obligation to his other constituency, the traditional Democratic leaders in the state. He couldn't cater to one constituency to the exclusion of the other. There weren't two Robert Kennedys, there was one. But that one would not have the same conversation on this subject with Jack Newfield as he would with John Burns [John J. Burns]. He tried to avoid having to make a choice by bringing in a new candidate acceptable to both constituencies. That failed. Now the time had come when he had to make a choice, and he could not desert the party because he was the acknowledged leader

of the party in New York. He'd run the Silverman campaign precisely to achieve that status. Then he found he couldn't do anything with it. It was very frustrating.

GREENE: I guess it got a lot more frustrating once the campaign....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, let's talk about the convention a little bit. You probably have talked to a lot of people who were at the convention....

GREENE: Yes. I've heard that story I don't know how many times, and it is so confusing and there are so many names involved in terms of the second level offices that it's very hard to keep straight.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I'll try to—I don't know if I'll be more helpful.

GREENE: Your version of it.

GWIRTZMAN: He went there with the sole purpose of introducing O'Connor after he was nominated. When he got there, he saw what he felt was a screwed-up situation, because O'Connor was not clear on whom he wanted as his running mate. I sat in on a conversation that O'Connor had with Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] over running mates. When they

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went through names, and O'Connor said, "Isn't it a shame that we still have to play ethnic politics and because I'm Irish, I have to have an Italian on the ticket. But I guess we have to do it." And then they brought up one name of a state senator in Manhattan, named Passannante [William F. Passannante]. He said Passannante had told him he wanted him to know that he had been divorced and that should be considered. These sets of considerations were high in his mind. O'Connor could not come to a final conclusion. Because of that, Robert Kennedy then took one more step. He said, "Well, since you don't have any suggestions maybe we could put one very classy guy on the ticket who might appeal to liberals. How about Jack Weinstein [Jack B. Weinstein], the federal judge, for attorney general?"

There again, you don't bring up a new face for attorney general on the night before the nomination. Other people had been seeking the office for a long time. O'Connor and the people helping him make his decision were not ready to accept Weinstein, even though O'Connor had told Steve that he would, Kennedy's people had told Weinstein he was O'Connor's choice. Weinstein was on his way over to the hotel. But then O'Connor and his people talked to other leaders and they said, "No, Weinstein isn't going to give us much help. We want Sedita [Frank A. Sedita]." Some commitments evidently had been made to put an Italian on the ticket. It was supposed to be an upstate Italian, and Frank Sedita was the one. It was very, very confused because one man who could have taken charge, Kennedy, was reluctant to take charge, and O'Connor, who could have taken charge, was not a take-charge

person in this situation. The result was a good deal of confusion until—what did they do?—they finally threw the nomination open for lieutenant governor, didn't they?

GREENE: Yes. Well, and then there's the whole thing with...

GWIRTZMAN: ...Petito [Michael N. Petito]? Let's take it one step farther. After the leaders said, "We have to have an Italian,"...

GREENE: They brought that guy down from Syracuse.

GWIRTZMAN: ...the Kennedy people said, "Okay, if we have to have an Italian, let's look for a classy Italian who will appeal to the liberals." And Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] was consulted. He knew of a guy in Syracuse who was at the university, a professor who was a very good man. They called him up and got him out of his garden—he didn't have time to change into a suit—and he came down there looking about nineteen years old, and he was supposed to be lieutenant governor, and the older leaders couldn't accept that. And then there was Petito from Suffolk whom Jack English [John F. English] was interested in, and they considered him. But again, he didn't have much support. They were trying to blend the old-time ethnic politics with the personal appeal. And further confusing the whole thing was the possibility of vanden Heuvel for attorney general. Bobby had said that he would support him if he wanted it, and Bill was tempted to try to go for it.

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GREENE: That was the one person that you've mentioned where Robert Kennedy actually said he would push for.

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. As sort of the Kennedy person on the ticket. But some of us persuaded Bill that he couldn't be elected, first of all, because he would be running against Louie Lefkowitz [Louis J. Lefkowitz] who had a strong reputation in the state, and secondly, because the attorney general's race gets very little attention, so Bill would have no opportunity to overturn Lefkowitz's recognition factor. Adam Walinsky found that out in 1970. In the absence of a landslide by the candidate for governor, Bill couldn't be elected, and it didn't look like it was going to be a landslide for O'Connor.

GREENE: Did you see anything that would corroborate any effort by Robert Kennedy to keep Samuels off the ticket? That's one of the things that's been written, that O'Connor really wanted Samuels and Robert Kennedy vetoed that one. I've gotten all versions of that.

GWIRTZMAN: In a discussion heard between Smith and O'Connor, Smith made it clear that he and Kennedy would prefer that Samuels not be on the ticket.

GREENE: Did O'Connor push hard for Samuels or was this just one of the names thrown out?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know. I know that since Samuels was coming in second best, for the governorship and had a very loyal party constituency, especially upstate. The leaders felt he was someone who could add strength to the ticket.

GREENE: Well, anyway, Robert Kennedy supposedly left in disgust at one point. Did he leave any instructions or express any of his wishes?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't think so. I don't remember that he did; I think he was just anxious to go away because he realized he was doing what he always knew was the worst thing to do politically, and that is try to intervene at the last minute without having touched the necessary bases. He realized he was just alienating people. I don't think he quite realized how much he had alienated the convention against him when the rumor got around that he had vetoed Samuels and he was not there to scotch it. But he just wanted to leave and go back to his national constituency in Washington at that point. Shortly afterwards, he did come back in and tried to do what he could, through Steve Smith and others, to get Samuels and O'Connor elected. And he got over whatever mad he had about that convention.

GREENE: What about O'Connor's part? Did he ever discuss with you O'Connor's role in the convention? It looks to me, and I've

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heard other people say it, that... [Interruption] What I was saying when we stopped was, it looks to me—and I've heard other people say also—that O'Connor was terribly indecisive, and a lot of the confusion that transpired at the convention was because he did not take hold of the situation. Do you remember Robert Kennedy or Smith commenting on this?

GWIRTZMAN: Not specifically. But it was obvious that O'Connor was not a take-charge guy in these kinds of situations. And there was no center of authority in the O'Connor organization to do it.

GREENE: Could this problem have been avoided, do you think, if he had been more assertive, or was it the mood of the convention?

GWIRTZMAN: Usually a candidate for governor can name his running mates. But a candidate coming in, as O'Connor did, so beholden to the leaders, couldn't move without them. What I would have done if I were O'Connor was keep all those leaders together in a room and make them agree on a common strategy. I think at one point they did do that, but it was too late. They could no longer control the delegates. It should have happened earlier. They should have made the decision on the running mates before the convention opened.

GREENE: Well, my understanding was that they did agree on, I think, Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman] and Sedita, and then they came out and Ray Jones [J. Raymond Jones] threw the whole thing apart because he had not been consulted and he demanded it be Samuels and that's when the whole thing went to the floor. Does that....

GWIRTZMAN: I remember reading that in the paper. For some reason just before Kennedy left—I forget what I was doing, but I wasn't in those meetings.

GREENE: Okay, well, from your book and I guess other places, you get the feeling that Steve Smith was not at all anxious to manage their campaign and they weren't terribly enthusiastic about having him. Do you know the negotiations that went on on just what his role and title was going to be?

GWIRTZMAN: No, I don't. I think that, again it was part of Robert Kennedy's vacillating moods on the subject of taking over New York Democratic politics. After the convention he realized that he hadn't performed as he should have, and he wanted to do something. He did want to beat Rockefeller. And O'Connor did pretty well in some of the polls; the polls indicated that he had an opportunity to win. So he felt that by offering Smith as campaign manager, and by offering to campaign himself, that would show that he was interested. And it would improve the campaign. However, Smith did not want to get into the money part of the campaign, which was a vital part.

GREENE: Why would that be?

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GWIRTZMAN: He didn't want to be put in the position of being responsible for raising the money for O'Connor. They were still raising money for the Kennedy Library project at that time. They knew there would be other demands on the Kennedy family's finances, and since O'Connor was not a Kennedy man, Smith didn't want to be stuck with both the raising and the control over the expenditures of the money. Pierez [Lawrence Pierez] did that, mostly.

The newspapers played the Smith entry into the O'Connor campaign very big, as indicating that the whole Kennedy crew would be in there. A lot of them did work. But they weren't able to function effectively as a team because they couldn't merge with most of the O'Connor people.

GREENE: Was that really a problem, working with the O'Connor people?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, the problem wasn't just that. It had other facets. For example, Samuels tried to take a much more active role in the management of the campaign than the candidate for lieutenant governor usually does. Usually the candidate for lieutenant governor just goes out, covers as many areas as possible, and talks up the ticket. Samuels, whenever he was in New York, would come back and make suggestions and make complaints about the way the campaign was going and try to move his people and his views in. So that added another element.

O'Connor's people in the research area, with the exception of Paul Gorman, were not as effective as they could have been; there were not enough of them. In the money raising area, it was done in strange ways that I can never understand. Piercz would go around with fistfuls of cash. In the organizational area, they depended entirely on the county organizations which by that time were shells. They had put together a pretty good organization for winning the delegates, but not for winning the election; and they were helpless once Rockefeller started moving into action. Now as you remember, Rockefeller moved very quickly after the Democratic convention to come up with labor union endorsements. That started to demoralize the O'Connor campaign, because it was cutting right into the labor base of the Democratic party.

At the same time, Frank Roosevelt was getting a good deal of publicity on the "deal" charge, and with his own campaigning. That started to demoralize the campaign on the left, in the liberal camp. So there was never really an effective campaign. There were some good polls; once the [New York] Daily News poll started coming out, showing O'Connor ahead of Rockefeller.... There was a lot of encouragement at that point. But that's all that campaign really had: a poll. It was running on a poll. It was running on the hopes that the candidate could be elected. But very little was being done at the grass roots level to see that he would be elected. And insufficient money was being raised.

GREENE: Did you find a sense of suspicion among the O'Connor people that made it difficult for you to function, to coordinate your

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activities.

GWIRTZMAN: No, not at all. The area that I worked in with Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] was the research and speech writing area. We worked along with Eileen Brenner. She had been Nickerson's researcher, and then

she came over and worked for O'Connor after Nickerson. [Interruption] She had worked with Peter before, and she worked with us. Paul Gorman, who was O'Connor's speechwriter, was a good friend of ours. So in our area it worked fairly well. The trouble was we didn't have any clear direction.

Peter and I stayed in the hotel where the campaign headquarters was. We actually slept in one of the bedrooms in the suite that was reserved for O'Connor; he was never there. Each morning, the key people of the campaign on the political side and the financial side would have a meeting in the sitting room of the suite. Each morning we would hear, from our bedroom, all these footsteps coming in. We'd get up and go in, and they'd just be arguing with one another all the time. We nicknamed them "the elephants" because each morning the noise of their coming into the suite would sound like a herd of elephants. They pounded on the ground and then went out, and nothing was really decided. When Steve sat in with them he was reluctant to assert authority. Whatever authority there was, was asserted by two or three people who had been with O'Connor for a long time. But they were not really sufficiently grounded in electoral politics, outside of Queens, to realize what the problems were. I think that if there was difficulty in the campaign organization it was more on the political side. It also might have been in the advance work, where Jerry Bruno was working. Maybe he had difficulty with some of O'Connor's guys. I know that in the money area there was trouble because Pieroz collected money in cash and dispersed it in cash; he promised people money and didn't fulfill his promises.

GREENE: What do you mean, promise people money? Staff people?

GTWIRTZMAN: Outside suppliers of services. And then he'd say, "We didn't collect the money today." Money was raised and spent on a very ad hoc basis. He would go around with wads of cash. And if you were owed something, you just had to follow him around and badger him until you got it.

GREENE: First come, first served.

GWIRTZMAN: Steve did not feel this was the proper way to run the financial end of the campaign. And at the end of it, I remember one session we had with Pieroz, in which Steve was quite exercised because he felt a lot of little people were going to get hurt; that is, if O'Connor lost, there wasn't going to be money to pay the ordinary guys outside of politics who had supplied signs and stickers and printing and stuff. They were going to be hurt. He wanted to make sure that whatever was left, whatever was available would be used to take care of them first, and the more political people would be paid afterwards.

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GREENE: The other area of suspicion that I've run into is the feeling among the Kennedy people beginning around this time, maybe even somewhat before, that O'Connor was really again playing both sides of the street,

working closely with the Johnson people and particularly with Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], and that they would get hurt if....

GWIRTZMAN: I'm glad you mentioned that because you reminded me of a remark I remember Robert Kennedy making, long before the convention, before it became obvious O'Connor was going to be the nominee. He was told, and I don't know whether this was true, that whenever O'Connor came to Washington, Humphrey's chauffeur picked him up and took him around. To him, that indicated that he was closer to Humphrey than Kennedy wanted him to be.

GREENE: But, do you have the feeling that they held back once the campaign was underway in support?

GWIRTZMAN: Who held back, the Kennedy people?

GREENE: That the Kennedy people did because they were afraid that someone like that was....

GWIRTZMAN: No, I think if they held back it was because they realized Robert Kennedy's heart wasn't in it and because they felt that it was a lost cause. We could not detect any elements of victory until the Daily News poll mistakenly said the victory was coming. O'Connor didn't have crowds. He went to upstate New York on one swing and got no crowds at all. There wasn't sufficient advance work; he didn't have a good press; he wasn't really making many issues; Rockefeller was all over the place, Rockefeller was organizing interest groups, was organizing in the Spanish community, was organizing in the black community. He was running a very professional, a highly expensive campaign. The O'Connor campaign was out-gunned. I did not give my all to that campaign because I didn't think it was going anywhere.

GREENE: That was what I was going to ask you. You and Peter and—I don't know, did Adam get involved on speeches at all?

GWIRTZMAN: Adam helped to write the speech endorsing O'Connor at the convention, but nothing after that. He stayed in Washington.

GREENE: Okay. But all of you who were really Kennedy people, how did you feel personally about doing this sort of thing? Did you do it as....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, we were doing it largely as an anti-Rockefeller thing. I liked O'Connor; I thought he was a very decent man. I think he was able. He was a good lawyer and has a very good mind. I think he was of better stature, for example, than Abe Beame [Abraham D. Beame]

although Abe Beame was a different type. He had a broader base of governmental experience than Abe Beame had. But I couldn't get excited about him. I probably would have gotten more excited about him had the campaign had more chance of success. You could look at it in this way, that if he became governor, a lot of Kennedy's patronage problems would be solved. The people could work in Albany. And also, insofar as we may have had an interest in the 1968 or 1972 presidential election on Kennedy's behalf, I understand that O'Connor had made a commitment to Kennedy that Kennedy would control the New York delegation. So if he won, Kennedy would have a Democratic governor who would not be a rival or a threat to his presidential ambitions.

GREENE: That would sort of contradict the other thought—I mean the other rumor that I've heard—which was that Kennedy was afraid to have O'Connor come in because he saw him as a potential in state rival for support in '68 or '72, as a supporter for Humphrey.

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Because he had gotten that commitment out of him. I wasn't there when it was given, but I believe he had gotten that commitment. Kennedy saw Samuels as more of a threat politically than O'Connor. And some people on the Kennedy staff saw Nickerson as a threat on the grounds that all Protestant governors of New York who have had polio have run for the presidency. [Laughter] (Bill vanden Heuvel made that remark to Kennedy once.)

GREENE: I never knew Nickerson had polio. The other thing is, did you have much chance to observe Robert Kennedy campaigning with O'Connor?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: Because I wonder what it's like—I meant to ask you this in terms of the Beame campaign, too—for a person like O'Connor or Beame, or really anybody, to campaign with someone like Robert Kennedy where he's always the attraction and the candidate always has to take a back seat.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I guess it's personally depressing, but you do get big crowds to talk to, and excitement, and you're grateful for the support he's giving you.

GREENE: You never heard O'Connor discuss it or complain about it?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: Okay. The last thing that I can ask you about is that, when you speak of what a dud O'Connor was in the whole campaign, his people complained at one point, and I know his wife specifically, that Kennedy tried to remake O'Connor into his own kind of a

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candidate and kind of screwed up his traditional sort of Hail-fellow-well-met technique, and in the end he just came out a mishmash and completely ineffective. Do you think it was like that?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know. I'm sure Kennedy gave him advice, because he always did that with people he was campaigning with. I was told—and you better check this out—that O'Connor had been told early on in the year that if it looked like he might win, Rockefeller was going to expose a scandal concerning something that he had said or possibly done; in the 1930s, that had anti-Semitic overtones. I was told O'Connor lived under this cloud through the whole campaign. If so, it would have been debilitating, because he thought it could ruin him politically. So, I was told, that in a sense, losing was a relief for him because he came out of the campaign with his reputation intact. Have you heard anything about that?

GREENE: No. That's very interesting. Certainly a sense of relief at losing doesn't correspond with what he said or really what anyone else has said, but no one has ever mentioned this. I wish I had known that. [Interruption]
What about Nickerson's people and particularly, of course, Jack English. Did you ever get any feeling of resentment on their part, of feeling that maybe Robert Kennedy hadn't done as much as he should have and....

GWIRTZMAN: No, but I never talked to them about it. Eileen Brenner might know.

GREENE: Eileen Brenner. We'll insert that in the proper spot. Well, I suppose there must have been some carry over of this into '68. Do you have any connection with it, O'Connor's feeling and people?

GWIRTZMAN: No. What happened? Whom did he support?

GREENE: He went first for Johnson, then for Humphrey. Anything else on that before we go on?

GWIRTZMAN: I wasn't around there election night. I was in Washington. Peter called me early and told me that it was all over. The thing you have to realize is the great difficulty anyone has running against Nelson Rockefeller in New York State. They say he spent twelve to fourteen million dollars that year.

GREENE: I saw the breakdown, in fact, on campaign spending, nationally—I think, all national races—and he spent more money running for governor in 1966 than the Kennedys spent running for president in '60 which was supposed to be such a tremendously expensive campaign.

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GWIRTZMAN: He spent an unlimited amount of money, and he knew the issue, too. There was a debate toward the end of the campaign, and Rockefeller knew far more about the state's problems. He had superb briefing books, and he had eight years of personal experience with the problems. That's one thing that Robert Kennedy found it difficult to understand about O'Connor. I remember him saying, "Here is O'Connor, a man who has been preparing to run for governor of New York for three years or even seven years, and he is not strongly grounded in what the problems of the state are." O'Connor looked at it as a political problem, getting the delegates, getting the commitments. Rockefeller just knew so much more about the state. And that showed.

GREENE: Yes. Well, he probably never ran an issue-oriented campaign in his whole life.

GWIRTZMAN: That's right.

GREENE: Well, the reason I was interested in the question I asked you quite a while back about the liberal party is, you look at the record, O'Connor had strong liberal backing for every race he ever ran, and then, you know, they deserted him in this case and went with Roosevelt. And again I had the feeling that maybe Kennedy could have brought them around through his newly won friendship with them after the Silverman race, and did he make any effort and the results that you might....

GWIRTZMAN: I doubt it. It sounds like a thing that he should have tried to do, and might have. But the antagonism between Alex Rose and the leaders supporting O'Connor was very great, and there were a lot of people who would rather lose with an independent candidate than win with someone they felt was totally submissive to the group within the party which they were fighting.

GREENE: Right. And particularly if this whole third line question was really that important to them.

GWIRTZMAN: That's right.

GREENE: Okay. Well, the next topic I've got is the development of Vietnam policy. [Interruption] You said last time that you had some insight into the evolution of the senator's policy or attitude toward Vietnam, primarily through your contact particularly with Adam. Do you want to elaborate on that?

GWIRTZMAN: Yeah. Well that's in addition to what we said in our book about the evolution of his position.

GREENE: Right. Right.

GWIRTZMAN: I think a great deal of the evolution of his position came about because of Adam Walinsky's persistence in keeping him

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in contact with the facts about the war which showed that it was a damaging thing for the country, and keeping him in contact with people who expressed that view at a very early time. After Robert Kennedy went into the Senate, I resumed my law practice, and I would hear fairly regularly from Adam on the telephone. He would express his discouragement at the fact that things were going on in Vietnam which were very bad and immoral, and he was unable to persuade Robert Kennedy to speak out publicly about them. This was in 1965 and 1966.

GREENE: Did he say he was having difficulty persuading Robert Kennedy of that position or just the speaking out about it.

GWIRTZMAN: Speaking out about it, about specific things. I was not very sensitive at that time as to what Vietnam was doing or would do to our country. I must say that I heard Adam out but didn't act on the questions he was raising. I'm sure that he was calling me—he may have called others; he probably called as many people as he could—to try to get us to use what influence we had on Robert Kennedy. I would have done the same thing if I had been in his position. I didn't talk to Kennedy about it because I wasn't concerned enough about Vietnam at that time.

One of the reasons I wasn't was because I was influenced by David Halberstam's view. He had been in Vietnam for two or three years. When he came back I asked him, "Should we get out?" He said, "We can't get out because too many very good people would be killed; people who had associated themselves with various governments in the South."

I believed him—although when we finally did get out, that didn't happen—so I was against withdrawal. And I believed what I read about what McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] said about the war. Also, my instinctive political judgment was that Robert Kennedy should not raise that issue at that time, because if he did, it would look like just a way of trying to bait Johnson. So I heard Adam out, but I didn't pursue it at all. I'm sorry I didn't. I admire what Adam did. He was persistent and he was right.

What he would do was put into Robert Kennedy's briefcase—which he took with him when he went home at night—columns that appeared in liberal newspapers about the war, I.F. Stone columns, facts, figures, comments, analyses, Bernie Fall [Bernard Fall]—in order to continue trying to create in Robert Kennedy's mind doubts about our policy. It may have been successful in raising doubts, but not in persuading him to speak out. Edward Kennedy

[Edward M. Kennedy] went to Vietnam in 1965, came back with the line that all the... Even George McGovern [George S. McGovern] went to Vietnam at the end of 1965, came back, said he had talked to our pilots, and our bombing was not creating civilian casualties as had been reported in the press. I mean, everybody was taken in by the Pentagon line, and everybody who went there felt an identification with our soldiers who were fighting and taking risks there. But no one came back wishing to attack our army. So Adam fought a very lonely battle for a long time.

GREENE: Was he really alone or were people like Peter and Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] and the others with him?

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GWIRTZMAN: Well, he gradually persuaded Peter to take more of an interest in it. But in the Kennedy Senate office, it was Adam who was talking to the people about Vietnam, writing the memos, gathering the clips; Peter was giving him moral support, discussing it with him—they sat right next to each other. Frank, I don't know. At some point he came around, too, but I'm not sure what his role was. He may have joined in at some point. I just don't know.

GREENE: Well, again, to press the point, was Robert Kennedy hearing Adam out and just not convinced, or at least not convinced enough to speak out, or did Adam get the feeling that he was getting the short shrift and wasn't even getting a proper hearing?

GWIRTZMAN: It wasn't made that clear. I know at various times Adam would call me and say, "Don't you think the senator should say this on the floor about what is going on there?" And I kept saying, "Well, I don't think that it's politically helpful." I don't know whether he ever presented those things to the senator, and if he did, when he started doing so. The first statement Kennedy made—the short statement on the floor—said that if we continue bombing, that's the road to disaster, or something like that. And bombing was the big issue at the time.

GREENE: That's '65.

GWIRTZMAN: And whether ending the bombing would help start negotiations toward peace. There was never any talk about withdrawal—mutual or unilateral—at that time. You have to understand this in terms of what Johnson was doing.

GREENE: Do you think or do you know whether the senator was aware that Adam was actually contacting people like yourself and others to try to bring them around?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know. But if he was he would not have thought it was a subversive thing for Adam to do. I think that he realized that staff members would try to get other people, whom they think have some influence on the senator to speak to him about things. I mean, if I had a problem that I wanted to get support for, I would call people and see whether they would join. It's a normal operating procedure, especially with someone like Robert Kennedy, who had such a wide circle of influential advisors outside his Senate staff. Adam never poor-mouthed Robert Kennedy because he didn't do what Adam was suggesting. The issue was raised completely internally, in a very proper way.

GREENE: Okay. What about specific conversations with Adam regarding his contacts with peace people?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I didn't have those kinds of conversations, but I do know that Adam encouraged Jack Newfield who was writing a

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biography of Robert Kennedy, and spent a lot of time around him, spent time with him in the evenings in New York, to talk to him and Newfield was in contact with Tom Hayden [Thomas Hayden], and one of the young black leaders.

GREENE: Staughton Lynd.

GWIRTZMAN: And there was one time when he dropped into the office and they all had a rap about Vietnam.

GREENE: There was more to the Hayden contact than just the one incident at their apartment when Hayden and Lynd came up?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know.

GREENE: Do you know Robert Kennedy's opinions of any of these people that he did meet?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: And do you know anything about Ellsberg [Daniel P. Ellsberg], when he first met him, and....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, that's the one thing I'm glad I did do. Dan Ellsberg was a friend of mine from college. I had spent time with him when he had been in Washington with the Department of Defense. Then he went to

Vietnam, and at the end of his tour he got hepatitis and spent a long time in the hospital, and while there wrote long, long memos to the American command there on how he felt we could use our influence to make sure that the presidential election—the one that Thieu [Nguyen Van Thieu] won the first time—would be fair.

He didn't get anywhere there, so when he came back he brought the memo to me and asked me to read it. It was very long. I must say I didn't understand all of it but I got his point. He said, "I'd like to make contact with Robert Kennedy on this," because at that time Kennedy had been speaking out on the bombing. Ellsberg was of the opinion that Huong [Tran Van Huong], who was a candidate for president, would be the best man to broaden the government to begin real peace negotiations. And he felt that Huong could win if our military commanders told the South Vietnamese military commanders not to influence the voting and not to allow their soldiers to vote twice—both in the camps and in their towns.

At that time Ky [Nguyen Cao Ky] was president—Thieu was running. At first Ky was running with Thieu, and then he decided he would run for the vice-presidency. Ellsberg thought they could both be beaten; they were both military men at the time. They could both be beaten by a civilian if we used our influence to insure an honest election. So I took him to meet Frank Mankiewicz one Sunday, and he went over the whole thing with Frank. And Frank put him in touch with Robert Kennedy and with Adam and he stayed in touch.

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GREENE: Now is this sometime like late '66 would you say, mid '66?

GWIRTZMAN: The summer of '66, because the election was in the fall of '66—or was it '67?

GREENE: No. I think it was '66. It might have been '67, come to think of it. I should have that date but I don't remember.

GWIRTZMAN: We'll check it out.

GREENE: Anyway, do you know anything about that meeting with Robert Kennedy or subsequent meetings?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, let me say, they listened to Dan because, first of all, he'd been there; and secondly, he was working for McNamara at the time, and McNamara had a high opinion of him. So if anyone wanted to check him out with McNamara, he said yes. What Dan was doing was the same thing he did prior to releasing the Pentagon Papers; his viewpoint had been rejected and he was trying to find another source for it. He took the Pentagon Papers all over the Congress—no one would touch them—before he released them.

GREENE: Do you know anything about the meeting with Robert Kennedy or any subsequent contacts they had?

GWIRTZMAN: Ellsberg?

GREENE: Yes.

GWIRTZMAN: I know they had a few. I wasn't in on any of them; I'm sure that Frank and Adam were. And I know that in the '68 campaign, they spent time with Ellsberg, on the "no more Vietnams" speech and on Vietnam policy in general. But I don't know how frequent the meetings were.

GREENE: Do you know anything about Kennedy's opinion of Ellsberg?

GWIRTZMAN: He never expressed an opinion to me, but the very fact that he was taking time to listen to him indicated he thought he was someone who knew about the situation.

GREENE: I just wonder. On page 243, you mention a former aide to Secretary McNamara who was writing about the history of American involvement in Vietnam.

GWIRTZMAN: That was Ellsberg.

GREENE: That's what I thought.

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GWIRTZMAN: And what he was working on was part of the Pentagon Papers.

GREENE: Right. And the context in which it was mentioned was when Ellsberg asked Robert Kennedy about JFK's [John F. Kennedy] involvement and whether he would have pursued it the way Johnson did.

GWIRTZMAN: That's right. I do remember later times when we had Dan on the phone—Bill and I, or Frank and I—and he.... Excuse me now, this was after Robert Kennedy's death.... But he wrote several memos to Robert Kennedy which should be in the archives. I mean, you could probably trace the evolution. What he did would be interesting to compare. I know that the first speech, before Ellsberg got on the scene—the stop-the-bombing speech in 1966—was the corporate version because McNamara saw it....

GREENE: Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] saw it.

GWIRTZMAN: Taylor saw it. Adam wrote it. Adam had to negotiate a lot of it with these people, and it was quite restrained. And it had the reaction I had predicted: it was interpreted in a political move on Kennedy's part and no one was concerned about the merits. The second speech, the 1967 speech, was much more liberated. I don't think McNamara and Taylor had much input into that, although McNamara's views were starting to change at that time, too. The first speech was a diplomatic document; the second speech was a moral document.

GREENE: Were you consulted on....

GWIRTZMAN: No, I wasn't involved in any of them.

GREENE: And Adam hadn't contacted you on them.

GWIRTZMAN: No. After awhile, after about a year of fruitless contact with me, he gave up.

GREENE: Did it harm your later relationship at all?

GWIRTZMAN: That? No.

GREENE: This is off the subject, but on the page after the paragraph that is obviously about Ellsberg, you mention Nixon's [Richard M. Nixon] special assistant for national security, et cetera, who I assume is Kissinger [Henry A. Kissinger], and saying that he consulted closely with Robert Kennedy, agreed with Kennedy's analysis of Vietnam, and hoped to see Kennedy president.

GWIRTZMAN: I'll have to ask Bill about that. That was his input.

GREENE: Oh, I know there was one contact in Paris, but I didn't know

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there was anything beyond that.

GWIRTZMAN: Bill would know about that.

GREENE: Okay. Is there anything else?

GWIRTZMAN: On Vietnam?

GREENE: Yes.

GWIRTZMAN: No, except generally to say that it was a long evolution in which he had to entangle himself not just from the views he had expressed and his brother expressed, but also from some of his very close friends who were still holding those views, like Taylor. He named his son after Taylor.

Now let me add one other thing about his conflicts over his role just before the assassination of Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem], and the meeting, the famous meeting. Robert Kennedy never said—even though historians and other people around are attributing it to him—he never said that he or his brother had been opposed to the war at the time. All he said was that John F. Kennedy had been to Vietnam when the French were there and saw the problems involved with a western white man's occupation. And just because he may have raised the question at that meeting—of whether we should get out entirely—doesn't mean he was trying to advocate that point of view.

GREENE: That's right. I think that came out fairly accurately in that program that—was it CBS—did, "The White Paper," the two-parts on Vietnam, yes.

GWIRTZMAN: Because if he had been advocating that view, then why wouldn't he.... I mean, it took him another three years to get to it.

GREENE: Right. He was just raising the question.

GWIRTZMAN: And in fact he never advocated unilateral U.S. withdrawal; that wasn't the issue in 1968. Gene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] never advocated unilateral withdrawal. The doves just felt that we could negotiate an end to the war if we stopped the bombing. It hasn't worked, actually. We did stop the bombing of Hanoi and we haven't been able to advocate.... The issue has shifted from winning the war, in 1961-65, to negotiating an end to the war, in 1966-68, to the conditions of our unilateral withdrawal, from 1969 on.

GREENE: That's right. Then all he really did in that meeting, as far as I can ascertain, was raise questions and say, you know, if the answer to these questions is no, then we might as well pull out. But it was kind of a rhetorical statement.

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GWIRTZMAN: That's right. And may I say also, that insofar as the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] looking back, was more right than the other government departments in its views, part of the reason was because of what Kennedy did in trying to reorganize the CIA to perform a better intelligence function, as opposed to a covert operations function, after the Bay of Pigs.

GREENE: Do you think part of his reluctance to speak out even after he was convinced, besides the obvious political reasons, was because of his brother's role in it and that he felt in some ways it would be critical of John F. Kennedy to the....

GWIRTZMAN: He would never do anything that would be critical of John F. Kennedy. I don't think the issue was posed in those terms because it was a different kind of wax after 1965 than it was in 1963. There was no real continuum. The escalation began in the summer of 1964, at the time of the political collapse of the Saigon government and the fear that the Viet Cong would take over unless there was a largely increased American military presence to shore them up, to give them support and morale.

GREENE: Is there anything else?

[BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II]

GREENE: Anyway, you were out of the picture for quite some time in '67.

GWIRTZMAN: I was in Cambridge working on the book Decisions For A Decade until Memorial Day 1967. So my only contact in Washington was with Senator Edward Kennedy and Dave Burke [David W. Burke] and people on his staff. I had no contact with Robert Kennedy or his staff at all.

GREENE: Through Senator Ted did you get much of a feel for the way the situation was?

GWIRTZMAN: Through the first six months? No. In 1966, when Robert Kennedy campaigned in other states for candidates, he got some feeling that there was great dissatisfaction in the country, great dissatisfaction with Lyndon Johnson. None of the political leaders asked him to run in 1968. Harold Hughes [Harold E. Hughes] came the closest by saying that he didn't think Johnson should run. The war was an issue in the 1966 elections. Robert Kennedy again was caught between criticism of the war and other Johnson policies, and his feeling that, as a Democratic leader, he had to support organization candidates.

For example, when he went to Syracuse to campaign for a Democratic congressman, the congressman was being opposed.... Do you remember in 1966

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there were some independent peace candidates running in the general election? Well, in Syracuse, one of them was Wayne Morse's [Wayne L. Morse] sister. And she wrote him a note about, you know, "How can you be against me—the way you stand on Vietnam for

negotiations? I'm for that, and yet you come here and campaign against me." And he sent her back a quote from Shakespeare saying that, "I hope in years to come we can unite."

It concerned him, but he couldn't make the break, any break, at that time. And he felt that the independent peace candidates, if they were going to campaign in the general election, had to assume that the major Democratic leaders like himself would be campaigning against them, or at least for their Democratic opponent. That was part of the burden they assumed.

GREENE: Was there anything direct, prior to the time of that second meeting on December 10th? The December 10th meeting saw discussion....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I think it probably started in the fall. I'd hear from Senator Edward Kennedy who was opposed to Robert Kennedy's running, and Dave Burke who was working for Edward Kennedy, about various people who were starting to urge him to run. But I was hearing it from people who were negative on it; I wasn't really impressed with the political judgment of the people who were more positive on it—Adam, Peter, Frank, maybe some others. When was the first meeting?

GREENE: The first one was in November—I think it was November.

GWIRTZMAN: In Pierre Salinger's suite?

GREENE: In Pierre Salinger's. Yes, I think it was November, but I had forgotten the date exactly. Were you at that one?

GWIRTZMAN: I wasn't at that one. But Joe Dolan's [Joseph F. Dolan] work came out of that one, didn't it?

GREENE: No. Out of the second one.

GWIRTZMAN: Pierre came back from Europe saying that Robert Kennedy should run, and he, on his own initiative, called this meeting. I don't know what happened, but most of the people there were negative. But they did decide that Joe Dolan should stay in touch with political leaders around the country and should not do it out of the senator's office.

GREENE: Well, my chronology says that came after the second meeting in December. That could be wrong. But nothing really came out of the first one.

GWIRTZMAN: Nothing at all? You're probably right.

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GREENE: And that's when Dolan moved over here.

GWIRTZMAN: No, he didn't move; he'd come in to this office (mine and Fred Dutton's [Frederick G. Dutton]) from time to time and make phone calls. And the reaction he got was a very nervous one because—I mean, what could he say? He couldn't call and say, "Senator Kennedy wants to know whether, if he runs, will you support him." He'd say, "How are things in your state? How is the voters' feeling toward the administration? How is its strength and how does it look for Johnson?" And they knew what he was getting at and they were afraid to tell him, so he did not have satisfactory conversations except with long-time Kennedy people. So it wasn't really very helpful. He wasn't able to let it be known around Washington that he was doing it. He didn't do too much of it.

GREENE: There was nobody really of substance that was in favor of it, except maybe Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] at that point, was there?

GWIRTZMAN: I'm not sure about Jess. I think Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] was for it. But out of the second meeting came the idea that a couple of well-known Democrats who might be asked to go around the country and make inquiries on their own, at a higher level than what Joe was doing. It looked like they were going to—it was suggested—Terry Sanford [J. Terry Sanford] and Governor Combs [Bertram Thomas Combs] of Kentucky. But that never came about. Robert Kennedy just wasn't that interested in it or if he was interested one day, he'd be negative on it the next day.

It had to do with several factors. First of all, after the Glassboro, New Jersey, conference with Kosygin [Aleksi N. Kosygin], Johnson's popularity increased, and the polls which showed Kennedy beating Johnson changed around to Johnson beating Kennedy. Those things were a measure of Johnson's temporarily increasing popularity.

GREENE: And the power of the presidency, I think, too. Wasn't Robert Kennedy always pointing to that, the power of the president to influence events?

GWIRTZMAN: Influence events in his favor, and to control the convention. So really there wasn't anything up until McCarthy announced. McCarthy announced, and got a pretty good press on his announcement.

GREENE: You don't know anything you could add to the period prior to that, when Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] and others were trying to get Robert Kennedy to take that position?

GWIRTZMAN: No. I just know that he refused to do so. He gave them the reasons that you know. McCarthy announced, he got publicity for awhile, and then he disappeared. And, in January he was going nowhere. Mary McGrory wrote a column saying he was going nowhere.

Nothing really happened until the Tet offensive. And, in fact, I think probably Robert Kennedy saw McCarthy's difficulty as an indication of difficulty he might have had if he had run.

GREENE: Well, is there anything then that you personally got involved in between then and the New Hampshire primary?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, then came the Tet offensive. There were more pressures. We did it in terms of what Dave Burke used to call panic signals. He'd call me every once in awhile and say, "The red panic button is on," and that means that Robert Kennedy seemed, in Edward Kennedy's, eyes to be veering toward running. And we were supposed to persuade Edward Kennedy to make the right arguments against his running, and it worked for a long time. Then Tet happened and McCarthy started going up. Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] had a lot of influence on Kennedy at this point, telling him what was happening in New Hampshire.

And I think Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] had some influence. It started to gnaw at Robert Kennedy pretty badly, and I think that some of the people in his family felt that he should run and get the thing out of his system, that he couldn't... I mean, he was an activist, and he was feeling more and more strongly about Vietnam, he was feeling more and more strongly about the cities, about the poor being rejected, about a lot of these things. Now whether that meant that he felt issues were developing against Johnson, or whether he felt that morally a position had to be taken against Johnson, I don't know.

When he went around and talked in New York State, he went to Marymount College, and girls asked him tough questions about why he wasn't doing what McCarthy was doing. And he thought that, again, it was the conflict in his own soul, between that part of it which was the Irish Democratic politician saying stay with the chief even though you don't like him and be pragmatic because he's going to be nominated, and the other part of him which told him Johnson's policies were wrong and had to be opposed in the electoral sphere. He kept saying in public all the time, "Lyndon Johnson's going to be the Democratic nominee. If he is, I'll support him."

There was the briefing for "Meet the Press" which we had at his house. One of the questions I asked him was, "What if they ask you, 'Do you hope Lyndon Johnson will be the Democratic nominee?'" He couldn't answer that. Fortunately they didn't ask it. It was "Face the Nation" actually, and that was the time when Sandy Vanocur [Sander Vanocur] put it to him and said, "Here you say these things about Vietnam and then you say that you'll support Lyndon Johnson. How can you reconcile those two things?" He had just made a very eloquent presentation against our conduct of the war, and Vanocur put it in terms of a moral issue, an issue of soul. He hit a very sensitive nerve. Kennedy came out of that "Face the Nation" very disturbed, and very dissatisfied with himself and the position he was taking. I think from then

on the button started showing red a lot, and I know that long before the New Hampshire primary, maybe three weeks before, Dave Burke told me that Ted Kennedy was no longer resisting, because he felt that even though politically he should resist these pressures on his brother, for the sake of his brother's personal peace of mind he should let things go along, take their course.

GREENE: Were you unalterably opposed to it up until the time he announced?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Well, I mean not up until the time we knew he was going to announce, up until the New Hampshire primary.

GREENE: Well, obviously, right. But up until the time the decision was out.

GWIRTZMAN: I had one conversation with him about it and I knew the panic button was going. I did go in and see him and I said, "I hope that you're not going to run." And then he started telling me all the reasons why he shouldn't run.

GREENE: Shouldn't run. Oh, usually he took the opposite.

GWIRTZMAN: No. He said, "Not a single political leader in whom I have any confidence..." Well actually he was not telling this to me, actually he was on the phone—I forget whom it was with—but he was talking to me as well as him. He said, "Nobody in my family wants me to run. No one in whose political judgment I have respect wants me to run. And not a single political leader in the country wants me to run."

GREENE: He wasn't even mentioning the exceptions which were usually....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, Jess was the only exception, and Jess had a special problem. He was running himself, and he wanted Robert Kennedy to run with him. So he discounted Jess' judgment as being self serving. And I guess he didn't have confidence in Adam or Peter or Frank's political judgment. He had confidence in Teddy's and Ted Sorensen's [Theodore C. Sorensen]. Dick Goodwin had written him—and we excerpt from it in our book—a pro and con memorandum. Dick Goodwin had had a long dinner with Teddy in New York—probably after Tet, during February—and wrote Robert Kennedy a long memo which should be in the archives, which made some very good points, such as; "the 'rules' say you can't win because no president has ever been denied the nomination. But in politics there are no rules. In politics, rules are just a compilation of what's happened in the past. And this and that, all those things, but that doesn't mean anything." But in the end Dick didn't come out strongly and say he should run. He just tried to put down the thinking. I guess you'll have to talk to Fred Dutton about it. Fred always told me that he was urging Bobby not to run, but that's because I think because he knew that I

didn't want Bobby to run. I think he might have taken a different line when he was with Jess, but it wasn't strong. But

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I think you have to count Fred as being closer toward urging his running than most people.

GREENE: And O'Donnell the same. Well, O'Donnell became fairly convinced later.

GWIRTZMAN: Yeah, O'Donnell, again, was getting ready to run for governor in Massachusetts and was making his alliance with the liberals up there and was getting a lot of anti-Johnson sentiment there.

GREENE: The next specific thing that I have is the meeting at Smith's which was March 13, and I think it's conceded that the decision had already been made by the time that took place.

GWIRTZMAN: Oh, yes. He probably made his decision three days before the New Hampshire primary, but he didn't feel he had to execute it then. He knew, though, that if he was going to be in the California primary he'd have to file. There was the date you had to have a committee go out and get signatures, and the actual date you had to file. So he felt he had some time there. He had also had the conversation with McNamara, in which McNamara told him that Johnson was not going to run for re-nomination.

GREENE: I don't think I've heard that. Can you expand that?

GWIRTZMAN: Oh, yes. You understand that while everyone was saying that Johnson was going to run, Johnson said that he had decided long before that he would only go for one term, and he communicated that to a few people. I don't know whether he communicated it directly to McNamara, but McNamara did communicate to Robert Kennedy in January his feeling that there was a good chance that Johnson would not run. Now if that were true, that would have solved Robert Kennedy's problem because, if his overriding problem was that, if he announced, it would be interpreted as just an attempt to get Johnson, a ruthless maneuver on his part to oust the president, then he'd start behind, and even though he might be ahead in the polls in certain primary states, that image would hurt him, just like it hurt him with Keating [Kenneth B. Keating]. He didn't feel he had a sufficient issue to run on at that time. However, if Johnson were to announce in March sometime, or in April, that he was not going to be the nominee, he wasn't going to run, then Kennedy thought the party would come to him and that he would be free of that criticism, and he could just run in the regular line of succession, as he would have in 1972 had Johnson run and been re-elected, or run and lost. He wouldn't have been a rival to Johnson; he wouldn't have had this difficulty. Of course, the fact is, and I don't believe

Johnson's version of this, but if it had happened and there had been no McCarthy candidacy, if it had just been Kennedy and Hubert then Kennedy could have been nominated. No one would have been in the primary in California against Kennedy except the state attorney general, running with all the Kennedy people in an uncommitted slate. That would have been okay in California after the first ballot, because those

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people could then have switched to him. He could have entered some later primaries; because their filing dates would not have passed—a sufficient number. Indiana, for example. So, with what McNamara had told him, that strategy was in the back of his mind as an easy way out.

GREENE: Was that taken seriously, do you think?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know how seriously he took that.

GREENE: Because it seems to me I read in your book, and it may have been from Fred Dutton, a memorandum intuitively saying that Johnson would not run. So there were....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, let me tell you this—no one believed it. None of the Kennedy people believed it. So we get to the day of the New Hampshire primary, and at that time, then, we knew that he was going to announce at some point. And, again, I was working for Teddy, and I prepared a list of questions Robert Kennedy might get at a press conference. I took them over to Frank, I think. And then things happened very quickly, and I was asked to come up to New York for that meeting. By the time we got to the meeting he had already said he was reassessing. We had the meeting, which was the beginning of the candidacy and when he got there he talked to everybody.

Teddy tried to get the organization going, and give everybody assignments. Part of the people were assigned to what Teddy called the "delegate hunt." Those were my words. They'd go into the states and see if they could get pro-Kennedy delegates. Other people were assigned to the specific primaries, California especially, because it was one of the important ones but also some others. Bob Troutman [Robert Troutman, Jr.] was there and he was asked to look into the situation in the South. Seigenthaler [John Seigenthaler] was there. So everybody was given something to do. Teddy was in charge of the non-primary states. Later on, his own organization took over responsibility for the Indiana primary, but not until after the decision had been made to go into Indiana.

GREENE: Were you immediately, even at this meeting, given the research division? Or was it just kind of assumed that...

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it's obvious.... This sort of thing, you see.... Jeff [Jeff Greenfield] and Adam had been doing the speeches, and while that would have been my function in the '64 campaign, and for Teddy,

Bobby had two very good people doing that. So Peter and I were given—I mean, not directly but it was assumed that we were going to do—the research. And again, I had been away from the Senate staff operation which had assumed a much more important part in his issue orientation and delivery. His Senate staff members were much more current on issues. Peter knew what Kennedy's positions were on all the issues. He was almost the only one who did. I didn't, at that point, because I hadn't given any thought to a presidential campaign. But Peter and I worked well together and we knew we were going to be working on it together, so we stayed in close contact

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from then on.

GREENE: It's funny because I know when you talk about the March 16 meeting in Ted Kennedy's office where all these assignments were given out, you say that Peter was put in charge of research and you never even mentioned yourself. Didn't you come on immediately or were you just modest?

GWIRTZMAN: Probably both. But in my opinion, Peter was to hold down.... He had to be the one to hold down the job because he had been doing it directly with Robert Kennedy and he knew, working with him on all the issues what the right positions were. And he was in better touch with the people on the Hill [Capitol Hill] than I was, in terms of getting data quickly. Now he, on the other hand, insisted that I take the corner office, which ostensibly was the director's office. But Peter had the adjacent one, and most of the visitors came to his, because he knew so much more at that point. In a campaign there are so many things that have to be done. The important thing is that people work well together, and Peter and I do and we were then, and there was never any difficulty. We didn't have any difference in views on issues, and we weren't competing for any position—his position with Robert Kennedy was absolutely secure. And as other people came in, it is true that some worked more closely with me than worked with him and vice versa. I went out into the field first, especially into Indiana and set up a subsidiary of the research operation there with some people.

GREENE: What about the other people? I know the names I've got are Lew Kaden [Lewis Kaden] and Bruce Terris and Mike Schwartz [Michael Schwartz] and P.J. Mode.

GWIRTZMAN: Okay. Well, Lew had been working in the Senate staff during the summer before, and he was asked to come back because Peter thought he was very good. Mike was working at that time—they had these Senate internships, with recent graduates of the top law schools. He was an intern at the time. Bruce was a very close friend of Peter's from the civil rights movement in Washington; he had been working for Humphrey. He was free and he came on. They were sort of Peter's people. P.J. Mode was someone who Lou Oberdorfer [Louis F. Oberdorfer] said was very

interested; he had been working in Lou's law firm and he came in. He started working with me. Who else was there?

Well, there was Edith Green's [Edith S. Green] sister, Ruth Costello, who worked as our secretary. There were people who had worked the John Kennedy campaign who gave us time. [Interruption] I really worked directly under Ted Sorensen, who took over the overall supervision of the issues part, along with other parts. Adam and Jeff went on the road immediately with Fred and serviced the senator directly from there. And Peter and I stayed in Washington for a while, trying to build up the research staff, working with the people who were preparing the initial advertising, trying to get the right material to the people who were going to do television,

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and to the other parts of the organization. Pierre stayed in Washington and Frank was on the road. There was a long trip out to California and to other states immediately after he announced. During that period we tried to get it going. As soon as they got back, we had the decision to enter the Indiana primary. And then, very quickly after that, I had to go out to Indiana, I'd say right after the first week in April.

Once I got out to Indiana I did not spend much time in Washington. I spent all the time in Indiana except weekends to be with my fiancé, Lisa Lansing. As soon as the Indiana primary was over, I went to Oregon, and then down to California and then back to Washington for a short time. By that time.... The way these things happen, a large part of the campaign organization had to shift from Washington to the primary states. By that time Peter was ready to go. He had written his compendium—which we called the “barn”—of all Kennedy's positions and recommendations on issues. And with that out of the way, when he left he got Bill Smith [William Smith], who worked for Senator Clark [Joseph S. Clark], to come in and hold down the Washington end. And I was hardly around at this time. I went out to California, and just came back for one weekend, to get married.

GREENE: You got married in that campaign, too?

GWIRTZMAN: I had planned that and set a wedding date before Robert Kennedy had decided to run, and I wasn't going to change it. Those things you don't change.

GREENE: Because I know that Jeff Greenfield got married in this period, too.

GWIRTZMAN: Kaden went to Oregon, Mode went to Indiana, Terris was put in charge of the D.C. primary campaign—Peter worked with him.

GREENE: You didn't work on the D.C. campaign then. Did these people, do you think, work out pretty well?

GWIRTZMAN: Very well. They were all very good.

GREENE: What about the other assignments that were made initially? Were they logical and did most of them function fairly well?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, they were logical. I mean, some just didn't work out for one reason or another. Barrett Prettyman [E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr.] was supposed to go out and be the coordinator in California, but it turned out that obligations he had with his law firm made that difficult for him to.... Or was it Oregon?

GREENE: Oregon, yes.

GWIRTZMAN: Oregon. He had to go back, so Bill went out. So that changed. California, they started with Jess, and Jess wouldn't broaden

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the organization as much as he should have; and so after some articles appeared in April which said the campaign was bogging down in California, Senator Kennedy asked Frank Mankiewicz to leave the traveling party and go to California and work with the liberals in the south. And Dick Drayne [Richard C. Drayne] took over Frank's function—the press function—with the traveling party. So there were changes and shifts. And then Dick Goodwin—we went into this in our book—his dilemma of being the person who all of the young McCarthy workers looked up to, but feeling an obligation to Kennedy. He felt that he couldn't do anything for Kennedy directly until after the Wisconsin primary; I think it was the third primary.

GREENE: Nebraska?

GWIRTZMAN: No. But he was initially supposed to handle the student operation because we had a problem: Robert Kennedy would go to the big universities, get enormous crowds of students and then there was no follow-up to organizing. Jim Flug [James F. Flug], who had had some experience in the national student movement, started on that but he just didn't have enough political experience; he couldn't do it by himself. So Dick volunteered to do that, started on it, and then very quickly switched over into the television field, because we had two competing advertising agencies that someone had to coordinate.

GREENE: Right.

GWIRTZMAN: You know that story. So there was a focus. But when you get people who have worked together in past presidential campaigns who know each other well, who all knew whom to go to if there was a problem,

who all had a good relationship with the senator and with Steve and with Ted Kennedy, it just sort of fell in line and worked, and you didn't have much conflict. Well, there were some. There were some ideological conflicts. Adam and Jeff—Adam especially—kept writing stuff that the senator felt was too hard, that Ted Sorensen felt was too hard. Ted Sorensen tried to get me to do more speechwriting. But the first time that I gave Kennedy a speech—for the start of a swing through Indiana—he didn't like it as well as the speech Jeff had written for the same occasion, because he was more used to Jeff's speeches and they were more in his style. Some of the younger staff were concerned when he shifted emphasis in Indiana to more of a law and order stance. But he didn't change. He made a basic political judgment of what he had to do. Probably, had the campaign gone on, you know, these conflicts would have come to a head. But the campaign was cut short before they did.

GREENE: You know, I had the feeling, from what I've heard, that these things were really more of a problem than perhaps, you know, you're giving the impression.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I don't know. I've been through a lot of campaigns, and others had far more conflict, personal and. ideological. There were individuals.... Fred Dutton did a very good job of

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working with Adam and Jeff, moderating their speech drafts and being sort of the final editor on that. He would stay up till all hours of the night talking things out with them. There were individual instances of conflict.

I remember a time during the Indiana campaign when John Douglas [John W. Douglas] came to Kennedy with the proposal that, in order to help with the crime and the riots there should be a federal force that would go into states at the request of mayors and governors. Adam was violently against it, and he successfully argued by saying, "You would have Dick Daley [Richard C. Daley] bringing in federal troops to knock the heads of the blacks." So there were conflicts of opinion and sometimes they were expressed in a tough way. And, sure, some people work better with some people than others.

But the thing that usually causes that sort of friction, is that people feel insecure with the candidate, don't feel they have his confidence, and feel they have to push their ideas in order to gain his confidence, that wasn't there because all these people, and even the younger ones who, when they first started working for Kennedy may not have been quite sure of their positions, had by now been working with him long enough and closely enough so that they knew they had his confidence, they had a personal stake in his success, and they knew they had status. They knew that if he were to become president, there would be plenty of room in that big White House for important jobs for everybody.

GREENE: Was there a lot of that thinking, do you think?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, we never got to it because it was never evident he would make it. Except after Johnson announced he wasn't going to run. There was a short period then when we thought he was a shoo-in.

GREENE: Jubilation, yes.

GWIRTZMAN: But there wasn't much of that. But that's a normal motivation in a campaign for anyone. But see, in my opinion what conflicts occurred were more ideological than personal. There was some backbiting. A lot of people felt that Bill vanden Heuvel didn't do well in Oregon. But the fact is that the organization neglected Oregon. Nobody gave it any attention. There were basic strategic mistakes made by the candidate in Oregon. As he said after that primary, "I lost, and the only reason was me."

GREENE: Okay. How would you be specific on that?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, he went into Oregon with a huge entourage, press and everything, crowds. You really should go into Oregon very loose, lightly, go around and talk to people individually. Not big crowd scenes. Oregonians appreciate that kind of campaign. Also, he did not debate McCarthy when he should have in Oregon. He went swimming

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in the Pacific Ocean to show his interest in the environment. People there thought he was a nut to do so, because it was so cold at that time of year. But basically, he lost in Oregon because he relied entirely on Edith Green, who did not have the kind of organization that she had in 1960, and Edith Green did not let other people into it. Also, McCarthy had been there earlier and gotten a lot of the best people—McCarthy out-organized him in Oregon. Kennedy's approach to Oregon wasn't the right approach. Fred and others had told him that when you campaign in Oregon you're also campaigning in California, because your Oregon activities are carried on California TV news. So he did a California campaign in Oregon. It was the wrong kind of campaign to do.

GREENE: What about the shortage of worthwhile things for him to do? Was that a lack of....

GWIRTZMAN: Shortage of worthwhile things?

GREENE: Yes. I mean, the people said that there weren't enough events, the events they selected were poor ones, they overlooked obvious things that would have been attractive?

GWIRTZMAN: Like what?

GREENE: Well, I know, for instance, somebody told me about a dam—I don't even remember the name of it anymore—up in Oregon, some kind of great thing that the people there think is the most terrific thing that's ever happened in Oregon, and they never even went near the place. And sort of obvious things that they....

GWIRTZMAN: Scheduling mistakes.

GREENE: Right.

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know about those. Well, now, there were some. I was against him going to the Indian reservation at Window Rock, taking that time to go to the Indians instead of campaigning. Peter, on the other hand, because he had had a long relationship with the Indians, because he felt the senator had made a commitment to go there, fought like the devil to make sure he went to the Indians, and he did go there. But those are differences of opinion on what is the best allocation of the candidate's time. While that appearance was initially dropped from the schedule, it was done without telling the people who had invited him, and people like Peter were very upset and they roared back and charged that someone or other had cut them. But I think they realized that everyone was working toward the same goal; and that the schedulers—Bruno and the others—sincerely felt he'd be wasting valuable time spending it with the Indians. It took a full day to get there and back, and only a handful of press could accompany him. They didn't think that anyone was deliberately trying to do damage.

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I remember one time when I was in California, Peter had prepared, in Washington, and sent out a statement on welfare that the California people said would be disastrous. So I undertook to hold it up. And the people travelling with the candidate learned of that and they went to Fred and they said that I was undercutting this statement which was so very important. Fred was very mad at me, but the next day he apologized and said that in the heat of the campaign, with all the exhaustion and tension people tend to lose their tempers. But we were all friends, and we were all in the thing together. It wasn't like some campaigns—like the '66 New York governor campaign—where new people come in, and are thrown in with the existing group, and they don't really know each other, they don't have fixed relationships with each other, they have no history of working together. That's when the sort of thing that I am talking about is difficult, because then the group that's in feels they're being replaced by the group that's out. Robert Kennedy didn't say, "Okay. Now I'm running for president and I'm going to fire my staff and take on Teddy's staff." There was some difference of opinion between the older John F. Kennedy people and the younger people on his Senate staff. And I guess the younger people might have resented the fact that some of the older people were coming in and Robert Kennedy was leaning on them much more than he did before.

GREENE: Was there that feeling—well, not feeling—but do people sort of say, “Well, in 1960 we did it this way.” Was there a lot of that stuff?

GWIRTZMAN: Oh, sure. Everybody relates new problems to their own past experiences.

GREENE: The phrase I’ve heard used is the “in the room syndrome” which I guess is a way of saying rivalries and jealousies, in the sense that everybody was competing to be as close to the candidate as possible. Do you think that’s true?

GWIRTZMAN: That’s a natural tendency.

GREENE: But it wasn’t a problem?

GWIRTZMAN: It could have been. I remember John Seigenthaler who was in charge of Northern California, told me once he felt that Fred Dutton was trying to run the whole California campaign from the road, because what had happened was Fred had cancelled some things or changed some things. When you work on something and you think you have the authority for it and then someone else persuades the candidate or the schedulers, without telling you, not to do it, you can have that problem. But, see, John Seigenthaler didn’t think, “I’m undercut; the senator doesn’t like me as much as he did,” because he had known Robert Kennedy for fifteen years. So it wasn’t like other campaigns I’ve been involved in, where you do have the problem of different groups coming together.

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GREENE: Well, I’ll tell you, you’ve covered a tremendous amount, I’m not even sure it’s all sunk in. But I have some specific questions that go across the whole spectrum. Do you want to stop?

GWIRTZMAN: I’d better stop.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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