

Bernard Boyle, Oral History Interview – 7/6/1967
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Biographical Note

Boyle, a Democratic National Committee member from Nebraska, discusses the 1956 and 1960 Democratic National Conventions, the 1960 primary and presidential campaigns in Nebraska, and anti-Catholicism in Nebraska, among other issues.

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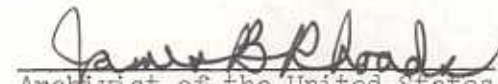
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Bernard Boyle


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Bernard Boyle

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Oral History Interview

with

Bernard Boyle

July 6, 1967
Omaha, Nebraska

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Boyle, when did you first come in contact with John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

BOYLE: I think it was in... Can you shut that off? Well, I first came in contact with President Kennedy during the '56 convention in Chicago when he and Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] were the contenders for the vice presidency. And later, I was in his senatorial offices in Washington, then in 1959 when he was trying to decide whether or not he'd run, he came out to Nebraska. And numerous times since then.

HACKMAN: Do you recall anything specifically at the '56 convention about Kennedy's efforts with the Nebraska delegation?

BOYLE: No. The Nebraska delegation voted for Kefauver because of Frank Morrison [Frank B. Morrison] who was a delegate. He had been Kefauver's campaign manager in Nebraska when he ran for president. I had been Senator Kerr's [Robert Samuel Kerr] campaign manager. I would say the majority of the delegation wanted to vote for Kennedy for vice president, but I persuaded them that we should pay the courtesy to Morrison because he was close to Kefauver, to vote for Kefauver, which they did.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what the reasons were for Kennedy's popularity at that time with the Nebraska delegation? Was this mainly a personality thing, or issues...

BOYLE: I would attribute it to just personality. He did not come to the delegation and solicit any votes at that time for

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vice president. Of course, it all arose so suddenly.

HACKMAN: That's right. Do you recall any people giving reasons for any objections to him at that time; his stand on any issues?

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: Moving on then, after 1956—you had talked about this a little bit before—could you go into some specifics about your contacts with him in the period up to '59, and then that visit out here to your house that took place in '59?

BOYLE: Well, I was in Washington one time, and I went over to his office to see him, or to pay him a little visit, and at that time he was thinking of running for president. He asked if I would have a gathering for him in my back yard. He said, "I understand that you had one for Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] and for Harriman [William Averell Harriman] and for Kerr, and I'd like, if you would, to have you do the same thing." And those meetings were mostly of delegates and their wives. I told him I would, and then later on he made definite arrangements to be there. He hadn't announced that he was a candidate at that time. He came here on that occasion to sound out and perfect an organization if he decided to run in the Nebraska primaries, which he had already decided but hadn't announced.

HACKMAN: Were there any people working for him in the state previous to that time, any effort?

BOYLE: No. No organized effort for him, until after that meeting, and then there was.

HACKMAN: Do you recall who he was—was he interested particularly in winning any key people at that time?

BOYLE: Well, I called the key people together in my back yard on that day from all over the state, and that was understood by him; it was the

purpose of him coming here, to meet the key people, which included the delegates and the alternates to the former convention. On that day, he had made an arrangement to meet George Rock [George F. Rock], who was the national committeeman from Colorado. He came here, and he visited with him on that particular day.

HACKMAN: How did it develop that Hans Jensen [Hans O. Jensen] became the head of the Kennedy for President organization in this state?

BOYLE: He was selected on my back porch. We wanted to select, because of Kennedy being a Catholic, someone who wasn't a

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Catholic and who had a Scandinavian name, who had been in public life, and we decided on Jensen who was there at that time.

HACKMAN: How did he go about setting this whole thing up, and how effective was he?

BOYLE: He was useless. We had a girl named Helen Abdouch. She was there and sat as secretary in that meeting on my back porch, and she set up headquarters here in Omaha. I worked with her, we set up and selected the delegates to run pledged to Kennedy, we selected those that we thought could be elected in various districts then circulated petitions and got them to run for delegates to the convention.

HACKMAN: What was the problem with Mr. Jensen? Just lack of knowledge of politics?

BOYLE: Yes, and lack of knowledge over the state, he didn't know the people in the Democratic party who were influential in various portions of the state.

HACKMAN: Well, let's say, at this time before the primary, was he working outside the Democratic organization, or was there a conflict between his group and the regular Democratic organization?

BOYLE: No. No. The conflict arose when they sent some cigarette salesman in here, I forget his name, to organize Citizens for Kennedy. It was primarily, as I understood it, he said, to interest Republicans in a group for Kennedy. He came in here and started contacting Democrats and advising them that he was a close personal friend of Kennedy and was the best man at his marriage; was so close over the years; and went to school with him. Instead of calling on the Republicans, which he was sent out here for, he was contacting Democrats.

HACKMAN: This was after the convention, after Kennedy was nominated?

BOYLE: Yes.

HACKMAN: Before the convention, even before the primary, which of the state leaders of the Democratic party were coolest toward the Kennedy effort? What was the popularity of the other candidates who were coming in the state, Kerr and Symington [Stuart Symington II] and some of these other people?

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BOYLE: Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had come in the state and talked, but he came in here rather late, after Kennedy had had this meeting and had a number of people who, I thought, could be elected as delegates pledged to Kennedy. Karl Rolvaag [Karl F. Rolvaag], who was Governor of Minnesota, was with him a couple of time, he asked me what I thought of Humphrey's running. I think Humphrey is a very capable man. I told him I thought that he had started too late. Then Rolvaag told me that after Morrison wasn't selected to head the Kennedy organization, he called Rolvaag and said he'd like to head the Humphrey organization, could he get Humphrey to file. And Rolvaag called me, and I told him I didn't think he could beat Kennedy. So he didn't file. But there were a few delegates who were elected that were not for Kennedy, and I think because of his religion.

HACKMAN: Did you attempt to get other people to enter the primary, to make it more...

BOYLE: Other candidates?

HACKMAN: Right.

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: When the delegates were elected to go to the convention, was the large number of Kennedy-pledged delegates a result of any work of the Kennedy for President organization, or Citizens for Kennedy, or whatever it was called?

BOYLE: No. None of them.

HACKMAN: What was the attitude of Governor Brooks [Ralph G. Brooks] toward Kennedy?

BOYLE: He didn't think he could be elected because he was a Catholic, and I would say that he was cool, very cool, until he found that Kennedy's

popularity just overwhelmed them, then he kind of tagged along. But he had no say in the selection of delegates.

HACKMAN: Do you know if Kennedy or the Kennedy people ever made any great effort to get Brooks to support the ticket more strongly, or did they regard this as important?

BOYLE: Well, I think the people he had for him were stronger than Brooks, spread over the state, and they felt they would do the job.

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HACKMAN: Did the issue of presidential candidates enter into the governor's primary at all, as far as the race between Conrad [Robert B. Conrad] and Morrison at that time, in '60?

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: Were they both in favor of Kennedy at that point, or both opposed, or what?

BOYLE: Conrad was for Kennedy. Morrison has had the habit, at election time, to dissociate himself with any party, he'd just run as Frank Morrison.

HACKMAN: On the Nebraska issues.

BOYLE: Yes, and then he didn't want Kennedy's name used in an ad with him, but it was used anyway.

HACKMAN: Was this primarily because of the religious issue, or...

BOYLE: Well, I wouldn't want to say that he personally had any antagonism toward Kennedy because of religion, but he felt that over the state of Nebraska this might react to his detriment, if he came out for Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Did the choice of Jensen to head the Kennedy organization in the state have any effect on Morrison's attitude later toward Kennedy for president?

BOYLE: No. Morrison was a delegate, and he hadn't made up his mind he was going to vote for Kennedy until the night before the caucus. Then a fellow named Jim Green [James F. Green], who was a delegate, talked with him and after much effort sold him to vote for Kennedy in the caucus. He was undecided, and he didn't think he could be elected because he was a Catholic, you see.

HACKMAN: Did you face much opposition at that time in relation to yourself as Democratic National Committeeman in the election that year for the Democratic National Committee?

BOYLE: No. I didn't have any opposition.

HACKMAN: What about as chairman of the delegation to the convention?

BOYLE: No.

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HACKMAN: What about Kennedy's stand on farm policy, did any people in the state worry about this issue?

BOYLE: No. He met with.... Jensen, as a farmer, he had contact with the farmers, he got a group together, as did Frank Sorrell, who I think was more effective than Jensen, and he met with Kennedy and kind of briefed him on their idea of the farm problem.

HACKMAN: I think Kennedy made one trip out here when he spoke at an AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] meeting. Do you recall anything about that, in the attitude of the labor people in the state toward Kennedy?

BOYLE: Where did he talk to them?

HACKMAN: I was thinking it was in Omaha. I may be mistaken, or maybe he had planned the trip, and that was one of them he had to cancel. I'm not sure.

BOYLE: I don't remember him coming here to speak at that kind of a meeting. I don't know any big meeting they ever had.

HACKMAN: What about the delegates who would be somewhat representative of labor? What was their attitude?

BOYLE: They were for Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Who from outside of the state was working on Kennedy's behalf, let's say, before the campaign, before the convention? Was anyone coming in and meeting with you people as far as planning the effort in the primary here? Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], or Bob Wallace [Robert Ash Wallace], or any of these people?

BOYLE: Bob Wallace might. My recollection is that is after the convention, and Bobby Kennedy, and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], and Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and then chairman of the National Committee, Jack Bailey [John Moran Bailey].

HACKMAN: You mean from Connecticut? Bailey.

BOYLE: Bailey, John Bailey. Just for a day's visit. But as far as anybody coming in here and staying here before, I don't know of anybody. Bob Wallace was in two or three times, a very nice fellow.

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HACKMAN: Did you have the feeling that after the primary was over in Nebraska, that the Kennedys took less interest in Nebraska? Or did this ever come up?

BOYLE: No. I didn't. They kept in contact, and they wanted to hang on to the delegates that I told them we had for him, they didn't want to lose any.

HACKMAN: What about during the campaign? Do you think they ever wrote Nebraska off, so to speak? I don't think Kennedy ever did come into the state during the campaign. I wondered if efforts were made to get him in, and...

BOYLE: Well, he was in three times before at the Jackson day dinner. At one we had Symington, and Truman [Harry S. Truman], and Kennedy here, all three of them. Bobby Kennedy was here and stayed at my home. He'd call up quite often about minor things after that.

HACKMAN: Did you feel that people out of the Kennedy office, let's say, in Washington, and people close to him had a fairly good understanding of the Nebraska situation, or not?

BOYLE: You mean this was after he was nominated?

HACKMAN: All the way through, let's say, before as far as Bobby Kennedy and Bob Wallace and people like this went, and then during the campaign.

BOYLE: Well, I think that they had so much to do, they could probably spend their time more advantageously in some of the larger states than they could here, which has been a predominantly Republican state.

HACKMAN: When you worked with the Democratic National Committee, say in the period between '56 and '60, when you would attend the meeting,

was anybody particularly active on promoting the Kennedy cause at those meetings?

BOYLE: No. I don't know of anybody that was.

HACKMAN: Did you play any particular role in the arrangements for the 1960 convention at Los Angeles?

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: Do you recall if you had any feelings toward the expression of some people that Paul Butler, who at that time was

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chairman, showed favoritism toward Kennedy?

BOYLE: No, I think there was quite a bit of feeling directed against Paul Butler because of his method of running the National Committee by some of the older heads in the party, such as the governor of Pennsylvania, what's his name? He just died.

HACKMAN: David Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence].

BOYLE: Dave Lawrence. And national committeeman from Chicago...

HACKMAN: Jake Arvey [Jacob M. Arvey].

BOYLE: Yes, that's it. That type of national committeeman.

HACKMAN: Do you recall specifically what kind of objections they would have had?

BOYLE: It was a kind of silent opposition, silent resentment. I think Butler was a pretty capable fellow. Of course, I greatly admired Dave Lawrence, and DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio] and Jake Arvey. They always sat around and voted together.

HACKMAN: What changes took place in the Democratic National Committee after Butler left? Was it much of a different operation?

BOYLE: I think it was run more from the White House than it was by the party.

HACKMAN: Because we had the President. Well, going to the 1960 convention, what were you primarily involved in there, during the '60 convention

as chairman of the delegation?

BOYLE: Just to hang on to the votes that we had, that they didn't get mixed up.

HACKMAN: Did you work at all in any other delegation?

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: Were the Kennedys making any great effort to swing those votes in Nebraska that weren't for Kennedy at that time? Were there any changes at the convention?

BOYLE: No. They voted strictly on religious lines I believe. There were only three and a half votes, or something like that.

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HACKMAN: Four went for Symington.

BOYLE: One for Humphrey who wasn't a candidate.

HACKMAN: Was the opposition to Kennedy by the delegates who didn't vote for him the result of any great efforts by other candidates in the state?

BOYLE: No, they were seeking a berth somewhere, going around to different presidential candidates' offices, trying to attach themselves to someone who looked like a winner. In my book they just wouldn't vote because he was Catholic.

HACKMAN: Had there been up to that time much activity on any of the other religious groups putting pressure on these people, or was this primarily a personal commitment, or do you know?

BOYLE: Oh, I think it was just inherent in them, they just thought.... They didn't like Catholics, in my book. I tried to tell Jensen that he should see them, that he was not a Catholic, and that he might be able to persuade them. He said, "I can't talk to them." He said, "They're not Catholics." I said, "Neither are you. That's what we got you for." He was absolutely useless.

HACKMAN: What was he primarily doing during this period?

BOYLE: I don't know. I don't think he was very effective. I always thought he was kind of stupid, myself.

HACKMAN: Did he keep in close contact with your office at all or did he go off on

his own, or what?

BOYLE: No, we had an office over here, and Helen Abdouch ran that, She's a very capable girl. He was chairman in name only, I'd say.

HACKMAN: What about the efforts of other candidates in the state, specifically Symington and Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], had they been at all effective in coming in and organizing?

BOYLE: Yes. Symington toward the last of it came in and perfected an organization, or attempted to, by the then-County Attorney, John Hanley, to try to get some of our delegates away, but they wouldn't leave.

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HACKMAN: Do you recall any efforts on the part of Ed Jaenke [Edwin A. Jaenke], I believe, who was working for Symington in the state, at some point?

BOYLE: No, I don't. Young Symington [James W. Symington] came in here with his fiddle or something. A very talented young fellow.

HACKMAN: What was your reaction to the selection of Johnson for the vice presidency?

BOYLE: Fine. He was at my home with Kerr, and I think Johnson was an exceptionally capable fellow in the Senate. And Kerr, I formed a great attachment to him, and I respected his judgment a lot. He brought Johnson and his wife [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson] out here. We had a meeting of the delegates for him at my home before the convention—and Governor Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.] was with him, to see if he could get some delegates. Well, we had pledged ourselves to Kennedy. I told Kerr that had he come earlier, it might have made a difference, but right now we had given our word.

HACKMAN: What about the reaction of the other delegates to the choice of Johnson for the vice presidency?

BOYLE: I never heard any opposition at all.

HACKMAN: I know some of the labor people in other delegations were objecting...

BOYLE: Well, we don't have much of a labor party here. This is an agricultural state. Labor is centered here and in Lincoln.

HACKMAN: What were you mainly involved in during the campaign?

BOYLE: In trying to encourage the county chairmen and those who were favorable to it to have meetings to promote the cause of Kennedy, solicit funds, if we could, have dinners and coffees and such as that.

HACKMAN: What problems did the Kennedy-Johnson ticket create for the candidates here on the state level, the governor and...

BOYLE: None that I know of.

HACKMAN: You had talked about Morrison having some fear of the religious issue. Were most people of this feeling?

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BOYLE: Well, that was.... Kennedy was president, and Morrison.... We had the election at midterm. We ran an ad in all the daily newspapers—a big ad—as “These candidates will uphold the right arm of Kennedy,” and we listed the candidates. Morrison did not want his name used in that ad. He ordered me not to use his name without his approval, we just ran it anyway.

HACKMAN: Well, during the '60 campaign, was there ever any approach or strategy evolved on how to handle the religious issue?

BOYLE: Just left it alone.

HACKMAN: During the campaign, did you encounter any organized effort on the behalf of religious groups in the state?

BOYLE: Oh yes, I mean some of these ministers were talking right out of the pulpits against him. If we elect a Catholic, we're just gone, it's the end of the world.

HACKMAN: Do you think that had a great deal to do with the vote in Nebraska?

BOYLE: Yes.

HACKMAN: That was a primary issue?

BOYLE: Yes, I think it was in Nebraska.

HACKMAN: Did the split in the delegation at the Convention, let's say, between the people who voted for Kennedy and who didn't, carry over into the campaign, as far as working for Kennedy, these people who had objections to him?

BOYLE: Well, I don't think they did any work for him.

HACKMAN: How did this Kennedy for President movement that Jensen headed tie in with the regular Democratic organization during the campaign? Were they completely separate, or...

BOYLE: I don't think he had any organization. And that cigarette fellow came in here, and he...

HACKMAN: Was that Ralph Horton [Ralph H. Horton]?

BOYLE: Yes.

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HACKMAN: What role did he play?

BOYLE: Well, he'd go out to these counties and visit with Democrats when he was supposed to be sent in here to encourage Republicans.

HACKMAN: To get that vote. Did he create problems within the party by doing that?

BOYLE: In my opinion, he did, and I told him so. He was soliciting money from them. I don't know what he did with it, but we were trying to get it to send it to Washington. And he had them all believing they were going to be ambassadors to Switzerland and different promises like that.

HACKMAN: I was going to ask you about funds. Did this Kennedy for President organization create any problems, did they attempt to get funds?

BOYLE: No. We would have our annual dinner set, and we were assessed a quota, and we paid it every year that I was in there. I don't think they paid a cent.

HACKMAN: Do you recall if there was anything about the voter registration in '60? Were you involved in that at all?

BOYLE: That was handled here through, of course, the County Register in the larger cities over seven thousand, and we would try to do it here in homes and then in different towns, but as far as being very successful, I don't think we were. I think the people just went and registered themselves.

HACKMAN: Were any of the Kennedy people from Washington or was Horton

involved in this at all, in trying to get this going?

BOYLE: No, this was strictly local. He stayed out of here, he stayed out in the country.

HACKMAN: Did you have close contacts in this period with the Kennedy organization in Washington, D.C.?

BOYLE: They'd be calling quite often wanting to know just how it was coming.

HACKMAN: Did you ever express feelings at that time toward what Horton was doing out here?

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BOYLE: Yes.

HACKMAN: What was their reaction?

BOYLE: Frankly, I don't think they appreciated it.

HACKMAN: I know I've run across the same thing in other states with people who had similar problems.

BOYLE: Well, I think he.... Well, I don't say that if he'd stayed out of here we'd have carried the state, but I don't think he did the party any good.

HACKMAN: Did the death of Governor Brooks during the campaign have any effect on the vote, do you think?

BOYLE: No.

HACKMAN: What was your role in relation to choosing Conrad as his successor?

BOYLE: I favored it. I thought he was very capable, a good organizer, a good speaker, and he was Governor for the last six or eight months that Brooks was bedridden. I think he would have been a good governor.

HACKMAN: Were any other people considered at that time as a Senate candidate?

BOYLE: Yes. Clark Callan wanted to be, and then at the convention Conrad beat him, of course, and Callan got hot. And Morrison was for Callan instead of Conrad.

HACKMAN: We talked about this to some extent before, you said you thought the

religious issue was the overriding one in the state. What other issues entered into it? Did agriculture to any appreciable degree?

BOYLE: Well, I don't think so. I mean, I think it was mainly a religious one. These ministers would get up on Sunday in the pulpit and just tell them it would be terrible. "The Pope would be over here, he's got the boat all ready." And that makes you kind of hot.

HACKMAN: Were there any specific religious groups that were...

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BOYLE: Baptists were, I think, the most bitter. Some fellow up here at 29th and Arney, he was really laying them out.

HACKMAN: What about the role of the press in the election? Did this hurt a great deal?

BOYLE: Press always hurts in Nebraska. This is a Republican paper except when Johnson ran last time, it turned over, and I think it was helpful. But this *World-Herald* [*Omaha World-Herald*] which had been a Democrat paper, owned by Senator Hitchcock [Gilbert M. Hitchcock] then it turned over Republican, and I think they're pretty hard to overcome. They're the biggest paper in the state. You just have a difficulty answering them.

HACKMAN: Do you know if Kennedy ever made any effort to talk to the people, who ran it?

BOYLE: No, I don't. See, at that time Kiewit [Peter Kiewit] didn't own it. He acquired it afterwards. And he has a lot of government work. He's probably got bigger ears to listen with that connection.

HACKMAN: After the election then, did you have any further contacts with Kennedy, after he became president?

BOYLE: Well, in what way?

HACKMAN: Any personal meetings with him?

BOYLE: No. Just the reception at the White House, just the normal. But I never went in for any big...

HACKMAN: Did you ever feel that Nebraska's Republican vote in '60 created any problem for the state as far as relations with the administration?

BOYLE: Yes.

HACKMAN: Could you go into that at all, what type of problems?

BOYLE: No. What could you do? What do you mean, go into it? If you're in a ball game and get beat nine to nothing, then it's over, you just don't change the score. But I think they should have appreciated the efforts that were expended by the loyal Democrats whether we got beat or not. But I think they always kind of felt that they got beat pretty bad here, and to hell with it.

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HACKMAN: When the Kennedys would work in the state after the election, would they usually come through the regular Democratic organization or would they go to this volunteer group?

BOYLE: Oh no. They didn't go to them, but they didn't work through the Democrats, they work through Morrison, who was then governor. And then he was appointing all Republicans, and I think that's what helped beat him the last time. He thought he would fool the Republicans by recommending Republicans to the post office and stuff, and I don't think the Kennedys should have permitted that, myself. I believe if you win the election, your people should get the benefits, if they're capable.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any specific appointments, any federal appointments, of Nebraska people or people in this area that you particularly objected to during the Kennedy Administration?

BOYLE: Yes. I objected to the fellow that's postmaster in Lincoln. The county central committee had a meeting and recommended a fellow named Frank Golden—he was a Democrat, Well, Morrison recommended a fellow named Lewis who had changed his registration four times in the last four years, but if there'd be a Republican administration in Lincoln, then he'd be a Republican, and he recommended him, and they appointed him. Well, I thought that was not the way to build a party. Bob Conrad wanted to be United States attorney. And Morrison objected to him, you see, and they finally compromised with Ted Richling [Theodore L. Richling]. I think Conrad should have had it. Of course, he has a better job now.

HACKMAN: Any federal judgeships come up out here in that period?

BOYLE: No, no.

HACKMAN: How do you think Kennedy would have run in '64 if he would still have been around? What was his general popularity in Nebraska by that time?

BOYLE: I think it was good.

HACKMAH: I think that's all I have, unless you would want to have any general conclusions on anything?

BOYLE: No. It's fun, it's politics, and we tried to be Truman Democrats.

HACKMAN: That's good. Thank you.

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