

**Bourke B. Hickenlooper Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 07/30/1964**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Hickenlooper was the U.S. Senator from Iowa from 1945 through 1969 and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In this interview Hickenlooper discusses various meetings with President John F. Kennedy [JFK] on foreign relations; Soviet and American nuclear testing; the nuclear test ban treaty; the Bay of Pigs invasion; Laos and Vietnam; the Punta del Este Conference in 1962; the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962; Hickenlooper's 1962 reelection campaign; traveling with JFK to Costa Rica; the 1961 Berlin crisis; JFK's congressional relations; and social occasions at the Kennedy White House, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Bourke B. Hickenlooper

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Oral History Interview

with

BOURKE B. HICKENLOOPER

July 30, 1964

Senator's Office [Washington, D.C.]

By Pat Holt

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLT: Senator, what is your.... Do you remember the first time you met Senator Kennedy, or Representative Kennedy?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I think the first time I met him was when he was a member of the House of Representatives and he came over to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee on some matter that he was interested in which was before the Committee at that time. This was, well, of course, a number of years ago. It was about four years before he came to the Senate I believe.

HOLT: What sort of impression if.... Do you remember anything in particular about him?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I can't at the moment recall the exact nature of the hearing. But I do recall that I was impressed by him as quite a young man at that time because

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of his articulate presentation and the clarity of the views which he expressed before the Committee.

HOLT: Did you have any other contacts with him during the time that he was a member of the House?

HICKENLOOPER: No, except perhaps an itinerant, casual meeting someplace in the Capitol or something of that kind. But no official business of any sort.

HOLT: What about the period when he served in the Senate?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, of course there were frequent contacts during those years while he served in the Senate, and my seat most of that time, was almost immediately across the aisle from his. And then he served on the Foreign Relations Committee, I believe, for about four years.

HOLT: That's right. In connection with legislation during this period that you were in the Senate together, did you particularly collaborate on anything, or

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did you particularly oppose each other on anything?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I think that we were not continually opposed to each other nor continuously in collaboration. There were measures where we would vote alike and measures where we differed. It seemed to me that most of his interest during that period of time was centralized in labor legislation through the Labor Committee, and there were not very many pieces of legislation before the Foreign Relations Committee in which he took a very prominent or active part.

HOLT: When did you first suspect him as a serious presidential candidate?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I think I first suspected him as a serious presidential candidate when he almost got the vice president's nomination in 1956, I believe it was. '56. Yes. That is, he came up rapidly

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at that time. And it was quite unexpected, of course, that he would make the showing that he did. And then, of course, after that he was a completely devoted candidate for the presidency during the next four years.

HOLT: Moving on now to the period when he was President, on the day he delivered his first State of the Union message to Congress, he had lunch in the Foreign Relations Committee Room afterwards. Among others.... You were among those present. Do you remember anything about this lunch?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, yes, I remember the luncheon very well. It was a very pleasant luncheon. He had just been inaugurated as President. He, of course, was very pleased. He had a charming personality, and it was not a luncheon where great exuberance was expressed. I mean, it was not that kind. He was highly pleased; he was extremely courteous. And it was a

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very pleasant meeting all around.

HOLT: Do you remember any particular fragments of conversation or bons mots that were...?

HICKENLOOPER: No, I can't recall any at the moment. I haven't thought about this for a long time and I'm not so sure that I could recall any if I did think about it. But I just.... Nothing occurs to me at this time. It was a jovial meeting, and President Kennedy was a very witty man in a subtle sort of way. And usually his wit was very much to the point and could be enjoyed, I think, by everybody.

HOLT: Well, let's turn now to the general field of atomic energy and disarmament and events leading up to the test ban treaty which came later. On March 7, of 1961, there was a luncheon at the White House which was off-the-record and those

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present included you, Secretaries Rush and McNamara, General Lemnitzer, Mr. McCloy and Mr. Seaborg, Senators Jackson, Humphrey, Anderson, Gore, Pastore, which indicates that it probably had to do with atomic energy matters. Do you remember this lunch, or do you remember... ?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I remember the luncheon and it had to do with atomic energy matters — the question of testing, the question of pollution of the atmosphere, its degree, its potential danger or lack of danger, the impact on foreign countries. It was quite a little discussion of that phase. Also, the question of the — either control of testing in the atmosphere and otherwise, was brought into the conversation, as I recall it.

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HOLT: Do you remember anything in particular that the President said at this lunch?

HICKENLOOPER: I can't recall particular details of the expressions of President Kennedy at that time, except my recollection that he was searching for possible solutions to the lessening of the dangers of such things as fallout; a solution to the testing problem, if possible; the matter of controls was an element of

discussion. In the main, as I recall it, laid out the problems and listened to the discussions around the table. He rather led the discussions in that way. But he did not, as I recall it, make any firm pronouncements or firm determinations of policy. Rather, he seemed to be soliciting views.

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HOLT: There was a further meeting in the White House on August 31, 1961 which went on for an hour with the President, the Vice President, you, Senators Fulbright, Symington, Mansfield, Dirksen. This was the day before it was announced that the Soviet Union had resumed nuclear testing after the moratorium. And I would assume that is what that meeting dealt with. Do you remember that?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, in the main, and I think that was the chief topic of conversation — what do we do now; what suggestions would be offered as to our conduct? The consensus of opinion, I believe it's safe to say, was that we should lose no time in beginning our own tests because the Soviets had evidently been planning for a considerable period of time to make this series of tests in spite of the fact that

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they had given indication that they were not doing so. And I think I called attention to the fact that I had on several occasions stated my firm belief in the past year or so that the Soviets were secretly preparing for these tests, and I rather objected to the fact that we had not made adequate preparation for immediate beginning of our tests if the Soviets should break their self-imposed moratorium.

HOLT: When you said it was the consensus of that meeting that we should resume testing or begin preparations to resume testing, did you have the impression that the President shared in that consensus?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I'm definitely of the opinion that he thought it was essential that we go on for a

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very important reason and that is that with this new series of tests by the Soviets which they, without doubt, had been preparing for for some time because they couldn't conduct a series of tests without substantial and extensive preparation, that they would learn a great deal more through physical tests than they already knew. We knew approximately what they knew. I mean, we had.... We felt that we knew the extent of their knowledge at that time, but we also knew the potential of what they might learn in some advanced tests, and I think we all felt that we could not let them go forward with their proven information as a result of these tests in this new series because we had many things that we had to test out, or should test out, for our own information in order to keep our superiority.



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HOLT: Thereafter, on March 2, 1962, there was another off-the-record meeting at the White House with you, Senators Fulbright and Dirksen. This was either the day, or the day before, President Kennedy announced the resumption of our own nuclear testing. Do you recall that meeting?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I recall being there at that time. We were told of the announcement that was to come, and so far as those who were present is concerned, I think there was universal agreement that it was high time that we did get on with the business of testing. I don't think there was any criticism of the fact that we had not tested before because everyone knew that it took a substantial period of preparation for these tests. But we agreed that the testing had to go on.

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HOLT: In connection with the negotiation of the test ban treaty, and of events leading up to it in the summer of 1963, did you have any particular contacts or conversations with the President about this matter?

HICKENLOOPER: I don't recall any specific conversations early on that score. It had been the policy of the United States for several years — three at least, or perhaps four — that we would welcome the joining in a ban on atmospheric testing of atomic weapons, because of the fallout apprehension of many people. I had more discussions, I think, with the Secretary of State and with others about the possibility of negotiations and with Mr. William Foster, the Disarmament chief, because that was a part of their interest. These discussions were quite nebulous although

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they went to the heart of the theory of the cessation of these tests. And, as I say, it was a continuation of a policy that had long since been established, and we had offered, as a matter of fact, on a number of occasions, to advance the cause of stopping these atmospheric tests under proper control and reliable conditions.

HOLT: There was a meeting at the White House on July 22, 1963 — you, Senators Mansfield, Dirksen and Morse. From the date involved, this could have been about the test ban treaty or it could also have been about the railroad strike, which was then threatening. Do you remember that one?

HICKENLOOPER: I don't have a clear.... I remember being over there two or three times along in that period of time, but this particular meeting I don't have clear in my mind. I do not recall a meeting on the railroad strike, so I think it was probably

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on the test ban treaty. If that is the subject of the meeting at that time, I recall that I seriously objected to the provision to be discussed in the treaty that would forbid us or anybody from even using atomic explosions for peaceful purposes such as Plowshare; that is, the digging of canals, or the deepening of harbors and things of that kind. I thought that was a rather dangerous and unwarranted handicap which would be put upon us. So far as the test ban treaty, with respect to atmospheric testing is concerned, I had supported that theory for several years.

HOLT: What did the President say about your objection on the peaceful uses aspect?

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HICKENLOOPER: Well, as I recall, the conversation and I think this is the time, he indicated that Governor Harriman or whoever was conducting the negotiations during that period...

HOLT: It was Harriman.

HICKENLOOPER: ... felt that it was essential to put that in in order to get the treaty. My own view at the time was that maybe we should've — backed up and taken another look at the treaty rather than put that provision in.

HOLT: Just to wind up this part on the test ban treaty, after the treaty was signed and during the time of Senate consideration of it, did you have any contacts with the President about it?

HICKENLOOPER: No, I don't recall that I did.

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HOLT: One other thing on atomic matters. On January 18, 1963, the President met with the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. At this time, Premier Fanfani of Italy was here and at about that time the President proposed that the nuclear missiles in Italy be replaced by Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean. Whether that was the subject of this meeting or not, I don't know. Do you recall it?

HICKENLOOPER: I recall, I believe, that there was something mentioned about this, and I was in favor of removing these missiles from Italy because I thought they were completely obsolete from a defensive standpoint and from a practical standpoint. In fact, I was not enthusiastic about placing them there in the first place, after I saw the plans for their placement and so on. I didn't

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think they were sufficiently protected. I thought they were vulnerable to attack and, while at the time they were placed there they undoubtedly served a defensive purpose and a protective purpose for a short period of time, yet that purpose had long since gone by. So I was in thorough approval of removing these missiles.

HOLT: Were there other topics discussed at this particular meeting?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I think yes. There were other topics discussed. I think the discussion, one phase of it at least, revolved around the political impact in Italy and other places, of the removal of the missiles when the people might not fully understand why the missiles were being removed. In other

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words, the question of whether or not they thought they were being left defenseless, and the possible political impact was discussed and, I think (again expressing what my impression is of the consensus of views) that it was a removal that was not only justified but probably in the interest of better defense and more efficient defense to remove them and that we would merely have to see that the people there, if possible, understood the desirability of this move and its benefits.

HOLT: Well, unless you think of something else in this general field, I think that covers that. I'd like to turn now to a series of White House meetings in regard to Laos in 1961 and 1962. The first one in this list I have here is on April 27, 1961 — an off-the-record meeting on Laos with you,

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Senators Fulbright, Dirksen, Humphrey, Russell, Bridges, Saltonstall, Wiley and a group from the House. This was at the time that negotiations were in progress for a cease-fire agreement in Laos. Do you remember this particular meeting or the general contacts which you had with the President about that particular situation?

HICKENLOOPER: Is that the meeting of the 7th of March or the 27th of April.

HOLT: The 27th of April.

HICKENLOOPER: Yes. I believe there were others there from the Defense Department as well as the State Department at this particular meeting. And, as I recall this particular meeting, either this one or the one before and I believe it was this one on the 27th of April, although it could have been the 7th of March, but I believe it was the 27th of

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HICKENLOOPER: Well, this particular meeting is not very clear in my mind. The impression I have in trying to recall it, is that there was another decision to be made as to how far we would be going in connection with our activities. The internal

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situation in Laos was tense and uncertain. The communists were apparently making inroads politically, and from a guerilla warfare standpoint and so on. And as far as I can recall, any statement that I had was that I did not believe in the success of coalition governments. Because I thought the history of them was that the communists eventually took over once they got their foot in the door.

HOLT: The question of a coalition government was very active at that time and it led up to the Geneva Conference on the neutralization of Laos and so on. That's correct.

HICKENLOOPER: But other than that I can't remember details further.

HOLT: Well, let's turn now to.... Or while we're on the subject of Laos, in the area of Southeast Asia, do you recall any contacts you had with the President about the situation in Vietnam at any time?

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HICKENLOOPER: Well, there were several meetings periodically with regard to the acute situation in Vietnam and what should be done about it. And in those meetings it was made quite clear that the policy was to advise and assist logistically, but not to participate in active military operations other than advisers for the training and development of Vietnamese forces in the South. Most of these meetings were meetings of information only as to what had been decided or what was going on — in the nature of reports, I'd say.

HOLT: You don't remember specifically anything about the President's part in any of these meetings?

HICKENLOOPER: No, his part in most of these meetings was in the nature of a presiding officer calling upon various government officials in their departments where

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they were expert to give reports, to give impressions, to give information.

HOLT: Right. Well, let's go now to Latin America, and I guess the first thing about Latin America and the Kennedy administration is the

Bay of Pigs invasion in April of 1961. Did you have any contact with the President on this subject either before or after or during... ?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I did. Not before the Bay of Pigs operation, but I did a few weeks after. And I think the record would show, that is on, let's see, about May, I believe it shows, May 23rd, when it was just a personal meeting with the two of us. And we were discussing the general Latin American situation somewhat, but he said he would like to talk about the Bay of Pigs, so it was a bright, sunny day, and he suggested that we get up and go out of the office

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out into the garden outside of his office, and we sat on a bench out there for twenty or thirty minutes, in the spring sunshine, and he talked with considerable frankness about the Bay of Pigs and some of the implications and influences that entered into it.

HOLT: What did he say?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I have never repeated this conversation because I respect the confidence of a president, any president, and I'm not just sure what liberty I should have in reciting unilaterally, I'm sure quite an unrecorded conversation which we had there.

HOLT: I don't want to seem to press you unduly, but you are the only surviving source for historians on this point, and...

HICKENLOOPER: Well, that's why I would like to be utterly fair and respectful of something of this kind. This

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I would consider to be highly confidential, and I would consider it as a, at least in any honorable way, as being a classified conversation, although there's no classified mark on it.

HOLT: Well, obviously, this whole tape can be classified as highly as you want it to be, either in the formal sense or any other restriction that you want to put on it, as, for example, the year 2000, or something....

HICKENLOOPER: Well, at that time, President Kennedy suggested that I had had some experience in Latin America and as a member of the subcommittee on Latin America, and that — he asked what my view was and I told him very frankly that I thought we were failing in leadership in Latin America; that I had had many comments, privately spoken, by Latin American leaders in several countries to

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the effect that we were not actually asserting leadership, that they would follow leadership if we realized that they did not want to lose face, they didn't want to appear in the eyes of the world as taking orders from the United States, and yet there were ways and means of letting them know that there were certain basic principles in the interest of freedom and liberty and good government and all those things — that we would insist upon, and if we did it quietly and forcefully, and yet indicated that we — that that was policy which must be followed, that they would come around to complying with those things. But that we hadn't done these things in the manner which was appealing to the Latins. I told him that, for instance, immediately following the election in 1960 I was in Central America. And at that time President Eisenhower had sent a small squadron — I think a small carrier, and a cruiser, and perhaps a couple of destroyers, down to patrol the sea along the Atlantic side of Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, and so on.

HOLT: Guatemala.

HICKENLOOPER: Guatemala, yes. Because the Castro people were very active then in sending small cadres of highly trained saboteurs and so on, trying to land them in those countries, and that these people were so jubilant over the fact that they thought the United States was finally showing its teeth — that the lion was finally roaring. We were going to see that these things didn't occur, and they were very happy about it. Then we had gone into the Bay of Pigs, and I said it was my firm conviction that, having gone into the Bay of Pigs operation,

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then it was our obligation — not only to save face but to save the whole situation — that we follow through and that we should have seen to its success. And that when we called off the air strikes around midnight of the night before the Bay of Pigs, that it was an emotional disaster to a great many people. I told him that I had been down in Brazil at the time of the Bay of Pigs, and that I heard the night before, through the rumor route, that the invasion was going on the next day. This was at a big reception there. And this word went around through that reception with great rapidity, and there was a great stimulus on the part of the Latin representatives from all the Latin American countries there; that finally the United States was taking this thing in hand; that

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something was being done. And then when the strikes were called off and the Bay of Pigs failed, there was a great disappointment and, well, in some ways a disillusionment. They felt that the United States had failed; that we could be accused of being a so-called “paper tiger” whose growl was much worse than any other action and there was no bite in our plans and that I felt very keenly that we had to assert more vigorous and positive and successful leadership in these matters. Well, he then went ahead and said that so far as the Bay of Pigs was concerned, that he had been greatly influenced by Adlai Stevenson in calling off this last strike — air strike — against the few remaining military planes of the Castro regime, and that he had been in conversation

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with Ambassador Stevenson, who was then Ambassador to the United Nations, and who said that it would put him in a very embarrassing position there with other Latin nations and other nations of the world; that he had made some statements before the United Nations on information that apparently — that is, without adequate information — and the President said that a lot of people would be killed and at the last minute he took the responsibility for calling it off. I pointed out something which everybody knew very well — that a lot of people were killed anyway. And that when a military adventure was started, it was the rule that deaths did follow. I mean, you don't have one unless the sacrifices are willing to be made. He went on then

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and, he was thinking about this thing — it was very much on his mind — the responsibility for the failure of the Bay of Pigs, and our position and the fact that we probably had lost face, and we hadn't carried it through. He went on and said, well, it may have been a very bad mistake not to follow through once we started. But, he said, the die has been cast; the decision was made and while it might have been wrong, nevertheless that was the decision that was made and we are in it and what do we do from now on? And I said, well — I didn't consider that he was asking me to tell him what to do there except just in discussion. And I said, "Well, I think that we've got to retrieve our position of leadership here through a vigorous development of policy which can be understood, and that is

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something that will have to be decided on administrative levels. But I do think it's important that we, in every way, retrieve that leadership without putting ourselves in a position of being accused of dictatorial policies or anything of that sort, but there are many ways in which it can be done." But the most important thing, in my mind, was that the United States as the leader — economically, militarily, and every other way — should be asserting strength, rather than compromise, and we shouldn't march up to a barrier and then refuse to jump. That was the general tenor of the conversation.

HOLT: That's quite a valuable contribution to history, because some of these things have been alleged and denied and I don't know that they've ever been

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confirmed.

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I know they have been denied, and, as I say, I hesitate a great deal to unilaterally recite a conversation when the other party of the conversation can't necessarily give his version of it, and I have tried to be moderate in my statement of it here.



HOLT: Did the tractor deal come up at all? This was about the time, I think, Castro first proposed that.

HICKENLOOPER: Oh, yes. Yes, there was a . . . The question of tractors and the purchase of the freedom of these Bay of Pigs people was a part of this rather extensive conversation. And I said — just gave him my view — that I would have no part of it because it was blackmail and that the fortunes of war always had to be taken into consideration in a matter of this kind, and

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that we were simply being blackmailed by a sort of banditry, and that I didn't want any part of it and I didn't think we should do it. And I opposed it. Now at a later date he sent a man to see me in my home town of Cedar Rapids — I forget this particular date, but we had a — he came out to see me specifically on this eventual second proposal which was carried through — about a good many millions of dollars worth of medicines, this, that and the other thing. And I again told that man that my position, so far as I was personally concerned, was still definitely against that because I considered it to be a demand for tribute, and a blackmail operation which I didn't think that we could do and preserve the kind of firmness of position which other nations would

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expect us to do.

HOLT: Well, the next big event in the developing Latin American situation that I think you were concerned with was the Punta del Este Conference in January or early February of 1962. On January 20, you and Senator Fulbright saw the President off-the-record for almost an hour. Was Punta del Este by any chance the subject of that?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes, it was. And the President emphasized at that time to us the importance of securing a document of unity signed by as many as possible, if not all, of the Latin American countries other than Cuba, and that the specific terms of constricting against Cuba were not as important as getting a substantial number of signatories on the document itself to show unity. I had to disagree with that because I felt,

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and I so said, that I thought the contents of the document itself was of vital importance — that a document that didn't have a great deal of meaning but merely had unity of signature, would be somewhat of an empty gesture; that I had thought that the Conference at Punta del Este should be vigorously pointed toward a strong, implementing document, agreed to by the representatives of the various Latin American states. Well, he didn't disagree with that as a matter of desirability, but he kept emphasizing the desirability of a great number of names on the document — the greatest possible unity. And again I expressed myself as feeling that merely unity of signature

wouldn't accomplish very in my judgement, and it wouldn't be very meaningful to other countries

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of the world or Latin America, and that if we could even get just a bare, necessary two-thirds, I believe it was, of the countries to sign it, if it had some meaningful provisions in it and forceful provisions in it, that would far overshadow the acquisition of four or five other signatures on the document. And we were going down to — two or three of us were going to accompany Secretary Rusk down to Punta del Este — and we had a general discussion but, just merely expressed views. And the interview eventually ended on that note of mutual exchange of views and attitudes.

HOLT: In the course of this exchange, did you get at all into the question of the identity of the signatures that went on the document from the point of view of the importance of the countries involved? For

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example, at that time the holdouts happened to be some of the larger countries — Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, etc. Did the President raise this point, or did you?

HICKENLOOPER: I don't recall at the moment who raised it, but the matter was discussed that the probabilities were that Argentina might hold out; that Chile was doubtful, that Mexico had been quite consistent in holding out on such things of this kind; that Brazil was probably definitely a holdout because Brazil had already expressed opposition to such a declaration at that time. That is, if it was meaningful at all. And we were not sure about Bolivia and Ecuador.

HOLT: Did you discuss the Punta del Este Conference with the President after it had been held?

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HICKENLOOPER: Yes, I discussed it with him very shortly — I think there were two or three of us, two of us, I believe — spoke to him the evening we got back from Punta del Este at the White House. We came back in a helicopter from Andrews Air Force Base, landed on the White House grounds, and I recall telling the President at that time that I was very much stimulated by the vigorous, persistent and forceful job which Secretary Rusk had done at Punta del Este. And that in view of the preliminary circumstances, or the prior circumstances, or the circumstances that faced us when we got to Punta del Este, that I thought he had overcome some of these roadblocks with great patience, great understanding, and yet with great force and determination

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and that, in the main, it had been a successful conference. I believe I said, and I can't be quite sure of this, but I believe I said at that time, or perhaps a little later, that I thought we'd got about three-quarters of what we should have had out of Punta del Este, but that three-quarters was quite strong and that in view of the circumstances that faced us when we first arrived there, we got a very substantial and beneficial result out of the meeting.

HOLT: What was the President's reaction to that?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, he expressed, I can't recall the exact words, but he expressed satisfaction with the results of Punta del Este, thought they were very good; as I recall it he expressed regret that some of the

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countries that had not voted for the agreement — he expressed regrets that they had not voted for it; that they couldn't see their way clear. And I'm not sure whether it was at this meeting or another that I expressed some irritation at what I considered to be the, well, the basic failure of Argentina, for instance, to do what we understood they had agreed to do, and of Bolivia, whose representative had agreed to sign the document, to my own personal knowledge, in the afternoon, and then in the evening voted against it. And certain things of that kind. But, generally speaking, the agreement — I think he was pleased with the results.

HOLT: Well, the next big thing, unless you think of something that intervened, would be the Cuban missile crisis of the fall of 1962, and the events

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leading up to it. On September 4, there was a meeting at the White House — you, Senators Fulbright, Dirksen and Mansfield — concerning Cuba and also concerning Berlin and the U-2. This went on for an hour. What do you remember about that?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, at that time I think the question of the continuance of U-2 reconnaissance flights was discussed. And again...

HOLT: As I recall, at that time the U-2 reconnaissance flights over Cuba were not a matter of public knowledge.

HICKENLOOPER: They were not a matter of public knowledge, but we were told that they were going on — that these reconnaissance flights were going on. And I believe that we were told at that particular meeting that low level flights were also going on at a very low level. Not with as great frequency, perhaps, as

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some of the others, but we were having low level flights as well as high level flights of the U-2. I recall no disagreement with the program as we were told about it at that time. In fact, it is my recollection that everyone there thought that we must have information because of the allegations about the buildups in Cuba and all those things. And I think we raised the question that there were many reports coming in from Cuba that differed because they were much more ominous than the reports which we were getting from official circles, and that we would like very much to know what kind of reports we could rely on — what the truth might be about the situation. And, as I recall it, the President stated that he thought that we were getting the cold facts insofar as they could be verified. That there was a lot of speculation which could not be verified at the moment

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and that they didn't propose to, or didn't desire to, report things which were only rumor as fact, and they would report matters of fact where they thought they had hard and fully satisfactory proof.

HOLT: The next thing, unless there were developments during the balance of September and early October, the next thing, of course, would be the missile crisis which began on October 22nd with the President's speech on television that evening. Prior to his speech, he met with a substantial number of members of Congress, including you. What can you tell us about that meeting?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I was in my home town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa at that time, and that morning about — oh, I would say somewhere around 8:30, I received a telephone

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call from the White House saying that it was most important if I could come to Washington immediately; that there was a matter of vital importance that the President had to present to several members that he was asking to come in from various places in the United States. And I said, well, of course, if that was the case I'd be ready any time. And they said, well, could I be ready, I think, in an hour and a half, because they were having a plane stop in Cedar Rapids for me. And I said, well, of course I would. And I was in the midst of the last end of a political campaign in my home at that time, but I did meet the plane — it was a small jet — the plane had picked up Congressman Halleck of Indiana who had been on a few days vacation, I think, hunting or something in South Dakota. It had picked up Senator Humphrey in Minneapolis and stopped in Cedar Rapids and then the three of us came on to Washington. We got in

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here — got to Washington — sometime after noon Washington time. And we met with the President, I believe around five o'clock — four-thirty or five — that afternoon. At that time, he told us what the intelligence situation was in Cuba; about the apparent installation and completion of missile bases which would take missiles with a range of some, perhaps two

thousand — 2500 miles — that there was indication that some missiles were on station at that time; that all of the bases had not been filled with missiles but some were on there and they were apparently rapidly placing missiles on station, pointed, or aimed, at the United States, and various spots in the United States; that it was considered to be vital and that time was of the essence and that perhaps only a few more days

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and they would be ready to mount atomic warheads on these missiles and they could fire them — pull the trigger at a moment's notice. He said this information had been gathered very carefully; that it had become hardened information within the last few days prior to this meeting, and he read us the major portion of the speech which he proposed to make to the nation and the world that night, I believe, at about 7 o'clock Washington time. There was a considerable amount of comment, discussion and questions. It was a rather large crowd — there must have been fifteen or twenty there. And one of the things about the meeting was, it was not a meeting to ask opinion. It was solely devoted to telling what had already been decided, and when it came to the question of the

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President's message that night, we were told that the message had already been sent to the various foreign governments of the world. So the message had already gone out on the wires and it would be delivered over television and radio that night. There was no dissent on the part of anybody that I know of, or that I can — well I'm quite sure I don't recall any dissent, and I'm sure there was none. On the contrary, there was agreement that the United States had to show its colors; that it had to show its determination that we would eliminate this situation down there. And the President did make his speech that night. Most of us, at his suggestion, stayed in Washington the rest of the week awaiting developments. And thereafter the so-called agreements with Russia following

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the blockade which was announced to be set up, the various alleged agreements to get the missiles out and to clear out the Russian forces, and permit inspection of the military buildup, and so on, those matters developed later — a few days later.

HOLT: There was a further meeting at the White House of approximately the same group two days later, on October 25, which I believe was a Wednesday. Do you recall anything about that one?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, that was in effect a continuance of the first meeting in order to simply review the events which were coming to pass. The question then was very acute as to whether or not the Russians would confront and challenge the blockade; whether they would get their missiles out, and so on. This

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second meeting, we had a progress report as to what was happening, and I believe at that time we had reports that certain vessels of the Russians that were on the high seas had been rerouted away from the Cuban destination to other ports; that some vessels were proceeding on to the blockade and I'm not so sure at that meeting whether any had yet confronted the blockade, but later ships with innocent cargoes did confront the blockade and gave no resistance to any search or any inquiry and so on. And then a short time later the dismantling of the so-called missiles. And I say so-called because there was no proof that they actually were missiles. I don't have any doubt but what they were missile vehicles, but then, I mean, they had all the appearance — everything had the appearance of

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a missile. But even up until this time I have no proof that there were ever any atomic warheads in Cuba.

HOLT: Well, that was the question. I think there was no question about missiles, but no one knew whether they had nuclear warheads in them or not.

HICKENLOOPER: Well it was a situation where the vehicles apparently were there and could carry them, and it was a thing that we couldn't take a chance on, in our own interests. And everybody applauded the action that was taken. There was criticism, of course, later that we didn't follow through and insist on inspection and so on.

HOLT: Did you ever discuss this with the President after the fact, in a kind of reminiscence or post mortem, or...

HICKENLOOPER: I don't recall that I ever discussed it with him after that.

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HOLT: Well, the next major thing here is in March of 1963 when you went with the President to San Jose, Costa Rica for a meeting with the presidents of the other Central American countries. What can you say about your contacts with the President on that trip?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, the contacts were — of all of us — or several of us at least — were quite intimate. We rode in the President's private sitting room compartment of his plane going down and coming back. It was quite informal. A wide range of things came up for discussion on a completely informal and unpatterned basis. We discussed the economy. We discussed the action of certain foreign operations. I forget just what they were; they weren't too important. And the President took a

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substantial rest on the way down. I mean he went into his private bedroom; took a rest for a while, came back out and then we went into San Jose. A tremendous crowd greeted the President there. They had a ceremony at the airport. He made a speech. He was enthusiastically received, and he seemed to be very popular with the people there. We had the series of meetings with the presidents of the various Central American republics, and he made a speech at the university which had, oh I expect there were perhaps ten thousand there listening to it, perhaps more. But somewhere in that neighborhood. And it was enthusiastically received.

HOLT: Any particular anecdotes or statements of the President — I don't mean any speeches or things

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that are on the public record, but in private meetings that you recall from this trip?

HICKENLOOPER: No, because, outside of the visits which were, well, in a way quite casual conversation going to Costa Rica and coming back, we didn't see the President very much. He was busy with meetings. We saw him at each meeting, yes. But so far as any personal discussions were concerned, we simply didn't have any.

HOLT: On the way back from the meeting, or thereafter, did he indicate his reaction to it? Was he satisfied, or unsatisfied, or...

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I didn't... I can only give you an impression because I can't say that he said so in so many words, but I got the impression that he felt that perhaps these countries weren't as enthusiastic in doing

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lot of things for themselves as he would like to see them do; that there was some feeling of more support from the United States and so on. He was not critical, I mean, he was not caustically critical about it. He was pleased, I am sure, by the reception he got. He was very pleased by the reception at the university, and I think all in all he felt that something on the plus side and a little closer understanding between countries and the leaders of those countries had been accomplished by this meeting down there. But, so far as any anecdotes are concerned, I don't recall any.

HOLT: I've heard it said — this is in the category of rumor or unconfirmed report, I suppose — that some of the Central Americans who attended this conference were disappointed that the United States did not

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take a firmer position with respect to Cuba and counter-subversive measures. Can you confirm or deny, or shed any light on this?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, yes. I'm getting a little away from any immediate discussion with the President — President Kennedy now on this — and I get into the field of certain expressions by some Latin American people on the outside. I mean, outside of any formal discussions, and definitely there was disappointment on the part of several. They felt that we were not vigorous enough, or strong enough, in our actions against Cuba in order to curtail and possibly eliminate the Castro threat. And they felt that the meeting was a failure to that extent, according to their own statements. They felt that the meeting was successful in better acquaintance and better

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cordial relations of that sort, but the meat of the meeting, they felt, had been somewhat missed.

HOLT: You said you were getting away from anything having to do with personal contacts with the President. I take it from that that you did not discuss this with the President?

HICKENLOOPER: No. No, I did not.

HOLT: One other matter which was active, more or less continuously through his Administration, was the question of Berlin. He went to Europe in May of 1961 — May or early June — to Paris, and then he went on to Vienna to meet with Khrushchev and thereafter the Berlin situation began to become more acute, reaching a crisis stage, I suppose, in July. In this period — the period of his meeting with Khrushchev and the developments affecting Berlin — or thereafter, did you have any contacts or

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conversations with him on this general subject?

HICKENLOOPER: I recall one conversation in which this came up as a collateral matter. And the conversation was quite general except on the Berlin situation I expressed disappointment that we had not acted with more firmness in the Berlin situation at that time. I said I realized there were factors involved, of course, always, but that the wall and various other connotations of the wall could be with us for a long time to our detriment and discomfiture. But that was a sort of a collateral aside.

HOLT: Did he ever talk to you about his meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna?



HICKENLOOPER: Yes. At one of these meetings he gave us a general, and rather extensive, summarization, taken from notes and the record — inasmuch as the record could be made, and it was a rather extensive record. He

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read excerpts from it going through to give us a picture.

HOLT: Was this all taken from the record so that it's available?

HICKENLOOPER: No, I believe the record is still classified probably.

HOLT: Still classified but it's in writing so that someday it will be available.

HICKENLOOPER: Oh, this record — this was all the entire meeting with the exception of an occasional question which might be interposed by somebody. The entire meeting was a sort of summarized report, and as I recall it, it lasted for probably an hour, and a sort of summarized report in which he gave a running account of this, interspersed by rather

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substantial quotations from the record periodically from time to time. And when the meeting was over we thanked him for the information and the meeting was over.

HOLT: Well, if it's in writing then we don't need to rehash it here. That's really what I was getting at.

HICKENLOOPER: It was in writing, and it will eventually be available at the proper time, I suppose.

HOLT: Just a couple of other things — you mentioned you had an election campaign in 1962. Did you ever have any conversations or exchange any remarks of anything of that sort with the President about your reelection campaign?

HICKENLOOPER: Yes.

HOLT: Do you want to say what they were?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, at the time of the October meeting which was rather close to the election, and of course,

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Congress hadn't adjourned until about the first of October that year, and I'd had very little time to campaign — just about three weeks out in my home state — and coming down for the Cuban situation, which I didn't regret coming to and I thought it was part of my job — my business to come — I said rather facetiously to him, "Well, you're... Mr. President, you're certainly interfering with my election campaign out there." I said, "You didn't do this on purpose did you?" It was a very facetious remark and he understood it so. And he laughed and took hold of my arm and said, "Well," he said, "I tell you. If all Democrats were as assured of being elected as you are out in Iowa," he said, "we wouldn't have any worry." He said, "You haven't got any trouble out there. I know what I'm talking about." He said, "You're in."

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And I said, "Well, I never count the election won until they count the votes." But that was the extent of the remarks.

HOLT: What about your contacts with him with respect to the foreign aid program?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, we have had over the... did have over the three-year period some contacts each time the foreign aid program came up. There would be questions about the extent of this appropriation or that, and I think we were over there once or twice during each session — I mean during each period of consideration of the foreign aid authorization bill. And he, of course, was interested in not curtailing the appropriations and I was interested in curtailing some that he didn't like to see curtailed on occasions. And we talked them

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over, and...

HOLT: Do you remember any specific issues that came up in this, or... ?

HICKENLOOPER: No, because I was in general support of the theory of foreign aid and the program. I know we discussed, for instance, the discretionary fund of the President and which I have always supported for the President. I've usually supported a bigger discretionary fund that the Congress had been willing to give them sometimes. But I think it gives the President more leeway, and...

HOLT: How were his Congressional relations in general as you saw them? What — how did he deal with Congress?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, I think his Congressional relations from the standpoint of contacts with the Congress were

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quite good. He never attempted — that is, to my knowledge, at least, he never attempted to exert undue pressure, or what I would call undue pressure, or extraordinary pressure, on a point. He preferred to argue the point, to discuss the merits, to listen to the demerits, to present his views, to listen to opposition with great courtesy and with great friendliness. And to that extent, there was no resentment about his discussion that I could see with members of Congress. That is, they didn't feel that he was trying to coerce them unduly into doing something. I would say that they were very good and on a very high order.

HOLT: One last question; you attended a good many more or less formal social occasions at the White House —

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luncheons or State dinners for visiting heads of state or other dignitaries. What were they like?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, they were very much the same as the so-called State dinners or State luncheons have been over the last twenty years since I've been here. There is a sort of pattern to them. President Kennedy was a very clever and engaging speaker, and his remarks at the end of the dinner or of the luncheon were appropriate, considerate, and quite charming. The entertainment, I'll have to confess that I very seldom stayed for entertainment in the evening because by the time the dinners were over in the evening it was along about ten-thirty and if the entertainment went on until twelve or twelve-thirty or one o'clock in the morning — would be just a little

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late. So quite often, on quite a number of occasions I have asked him to be excused after dinner and he always very graciously said, "Of course."

HOLT: Any particular anecdotes from any of these?

HICKENLOOPER: No, I don't recall any at the moment.

HOLT: How was the food?

HICKENLOOPER: Well, if you want me to be utterly frank...

HOLT: Yes, sir.

HICKENLOOPER: With all the advertising of the continental chefs and everything else, I was not overly impressed with the food at the White House. I will have to say, without starting any rivalries, that I've considered in the last several years the food that the State Department puts out in the kitchen is far superior than that put out in the White House. The food is all right, but I mean the tastiness,

and the preparation, and so on. No, the food is good at the White House, but then I mean in many cases, I didn't

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think it measured up to the advance billing.

HOLT: I guess this does it unless you think of something else.

HICKENLOOPER: I don't think of anything else.

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