

Barbara J. Coleman Oral History Interview—RFK #2, 1/9/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Coleman was a journalist, White House press aide (1961-1962), member of Robert Kennedy's (RFK) Senate staff, and a presidential campaign aide (1968). In this interview she discusses RFK's senate staff and their responsibilities, preparing for RFK's presidential run, and senators using their own senate staff as part of their campaign staff, among other issues.

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Barbara Coleman
Barbara Coleman

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Second of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Barbara J. Coleman

January 9, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Ann Campbell

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

CAMPBELL: Let's talk a little bit about your staff in the Senate. I think there was an early bit of criticism about the size of the staff. How did that hit your office?

COLEMAN: Well, the first thing was that we were very slow in staffing the office. To start with, it was not at all as well organized as I'm sure a lot of people thought it was or planned in terms of having a huge staff. When I came on, which was about a week or so after the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] actually took his seat, they still did not have a complete staff. The main professional people were on. We were very short on secretarial help. As a matter of fact, I spent the first few months helping Joe [Joseph F. Dolan] recruit people. So we were way behind and we bought ourselves the kinds of problems we had throughout the Senator's career in the Senate in terms of office administration because we never really were.... We should have been ahead of ourselves; we should have been.

The mail that had piled up in the interim period between election and taking office should have been handled, of course, because we always got mail at the rate of at least seven to eight hundred—a slow day would be seven to eight hundred letters a day, and it would go up way past a thousand whenever the Senator made a major speech, as Vietnam, for instance. The Vietnam mail always ran heavy. But at any rate, this was a very slow starting operation.

Along about the late summer or early fall, I believe it was of '65, a column was published by a man named Taylor [Edmond Taylor]. I'm sure I'm going to confuse him with the historian named J.P. Taylor or something like that. Edmond Taylor. No, it is Edmond Taylor in this story. Well, anyway, this man wrote a column, which I think was syndicated by Scripps-Howard [Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance]. At least, I have a feeling I saw it

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here in the *Washington Daily News*, which said that we had eighty employees and it was the largest staff on the Hill [Capitol Hill]. We probably had the largest staff on the Hill; whether we actually had eighty employees at the time is questionable unless it was counting in—and it may have been since it was around the summertime—both part-time college students, of which we always had some, and counting in this college group that we had for the summer. Considering our problems of mail and the rest, we started a very ambitious program which the Senator apparently wanted and Joe Dolan was very anxious to work on, which was the college intern program.

We had fifteen college interns the first summer when we didn't have room in the office for our regular personnel. It was a standing joke that somebody had to go on vacation to make room for the fifteen interns. And the idea—which, you know, created absolute chaos on top of the chaos we already had—was that they would spend two weeks with one person in the office and then move on to another assignment. Well, that meant that they really weren't a heck of a lot of help to you because you couldn't very well get them into whatever it was you were doing in two weeks' time. Although at the time I used two girls we had, fairly successfully, in helping me with one early venture we tried, which was a kind of rundown of legislation for public officials in the state.

Anyway, if you counted in those fifteen, plus at least an equal number of part-timers who worked different shifts and different hours, and our New York office and our Syracuse office, we may have had close to eighty. But it, of course, didn't really represent the full-time staff that was actually devoting time, regularly, to the legislative problems although we probably still had a considerable amount of staff.

It also should be pointed out that we were not all paid by the Senate. The Senate payroll, the Senate disbursing office, and the Senate clerk—whoever it is who publishes the report every three months—gives you an indication of the size of the staff, and they list the payroll. But it's a very strange system they have which kind of hides what the actual salaries are because it bases it on a salary scale of years ago. It's called a base salary, and then it doesn't take account of the pay raises that have been passed in subsequent years. So, if you understand and know what the pay raises have been, you can figure it out, but it's very difficult. You appear in that book as making two thousand dollars a year.

But at any rate, the salary scale was low in the office. For the girls, the secretaries and receptionists, it was low. I don't know. Actually, I think the legislative assistants were making somewhere between twelve and fifteen thousand when they started. They may have only been making twelve thousand when they started, which was low, too. Joe Dolan, because he had a high-level position at the Justice Department, was making, I think, twenty-two or twenty-four thousand, whatever the highest was you could pay, probably. But even for him, of course, that was probably a cut. On the other hand, the way the

Senator made up for the payroll problems was by paying out of his own pocket. So some people were paid out of the New York

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office and the family out of ...

CAMPBELL: Out of the Foundation [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation]?

COLEMAN: ... Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith] office. And it was a question of, really, some people didn't want to. Like when Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] came on, he didn't want to because he had some government service time in, and he wanted the retirement. There were also ways of working that. He'd be paid partially out of the Senate office and partially out of the family office to supplement the salary. I don't know; I suppose Joe would be the only one who ever did know what the total amount was that the Senator spent out of his own pocket, but it had to be high because he had on some professionals like Joe and later Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] or Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] and Wes Barthelmes [A. Wesley Barthelmes, Jr.] when they were the press secretaries. People who were making over twenty thousand had to be paid at least that.

CAMPBELL: Let me ask you. With your large professional staff, what sort of access did you people enjoy to the Senator?

COLEMAN: Almost everybody on the professional staff had very good access to the Senator. It was a problem whenever he was in town because he was as often in New York City. I think he frankly preferred to work in the New York City office because he had greater freedom to see the people he wanted to see and do the kinds of things he wanted to do, all of the outside interests, the kinds of things he was interested in developing in New York City like the Bedford-Stuyvesant project. Plus, I seem to remember—I don't think I'm just saying this from the top of my head, but it's based on the terms of the schedules that were made up of his calendar for the day—that he was seeing political people, New York political people and outside political people. He could do a lot of that in New York and have a great deal more freedom with his day and his time than he could in the Senate. He was very restless in the Senate. If there wasn't major legislation going on, he'd almost always be up in New York City.

So, it was a question of the time of the year. In the beginning of the year when legislative activity was very slow, he'd want to plan trips to upstate New York; and we did that almost every year that I can remember. He might do that during the year, as well, if there was a break; but he particularly wanted them arranged in January and February, which happens to be a very bad time to travel in New York State although I can only remember one occasion when we couldn't go to Rochester, I believe, because of bad weather conditions. He would try to make it.

He also insisted—and it was Jerry Bruno's method of operating, anyway, as if it were a presidential campaign swing—that you pack as much into the day as possible. So,

inevitably, we would be two hours behind schedule by the middle of the day. But he wanted to go up to New York into the state itself on those trips. The problem was always what were we going to do with him upstate New York. He'd have some ideas, the things he wanted to do himself;

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and other times he'd want to go, partially, to cover areas he hadn't covered before.

He was interested in talking about federal programs. He went and made a few swings to the Appalachian area, where he had something very concrete to talk about in terms of the Appalachian program. He was prepared to answer questions about federal programs that people wanted to ask him although that got complicated.

We got into a couple of rural situations where I don't think there was any question he didn't know very much. He didn't have very much background in the rural problems. He would like to talk about going to the cities upstate like Rochester and Buffalo and Syracuse and talk about urban problems, which he always could—sponsored some symposiums and conferences. In Rochester he spent one whole day with plans for education one time, talked about education. They were doing some interesting things in Rochester so it's possible always to find a number of people to help us plan the trips.

One of the people Jerry Bruno used a lot in upstate New York to help him on ideas for the different trips was Alan Campbell [Alan K. Campbell] of Syracuse. And then there were a number of other people in education.

And then he would mix in politics at the same time, too. Sometimes there would be a session just with certain counties, whatever area he was in. He'd finish up the day with a dinner or cocktail hour with the county chairmen from ten counties, something of that nature. And there would always be a trip to the publisher's office, trip to the newspaper in the town. I'll never forget some of the towns; they had never seen the Senator. He would go into very small places very often; it was not a question of just Buffalo and Syracuse.

CAMPBELL: You said before that you got pretty heavily involved in upstate New York press matters. Why you? Why not the press officer? Was there just not enough time in his day?

COLEMAN: And there was always that schizophrenic nature of our office that the Senator was a national figure, so we were a national political center in a way, and then we were a state office as well. The press secretary could almost never get out from under the national reporters who wanted to cover the Senator and wanted to know what he was doing. The Senator was never ever out of national politics, he was never out of national issues, whether it was poverty programs or educational problems or Vietnam. And it wasn't Vietnam in '65. In '65 there was so much attention on him because it was his first year as a senator. How was he going to respond and that kind of thing. Thereafter, it was his Vietnam criticisms a great deal. There was never a time when there wasn't an issue of one kind or another.

So many of them were family problems. The book, the publishing of *The Death of a President*, and the family fight over trying to get Manchester [William Manchester]

or the publishers to exclude certain parts of that book became a national news story. And that kind of thing could go on forever. The interviews, requests for interviews, the newspaper people and magazine people who wanted to see him all the time. As a matter of fact, I don't think there's any question the New York reporters, themselves, apart from—I don't mean the *New York Times* because they have an obviously national interest—like Alan Emory [Alan S. Emory], who's sort of the dean of New York State reporters, had some complaints from time to time about not getting enough information on New York State matters.

Now, I don't think Alan complained that he didn't have access to the Senator. Probably, the newspapermen had better access to the Senator than any other group of people that I can think of. He was almost always granting interviews and seeing people. He knew a lot of them anyway, and if he ran into them, if he saw them in the office when they were just talking to Frank, he'd say, "Come on into my office and let's talk." So they had no problem seeing him. And, of course, whoever was the press secretary just had to deal with that kind of thing.

So there was time. The press secretary's girl dealt with the kinds of things we would have to do like grants, what the senators and Congress would do. You announce the grants. That was a big problem. It took us probably a year, year and a half, to get that working in such a way that we were getting the kind of publicity out of them that we wanted to. Jerry in upstate New York was very concerned about that because he wasn't seeing us get enough attention in the upstate papers, particularly on grants that really had an impact.

One of the biggest problems we had, for instance, was on the Appalachian program. Now, I always said—to take a very cynical view of this whole grant announcing process—the senator or the congressman in almost 99 percent of the time has no real impact in getting the grant. It's just an automatic thing. There are a number of cases in which you do have some connection with the grant, and it seemed to be perfectly valid for the senator or the congressman to take credit at those times.

Appalachia was one of those situations in which I consider we always had a connection because the Senator was responsible for the program being in existence in New York at all. But we had an endless fight with Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] over those grants because the Governor's man sits on the commission [Appalachian Regional Commission]. Each state is represented on the commission. So as soon as the grants are approved.... The grants are approved by the commission or the states, in effect. So therefore, Ron Peterson [Ronald B. Peterson], the Governor's man, would go back, and the next day Rockefeller's announcing the grant, too. Jerry would go through the ceiling, and we would start all over again. Well, we had good friends at the Appalachian commission who were very sympathetic for the Senator's concerns there. They used to try, but he didn't really need that. I mean, we had enough.

CAMPBELL: Did the Senator ever get, to your knowledge, personally concerned over

something like that? Did he get...

COLEMAN: He got personally concerned over Rockefeller a number of times that I saw. One of them was the debate over the mental hospitals in the state.

That was an early issue. It was on one of the fact-finding trips that the Senator first saw the conditions; Rome, New York, was one place. I've forgotten some other places. I think maybe out on Long Island. They were deplorable. He said the state was heavily responsible. The Governor reacted, of course, maintaining that that wasn't the problem; it was not really the state's responsibility. And I think the Governor reacted very much like he reacted politically, extremely sensitive to the charges, which were difficult charges—no question about that. But they were valid; the Senator had some valid points in that. It may have been a little bit overstated, if one can be perfectly objective about it so that Rockefeller had some things on his side, too. It wasn't the kind of issue you really wanted to make a political argument out of, but it really became one. And the Senator was firmly convinced that he was right in this particular issue, as opposed to Rockefeller.

I don't think he really was aware in that sense of the Appalachian situation, that level of thing, except that he was concerned, in terms of general overall concern, about how he was being thought of in upstate New York. He was very concerned about that. He often asked me. He reacted well when I had things to show him to show that we were trying. We worked on it all the time; all the time I was on the staff we made an effort, a very strong effort, to get him involved in upstate New York matters and to have him take positions on things that were of concern to upstate New York. He was very aware of it; it wasn't that it was done totally apart from him.

I was preparing some statements for him on water and sewer grants. I started to say food stamps; we did that too. He would testify before committees, particularly if you drew it to his attention. He wanted to do it. Sometimes a congressman drew it to his attention as in the case of, you know, a congressman wanting a post office as Hanley [James M. Hanley] did for Syracuse. It had to be passed on by the Senate Post Office Committee [Senate Post Office and Civil Service Committee]. The Congressman would ask him, "Please testify," and he would. But there were a number of ways these kinds of things came to his attention, some from us.

He testified on getting the food stamp program extended to more counties in New York State. What he testified on was extending the food stamp program. Then he pointed out how, if it were extended, it could be added to additional counties in the state. Then one time we were doing some testimonies for him on the water and sewer program. He was going to testify on a bill to expand the program, and he said, "Give me more local examples. I want to really talk about New York State in connection with this problem. I want to know where they're having problems with it."

The sewer and water problem was one that he was very aware of, as urban

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renewal, because we had a number of mayors come in from time to time, and he'd see them. They, uniformly, had the same problems. He used to call me his "water and sewer expert" because if there was any problem they had in upstate New York it was almost

always the sewer grant. He wrote me a little note one time saying, “I tell everybody around town that”—something about “you really don’t know anything about water and sewers and....” I’ve forgotten how. He made a joke out of it, endlessly. Of course, that was...

CAMPBELL: Your big thing.

COLEMAN: Yeah. Big thing.

CAMPBELL: Could you give us your view of how duties were divided in your office, for instance, between Dolan and Angie Novello [Angela M. Novello]? Was there a clear delineation there?

COLEMAN: There was a lot of friction there all the time. But there was a lot of friction in a subtle sort of way in the office because the lines were never carefully drawn. Then the Senator preferred it that way; I think it was obvious that he did. At least, he never.... There were certain things you were responsible for doing or reporting to him on; and then he took it for granted that you were doing them, like hunger problems with Peter [Peter B. Edelman], or Vietnam, writing speeches, almost always Vietnam, and then certainly other times on almost anything else for Adam [Adam Walinsky]. Joe handled political things in New York City, New York State, any number of related political problems like post office appointments, that sort of thing, and the whole office was in any number of other things. There were certain broad categories of what people did.

The Senator never had any problem in going outside of you, going apart from you, and asking somebody else to do something that was really something he should have asked you to do. I don’t know whether he just—it could be that he wanted the best that he could get. In other words, he’d just as soon see what three people came up with. Partially, that was it. Sometimes he did that if he didn’t trust you. I mean, there were people, I think, he did not have as complete confidence in as others, and he’d get advice from other people. But mostly it was simply because there were any number of people he could draw on. It never occurred to him that he should worry about what the line organization was and, you know, whose responsibility it was.

Now, as far as Angie and Joe were concerned, Angie was very solicitous of the Senator’s time, privacy, and the rest of it. She was the dragon at the door for everybody in the office. They would really, when the Senator was in town, literally have to line up in front of the door to cajole her sometimes; and sometimes they just went directly in. It wasn’t that she could keep anybody out. There were many times when she could, you know, try and direct traffic if she would. But clearly she wanted to know what he was supposed to—she wanted control of his calendar. Sometimes, she just did not want to put in people, times, and things that other members of the staff wanted. It was possible for them to always get in, one way or the other, even if they

were going to have some problem with her about it. But, whether they could get somebody else in, they might have more of a problem with her.

It's not unusual in offices where a secretary has been with a man for a long time. She's more concerned about him than she is about what staff people may think is a need. And she may be right in 50 percent of the cases, too. You know, there was that. There were too many demands even though there was a limited number of staff people. You could figure the number of staff people who had to see him or thought they had to see him or had some legitimate reason to see him numbered about five in our office there: the press secretary, two or three others depending on whether Wendell Pigman had something important, like a speech he was writing for him on water pollution. Now, Wendell's problem was that he just didn't have the critical areas of the Senator's concern to deal with, so there were fewer reasons for him to go in there. But Peter and Adam, Joe, Frank.

CAMPBELL: What was your...

COLEMAN: And later on several of the others, like Mike....

CAMPBELL: Schwartz [Michael Schwartz]?

COLEMAN: Well, yeah, but I wasn't thinking of him. I was thinking of Mike [Michael Curzan] who did the housing bill. He was really there sort of as one of those legal interns we had for awhile but stayed on longer. He did the housing bill. And Jeff Greenfield.

CAMPBELL: What was just your general feeling on Robert Kennedy's staff? What kind of spirit was there?

COLEMAN: When you say staff, I think it was clearly divided into professional and secretarial, each with their own—I don't think we were a unit as far as all of us were concerned as a group. Although the Senator would have us in for office parties in an attempt to have us together as a unit, really, I think mostly to give the girls an opportunity to feel that they were part of something. They could see him and talk to him, and he wasn't that distant from them. He made that attempt. I don't think it worked too well. I mean, I think he was away a good deal. I think he was too busy to spend time with his staff. I think there were too many girls, really, for him to know each one of them personally.

And we had this, you know, other office down the hall kind of situation, too, which made it even worse. He couldn't possibly even know who those girls were although from time to time he went down the hall just to say, "How are you? What are you doing? Is everything all right?" and make small talk.

But the staff... I think the men were very competent and very hard working. And I think that Peter and Adam were probably resented a great deal around the Hill for being cocky, young, brash fellows. They were both very young when they started, late twenties and early thirties. I think they were extremely competent. I have not met two young men I consider as competent as

those two in a long time. Totally different reasons, too. Totally different type skills to bring to bear on the job. It's amazing that you can find two people like that so perfectly suited for the boss they were working for and for the type of work they had to do.

I think they were excellent. They could work under pressure. They could write. Peter, really, could not write anywhere near as well as Adam.

Adam was extremely capable, I think, as a writer for a guy his age, as he was then. He could be given something—I mean, the Vietnam war, some problems on Vietnam—and turn out a speech in a matter of days or hours, whatever it took. Peter was very much slower and careful. Adam was prone to always be more emotional and quick. He was, for instance, very upset about whether the Senator was taking enough of a role, speaking out enough against the war, speaking out enough against Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], speaking out enough.

The Senator, of course, was much more old fashioned—we used that expression—in terms of political concerns and making sure he didn't deliberately provoke fights with Johnson. And every time he'd give one of those Vietnam speeches, the next day he was worrying about whether he'd gone out too far on a limb about it, in terms of, "It's going to be interpreted as an attack against Johnson." That's what he said, you know, several times. "It's going to be interpreted as an attack against Johnson." I think that's why he hesitated to do them more often than he did.

Interestingly enough, he did one in '66 and one in '67 almost at the same time of the year, February and March. I always thought of it as if at the beginning of the year, you know, sort of he's restless, and there are fewer legislative things to tie him up, and he really starts worrying about it again. "I should be saying something. I should be saying something."

Adam was a good deal of pressure on him to speak out, but I don't think he trusted Adam—well, "trusted" is a little strong. I don't think he ever thought to use Adam or Peter for political advice although the two of them, because they got naturally into the milieu, you know, and were excited, I think, in a sense, about their participation, often tried to be somewhat involved in that.

Jerry was very mad one time because Peter had done some—what he considered—meddling in what Jerry's business was. There were those frictions because Adam and Peter, being as bright and competent as they were, tended to sort of reach into everything.

I think Joe felt that, too. I think to some degree, Joe could never be as pushy as Adam or Peter and so, therefore, Adam and Peter seemed to have the Senator's ear more than Joe did a lot of the time. I think Joe had the attitude, and I suppose we had conversations on it. At least, I remember having the feeling that he just felt—he may have said something like this to me. We talked about it without getting, you know.... I didn't want to suggest things that would hurt his feelings so we never talked about it directly. But he said, "Well, you know, the Senator knows I'm...." His

attitude was, "He knows I'm here, and when we have things to say to each other, we talk. We understand each other and I don't need to go pushing in like that."

But, then, of course, there were all the outside people, too. It's so hard to talk about the staff as if it did everything, when you had Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] in there; Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] in there; all these people coming by to talk; people he talked to on the phone. What's-his-name Moyers [William D. Moyers]. He was very fond of Moyers. I can't even, you know.... I could make a list that would probably run on forever, people who both came from the '60 campaign and people he knew through government for other reasons. Burke Marshall, of course; Burke stood very high with him.

CAMPBELL: What kind of comparison could you draw from your kind of unique position as a member of both John Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] staff and Robert Kennedy's staff? Is it possible to compare their staffs, their use of staff members?

COLEMAN: Well, I didn't work for John Kennedy in the Senate, of course, so a totally different kind of comparison would have to be made. Although I do know this about John Kennedy's Senate staff, he had some older and more experienced men around. But he'd been in the Senate for awhile by the time he was running. By the time I knew John Kennedy's staff, he was already clearly a candidate, and so he had assembled men who had more experience. I don't know if that was deliberate or not, but they were on the staff. Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] for instance. And, of course, he'd run through several state campaigns. So had Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] in Massachusetts. He had that kind of expertise so it's a totally different kind of use of staff.

In terms of just how you work with people, I think my impression is that Robert Kennedy was very tough on people, but only in the sense that.... He never really yelled although I saw a couple of occasions where he yelled at Adam, really yelled at Adam, not really in front of other people, as a matter of fact, but I know of several cases where he was very angry with him for several things. Adam, of course, could take it. A great deal of bounce back, but...

CAMPBELL: Let me interrupt to just ask you what sort of thing? Anything specific that you remember?

COLEMAN: Oh, what was it about? It was something he was supposed to do, and he didn't do in one case. No, I'm afraid I don't remember. I might remember if I thought about it.

At any rate, you knew what he expected, and if you didn't do it, repeatedly—I mean, you didn't have to be told specific things to do, almost ever. You really understood what he wanted from you. Whatever your responsibility was, you know, he expected something from you. If you didn't produce,

really in short order, you know, if you didn't really.... I don't want to make this sound too extreme, sound like he was a complete bully, because he wasn't. But you just knew when you hadn't done it; he didn't have to say anything to you.

You could make mistakes, and he'd very easily forgive you. I mean, there was no question; sometimes he was very gracious about things you had done wrong. But you didn't make mistakes all the time and still be anybody he could use. What happened was he ignored you. You know, in a couple of cases of staff people I can think about who just didn't prove to be the kind of people he could use, he just didn't use them at all, to a point where there was no point in their being around. And that's a very hard way—actually that's tougher than being yelled at, as a matter of fact, because it's quite apparent to you and it's very tough to stay on. In a couple of cases, people didn't stay on. But, you know, it was an understanding, I think, of what you were supposed to do.

You couldn't fake him. You really could not fake him. I mean, you needed to know something and if you didn't know it, the thing with him, what you should say was, "I don't know it," and then go off and find out. It's a cliché, but he didn't suffer fools gladly, and he didn't suffer fakes gladly either. He just didn't do it.

As I said, I think he uniquely found in Peter and Adam people who could serve what he needed out of staff. And for them he was very hard in a sense that he demanded a lot out of them, but they were able to produce that.

I think nobody whoever worked for him disliked him, as far as I know. Well, that's a little bit of an exaggeration. I've known some people who disliked working in that office very much. Whether they really disliked him or not, I'm not sure. But if you accepted the fact that he was a hard worker, an extremely hard worker, and that he was going to want to know things and do things in a million different areas, if you could accept that and you believed in him, you really wound up being just a total and complete fan of his. You know, *fan* is a terrible word; you had, you know, this incredible respect for him, and so you enjoyed working for him. I think working for him may well have been much harder than working for John Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: You might be right. Now...

COLEMAN: You know, his passion for things did not leave you alone, because his passion for things just infected you. He had to know; he had to do; he was doing all the time. You know, it was really something to keep up with that. But you could make mistakes; there's no reason to think that, because the pressures on you were so considerable.

CAMPBELL: When did you leave the staff?

COLEMAN: Oh, in June or in July, summer of '67.

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CAMPBELL: Then let's get to these kind of interesting dates and times...

COLEMAN: I should say that I think that Frank stood very high with him because Frank came on and became the kind of person who understood him very well, understood what he wanted, understood what he needed.

CAMPBELL: What was the problem with the previous press secretary there?

COLEMAN: You know, difficulty in being the kind of personality that dealt with that—I mean you see, the Senator would never tell you what he wanted you to do. There's no way of working with him and having him give you a list of things. It was largely up to you to understand him and to know what kinds of things he wanted and to appreciate what were his priorities and what he did not want. He did not care about what he would consider the lesser aspects of the job of press secretary. If you concerned yourself with just answering questions and dealing with the press in a certain way, you weren't really serving him. So you had to be more outgoing and more—you had to.... I don't know. It's sort of a hard thing to spell out in terms. You had to understand him and just deal with the press in a way that served his interests more. And I don't know how to tell what serving his interests more was. It wasn't that the press secretary had to do any real writing because the speeches and text were not done by the press secretary.

CAMPBELL: When were you first contacted to come back and work in the Senator's interests again? Was it early '68 or late '67?

COLEMAN: It was early '68. Actually, I had no premonition or no clue that anything was going to change in terms of my involvement for him. Of course, there were a lot of stories at the time after McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] announced. As a matter of fact, I heard about the secret meeting in December, I guess it was, or maybe it was earlier. I think it's on the chronology for October.

I heard about that at a party I went to around Christmastime. Somebody said had I heard about the meeting. Did I know Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger] was at this meeting? I had heard nothing about this meeting in New York of a lot of people. But Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] was there; and Milt Gwirtzman [Milton S. Gwirtzman] was there; Pierre was apparently there. I think he was. That's the first I knew of anything about it. But then I was out of contact with everybody.

Well, I went to Stowe skiing in January of '68, and Steve Smith called me to ask me what I was doing. I was at that time on a temporary job which had another month to run, but I was taking some time off. Steve asked if I would be interested in coming back and helping them out. Well, he was very vague about it, but he suggested that I

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see Joe when I came. He asked me when I was coming back to town, which was in a few days. He asked me if I would see Joe. I knew Steve well enough not to ask him on the phone what he was talking about because they're all alike; they're very cryptic.

I just came back to town, saw Joe, and had probably an hour or two hour conversation with him in the Senator's office. The Senator was off on a trip again. That

was for another one of those, I think, January upstate New York trips, or maybe he was in New York City. He said then that he was very excited. Joe always wanted the Senator to go ahead and do something, but he was more cautious than, say, Adam. Joe told me at the time that Adam said if the Senator didn't run, Adam was going to quit, you know. He just felt that strongly about it, that he had to do this. Adam felt he had to do it over the Vietnam issue, of course.

Joe was excited and gave me the impression that Joe and Steve and some other people were pushing the Senator at this point to run, and that the Senator had agreed to this much: that we, Joe and Steve, could explore what was going on in the different states and find out, you know, make contacts with people and just find out what people thought about the Senator's running.

Well, the idea didn't seem to me to make much sense, and I really don't know whether the Senator had given his okay to this particular idea. But, at any rate, he may have just let them, you know, go generally off and do some scouting around. That may have been the extent of it. Anyway, Joe's idea was that Joe and I would use a downtown office. They put me in a downtown office. What it turned out to be was Fred Dutton's office when, apparently, the partners were on trips and things from time to time, so there would be space. Joe would, then, go off around the country talking to political people, and he would phone in, you know, sort of political intelligence to me. I suggested a lot of problems to that approach that seemed to me very obvious. Like Joe could not go unrecognized in different places around the country and talk to people. Besides, the time was running out. This didn't seem to me to be a very logical idea. But I was prepared....

CAMPBELL: What time in January was it? Do you remember?

COLEMAN: Mid-January.

CAMPBELL: Mid-January.

COLEMAN: I can't give you the exact date, but it had to be, you know, like I have the feeling the eighteenth or something like that when we had this conversation. The idea was that I would come into this office on the first of February, and I did. It's my recollection, though it's not on the chronology, that on January 31 the Senator made a statement he definitely was not running.

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CAMPBELL: Thirtieth or thirty-first?

COLEMAN: Yes. Because I remember the irony of it was that I thought that "Well now, this is ridiculous. Joe has just asked me to come on for something that the Senator has clearly ruled out."

The Dutton office arrangement didn't work out because Joe came down there one day to work and couldn't really work because we were borrowing different people's offices, and it just didn't work out. So, the next thing he said was to come back to the Senate office and

I'd work out of the extra office down the hall. I did not want to be back on the Senate staff, and I really didn't understand what was going to happen with me now. It was all sort of awkward in terms of that.

In the meanwhile, Joe sort of hadn't given up except that he felt, or else was told, that he had to do whatever he was going to do very minimally at this point. So he had me just checking on our old card files and people who were delegates for the conventions who were committed to John Kennedy in '60. He had some people making checks in different places. Like, I know I called Bill Brady [William Brady] in Philadelphia, I think, and talked to him about who was still around of the old Kennedy delegate list. Really what we were talking to these people about was, you know, who was still important and who wasn't. I wish I could remember some of the other people because I know I made some other long distance calls in that time.

In the meanwhile, Joe had sort of a Black Book* kind of list of national committeemen and all the other party officials. Then he added contacts, people he knew in different states. He was trying to make up a list for every state. And he was making calls. He was making these calls—this is early February—steadily. He has a certain number he's calling every day. He told me, as a matter of fact, about them when we had the initial conversation. The participants of these meetings—you know, the Duttons and the Gwartzmans and all the other people—were given lists of names. Everybody was supposed to do a certain amount of calling, including the Senator himself.

The Senator said, "What am I supposed to say when I get them on the phone? What do you think about my running?" you know. He didn't quite know how to do it and didn't really want to do any of the phoning himself although he was willing for others to. Edward Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] had certain people to call. And so this is what Joe was doing.

I wasn't doing an awful lot of anything. There were certain people in the office who were checking election laws and primary laws, but that had been going on even before I came. They were trying to find out

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what was the last possible date you could file in a lot of places and where you had to take your name off. And then there was the problem about New Hampshire and people putting his name on the ballot in New Hampshire and Wisconsin. I remember it for New Hampshire; I'm not sure what the situation was in Wisconsin.

We were, you know, in sort of a strange situation where we were telling people to take his name off, and we were still going. As far as I know, a number of people were doing a number of limited things, still checking out the possibilities. But I had no awareness—at least if he were changing his mind yet again during February, I didn't know about it, and Joe had never made it clear to me.

In the meanwhile, some other job had come up with the D.C. City Council. So I said, "Well, if you don't need me, then I might as well go take this other job," and they

* Black Book: a loose-leaf notebook of correspondence compiled for an individual state during a political campaign.

didn't stand in my way. I don't know if that had anything to do with being conclusive about whether he had specifically made up his mind at the end of February because I don't know that there was any real relationship whether they could have kept me on or not. So I went off. He did announce on the sixteenth...

CAMPBELL: Of March?

COLEMAN: ...of March, but by that time, of course, the primary in New Hampshire was over.

CAMPBELL: Do you recall in the early period the nature of the contacts? Were commitments asked or was it just simply a fishing expedition?

COLEMAN: No. Because I heard Joe on the phone with several of these. He would take the approach, you know, "What are the people saying about what the Senator has decided?" You know, he'd put it some way he could actually, "What are people.... What is the feeling about the Senator being in the race?" One conversation, he said, "Now, just"—like Mildred Jeffrey, somebody he knew well—"If he decided to run, if he really did, I mean let's just assume a far out situation, you know, if he decided to run, what would be the reaction as far as you know?" And they were still negative. As I recall he was getting negative reactions. People were still saying that, those political people he was talking to at any rate.

CAMPBELL: Do you recall any specific reasons given for the negative reactions? Is this the sort of thing where you...

COLEMAN: The sort of thing we've heard, "You can't challenge the President."

CAMPBELL: Do you recall any discussions around about the California primary which required a particularly early filing date, I

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think? There was some problem about how to handle that.

COLEMAN: Yeah. There was. I remember that was one of the considerations, but I don't remember how they....

CAMPBELL: Was Edward Kennedy's staff involved at all in this very early effort?

COLEMAN: I don't really know; I don't know. To the degree that I think Dave Burke [David W. Burke] almost always was involved in things that Ted Kennedy was involved in. I mean, you know, I assume he participated in some of the meetings, but I don't know how many others did. They were active in the campaign headquarters to a considerable degree. I mean, Dun Gifford [K. Dun Gifford] and Jim Flug

[James F. Flug], Dave Burke and Dick Drayne [Richard C. Drayne]. Dick Drayne was a press guy. But I don't recall at that point that they were.

CAMPBELL: At that point, too, and before New Hampshire results, how is the McCarthy candidacy viewed among the Kennedy people that you worked with?

COLEMAN: I don't know. That became so much more critical after the Senator announced than before. I don't think anybody took him seriously at all, of course. So there wasn't really a....

The concern in the office was so much on what Robert Kennedy should do. That was the sole occupying kind of thought. But, we were surprised one time when we checked the mail. I thought if we were getting maybe, you know, thousands and thousands of letters, we could convince the Senator. You couldn't really, you weren't getting that much mail to show that.... I mean, you know, we were always getting an excessively high amount. By anybody else's terms, we were probably getting a lot of mail then, but it wasn't that high.

CAMPBELL: So you left, and then when were you contacted to come back?

COLEMAN: Well, Pierre called me, I guess it was the night the Senator announced or the day the Senator announced. I was going to go up for that press conference, and then I just thought, "There will be so many people, and I won't be able to get in," or something, so I didn't. But Pierre called me that day and said would I come and help him out. And I did.

The first thing we did was get some space in the hotel across from the Senate Office Building, right down the street from the Senate Office Building. I'm not sure which one of the hotels that is, the Continental [Continental Hotel] or the Dodge [Dodge House], maybe. Dodge, I think. We took a whole floor, the top floor. I often thought about that because the hotel, of course, was very excited. And I think

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we stayed there for about three weeks. [Laughter] But, in the meanwhile it was just absolute chaos up there.

I really don't know what we were going to do up there because I worked about one day before Pierre said, well, he was going out to California. Would I get on the next plane after his and come out there and help him because the first trip the Senator was going to make was going to be out there? The major trip was going to be a Western swing. So that's what I did. I went immediately out to California and spent a week or two out there—a week, I guess—before he came out. As soon as he went through his couple of days out there and went on to Oregon, I went back to Washington.

Then we still didn't have a press operation anyplace. They'd just got what became the real headquarters. I was up in the Senate Office Building, I guess, for a couple of days. The press operation turned out to be an unusually large one because of the problems we had throughout the campaign headquarters of several staffs working together.

We had the old John Kennedy people like Pierre. I think Pierre thought he was running the press operations and that became a strange sort of situation because there was Frank Mankiewicz. And Frank had a guy working for him at the time who was an American Political Science [American Political Science Association] fellow who happened to be putting in his three-month stint as they do in this congressional fellow program—three months on the House side, three months on the Senate side. And there he was, Hugh McDonald. Well, he and Frank came down with Frank's secretary—well, that was changed because the girl who was his secretary, something happened; she had a personal tragedy in her life so she left the office. Then he got a girl who had been his secretary before, Pat Riley [Patricia A. Riley], who'd been working in New York. Anyway, there was she, and she brought a girl down from the Senate office to help her. There was Pierre, and I was reporting to Pierre, sort of. Then Pierre hired Lisa [Elisabeth Lansing Gwartzman]—Lisa's now Lisa Gwartzman; she was engaged to Milton Gwartzman at the time—and Pierre hired Amanda Pedersen [Amanda B. Pedersen], another girl, and we had Gail Tirana [Gail R. Tirana], who had worked for the Senator in his New York campaign and for a brief while in the Senate office.

CAMPBELL: Now, Pierre Salinger's doing the hiring?

COLEMAN: Pierre Salinger's doing the hiring except that other people are bringing in their own people too, you see. Because then Dick Drayne came down from Senator Edward Kennedy's office and brought his secretary Loudell Insley down. By the time we were finished we had.... Subsequently they hired a Black guy. I don't know whether he lasted. He went out to Indiana, and that's the last I saw of him.

CAMPBELL: Not Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves]?

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COLEMAN: No, not Earl Graves. And then there was this fellow.... There was a guy who's the press secretary [George Mitrovich] for Goodell [Charles E. Goodell] right now. He was hired by Pierre. Pierre knew him from California. Then he hired Tom Mathews, who had worked for the Peace Corps and various other things. Pierre knew him from before. And we had another fellow who was supposed to write, who came from the *New York Times*, and was supposed to write messages and stuff like that. So we had, you know.... It was enormous.

Of course, what happened was the scale of the operation was such that they were really immediately on the primary states; Indiana, of course, immediately and most important. So Frank went off to travel with the Senator; Pierre was staying around and doing some office stuff and working with foreign correspondents but also going out from time to time. The problem was all these guys wanted to be out on the road or in Indiana or in a primary state. Clearly, that's where the action was.

We had a strange problem in that we had seven hundred press men, and we never had anybody in Washington to handle anything, which is why Tom Mathews was finally hired to handle the Washington headquarters. But everybody at one point or another managed to get

themselves on the road. Finally Frank went on from Indiana, I guess it was, to California and spent most his time out there where he's from and, of course, knew people. So we had a strange operation that consisted mostly of women in Washington.

One of the things we did.... Pat dealt with all of the press calls that came in, largely for Frank, and a lot of queries and stuff, and sort of funneled questions and information back and forth to where ever Frank was. Amanda and Lisa mostly worked on a daily news sheet that we did which was circulated in the headquarters and sent out to primary states, which was a kind of roundup of what the papers were saying, the major stories that were being highlighted about the campaign.

We also got a machine, finally, that transmitted, you know, like a Xerox, only it transmits like a wire thing, and we'd send the thing out. We also did that for the speech writers. They would write things here, and we'd send it on the machine that way.

Gail helped me with a—not exactly a newsletter—but a thing we put together of the best stories that were being written, you know, laudatory editorials, stories about people who'd come out for Robert Kennedy. It was Ted Sorensen's idea, and it was supposed to go to the delegates, to the different state conventions that were being held. We always had a logistics problem in actually getting it out. You know, we went through all this thing about getting it printed up fast, putting it together and getting it printed up fast. I don't know how many of them we did during the course of the campaign, three

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or four; maybe we got that far.

We'd never get them out because there was a problem with getting the use of the machines they had for these automatic letters. They were trying to get out thousands of letters to delegates to state conventions, and what we needed from them was labels as well. Oh, they had a big problem in getting that whole operation straightened out, getting enough people to run it and getting it working, you know, like fifteen to sixteen hours a day. So I don't know how many delegates ever got this thing.

We did that, you know, and the normal kinds of query and answering things.

CAMPBELL: When you went to California very early what was the situation there then? Did Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] have things well organized?

COLEMAN: Well, no. There always seems to be the type of problems they always have in California, that the Unruh people and the anti-Unruh people are always fighting each other. In California headquarters there was a fight going on, I think, right from the beginning about an Unruh man and.... I think what happened, too, was a question of who was selected as State Chairman North and State Chairman South for Kennedy. I think one of them was an Unruh person and one wasn't, if I recall. There was some friction about who was the guy selected in Los Angeles. There were typical kinds of party—well, typical kinds of party doesn't tell you very much, does it? I'm trying to remember the name of the fellow who handled the southern California operation. They were never happy with him.

CAMPBELL: Seltzer [Arthur Seltzer]?

COLEMAN: Yeah, Art Seltzer. As a matter of fact, I think he was an Unruh man and didn't work out, something like that. But I'm not sure. There were the Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] people still and the Unruh people, but Unruh, clearly, was very much in evidence. I mean, he was right beside the Senator through the whole swing in California on that first trip.

I think, and of course I'm remembering Pierre's criticisms of people, Pierre had some long-standing opposition to Unruh which was probably still smoldering; so I'm not quite sure whether I'm just seeing these things through Pierre's vision of them. But there were complaints about the operation in terms of...

CAMPBELL: There were people that came in, Tony [Anthony B. Akers] and Charles Spalding was there, kind of Kennedy people brought in to California, too.

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COLEMAN: Yeah. They were brought in early, but they didn't seem to make much difference, either. The same thing happened in Oregon, of course, too. There were Kennedy people brought in who couldn't handle, apparently couldn't handle, whatever the local problems were. It required somebody of more stature, like Steve Smith, who did go in finally.

CAMPBELL: Did you get involved in Oregon? Were you there?

COLEMAN: No. I wasn't there at all. In the California, the first swing, they had just opened the headquarters. Californians have a strange way; one of the first things they do is open a splashy headquarters, and they seem to be spending a lot of money. They spend a lot of money, and that's why they have those huge deficits afterwards, I guess. You know, immediately they start to worry about equipping the place right. They always get a lot of volunteers in there, and everybody seems to run around, and you never really know that anything is being done. So you have this funny feeling about the way they do things out there. I'd seen some of that from Pierre's campaign: a lot of infighting and somehow they don't seem to be organizing that much. But, then, partially, I'm not sure that I wasn't seeing just the first initial chaos.

We were so immediately involved in that first trip in terms of the press accommodations that I literally almost never got off the phone for five days.

CAMPBELL: Now, you've mentioned Salinger and Sorensen and some other John Kennedy associates in connection with this campaign. You read a great deal about the problems that developed between the old John Kennedy people and the younger Robert Kennedy people...

COLEMAN: And the Ted Kennedy people.

CAMPBELL: ...and the Ted Kennedy people.

COLEMAN: My feeling is that they were always more of a problem than the Robert Kennedy people. The Robert Kennedy people there weren't that many of, first of all. I mean, there wasn't a very large.... All you can say the Robert Kennedy people are, are his, well, Justice Department associates to some degree and his Senate staff people. But there wasn't any question—I mean, Adam and Peter for instance, were either with.... Adam was with the Senator a lot, writing speeches. Peter was in the headquarters a lot in the research section that was set up. As far as I can tell, the least amount of friction was up there, but, now, that may just be a guess. It seemed to me to be because they were people who knew each other and worked together well before.

Milt Gwartzman was there and Peter was there; and Jeff, when Jeff

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wasn't traveling—or anyone of them—a fellow named P.J. Mode; what's-his-name-from the Senate staff of Senator Clark [Joseph S. Clark], Smith [William Smith], a very nice fellow, very low keyed. All of those guys were low keyed. Maybe that had something to do with it. They weren't the kind who would be stomping all over each other.

Ted Kennedy had a few very ambitious guys, young, ambitious and, I think, somewhat heady, who were excited with their role in this whole thing, I think. But, also, I've never been quite sure they'd put Robert Kennedy ahead of Ted Kennedy. I mean, they were serving their own master, in my opinion, all the time, and that was Ted Kennedy. But they were also serving, it seemed to me to some degree, their own ambition.

We had ridiculous problems in the headquarters. We had most of the men in the headquarters anxious to get out to a primary state where the things were really happening, and, yet, the time they spent in Washington, they wanted to run things. Dun Gifford, for instance, wanted to run the headquarters. He is a very deft fellow, and soon was, in effect, running the headquarters.

Ted Sorensen came in and spent sometime organizing certain things. As I said, he, for instance, called Dun and me in to discuss this mailing to the convention delegates. He asked Dun what he was doing, what we were doing about mailing anything out to the convention delegates. Dun, you know, sort of hemmed and hawed and tried to say, "Well, we're sending them the book." I forget, whatever the latest collection of Robert Kennedy speeches was. Well, that was clearly not what Sorensen wanted. He made it clear what he did want; and it was largely our responsibility. Yet, Dun did not want to stay out of that, either. I mean, he really didn't have.... It was not that important, it seemed to me, but he just wanted to have his finger in every one of the pies, kind of.

Dave Burke, was, of course, out with the Senator most of the time, Senator Edward Kennedy. Senator Edward Kennedy was out most of the time.

There was a problem of lack of leadership in the headquarters and a lack of cohesion and too many employees, many too many employees. Subsequently, I've heard that Steve said sometime around the California primary, "When this [the California primary] is over, we're going to fire everybody at headquarters." I don't know how much truth there is in that, but it sounds like Steve a little bit, and I wouldn't be surprised. It

would have been most sensible because somehow or other they had accumulated this huge headquarters staff which wasn't needed, by and large, because of the nature of the kind of thing we were doing.

The boiler room operation: we talk about it as if it were

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something. It could never have been the '60 boiler room operation. It was put together too quickly. I'm not saying it wasn't useful; I'm sure it was. The girls who were in it had, none of them, any real experience about politics. Well, Nance Lyons and her sister Maryellen Lyons both had some experience in Massachusetts politics. And both were very savvy girls. Esther Newberg had some experience working with the Democratic National Committee and had taken my job in Robert Kennedy's office. She knew Connecticut politics. She knew Ribicoff [Abraham Ribicoff]. Her mother was active in politics. Mary Jo Kopechne was a bright girl who had been Wendell Pigman's secretary in the Senate office but was really coming into her own in this job. Then there were several other girls who I don't think were as good.

CAMPBELL: Crickett Keough [Rosemary Crickett Keough].

COLEMAN: The girls I mentioned, I think, are the ones who were really competent at it, and then there were several other girls who were working at it. But the degree of what they did depended on the girls. I mean, they could be a funnel for the coordinators to call into, an accumulator of data as I think some of them may have been. The better ones searched for more and got more. I know at the end there Esther went out to Michigan. Nance Lyons was sent out somewhere. So they actually went into the state as well.

It wasn't anywhere near—I don't think they could possibly have hoped to have developed the kind of thing that the boiler room operation of '60 had, where they had months and months to do this. This wasn't the same thing.

Everybody was concerned with winning primaries, you know. First and foremost, you had to win the primary. Now, after California, there's no telling what they would have done with the time they had left. But, even then, after California there was only—well, no. The convention [Democratic National Convention] wasn't until August this time. The convention in '60 was in July. Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] was heading it up.

CAMPBELL: How did that work?

COLEMAN: Dun was working on that, too. Now, you see what I mean? But the girls will tell you I suppose. They have said to me that they felt Dun was good on that. I don't know what that means in terms of *good*, but they had fair regard for Dun's thoughts. And I'm not saying he wasn't capable; I just think he just tried to be in too much.

CAMPBELL: Do you think the Senator was—did he have time to be aware, was he aware

of the situation back in Washington?

COLEMAN: Oh, I doubt it. I just can't believe he did or could have.

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I think people like Steve might have been. Edward Kennedy might have been. I thought I heard something about Edward Kennedy being concerned, but that's probably largely because of the size of the payroll. We were in no way really hampering the operation. We weren't really involved to that degree.

There was a scheduling section which was significant. I suppose it was significant. I mean, I assume it was. Considering the time they had, you know, actually, the whole thing was rather efficient, even if it was overwieldy and undercontrolled. It was efficient in the sense that they could have this kind of thing: a scheduling operation. We had the components of what you really needed in the headquarters.

Scheduling, I understand, had their problems, of course, because they were endlessly on the phone with the given states where the Senator was going to be. There were always clashes about who was going to—I mean, I heard there were lots of fights between Joe and people in scheduling about where the Senator was going to go in states. Second guessing you and saying, "Well, we put him in here." But, again, the timing was such and he's going someplace every second.

CAMPBELL: In the Washington operation, who...

COLEMAN: George Mitrovich, that's the other—I just wanted.... George Mitrovich. The interesting thing about George Mitrovich was he got thrown out of Nebraska. I don't know what the heck he did in Nebraska, but Phil Sorensen [Philip C. Sorensen] who was out there—Phil Sorensen and who else?—really objected to him and told Pierre to get him out of the state. Pierre sent him to California.

CAMPBELL: I was just going to ask who resolved disputes. Was there somebody who clearly had the last word in Washington?

COLEMAN: As far as our office was concerned, it depended on who you went to, really. You know, if I took a problem to Pierre, he resolved it. If somebody else went to Frank—I mean Frank wasn't around any of the time.

There wasn't any contact, really, between Frank and Pierre. Pierre was conscious from the beginning that he didn't want to step on Frank's toes. By the very nature of the way Frank operated, Frank got himself out of the situation. He was doing special things almost from the beginning so he was not really involved in it.

There was less of a problem in having seven people telling you what to do in press than in having nobody telling you what to do. But, again, as I said, we weren't really ignoring a lot. I maintained that newspaper people who came into the headquarters wanting to write feature stories or whatever the heck they wanted to write, wanted to see a man, wanted to see a press secretary. We often had days when we didn't have a press

secretary. It wasn't that the pace was so incredible in our press office that we really needed a man for that because, again, the press attention shifted to wherever the Senator was, particularly the primary states. We had press people everywhere. We had press people in every one of the primary states. What's the name of that fellow in Indiana? We used to keep in telephone contact with all these places every day.

CAMPBELL: Do you remember what the immediate reaction was in the Kennedy camp to Johnson's withdrawal, the famous March 31 speech?

COLEMAN: Some people suggested right away that that was a real problem for us because you didn't have a villain to attack, that he really cut the ground out from under us. That was the immediate reaction. It wasn't so overjoyed.

The whole thing was they.... You know, one interesting thing you may be interested in: we had so little contact with the campaign in headquarters; it was really very demoralizing in a way. After the Oregon primary we thought we'd had it. We really thought he was the.... The idea was rampant in headquarters that he was going to pull out.

CAMPBELL: Is that right? What could you see in Washington about the impact of O'Brien's arrival on the campaign? Anything at all?

COLEMAN: Well, Pierre had a thing. Pierre was, you know, anti-O'Brien, I guess, by that stage. That's putting it a little strongly, but O'Brien suffered from the problem of having stayed on in the Johnson Administration. He'd had some feud going with O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] anyway, about this book they were both supposed to have written, which stemmed partially, I understand, from his having stayed on and Kenny leaving the Administration. So, he was not inner circle definitely anymore.

When he came down to our floor, the first day he came around, I greeted him like a long lost friend because, of course, I knew him from before and, you know, I like him. I think, as I recall, I sort of threw my arms around him, did something, you know, very friendly like that which I could do. You know, I mean, it wasn't presumptuous of me. But what interested me was his reaction. He seemed to be very grateful that somebody was being nice to him, which I thought was terribly sad. I think he was getting somewhat of a little bit of a cold reaction. But he went out immediately from the headquarters; he wasn't even there for ten days or so either. He didn't stay long.

CAMPBELL: Did the sort of frenzied image that the campaign created at first cause some concern among staff members? The really hectic impression that the media conveyed of the early campaign?

COLEMAN: I don't think there was anything. They were very desperate about Indiana. There was clearly no question that there was always a sense of desperation about Indiana. It was an incredible focus on Indiana. I mean, you might as well consider this. As far as I could see—I don't mean to downplay a headquarters staff, but in this unique kind of situation there was just.... I mean, I was not out in Indiana at all, so I don't know. But I have the impression that you really had a headquarters in Indiana, and you had a sense of the campaign in Indiana. You didn't have it in Washington at all.

People came into the headquarters at Washington merely like R & R [rest and relaxation] or something. I don't know whether they came back in town for some meetings and then they went back out again, but the only kind of really working staff we had at any point in that whole time in Washington was the researchers. That was simply because they needed to be someplace steady where they could write and do their background papers and the rest of it and have access to material. Everybody else was out either in Indiana or going to the next ones.

Once you got to Indiana.... Let's see, he announced on the sixteenth. The Indiana primary is—there's a District of Columbia primary in May. Is the District of Columbia primary the same day as the Indiana? But then two weeks later is Nebraska; one to two weeks later is Nebraska. Shortly thereafter is Oregon; one or two weeks later is Oregon. And that's all in May sometime, I think. So Indiana, maybe, is...

CAMPBELL: ...is April, I think.

COLEMAN: Late April. We had the riot in Washington in the middle of April—Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death and the riot. And the Senator in the meanwhile is on an endless trip. He's on an endless trip. So it's a very strange kind of headquarters situation, very strange.

CAMPBELL: Was the District of Columbia primary of major concern?

COLEMAN: No. He spent one day here, as I recall, campaigning, took the motorcade off from his headquarters. That was the one time we saw him during his campaign. I had seen him out in California, but I mean, obviously, he wasn't going to be at the campaign headquarters at this point. I think Edward Kennedy was there, probably, five times, if that much. But at any rate, between March and Indiana. I don't remember the exact date for that, we had maybe six weeks.

CAMPBELL: The first week of May in Indiana.

COLEMAN: Six or seven weeks. And in the meanwhile, shortly before you're getting into Indiana, you're beginning to concentrate—oh, no. South Dakota was involved in there, too, wasn't it? The South Dakota primary. So, you just did not have a situation where....

There are certain kinds of things that had to be done at the headquarters and were being done. One is your kind of mailing operation. We were getting very elaborate machinery, much more elaborate kinds of those kinds of things, automatic letter-writing things you didn't have before. You're getting a transmittal system, which is this Xerox kind of thing we had, which is unique, so we could—which we have to have because we're dealing with primary states, our staff in primary states, all the time.

You're getting some kind of a scheduling system. You're getting some kind of a boiler room operation developing for later on. So you're getting certain things that you needed and a certain number of kinds of attempts at publications or little stuff we put out ourselves to go out. Of course, it's not unusual for a campaign to be wherever the campaign, you know, literally in a national campaign, wherever the thing is. But the biggest problem probably with the headquarters is the amount of money to be spent. You know, we had two floors. Or did we have three floors? Three floors, perhaps.

CAMPBELL: Early in California, on the first swing, what was your impression of Robert Kennedy's attitude then?

COLEMAN: Well, I saw him at the close of a day in which he'd been mobbed endlessly and had enormous crowds. He was both exhausted and exhilarated. Unruh was with him—I ran into them in the hotel lobby. He sort of squeezed my hand or something. I think he was literally too exhausted to—I wondered if he knew who he was looking at, you know. He was really quite, I think, taken with it all.

They couldn't get to the Greek theatre. As I recall, some enormous traffic jam developed at one of the stops. It was just impossible to even—they had trouble getting him there, as a matter of fact, because the crowds had been so enormous. The next day he was more rested. He was very cheerful. He kidded me when he left. I was seeing them off at the airport because I was going to go catch another plane at the airport and go back to Washington. He said, "Am I saying goodbye to you again?" Made some joke about we just always seemed to be saying goodbye. I think he was in a good mood and he would say...

CAMPBELL: Who in his traveling entourage would contact headquarters back in Washington most often? Who got involved in that?

COLEMAN: Press people, whoever they were, would keep in daily touch on things. First of all, they wanted to know what was appearing in the papers. This sheet that Amanda and Lisa were doing, they wanted to have that. They called in every day for that, to be told that because they would tell the Senator. It was limited because we only had the papers we could get, you know, the East Coast papers, but they wanted to know what the East Coast papers were saying. Actually, I thought that was rather interesting. I always

think that's interesting in a campaign. The elections in Indiana, you know—the Indiana voters don't see the *Washington Post*, but it's very important, and it's important to Robert Kennedy. I mean, he cares what the *Washington Post* is saying and the *New York Times*. Very interesting.

They wanted to know when several things broke. Like, I guess, there was a Drew Pearson column about the Martin Luther King wiretapping, tapping of Martin Luther King's phone. That was one incident I remember. Oh, Ethel Kennedy's [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] having a baby caused a minor flap. That was the kind of thing we got in Washington because, of course, she was here. She was very upset because the story appeared in the Maxine Cheshire column that she was pregnant. If she were pregnant she could only have been very slightly pregnant at the time. It was really an amazing story, and I thought in very bad taste. But nevertheless, the only thing I can suppose is Mrs. Kennedy said something to a friend like, "I'm pregnant again," and that somebody told Maxine Cheshire. But, anyway, Mrs. Kennedy was very upset.

One of the few times Fred Dutton and I talked—Fred would come back to the headquarters from time to time—I think Fred was really.... I personally have a great deal of respect for Fred as a very sensible, organized kind of man. Fred was, I think, bothered with the headquarters to some degree at that point at any rate. I've forgotten why I have the impression that he was; maybe we talked once or twice. You know, he said something to me about the press operation there. He asked me about it. But I always had the advantage of having been around long enough so most people knew me and would.... Also, I guess, I say what I think.

Fred said Mrs. Kennedy was very upset about the Maxine Cheshire thing and he was suggesting, you know.... He said, "How did it get out, Barbara?" I said, "Fred, it couldn't have gone out from here. We didn't know." But, then, he said, "Well, she's very concerned about it. Don't say anything about it." People were calling in, and we were supposed to say nothing!

Then a story appeared that we had confirmed it; the headquarters had confirmed it. That blew everything wild. Fortunately, Fred would not get excited about situations like this, but she was on him about it, you know. I think one of the girls in the office said, "Oh, yeah, it's true," simply because she just assumed it if it was in the paper. I mean, the girl probably just.... The girl, I think, who said it was just a kid. She may never really have officially confirmed anything. I don't think she was silly enough to say, "Oh, yeah. We're confirming it," or something like that. But anyway, that was our mild flap at headquarters.

CAMPBELL: How about the King wiretap story?

COLEMAN: That was when—I think he was in Oregon at the time; it broke out there mostly. Again, the impact was out there, and as I recall—was it there or was it Indiana? At any rate, they

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handled it out there. You see, we had never really to respond to these things because the major query would go to wherever the Senator was because they wanted his reaction. It

seemed to me Pierre responded to that one. There was one thing where Pierre put out a press release on his own. You know, “Pierre Salinger today denied...” kind of thing. It may not have been that. It may have been something about Vietnam, but I was rather surprised at that.

CAMPBELL: Did your headquarters and the whole campaign staff make a conscious effort to sort of win the kids back, the so-called McCarthy kids?

COLEMAN: We had a student operation, which always impressed me as being totally inactive. It was supposed to. I understood the Senator was concerned about it. At least, Edward Kennedy, I think, asked about what was really going on. He had his own—he had one of his people, Jim Flug, heading it up. They were on the same floor with us.

There was always a lot of, you know, scurrying in and out, but I don’t know really what they were doing at all. They were trying to get student leaders in different schools, of course. They were successful to the extent that there were stops on whatever trips he’d have. They’d go to universities. And they were trying to drum up a Students for Kennedy. In the primary states, they were setting up separate student operations. I got the impression that it just nowhere recaptured the ground lost. And, again, it was another thing where the headquarters people just were not the important ones. Again, some of those people went out to Indiana. Everybody wanted to be in Indiana, I can tell you, at one point or another. They did some traveling so there weren’t very many people around the headquarters.

CAMPBELL: What have we forgotten? Do you...

COLEMAN: We had one point—there was a story I was remembering today that.... The story broke that both Senators were using their own staff in the campaign. It was true; it was clearly true. You can tell from what I’m saying that almost everybody I’m talking about was. There was really no way of denying that. Actually, it was one of those stories that hurts you, but it’s almost malicious in the sense that everybody knows it’s done. It’s done in every single campaign, that Hill people are used in the campaigns. A guy’s administrative assistant goes out with him to his campaign, if not half of the staff goes out to the state for the campaign. So this was not unusual.

But, I mean, you know, this does hurt you because they’re Senate employees and.... It gets out and it’s another one of those things. So what they did is they tried to provide a sketchy list of who was actually doing it, who was on view working in the campaign that they couldn’t really deny. They made the list incomplete is what they did. They provided a list, and then they said something about how they were trying to take care of their Senate duties as well [Laughter], which

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would have been the greatest impossibility of all time. Most of the time you can’t do all of your Senate duties, let alone work on a campaign and do your Senate duties.

Robert Kennedy’s office hired a whole bunch of new people to take on some of the Senate stuff, just take care of the mail, you know, and things that had to be done. I know

there were a couple of new receptionists, several new people working case problems and that kind of thing where you needed to keep up.

CAMPBELL: The people that were added for campaign purposes, basically their salaries came through the New York office, too, did they?

COLEMAN: Yeah. Well, they set up a whole new thing. Now, I'm going to tell you. I really hope this particular thing, since I'm directly involved in it, doesn't go out for awhile.

CAMPBELL: Well, you can close it for as long as you want. Let me reverse it and then we'll....

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

COLEMAN: The thing is, you know, all the controversy about setting up phony committees. Well, of course, we did that. I was treasurer of one, that's how I know. I mean, Steve called a couple of us in one day and said, "Would you mind? You sign. You're secretary of this. You're treasurer of this." Well, actually Helen did I think.

CAMPBELL: Helen Lempart?

COLEMAN: Helen Keyes [Helen M. Keyes].

CAMPBELL: Keyes. Yeah.

COLEMAN: Helen was one of the people who was really upset about what was being spent in Washington. She just fought every time somebody wanted to have something new or somebody new. There was nothing she could do. She really couldn't. I mean, you know what are you going to do? The kinds of people who were saying, "We need this so we have to hire this person," everybody was at such a level that, you know, who could you cut off?

CAMPBELL: You hear that...

COLEMAN: Of course, as we've said, part of them were Senate employees so they weren't causing any more expense. Still in all....

CAMPBELL: You hear that Robert Kennedy, perhaps, had a difficulty in becoming a candidate instead of a campaign manager and that, perhaps, sometimes he wanted to get involved in nuts-and-bolts

decisions that he shouldn't have worried about. Did you have that impression?

COLEMAN: No, not that I ever heard. But he used to do some things in the Senate office. For instance, from time to time he'd get unreasonably interested in the mail. I say "unreasonably" because he'd say "Well, why can't we answer the mail?" Well, you know you could tell him five million times why we couldn't answer the mail. There were very legitimate reasons why we couldn't answer the mail or keep up with the mail. You just cannot. You know, you've got.... All right, we should have figured out, maybe, a more mechanical way. We did have those kinds of machines and everything. And we had, what, two operators, a limited amount of time that you could do it all in, and, you know, all kinds of problems.

If you took that volume of mail and tried to answer it mechanically you just increase the number of errors you're going to make because you put the wrong letter in the wrong pile, which happened all the time. One would get to him, and he'd say, "Why does this happen?"

I'd get so provoked if it happened to be Joe discussing it with me because Joe often discussed office policy with me. "Can't you make him understand that it happens? You can't, you know...." Or he'd go upstate New York and somebody in the audience would say, "Why didn't you answer my letter, Senator?" He'd come back, "Why aren't we answering the mail?" So he'd take an interest in the mail. Maybe you'd say he should have; there's no reason why he shouldn't have taken an interest in that. But it wasn't a question of he didn't want to step in there and say, "Well, why don't we look at the new machinery?" He'd say, "Joe, do something about the mail."

We'd go through one of these incredible reorganizations in which we made more problems for ourselves. Joe was just not a very well-organized kind of guy, either. I mean, he tried very hard at this sort of thing, but it requires a really brilliant kind of administrative type of person. I'm not quite sure there was an answer to it, as I said. I don't think Joe did it, couldn't come up with it.

And then, we didn't have the best people, some of the people who answered letters and stuff. You know, what're you going to do? You're willing to pay them six thousand dollars a year. That was big salary in our office. But, I don't know.

You know, on that kind of thing he would say, you know.... He'd get interested in things like that from time to time, but I can't remember. Sometimes, I think I may have said before, he was kind of naive about the way you operate. If I brought in a mayor and city council group, he'd start talking to them. They'd say, "Well, Senator, our problem is urban renewal." He'd never stop and think that I was handling it in a way, for

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him. I mean, you know, the situation was such that we had a mechanism for dealing with it. It was almost as if he didn't know what I was doing. Or else, naively, he thought he should make a big impression—which is not naively maybe, you know. But it didn't sound like what you'd expect the really astute, really smart Robert Kennedy kind of person to do. So he meddled in that way.

CAMPBELL: But, not to your knowledge in the campaign? Of course, he was out there and you were...

COLEMAN: Of course, all he had—I mean, you know, his major problems were.... I'll tell you the truth. I have no way of knowing, but I don't think Ted Kennedy was that good at running the thing. I think Ted Kennedy was supposed to be running the thing.

Ted Kennedy, if he was going to be running the thing, did not necessarily have to be in Washington running the thing, but he should have had some better control over Washington, for one thing. He should have been directing what Washington had to do and could have found better ways for Washington to use its time. First of all, they didn't need all of those people, as I've said. They should have pruned our operation. It was ridiculous. We didn't need that many girls around. As long as it wasn't costing anything, okay. But he should have made, you know, some sort of evaluation. And they were going to do something about Washington, not just pruning it, but I think they were really going to try and reorganize it or somebody get a hold of it, which was the whole problem.

The thing is that maybe that's why Dun interfered as much as he did in things. Maybe he had some sort—or thought he had some sort—of mandate from Ted Kennedy to run things in Ted Kennedy's absence. You know, that was the problem. Everybody was sort of delegating it down the line. We didn't even work Saturdays. I mean, you know, we did work—what we did in press since it was ridiculous, we had so many of us around.

Another thing, Pierre said I should run the girls. I should sort of manage it. Well, it's a very embarrassing thing to do when everybody's reporting to a different boss. You know, I'm going to tell them they should come in and work on Saturdays? But I suggested once that maybe we could stagger our weekend duties since there were seven of us. There must've been two, four, six, eight—there was a girl, Melody [Melody Miller McElligott], who was down there, too. There had to have been eight or nine of us working there doing nothing half of the time. Can you imagine?

And I was being paid a good salary [Laughter], by this point in time, demanded one. But, I mean, you know, it was embarrassing. I had a feeling one of the people they were going to cut off was me because I was the only one really on the payroll. The others were on the Senate payroll. But I was making a good salary, and I'm being paid from the campaign.

CAMPBELL: Anything else?

COLEMAN: No.

CAMPBELL: Well, we've done it. We thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

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