

Richard K. Donahue Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 07/02/1979
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Lawyer, assistant to President John F. Kennedy, 1960 – 1963, discusses work on and staff involved in presidential appointments, among other issues.

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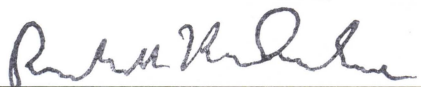
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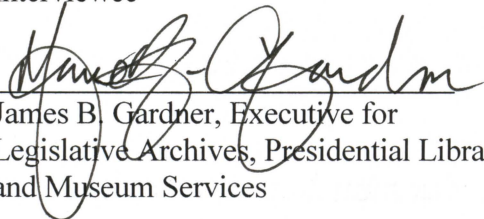
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Interviewee

8-21-12

Date



James B. Gardner, Executive for
Legislative Archives, Presidential Libraries,
and Museum Services

10/3/12

Date

Richard K. Donahue – JFK#4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

Richard K. Donahue

July 2, 1979
Lowell, Massachusetts

By Sheldon Stern and Dan Fenn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Okay, why don't we begin. If you could recall particularly from the period right after the election, into, say, the first six months of the administration, the setting up of the Personnel operation. In other words, the group that you worked on, with Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan], as opposed to the Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.]-Yarmolinsky [Adam Yarmolinsky] group, Dorothy Davies' operation. Just exactly what each group was doing.

DONAHUE: When we started pulling together, because we started the day after the election of the President [John F. Kennedy], when the President designated, he said something to the effect that, "Sarge will go on a talent hunt, and try to find cabinet officers, things of that nature. And Larry [Lawrence F. O'Brien], I'd like you to do, find what we're going to do with all the people that were helpful for us, and how we're going to put them in government. And Dick, you help him." And that really is when we started that. We went back—at that time Bill Brawley [H.W. Brawley] had flown up to us, the Senate Personnel Committee's, Post Office, and Civil Service Committee, print-out of what became the [unclear]. [Phone beeps] Yeah? [Pause in Recording]

 Because quite frankly we didn't really know what was available. We didn't know what we were going to have to do, and what we were going to have to fill up. So we went back to Washington, and we started, and there were really basically six of us, including, you know, Sarge, and Harris Wofford [Harris L. Wofford, Jr.], and Yarmolinsky, and Larry and Ralph and myself, who were just taking all kinds of lists of names. And we were not as

compartmentalized as we expected to be. And we just sort of battled back and forth. Yarmolinsky, of course, knows more people than any three people in the whole world, you know, and he had a whole bunch of names. And you had people like Elbrick [Charles Burke Elbrick?] and Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], and a lot of people who were sending enormously convoluted and complex letters to the President, recommending this one for that one and so on. I think it was probably Wofford and Yarmolinsky outlined a form, and we started using a form to categorize things, but it never really worked too well. Because quite frankly, in the final analysis, the President wasn't that organized. He was in Palm Beach, and he would be concerned, and his concerns were transmitted. He didn't necessarily transmit them through us. I mean, he might talk to Kenny [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], or he might talk to Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy], or he might all of a sudden saying, "What the hell are we doing about Commerce?" or, "Has anybody thought about the Post Office?" Then he might come up with some idea about the Arms Control Agency or something.

So it was not organized, and it really was a reacting to fill holes that we'd received. You know, we were interviewing people. Happy coincidence that someone in a job would come, would coincide. But it just didn't happen that often. I remember starting out, at one point, trying to do the Post Office Department, which actually was the last one that we did. And I thought we did a pretty organized job, because we had sort of a commitment. It was a long fight over who was going to be Postmaster General, and that fight was really between Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] and Hugo Fisher [Hugo M. Fisher], who was a—he was a Senator, a state Senator, from San Diego that he was much taken with. And we thought that would be a disaster. Of course [unclear] California, we had to think of somebody. And Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] came up with Ed Day [J. Edward Day]. And we had the others, sort of, in line. We had a commitment, really, to Brawley, that he would be Deputy Postmaster General, and we started looking for some other people. Well, I accepted Brawley's advice about the capacity of different people. We were on the phone with the President one day talking about the Assistant Postmaster General for Operations, and Assistant Postmaster General for Finance. And that's the one I got a kick out of the best. I could go over, the fellow who was Assistant Postmaster General for Operations had been the Staff Director of the House Committee, was pretty well recognized as an expert. But the fellow that was the Finance was a friend of Day's. And the President says, "Where did he come from?" And I said, "Well, Postmaster Day recommends him." And he said, "Well, I thought he was satisfied with his job." Which was a very, very, you know, clear perception that he didn't like other people giving out.

About that time, and that's going further on, but among the problems that developed from it were what I call the sort of McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] syndrome. And the McNamara syndrome is, of course, he was a stranger to the President. He was somebody who Sarge got out of *Time Magazine*, really approached him and he came on board. And then there is the great story that may be [unclear] but maybe it's not—but I think not—that McNamara met with the then Secretary of Defense, and came to back and said to the President, "You know, I met with the Secretary of Defense, and I want to tell you, Mr. President, I can do that job." And the President replied that he had met with President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], and he wanted Mr. McNamara to know he can do that job! But what happened was, we started suggesting some people to McNamara, and the one that was particularly suggested was for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel—and

that's not the exact title of it, but it is that notion, was Joe Keenan [Joseph Daniel Keenan] of the Electrical Worker's Union.

STERN: Joe Keenan?

DONAHUE: Joe Keenan. And McNamara rejected him. They also—and I think that many people have zeroed in on the fact that he rejected Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] for Secretary of the Navy. But the fact that he rejected Keenan set up the most common imitated process that you see in the distribution of power. McNamara was viewed in the press and by others as the most, first among equals, and therefore, you know, very important. The fact that he could stand up to the President, or the President's staff, or what have you, and reject the President's job, meant that every other cabinet officer, at that point, decided that he was not only going to demonstrate that he was strong, he would have to reject suggestions from [unclear], from people who were involved in the [unclear]. It was a problem that we really never got over. It's probably appropriate that we didn't get over, because we were perfectly willing [unclear]. But anyway, we started, and there would be a great deal of exchange physically. The six of us were working in a very, very limited area, with some other help. And—

STERN: [Several words unclear]?

DONAHUE: Yeah, and so that, you know, the exchanges were frequent, and the clashes were frequent, too. I think that there was some different philosophy of what we were doing.

STERN: Can you be more specific about the kinds of things?

DONAHUE: Well, lots of things that we were concerned, was getting control of the government. I, for instance, could never understand how you could take someone who opposed the President, and obviously had really been antagonistic to the primary, and almost through the election had done nothing, and all of a sudden find that he had great merit, and insert him into a position of sensitivity. If he hadn't been responsive to the President during the primaries and during the election, I could not understand how he could be responsive in that part of the administration.

STERN: Who have you got in mind?

DONAHUE: Well, I'm thinking of someone like that goofy Head of Indian Affairs, you know?

STERN: Oh, Philleo Nash?

DONAHUE: Philleo Nash. He was a total jerk anyway, but you know, it just didn't seem to me to make a lot of sense then to all of a sudden say that he's—well, Harlan Cleveland [J. Harlan Cleveland], I think, is probably a

better—now Harlan Cleveland was a [unclear], which he demonstrated beyond. But was absolutely, totally against it! And now they say that he was a marvelously gifted man! I always thought there were thirty-three million people that voted for us! We should be able to find some gifted person in that group.

STERN: He didn't think like that, though, I guess? The President felt he had to acquiesce to Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]?

DONAHUE: No, that really—you know, I don't think that he gave a damn what Stevenson wanted or did. I don't think Stevenson had any influence on him at all.

STERN: He pretty much gave Stevenson, I think, *carte blanche* at the U.N.?

DONAHUE: Yeah, but Harlan was in the State Department, and he was—

STERN: But he was International Organizations.

DONAHUE: Supposedly International Organizations. Really, he came so that... I think Harlan was [unclear] before Stevenson. I'm not—I may be [unclear]. But yeah, that type of person, who really.... And then of course you get all these other competing things. You know, Arthur Schlesinger, god bless him. But you know, all he wanted to do was to put people in government that he knew, or get the credit for it. Because he loved to call up and find out what you were doing, and if ever heard—there was a marvelous story. I think it happened to—yes it did, [several words unclear]. There was a professor at Dartmouth, Herbert Hill, who—Herbert Hill had been Democratic National Committeeman from New Hampshire for several years, had run for Senate at one time. And he was a pretty good guy, actually was someone that I knew then. There was also a fellow that went to Dartmouth by the name of Bob Hill [Robert C. Hill], who had been a very active Republican, had been Ambassador to Mexico under Eisenhower. The story came that Bob Hill was recommended for like, oh, maybe Ambassador to OAS, or some—but it was basically a major job in Central or Latin America. Well, Arthur got the story that Hill of Dartmouth was about to be appointed to this thing. He gets on the phone with the Professor, and tells him, "I hear the President is prepared to do it." Hill called me, because I had been a student of his, and said, [several words unclear]. But in any event, we did that. And then the other thing we had to do was to take people who had been very active during the campaign and find out where they would appropriately fit in the government [unclear]. One of the things the President was very concerned about the day after the election: what's going to happen to all these secretaries who had worked so hard in the campaign, and who had worked on the headquarters? You know, who was going to—where were they going to go? And Ralph I think was the one that did the list, so we had a list, of all people ranking from secretaries to guys like [several words unclear] campaign channels. And we were doing this [unclear] fitting everybody, you know, and [unclear]. So we didn't.

STERN: Did the Shriver group continue after the inauguration, or did they pretty much peter out?

DONAHUE: Well, they were anxious to get jobs for themselves. Once Sarge [unclear], really, he would continue to funnel things in. But as you know, he's just terribly enthusiastic, and that could be a heck of a job, jumping in and getting something started. So he might funnel stuff in, but he wouldn't do anything except [several words unclear]. As soon as Adam got with McNamara, he really devoted himself totally to McNamara.

STERN: That was before the inauguration?

DONAHUE: Yeah.

STERN: He lined that up pretty quick, didn't he?

DONAHUE: Oh yeah, oh yeah! He still—well, yeah, he still hung on, pretty much. And Harris was anxious to go to the White House, and he really didn't do anything else on it after that. But then, you see, we started getting—an interesting thing is that we had really discounted the input we were going to get from outside. I don't know why we discounted it, but we did. And all of a sudden, everybody who met with the President—now, this is [unclear], I mean, I don't care who it was that came down, they left him a wish list, a list of recommendations. And he'd lose some of them, or some of them made some sense to him. Sometimes we'd get them, and some, you know, if he happened to see someone going by, he'd just tell someone who wasn't involved at all to check out so-and-so.

STERN: That continued? That never stopped.

DONAHUE: Oh, that never stopped! I don't think it's—you know, the marvelous thing about Kennedy as a President is that he never felt that there was any structure. He was the structure! And let the goddamn structure tailor themselves to him. He didn't figure that if he wanted to check up on someone that was on a regulatory commission to call Dan Fenn [Dan H. Fenn, Jr.]. He just—

STERN: Called whoever happened to be in the office?

DONAHUE: Whoever happened to be next to him, and if you didn't know where to go to get the information, well—all he wanted was the answer, and he expected the answer. He only expected right answers anyway, so [unclear]. You know, as long as you got the right answer!

STERN: Was there any kind of a formalized distinction between the kinds of appointments you were making, Presidential appointments, Schedule C appointments?

DONAHUE: Not really.

STERN: Civil Service Department?

DONAHUE: You know, we talked about it, but it didn't work! For instance, if you developed a relationship with the Secretary of Agriculture, you might go through the entire thing. If, on the other hand, somebody else had worked from the very beginning, you know, they were different. For the longest time, as long as I was in the White House, I always talked to the Veterans Administration. Always, you know—

STERN: You had a nice friend over there?

DONAHUE: Yeah! [Laughs] He wrote me. He got parole.

STERN: Is he out?

DONAHUE: Yeah. But for all the time, I always did that, I called because it started. Same with the Post Office. When they had these big flare-ups, I talked to [unclear] or whoever it was; the rumor was that he would only talk to the President or me. Well, the President was never going to talk to him anyway, so he ended up only talking to me. So, those were the types of things that we got involved with. But we didn't, we weren't as compartmentalized as [unclear].

FENN: Dick, what happened, now I know the story from around the first of July, but what happened between the time when Adam and Harris and Sarge got off into doing other things, and you were doing other things, and when I came down and picked up the Presidential [unclear], there was some—Maguire [Richard Maguire] was doing some things. Dorothy was doing some things. And you guys had a weekly meeting for a while. That's where I get completely lost.

DONAHUE: Well, what really—I guess the next thing that happened that was dramatic was the people not meeting the President, but the people meeting us—or Larry, in particular. But this was when we really came eyeball to eyeball with the Congress, beginning almost the first of January, when we got involved in a rules strike. We all of a sudden found that we needed votes, and with the votes, those same people you're talking about votes, you're talking about [unclear]. So we got very, very heavily into those recommendations. And I suppose the dispute then—our priorities shifted. The hell with the people that helped us get there; now we were trying to get things done, and we were very anxious to mollify some people that we didn't really like very much. We were anxious to make appointments or at least give them answers. You know, it's important.

STERN: The President made a distinction. Dave Powers [David F. Powers] told me this story the other day, which he claimed happened just a few days after the election. They were sitting around in Palm Beach, and he claimed the President said, “For four years I’ve been crisscrossing the country, finding the people I needed to become President. Now I have only ten weeks to find the people I need to be President.”

DONAHUE: I think that there were other things that he said that were similar to it, you know: “After being around for all these years, I find I don’t know anybody,” meaning, you know, I just haven’t really associated with the types of people that run the government, as opposed to people who get you into government. [Unclear]

STERN: Right, he classified Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley] as a classic example.

DONAHUE: Yes.

STERN: Of the first type, but not the second.

DONAHUE: That’s right.

STERN: Okay, on the Rules Committee fight on the Congressional thing, by and large you weren’t messing around with Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology? And those weren’t the kinds of jobs they were interested in?

DONAHUE: I could—it might very well be. Like for instance—the poor guy; I’ll never forget—well, let me just say physically what happened. Nothing happened except most of it dumped on my desk. So if you go back in my telephone log to the first—well, one day I think I did a hundred and seven phone calls, some foolishness like that. It was just every—no one knew where to go, and they assumed that I must know. So you’d get involved in everything from interviewing people to trying to place people, or really trying to get information to trade off for what we were being asked for. I’m trying to think of the guy who got to be Secretary—Steve Ailes [Stephen Ailes], who got to be Secretary of the Army, for instance. For a short period of time, those nominations used to come across my desk! Well, I forget how Ailes got the job, but all I know is that nobody we knew knew him.

STERN: Really? That must have been Elvis Stahr [Elvis Jacob Stahr, Jr.] then?

DONAHUE: Yeah.

STERN: Stahr was the first Secretary. Ailes was Undersecretary.

DONAHUE: Okay, Ailes was Undersecretary. It was Undersecretary—

STERN: So you don't know how the hell he got a post?

DONAHUE: Well, he just sort of, you know, mooched around. And I don't know how he got involved in it, see? But I finally—the nomination, which, the final thing, was on my desk. It was on my desk, and on my desk, and so finally I got a call from Ailes, who was a consultant, saying, "I understand that my nomination is on your desk." And I sort of—I don't know what I said to him, but I wasn't really definite. And I just said, "I guess we don't know who you are," or something. The next thing, I got a call from Mike DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle]—or maybe I got the call, but I know that DiSalle said, "Look it, I know you're holding up the nomination. I want to tell you that he's a very good guy, and he deserves the job, and he understands what he has to do to get the job, but he has to do it." And I said, "Mike, just write out a letter [several words unclear]."

STERN: Desaultels' [Claude J. Desaultels] and Dorothy Davies' files seem to indicate that you at least checked off on virtually every appointment. There were some that were GS-3s.

DONAHUE: Well, that was at a point in time when we got to be really maniacs, okay? We decided—we got so mad, because we were losing control. And then all of these people were running in, and they were finding that it wasn't very important; it was a heck of a lot better to know someone over in GSA, or to know somebody in the Agriculture Department, than to know who was President. But we insisted that everything be held up, and we did. And we did set up a formal—oh, then we also had this enormous outcry from John Bailey [John Moran Bailey], saying that the Democratic Party is being destroyed, and raped, and robbed, and everything else. And of course John would go into those fits of depression where, "I know you bastards are doing me in, and you're always doing me in. I'm not squawking about it, but you're doing me in, and you better take care of things." So Dick Maguire had been over at the National Committee, and then he came over and was over at [unclear]. And we did try to set up a system whereby we'd meet once a week and go over what was there, or what our requirements were, or what we could do. It really was not really effective, because if we sat around and decided, unanimously, that [unclear] should be Chairman of this, that didn't have a heck of a lot of effect. Because quite frankly, the President might not make the appointment.

STERN: What if you were divided? What would you do in that case?

DONAHUE: If you're divided, well, we could always win. I mean, as far as if we wanted to stop something. But the problem was we weren't very effective in getting it done.

FENN: But you had a mixed bag then, right? You were doing Schedule Cs; you were doing an occasional Presidential appointment; you were doing Civil Service, so it just sort of—?

DONAHUE: Well then we had another thing that—

STERN: Well, I was just going to say that, just as a representative example from the file, I found that you handled cabinet heads, ambassadors, members of federal commissions, head of the V.A. Hospitals, Patent Examiners, U.S. Marshals, U.S. Attorneys, judges, special assistants to secretaries, etcetera. Just about everything!

DONAHUE: It was a little wild. But one of the—and, although we did start to get a [unclear], one of the things that doesn't show in all of that, which is interesting: we changed every Regional Director of the Post Office. We changed every Regional Director of HHFA, every State Director of FHA, every Regional Director of GSA. And we never got—and we did it all with reasonable balance, and without one lawsuit, and without one bit of difficulty.

STERN: Why did you pick those particular agencies?

DONAHUE: They were the most sensitive as far as Congress was concerned. I mean, it was the place where most of the Congress had felt the—every SBA—where they had felt the most Republican influence, either in terms of favoritism, or negativism. But it was a son of a gun! I mean, you tried, for instance, to change something—to change something in Alabama, I think [unclear]. You try to do something like Ohio, and try to balance all the competing forces, politics, qualifications. And that is for a place with qualified people. I don't think—I think if we buried a stiff, we pretty well announced that we were burying a stiff. But we never—you know, we tried to get with the best, because we were trying to get the best government.

STERN: Tell me about—Fred Malek says that the Kennedy Administration really raped the Civil Service. By the time I got there in the summer, we were pretty scrupulously leaving Civil Service things alone, and that was only [unclear] Presidential [unclear] anyway. But we were passing them on recommendations and suggestions, but we were not mucking around in Civil Service [unclear].

DONAHUE: I think that's absolutely wrong. We didn't—what we did was—Farmer's Home Administration, we changed that. They don't have much impact in Massachusetts, [laughs] but we [unclear] on that! The Farmer's Home Administrator in Texas. The one thing in the world Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] just was scared to death of was Sam Rayburn. He just couldn't survive. So Rayburn, who never asked for anything, now his back was hurting him, you know his back was against him. But he wanted a Farmer's Home Administrator in Texas who was the prior Farmer's Home Administrator, and who had been fired by the Republicans. And Rayburn wanted him back, and as far as we could find out, that was fine. It didn't seem to be a very difficult thing. I went and told someone, "Go ahead and reappoint the guy, and get rid of the bum that was in there." I got the damnedest call from Johnson! He went on and on and on and on and on, that some crazy bum had appointed the worst drunk there ever was in Texas! I said, "Very simple.

I'm the one that did it, Mr. Vice President, and the basis of it was at the recommendation of the Speaker." "Well, do you recognize my agreement with the President, that I'm to control everything in Texas?" "I understand." I said, "Tell you why I did it, Mr. Vice President. I did it at the suggestion of the Speaker, and I'll call up the Speaker and tell him that you don't want him, and we will remove him." "Now, don't you be a fresh son of a bitch with me, boy," and on and on and on! And, because he would just never talk to Rayburn! Well, it went on, and it got so bad that I said I was going to do another investigation—and you can do a Civil Service investigation, which is different than a full field. But a full field Civil Service investigation [unclear]. We looked it all over. I forget who I talked to, and I talked to, and I said, "How the heck did we do this? This guy's a terrible drunk," and all that. Well, it turned out that the only information that Johnson had was from the guy's former wife. And they went to everybody! No one could find that the guy ever drank! But he never would [several words unclear]. But we didn't change it.

STERN: You did change him?

DONAHUE: Oh, no, no, we did [unclear]. But he [unclear].

STERN: Well, did you get many—talk about GS-3s. Did you get many GS-3s, GS-10s, 12s, 15s, that you were screwing around with?

DONAHUE: The only ones that you get involved in were the ones that the President personally asked for. For instance, I did all the PT-109 crew as best we could. And honest to God, it was harder to get this poor guy! I mean, those were the ones who really would aggravate you. There was one classic [unclear]. It was a black secretary that Kennedy had—what was her name?—a member up here in Boston. Ginny. Ginny—okay, Ginny whatever her name was. And she came—she was a pain in the ass. But in any event, she had always been with him, and all of that. With her husband, she wanted to come to Washington, and be a big deal in the Administration, and God knows... Her husband worked—I think either worked for GSA, or worked in the Navy Yard. But he worked in the Civil Service, and all we were trying to do was transfer him. Huh! What a—you know, you just can't imagine!

STERN: Yeah, it's difficult.

DONAHUE: Getting Evelyn Lincoln's [Evelyn N. Lincoln] husband Abe [Harold W. Lincoln] a job! My God! You just have no idea how hard it was! It just was unbelievable!

FENN: I once took two years with Charlie Edwards. Charlie Edwards [unclear].

DONAHUE: Yeah, just unbelievable! I mean, those were the things! And I mean, hey look! I remember getting Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] over in the Labor Department. Just unbelievable! I find—and I got to be a great friend with

him afterwards, Jim Reynolds [James J. Reynolds]. And we had—that's one of the jobs we had penciled in, because it was a Schedule C appointment, Special Assistant to the Undersecretary. So we told Reynolds, "Your Special Assistant is Jerry Bruno." He gets on the phone, and he starts telling me, "I've only got one appointment that I can make, and this is the only one I can do. And gee, you're taking it away from me. And Jerry's a nice fellow." So I finally said to him, I said, "Look, Mr. Reynolds, I don't know you, and I know the President of the United States doesn't know you. But he knows Jerry Bruno, and he knows Jerry Bruno is not on the payroll. And all he cares is, is Jerry Bruno working. And whether you're working or not, he has no concern." [Several words unclear]. [Laughter] "Can I come over and talk to you?" "Sure." So he came over, and I just went over it with him. Well, he, Jerry—eventually he put Jerry on over there, and they got to be very great friends. Jerry came to me and said, "I don't want that job! There's no way in the world I want that job! And besides which, I don't want to work in government; I want to work in politics." So, but that was—

FENN: He was over there for a while.

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah! Oh, but it was the confrontation involved!

STERN: There are just dozens and dozens of recommendations in the files for various, patent examiners—and a lot in the V.A., so that was a major area—that came from members of Congress, which were funneled through your office, as far as I can see. Transfers, promotions.

FENN: We did very little of that.

DONAHUE: What we did require them, however, is to report to us personnel actions. And the Veterans Administration is a perfect example of people who took their orders literally. They were told to do it. Now what we found is we could not possibly digest all the decisions that were made.

FENN: The V.A. was almost the only one that did.

DONAHUE: Right. But they'd send over all of these things, and they'd put the—well, they'd tell you who was over there. They'd put all the background, why they were doing it. You know, which was the information that we'd want. Well every now and then Larry would see some of those things, and he'd say, "Well, what the hell did this guy get a GS-10 for when nobody in the district recommended him?" all that sort. And if you were foolish enough, you could trace it back. But if you ever tried to run down—suppose you went to a Congressman and said, "Do you really want Dan Fenn to be the Assistant Administrator of the FHA for the Eastern District of Idaho?" or something like that, he'd say, "Who is Dan Fenn? Well, I'll get back to you." Well what he would do is, he'd go running out, and he'd say, "Who do I know who can fill a GS-10?" and all that. And he'd get back to you and say, "He's unqualified, and here is a perfect choice." Well.

STERN: You get yourself into more trouble than you want.

DONAHUE: I never thought it was worth a damn!

STERN: I didn't either. What—did you get, when the Rules Committee [unclear], did you get a lot of pressure from Congressmen for Civil Service promotions and Civil Service appointments? If so, how did you handle those?

DONAHUE: Of course. The one that we used to have was postal patronage.

FENN: That was all right. That was legit in those days.

DONAHUE: Well, we did some of that. But one of the things that we did is that we took away postal patronage. We just absolutely shut people off. The funny thing is, you find that Washington and government is very circular, that no one in the Congress is unimportant, and that you do need somebody, you know, wherever you're going. You're always needed, some way or the other. You could find the worst son of a gun in the world, and then you'd find that he was on an appropriations subcommittee that might have foreign aid right by the throat. It's a very, very difficult thing, because it looks easier from the outside than it is from the inside.

STERN: Didn't you make a decision in the very early months that you would favor Congressional patronage, as opposed to state Democratic—?

DONAHUE: Oh, absolutely! We just abandoned our claims in the campaign, except that—and that was really one of the reasons that I stayed in the business. I never—up to the time I left, I always had a certain amount of it. Because it got so people could remember, and people could get in contact. And I had very great difficulty shutting them off, and I would get my nose [several words unclear].

STERN: Do you think if the President had, for example, a much stronger majority in Congress, that you would have been under less pressure?

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah. You know, you just cannot review the early—well, the whole Administration—without reviewing it through the eyes of the campaign, and the anti-Catholic attitude. I mean, because that's the thing that made the Congress feel that they knew more than the President. Because, you know, ninety-five percent of them ran ahead of him in their districts, so—

STERN: How did Ralph emerge as the Personnel Director, and how did what he was doing and what you were doing in personnel area, after the inauguration, fit together?

DONAHUE: Well, it really was that Ralph—for instance, the thing that Ralph was principally concerned with at the very beginning were things like the State Department, where he had pretty good knowledge, and the Labor Department, which he had great knowledge that we worth something, on, you know. And then Ralph was doing the mechanical [unclear], in the White House, of being the policeman of how they came and how they went. And the President started to rely on him for funneling that information. And Ralph was very good at balancing a lot of [unclear]. I don't think it's been [unclear].

STERN: I agree. I agree.

DONAHUE: And I think he was much more important then. But also, Ralph was not a very good [unclear], and you know, if a fight got real bad, you know, Ralph got screwed by Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] something awful!

STERN: Mm-hm.

DONAHUE: On a rather regular basis.

STERN: Or by Kenny, too.

DONAHUE: Or by Kenny, yeah. And Ralph was too nice to—he certainly wouldn't have taken some of the things. But he was a very, very good and devoted guy.

FENN: But he basically got to have the function.

STERN: Nobody else wanted it, [unclear].

DONAHUE: No, no! But also, he was the most conscientious of the bunch. You know, Ralph would never—I can see moments, I can remember moments of desperation where he was just fed up, and said, "Oh, the hell with it." And sign off. And Ralph wouldn't do it. You know, Ralph would keep going, and trying to find somebody better, or try to [unclear].

STERN: Well, was there any difference? I mean, you were doing personnel things, and Ralph was doing personnel things. How did you decide which was doing which?

DONAHUE: Oh, I talked to him all the time. You know, we might talk two, three times a day. Or we might talk, or might just generally get together with a laundry list, and go over types of things. Because Ralph would be getting heat from different sources, and he would not be as concerned. Oh, I would be getting—I mean, every one of them! Mike Manatos [Michael N. Manatos] could drive you right up the wall! And all he would do is go up on the Hill, and come back with a list.

STERN: With a list?

DONAHUE: Jeeze! And you know, it was always never ending. Every night that Larry went out, which is almost every night, he'd come home with pockets filled with notes. You know, and those were the memorandas [unclear], but they met with somebody. And Larry persisted in refusing to learn anything about personnel. I mean, he was adamant that he wasn't going to learn anything about it, because you know, they had some of the worst conversations over it. And he really didn't care, or he didn't appear to care very much where a function fit, and what was qualified. When he got something in his mind, like he wanted to pass something, he didn't give a damn if the candidate was qualified or not. There's a pretty good story about my responsibility. There's a guy by the name of Harold Donohue [Harold Daniel Donohue] who's a Congressman from Worcester. And you know, we've known Harold for years. And we had a Farm Bill come up one time, and jeeze, I look at the list, and all of sudden Harold Donohue going to vote against it. And that's crazy! I had had a series of memoranda from Larry that Harold Donohue was interested in his brother-in-law becoming Financial Officer in the Worcester Post Office. So I called him up and I said to him something about the bill, and he says, "I am absolutely against the Administration. They've ignored me, and after all my friendship with them!" "Well, what's wrong?" "Look," he says, "You know I'm a bachelor; I live with my sister and her husband. He works in the Post Office. I come home every weekend, I have every meal, and my sister says to me, 'You are the Congressman. You're a big man. Look at my husband. Why can't he be Financial Officer?'" "Well," I says, "just don't worry." I got a hold of Brawley. I had the guy's name. I said, "Bill, So-and-so at Worcester Post Office is Financial Officer by night fall! I don't care!" Brawley called me back in an hour. He said, "You can tell the Congressman that he is now Financial Officer of Worcester Post Office." "Thank you very much." Next day I get a call from Brawley. He said, "You know, that wasn't the easiest job I ever had to do." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Do you know what his job was before?" "No." He said, "He was a mechanic in the garage!"

STERN: [Laughs] Oh, no!

DONAHUE: Oh!

STERN: Did you sleep well that night?

DONAHUE: [Laughs]

FENN: [Laughs] Did you ever go to Worcester Post Office after that?

DONAHUE: That's one of the things that I—

STERN: What do you see as Dorothy Davies' role at the start, and how did it change over this?

DONAHUE: Well, she just was paper, she was managing paper. But she was an old Hill person. Then she started getting involved personally, you know, and she developed some relationships with some people, and she sort of had a limited clientele of people that she was trying to put to work [unclear].

STERN: It seems from the files that she essentially would keep track of things at Personnel.

FENN: Yeah, that's what the files show. What happened—I think what happened was that Dorothy Davies-Donahue-O'Donnell liaison concentrated more on friends and associates than on the Congressional end, began to clash with the Dungan-Fenn operation.

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah!

FENN: And Dorothy got very [unclear], and we had some—

DONAHUE: Yeah, but Dorothy—

FENN: —real battle royals.

DONAHUE: But Dorothy would be way out of her league! The other thing that Dorothy was very bad at when they misquoted. In other words, we might send over a do what you can, or this type of thing. And if she chose to determine, she would say that it was an order that this guy had to be taken care of, you know.

STERN: That's right.

DONAHUE: I mean, you'd get these crazy things! And sometimes I'd run into Dan, and Dan would be saying, you know, "How come everybody's so hot about this guy?" and he wouldn't even know what was hot about him. It would be Dorothy.

FENN: She would send memoranda to heads of agencies saying that this is a must, appoint this guy. Well, the smart ones around the town threw the memoranda away, but the dumb ones had round heels, and you'd find out a lot of stiffs were tucked away.

DONAHUE: And a lot of them came off nobody. I mean, there was no basis for it. Somebody that she either knew, or—I really, her function, basically, was supposed to be to manage the paper, period.

FENN: Boy, she was an operator, though!

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah.

FENN: But I know by the time—she wanted me out of there.

DONAHUE: Oh, she wanted—

FENN: She wanted me, yeah.

DONAHUE: She really wanted to do the whole blasted thing.

FENN: That's right. So we never reconciled that, and the interesting thing about it was that when, after November, and Dungan, and I had left by then. And even two years later, when Dungan had left, and John Macy [John W. Macy, Jr.] had taken over that operation, it took Macy two years to get rid of her. She was one tough broad!

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah. Well, she'd been on the payroll for years, you know, fighting. She'd fought her way up, and you know, she was still close to McClellan [John L. McClellan]. Once a week she'd go up and visit him, you know, and cootchie-cootchie-coo with him, and that's who—she'd always come back with a laundry list. And he was no great friend of mine.

FENN: So she was always responsible—a lot of that stuff from Dorothy came from McClellan?

DONAHUE: Oh, some of it, yeah. But it also came from her friends on the Hill, and her contacts. Her comment was always, "I am O'Donnell's girl. When push comes to shove, whatever Kenny says, I do." And Kenny cared. Sometimes he didn't give a damn. But Kenny was intensely loyal. If she said that someone was stepping on her foot, he'd like to cut the next leg off! [Laughter]

STERN: Is it possible at all to describe the mechanics of a typical appointment, if there is such a thing as a typical appointment? Exactly where you would go for information and sources you would attempt to contact?

DONAHUE: Not really. Not really. You know, in specific areas, yeah, but a typical appointment, I just—it's just that there was no typical situation that I can think of.

STERN: Did you find after a few months that there were things that you thought you could do, in terms of bending the system, that you found you couldn't do?

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah. We just couldn't impact it. One of the things that I thought really very quickly was that the level of Schedule Cs didn't cut nearly deep enough. Never, yeah, no President ever gets control of them. And the

more that they tried to what they call insulate the system. Best lesson I had about that was going to a federal national—National Management Association. The National Management Association had a—

STERN: American Management.

DONAHUE: American Management Association. They had a convention, and they asked me to be on a panel, and I went over to be on the panel. But the important thing for me was to pick up the literature, see who was there, and then all of a sudden pieces fell in place like you wouldn't believe. I mean, I could now understand why so-and-so thought that somebody in another agency was an [unclear].

STERN: Oh, you're talking about the American Association of [Unclear] Administration.

DONAHUE: All right, that's it. What that is, it's the greatest routing thing. And you let one of them in, and it's like getting a carpenter ant into a beam, you know.

FENN: That's right. That's a very important point. The sub-networks, and that was a key one. Jim Webb [James E. Webb], John Macy—

DONAHUE: Yeah! Boy, they take over the whole thing!

FENN: Brookings—

DONAHUE: Yeah. One of the men that—and they know names, and they know curriculum vitae. Okay, so they can always plug—they can send a guy over that looks like, you know, the second coming.

STERN: That's right.

DONAHUE: And, but they can plug in every single hole!

STERN: That's right.

DONAHUE: And their whole—if you look—then, I used to get [unclear] looking at the curriculum. Then you'd find that the guy who was the boss had been the other guy's deputy, and this. Gee! Jim Webb, I guess, was about—

STERN: Prize example!

DONAHUE: Prize example—had been everywhere, and knew everybody. And that is why you found that the bureaucracy doesn't change that much. It's very, very hard to get your decisions down. I used to say the President of the

United States can yell for a paper clip. And he may yell three times, and if was going to end up—and he never gets his paper clip. Well, somebody orders two hundred boxcars of paper clips!

STERN: Absolutely!

DONAHUE: The way it goes out, I'm— [Pause in Recording]—have any political support. But for cripe's sake, if he's in the network, all of a sudden they can end up with seven Senators. Then the question always came, and Larry would sometimes—you may have found records where we kept a fix on who was supporting who.

STERN: Oh, yeah, I found those.

DONAHUE: All right, so, but those things got to be as shallow as the devil, you know. You'd say, "Here's a guy supported by seven Senators and twenty-four Congressmen." Well, who knows whether the A.A. signed the letter, or somebody. Then you get involved in the silly process—which I never would do; I never did it once—of calling back all the supporters and saying, "Your candidate Dan Fenn has just been appointed Assistant Secretary of Commerce." The guy'd say, "Who?"

STERN: Yeah, right. Virtually every memo in those files says, "Call back so-and-so. Call Congressman, Senator."

FENN: Let me just get on there, picking up what Dick said about the SPA network, the thing that we were just talking about, which is that in that business you're surrounded, and to some extent certainly bedeviled by those networks: the personal sort of network, the Dorothy Davies thing, or the Arthur Schlesinger thing. And the Civil Service personnel network, because they've got their own thing going just exactly the way SPA does. And so that it is really, you know, like a jungle that you're in there!

DONAHUE: Yeah, it's a very—and the question is, how can you find out whether someone's really any good? I suppose that we were concerned—I was concerned about were they any good but I was also concerned: were they loyal? Because I'll tell you, you get someone who's loyal to someone on the hill, and not loyal to the Administration—

FENN: Oh, boy—

DONAHUE: Then you have got yourself a worse—

FENN: Well, look at Rand Dixon [Paul Rand Dixon].

DONAHUE: Yeah.

FENN: A nice guy, decent guy, played the game well. But his lines were not to us!

DONAHUE: Absolutely, absolutely. And you know, I'm not sure that that's exactly what it's all about, but it seems to me that if you are talking a tripartite system of government, the executive should have control. And when the executive gives up a portion of his control, and has to get along, it's then not appropriate to assess all of the lack, or blame for lack of administrative capacity, on the executive.

FENN: Let me ask you, [unclear]: what did you and Larry and Kenny think that Dungan and I were up to?

DONAHUE: Well sometimes they'd be antagonistic to you because they'd think you were putting a bunch of soft heads around who were not responsible.
[Laughs]

FENN: You mean responsive?

DONAHUE: Responsive.

FENN: [Unclear] fit the loyal, loyalty.

DONAHUE: But basically, no, other than that, I think that everybody was satisfied that with the quality, maintenance was very essential to us. As long as we could put appropriate input, it was marvelous.

FENN: All right, essentially did you see our shop as being concerned with presidential appointees, as opposed to a general body shop?

DONAHUE: Yeah, I think—oh, absolutely. Absolutely!

FENN: So when you turned to me, which you did, I think the most—gee, that looks great. The most intense, continuing project that you and I ever worked on was in 1962 after the Congressional election, where there were a group of people who got beaten.

DONAHUE: Yeah, yeah.

FENN: And then there was the Frank Kowalski thing and a few others—

DONAHUE: [Laughs]

FENN: —where you apparently felt that Dungan and I were going to be better able to find something for those—

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah.

FENN: —that goddamn Lutheran minister from Ohio!

DONAHUE: And best guy in the world, probably.

FENN: Yeah, he was a wonder! Or Homer Thornberry's [William Homer Thornberry] campaign manager, was a real, real tough one.

DONAHUE: Well, really I think first we felt that you had control. Secondly, there was no way in the world you could turn to Dorothy Davies, or Dick Maguire, or anybody like that, because they just didn't have any sense of what the government was about. If they did, they would come with the most impossible—

FENN: You were afraid that if you threw some of those people to Dorothy or Dick, that we would really—the quality control thing would go, that they would end up in places where they'd do us a lot of harm.

DONAHUE: Well, I always thought—and you know, this is like, again—but I thought that their capacity to embarrass us was so much greater than their capacity to ever help us. I would have done away with it, if I had my druthers.

FENN: Yeah, me too. I tried to, you know.

DONAHUE: Yeah, well I did—

FENN: And Kenny stomped on that.

DONAHUE: But I just thought that was—

FENN: Well, they got us into all that trouble with John Macy and the goddamn summer hiring. Remember that?

DONAHUE: Well, there were two or three memoranda that went out with my signature on them that were—I was not the author of, that would have been sufficient to bring down the Administration! I mean, there was one in particular that I would just never have forgiven anybody for.

FENN: What was that, looking for a job or something?

DONAHUE: No, it was looking—it was a direction to the Chairman of the F.C.C. to appoint a guy as head of the Broadcast Bureau, which is the licensing head.

FENN: That didn't have anything to do with anything here, did it?

DONAHUE: It sure could have! It sure could have had a substantial impact on Channel Five.

FENN: Do you know what we're talking about? We might as well get it on the tape, then we can take it, close it later. One of the things which was a potential embarrassment to the President, which he was quite jumpy about—except he kept hanging around your neck instead of Maguire's—

DONAHUE: Yeah.

FENN: —was that Dick Maguire and me, but I was a very secondary factor in it, were in intense contention with Channel Five in Boston, and had gotten the first decision out of the Administrative Law judge that we were to get the television channel, which was then overturned by the FCC, and then was in litigation and appeal, and so forth and so on. And I guess the President was pretty goddamn sensitive and jumpy about that one.

DONAHUE: Well, one of the damndest things: I got a call, or I got a message one time, from Bobby, from Kenny—from Bobby through Kenny—or from the President through Kenny, about some doggone thing that, “Damn it all, Dick damn well better get rid of his stock!” I got on the phone, and said, “Hey, look it. Let's get it straight. I don't know anything about it, except what I read in the paper! You've got me confused with Maguire, for cripes' sakes! I know nothing about it.” But then, when I got a memorandum suggesting the head of the Broadcast Bureau, I really blew up. And I told everybody that I could get a hold of that we should get rid of those people.

FENN: That could have—because that was so contentious!

DONAHUE: Well, it wasn't even so contentious. They were so stupid, and—

FENN: No, no, but what I mean is that the issue of who was going to be at Channel Five in Boston was intense.

DONAHUE: Hell, it was better than Goldfine [Bernard Goldfine]!

STERN: Was this the one that wasn't resolved until like five, six years ago?

DONAHUE: Sure, sure. That was in litigation for all the time we were down there. I never could understand. I didn't even know you were involved. I never could understand who was on first, and everybody had names like Mass Bay, Greater Boston—

FENN: Yeah, and I knew who was on—

DONAHUE: New England—

FENN: When I went down there, the opponents took a crack at it. But I had withdrawn, resigned, before I went.

DONAHUE: But I knew nothing about that.

FENN: Yeah, that would have—

DONAHUE: But that's why I just thought that that operation was never very helpful. I never thought that it did us any good.

FENN: But Kenny never either saw that, or had the concern or something, to lay his hands on it. Because when Maguire left—I don't know if, you may remember this. I don't know remember if I talked to you about it. But when Maguire left, Dungan and I hatched up a project—it came from me, essentially—to put the whole goddamn personnel operation, pull Dorothy Davies in under Dungan, and have her do the honoraries—stay out of the Civil Service stuff—have me do the Presidential appointees, and sort of watch what she was doing on the honorary [unclear], the honorary, you know, invitations to White House dinners, and that stuff, which is where the patronage really was, I thought. But Kenny would not have anything to do with that!

DONAHUE: That's good. She was very anxious to tell everybody what she had been able to do, which was really bunk! I cannot attribute anything that she did successfully. But I was always conscious of the potential embarrassment.

STERN: Just what was your relationship like with the Democratic National Committee, in terms of that?

DONAHUE: Pretty good, but the National Committee was—the one good relationship we had was with Louis Martin [Louis E. Martin], and that was an active thing, and that did meet on a regular basis, trying to get blacks. And that never ceased; you always worked with him.

FENN: Well yeah, except I'll tell you—and this is all on tape so I don't have to go into it in any detail—but Louis [sighs]—Louis had the same old goddamn list of names.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

FENN: And when we set out in mid-'62, I think it was, on a very specific project of plugging blacks into line, non-EEO positions at the upper level, we got six Schedule Cs from Macy, and that's where Andy Brimmer [Andrew F. Brimmer] came in, and that's where Davenport came in, and Stan Abair and stuff. Just holding those departments feet to the fire and saying, "Look, here's the Schedule C. Here are eight names; if you don't like one of these eight names, take another. But we want black

appointments.” But Louis ran the same track over and over again, and he didn’t know a lot of new names.

DONAHUE: That’s pretty hard.

STERN: Yeah. How about the assistant, Tom Brislin, [several words unclear]? Did you have any kind of day to day relationship with him? I’ve got a lot of memos from him.

DONAHUE: No. Yeah, that was a name, or that was—what happened was John Bailey got really in a snit, “You’re destroying the party.” And so we started saying, “You have input.” And Tom worked with him, and he would follow with the stuff over that they would get. Frequently people would attack us from three or four different angles. I think if anyone matched them up, you’d see a resume that might come from the Hill, that might come from the Democratic National Committee, or might have been picked up anywhere. But if a guy really wanted it, it would get in. Again, they were getting in, but there were not many going out. I mean, they were not being—I don’t think many were being taken care of.

FENN: And that made Bailey very mad.

DONAHUE: Yeah, yeah. And quite frankly, in order of, in the pecking order, his stuff would be dead last.

STERN: Mm-hm. I wonder if you could tell me how typical something like this is? This was a note from Brislin about an appointment from somebody from Massachusetts who was recommended to be Director of Mission USA in Thailand. And essentially he said, [reads] “Pat Lynch [John M. Lynch], our Massachusetts Chairman, says that Ewer [John Curtis Ewer] is a registered Republican. If he is to be named to this position because of his particular talents and qualifications, it must be without political clearance. The job of the National Committee is to get qualified Democrats jobs. Apparently no qualified Democrat is available for the job in Thailand, otherwise there would be no need to recommend Ewer. We have no desire to hamper the activities of any, but nevertheless we cannot in clear conscience give political clearance to any registered Republican for any job.”

DONAHUE: Oh, boy! All right, that would be a type of a thing that you would expect. And it wouldn’t amount to any—but I guarantee, Ewer hasn’t been in Massachusetts in forty years. I don’t know; my guess would be that he was a guy who was in the State Department. He was not?

FENN: I don’t think so! See, this is another kind of thing that happened. The President got this great idea, goddamn it!

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah, that was Tom Watson [Thomas J. Watson, Jr.]—

FENN: Tom Watson, yeah. Operation Tycoon. And the idea was: the President was very concerned about AID [Agency for International Development]. And the idea was, let's bring in a bunch of really hotshot business men, and plug them into the AID jobs.

DONAHUE: Borrow them for a year, two years.

STERN: Yeah, and that was the most asinine—[intercom beeps] [Pause in Recording] Where were we?

DONAHUE: I don't know.

FENN: Oh, about the—oh, John Ewer and Operation Tycoon.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

FENN: That's another network!

DONAHUE: There's a very interesting story with regards to that. Watson was called, and said, "Would you lend one of the great businessmen for our time?" And Watson was much taken with it. And the first guy he offered was his assistant. Do you remember him?

FENN: Do I? Stan something.

DONAHUE: Here's a guy, we're talking about now where Cabinet Officers were getting twenty-five thousand dollars. This is before the Executive Pay Act. Here's a guy who was being paid, what, eighty thousand dollars? Or some, I mean, enormous amount of dough! The guy looked like he stepped out of a band box. He should have been—Central Casting could have sent him. You wouldn't hire him, you know, to empty a waste basket!

STERN: Terrible!

DONAHUE: As light as air! But, Tom was—and so what happened? You went to any businessman; you said, "Will you lend us your executive?" Sure they'll lend you! They'll lend you someone's brother-in-law, a stiff, to get rid of them! There's nobody in this business who has—in any business, who has enough good people. I mean, if you ask me to lend you a lawyer—

STERN: I've only got one; I'll lend you my best one! [Laughs] I don't care what you say.

DONAHUE: I mean, I'll rent my best one!

FENN: But the President was very naïve on personnel kinds of things anyway, and he thought that was the neatest idea in the world. Because anybody who came out of IBM must be a terrific manager, and certainly better than those stiffes that they have over at AIB So that we spend half our time fighting off those guys that Watson and Stanley what's-his-face were pushing.

DONAHUE: Were trying to get rid of.

STERN: There were numbers of appointments that were recommended by Republicans in Congress, and I found evidence that obviously, in terms of close votes, that sometimes did have to pay attention to them.

DONAHUE: You bet your life.

STERN: One thing that struck me was how many were turned down that were recommended by John Lindsay [John V. Lindsay]. Was there any particular reason for that?

DONAHUE: Well, John Lindsay, he had no other reason to vote. I mean, he had no place to go, you know. He could never trade off. There was the group, I mean, there was Morse [Wayne L. Morse?], Lindsay, Sayboll. The guy with the two names from Connecticut—shows you what time has done. But there were five or six Republicans. Well, Mac Mathias [Charles M. Mathias] was one that you could frequently count on. You could count on [unclear]. And they had no real place to go. They were elected as Republicans, but they basically, on the issues, the [unclear] and the minimum wage—they had to vote with us. But you had, you know, tried to be a little bit nicer to them than some of the real turkeys. But Lindsay never really was very—he was not much of a leader. The other thing is that if your guy, you were going to do something for a fellow, you were hoping they could bring someone with them. And that's the other thing that nobody—it's a totally different story, but it's how little people really understood who was influential in Congress. Some of the biggest names were the least influential.

STERN: Can you recall any specifics about some especially tough appointments, like for example, Mortimer Caplin [Mortimer M. Caplin], because of his leftist background? I know there was a lot of stink about whether he ought to be appointed.

DONAHUE: There was no stink about him at all. I mean, relatively. Because he was the teacher at law school for Teddy, and he was recommended by Bill Battle [William Cullen Battle]. So I would take almost anybody. The worst thing that ever happened—and this is true! This is awful. This tape, I better [unclear] survive, something. We were looking for a Commissioner of Internal Revenue. This is very important. This is the first good lesson I had in politics. So, I was very close to Billy Green [William J. Green, Jr.], who was, you know, in charge in Philadelphia. And I called him up, and he was squawking that we did nothing for him, [unclear] for the President. I said, "Well, who do you

know as a good Commissioner of Internal Revenue?” He says, “I got one.” I said, “You have?” And he proceeded to send through a guy who was about as marvelous as you could find. This guy was a senior partner in a major Philadelphia accounting firm. He had taught, and done very blasted thing in the world. And jeeze, he was a marvelous candidate. It turned out they went with Caplin. I later said to Green, “You know that guy you sent down for Commissioner of Internal Revenue? Do you know him very well?” He says, “I think I met him once.” And I said, “Well, what did you send him for?” Well, he said, “You don’t think the first time you asked for someone, I was going to give you a stiff, do you?” He would give up, you know, exactly somebody! Okay, the second thing is that Paul Corbin, who you may have heard of?

STERN: Yeah.

DONAHUE: Paul Corbin produced a guy that almost got it, a fellow who did get it, called by the name of John Gronouski, out of Wisconsin. Gronouski sat in a room with me, which, he started talking about his accounting background, and being Commissioner of Internal Revenue. And then he started saying, “You know, I know how to do things,” and started winking at me. And you know, “It’s very helpful that you have a friend, you know, over there, because there are some things you may want to do.” I don’t know whether I got Ralph in the conference or not! [Laughs] I got scared to death! I said, “Jeeze! If we put this guy in, we’ll all end up in the can!” And he was winking, blinking, you know, “I can take care of this and I can take care of that.” And I don’t know whether I said to Bobby or somebody, “Jeeze, the last guy in the world that we need for it is John Gronouski.” But Caplin really was not controversial.

STERN: It’s funny, because I found some stuff indicating that there was a lot of opposition to his appointment.

DONAHUE: He was, he was not a very—he was very responsive! Actually, [laughs] with him, I located all of the data processing centers, including the one right down here in Andover. And they never—Gene Keogh [Eugene James Keogh used to get me absolutely furious! He used to say, “New York State pays something like ten percent of all the taxes in the whole United States, and they have to send their returns up to about ten miles from your home to have them processed!” [Laughs] There was a lot of jobs there. But Caplin was not that, you know, [unclear]. The only—and he was pretty responsive.

STERN: What about major errors or things that caused some embarrassment to the Administration? I’m thinking of Frank Reeves.

DONAHUE: Well, you know, that was sloppiness. But look it, this Administration has just done it with my old classmate, we almost did him. Todd Duncan’s son, Charlie Duncan, has just become a Federal Judge. We tried to make Charlie Duncan either District Attorney or something like that. He hadn’t paid his taxes either! Now obviously, the statute’s run, and he’s caught up paying his taxes, because they

just made him either U.S. Attorney or Judge.

STERN: [Whistles] Reeves and Duncan both came on about the same time.

DONAHUE: Yeah. And you know, I was in college with Duncan.

FENN: But that was a quick change after them, because after those appointments—

DONAHUE: That was very early on.

FENN: Yeah, then we began to insist on FBI checks before the appointments were announced.

DONAHUE: One of the things that you may come across is that during the interregnum, we were bothered by leaks.

STERN: I was just about to ask you that. The fact that people were being considered, to the FBI?

DONAHUE: So what we did was—and you may find a list somewhere around. In order to stop that, we found a list, a very long list, which we sent to the FBI, full-field. Let me tell you, parenthetically, we did not know that they charged us like twenty-five hundred dollars a full-field. There were more stocking horses on the list than you could shake a stick at, but later the network people told us we really screwed them! Because they were chasing leads all over the place, and they were then trying to plot some guy who was obviously going to be Farmer's Home Administrator, and they were on the track of a Secretary of State. They just didn't know where they were going! But that was done on purpose.

STERN: What problems did you have once an appointment was made to head a department, like let's say Secretary of Labor? Then, wouldn't it become very complex, in terms of filling the positions underneath, because there were people that weren't satisfied with that appointment?

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah, well then it got to be very imitative, see. Everybody who got to be Secretary of Something decided to do, set up his search team. And they'd have their own merit selection process, with which we would have frequently Chaucerian dialogue, you know, about the merit of them setting up their merit selection process! But they all did it. They all would then get together their brain trust, and they wanted to beat the President at his own game, find more qualified people. And most of the qualified people that they knew were people that they knew! And we had a hell of a job with that.

STERN: How about departments in which there were very specific interest groups, like for example, Interior, where you have coal, and oil, and gas, and then conservationists?

DONAHUE: Well, we had—we were gifted with the lighter than air battalion as Secretary, who was unbelievable! But there were good people, like John Carver [John A. Carver, Jr.], who were over there. And he had probably better sense, and better balance, and he was also easy to talk to. Wouldn't you say, Dan?

FENN: Oh, yeah, he was super. Well, he was a pol. He come off the Hill.

DONAHUE: Yeah, he came off the Hill, but he was also a very thoughtful guy, and a very intellectual guy. For those of us from the east who were not as familiar with the Interior Department's broad influence, I mean, and great impact, you could talk to someone like that. Of course, you talked to Stewart—Stewart really was lighter than air. His whole view—he wanted to be the master politician. If there was one goddamn thing he was lousy at, it was politics! And every time he did it, it was like, you know, an elephant in a bowl of whipped cream! Just awful! If he would just, you know, stay with the outdoors, and the woods and the streams and the Indians, [unclear]. But he always wanted to be sort of an inside joke, and he was!

FENN: He called me one time and says—this is about '61—thought it would be a great idea to start a birth control program in the South Sea Islands! [Laughter] Well listen, why don't I—I think we [unclear] this thing [unclear], so why don't I take off on my boat trip, and you guys go ahead.

DONAHUE: Have a good time.

[Pause in Recording]

STERN: One thing that struck me—maybe it's imposing present attitudes on something that happened, relatively speaking, a long time ago, but there were virtually, in all those files, almost no women appointed to any kind of political job.

DONAHUE: Well, there was no conscious effort to get them.

STERN: That's exactly what I was getting at. I remember once when May Craig [Elizabeth May Craig] got the President in a press conference and said, "Why aren't you appointing more women?" and he looked a little embarrassed, and he said, "Well, we're going to try and do a better job." I was just about to ask: was there any effort?

DONAHUE: I really don't think so. I mean, I don't—there's no question that we wanted to do it. But if you say—for instance, we did a conscious effort to solicit and recruit blacks. I am just absolutely blank on any conscious effort to recruit women. Obviously, if we came across one, you know, it was like a nugget. But you know, we didn't out into the highways and byways and try to find them. And I don't know, we just didn't do it.

STERN: This is, I would suppose, just an issue that had yet to really surface.

DONAHUE: That's right.

STERN: And it wasn't big on [unclear]?

DONAHUE: We had a much bigger issue, you know, why we weren't doing more for Italians. The ethnic thing was of much greater impact to us. We had a very vocal Italian group of Congressmen who were just absolutely livid that we weren't doing anything about it.

STERN: We have some evidence. They almost screwed up the very first bill that Kennedy was trying to get through Congress with their help. He hadn't made enough Italian American appointments. I think some Farm Bill.

DONAHUE: Yeah, oh, yeah!

STERN: And it passed on just a couple of votes, because they were furious. And most of them were from New York, as I remember.

DONAHUE: New York and New Jersey.

STERN: Yeah, right.

DONAHUE: But you've got Pete Rodino [Peter Wallace Rodino, Jr.] and the guy that went to jail, Addonizio [Hugh J. Addonizio]. There's a funny story about that, and it's a true story. I was at home one Sunday and the President called, and he said, "Dick, I want you to get a hold of Rodino. I'm going to appoint Anthony Celebrezze [Anthony J. Celebrezze] as Secretary of H.E.W." And he said, "You know, he's been on our back, and I really want you to get that done." So I was delighted, because I used to get a lot of bunk from Rodino. I used to get most of it, or as much as anybody; Kenny got a lot of it. So I get a hold of him; he's at home in New Jersey. And I say, "Mr. Rodino, I've got marvelous news for you." I said, "You know, you've been very conscious about the lack of Italian appointees. The President's about to announce tomorrow the appointment of Anthony Celebrezze as Secretary of H.E.W., and you must be tickled to death!" He says, "Well yeah, that's pretty good, Dick. But you know," he says, "He's not from New Jersey."

STERN: [Laughs] You can't win them all!

DONAHUE: You can't win any of them! [Laughs]

STERN: I found a number of examples in the files of conflicts which specifically identified you as the person who tried to work them out. I don't expect you to remember the specific examples, but perhaps you can give me some sense of how you would handle these kinds of conflicts? I'll give you two or three examples. One: there was a position open as Collector of Customs for Minnesota and Wisconsin.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

STERN: And the people in Minnesota felt that it belonged to them, but the people in Wisconsin said that it had been promised to them. And there's a note from Chairman Bailey saying: "Straighten this out with Dick Donahue. How would you resolve a conflict like that?"

DONAHUE: There's a lot of them. Sometimes, it was a historic basis, and you could find, by talking to the Treasury. Sometimes those jobs switched all the time.

STERN: You mean, just alternated?

DONAHUE: Alternated, yeah, and I remember something about that, but I have no memory of it at all now. Basically, I'd try to talk it out. And then, it might depend upon who had the most heat at the moment, you know. If Hubert [Hubert H. Humphrey] was really on our back, to appoint someone like that, and Prox [William Proxmire] and Nelson [Gaylord Nelson] were not—they were not that involved in stuff. But for instance, if the appointee that was projected in that instance, might have been somebody who was very loyal to us in the primary, and [unclear] primary to it, we might take the position and try to scratch it through. I'd basically just talk to everybody and try to get everybody to reason with me. The only other thing we could do is just hold it. You know, and you'd hold it until they got together. Our basic technique was: go together; you guys know who's fighting. Come back with one recommendation. And, because quite frankly—

STERN: Did it work?

DONAHUE: Yeah, sometimes, mostly. I mean, most people who are in the business recognize that nobody gets nothing if you just keep holding. And that was our offer. That was just what I recommended the Senator to do on Archie Cox [Archibald Cox]. "Carter wants to put somebody else in." I'd just tell him, "Tell him no one else is acceptable." That's a little bit reversed.

STERN: Just let me pick up on one point you just made, about, if you had this kind of conflict, could you finesse it through, for example, the use of Civil Service appointments? I sometimes find examples of trade-offs, at least how it appeared to me.

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah, there's no question that there's frequently be a trade. That was sometimes a compromise they would work out.

STERN: I see.

DONAHUE: I mean, they would come back and say, "Well, we are interested in some Regional Director and what's going to happen on that,"—

STERN: Here's two of those, and you take this?

DONAHUE: Something of that nature, yeah. Some of them, like for instance, there are certain things that you didn't care about. Like for instance, Collectors [unclear]. If a guy could get through the FBI, I didn't care who it was. If it was an FHA Administrator, that was something entirely different, because they had the approval of large amounts of money, and mortgages, and stuff like that. And you just couldn't stand still for somebody putting a stiff in there. You didn't mind if a guy was recommended, but you wanted to make very, very certain of the guy's integrity.

STERN: In the early months, did you pay any attention, significant attention, to where people's loyalties had been in the primaries? In other words, were you, did you tend not to want to reward people who had supported Humphrey?

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah! That was, you know, my instincts. Except that I didn't feel as strongly about Humphrey, because Humphrey had been so super himself during the campaign.

STERN: During the campaign, right.

DONAHUE: And actually, he was just magnificent right after—yeah, just really right. So you wouldn't feel as badly. But I would. And I think perhaps—I felt much more strongly about unscrewing the knickers of one person than, for instance, the President. The President could forget very easily. I mean, that was yesterday's fight, and he was on today's thing. And I guess it's typical of campaigns: the partisan, the people working for a candidate tend to take things more seriously than the candidate themselves. But you know, I was always discouraged to see us running and rewarding some guy who had been, you know, Humphrey's number one guy, or Johnson's number one guy, when some of our people were still in the [unclear].

STERN: Under what circumstances, if it's possible to generalize, would you oppose the strenuous recommendation of, let's say, a Democratic Senator? I found one case, and it's really intrigued me. There was a judgeship in Indiana, and at the bottom of the sheet somebody wrote: "Hartke [Vance Hartke] says no!" with an exclamation point. Then somebody else wrote: "The hell with Hartke." And the President made the appointment. I was wondering about—[laughs]

DONAHUE: Hartke was about as obnoxious as any person that you could ever meet. Hartke would call every day. He'd call, and he had a grinding way. He was a, oh, miserable son of a gun! And you couldn't satisfy him. He was absolutely voracious. It didn't make a doggone bit of difference. And he really couldn't vote a whole hell of a lot different than he'd vote, and he'd threaten all the time anyway. And I don't know what difference it would make. We just figured that we'd taken all we could from him. Jesus! And you could afford to do it, you know.

STERN: Is it possible to talk briefly about what a typical day was in this kind of operation? Where did you spend your time? How many phone calls you would make?

DONAHUE: Just responding to fires. I mean, I would think the least number of calls on a given day would be forty, but I would do over a hundred. And I'd merely be responding. I, to this day, will not talk very long on the telephone, and I never did then. But it might be, because I would be doing differently. I'd be responding to I guess which was the most emergent, just completing the call. The only currency that I ever got out of Washington that was successful was that I had a reputation for returning phone calls, which I didn't recognize was important. And try to get those done, and try to take care of the influx of things, and try to complete something. I tried to complete something every day, whatever the hell it was, get something finished and cut off, and taken off hold. The biggest frustration would be to have had something almost done, and then have two people say, "Well, I'll get back to you on it." Now, it might be Kenny, it might be Larry, or it might be somebody else. And then trying to get them to sign off and let's go, and let's go on to something else.

STERN: What was your access to the President on these kinds of matters? How often did you talk to him?

DONAHUE: Not very often, because he really didn't care about this stuff. I mean, he cared about it if it went wrong. He cared about—well, he really cared if it was resolved. But I mean, in terms of the battling, which would be all of the competing forces in the White House—he didn't care about that. Sometimes he'd, you know, he'd, in a legislative breakfast, that would be the time when you'd really talk to him. It might be at the legislative breakfast, walking over from the mansion, you know, some guys would get him on, and then say, "What about this and this and this?" And he'd want some answers very quickly. And you could normally anticipate the questions he was going to get. For instance, Humphrey! [Laughs] A beautiful man. He had—well, he knew more people,

and he had more—he had a laundry list that was longer than Adam Powell [Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.]! And you know, he'd come with it, and he'd forget about it. But the President really liked him, you know, and he might ask three or four or five things. He'd try to have them in mind, and answer them, and then he'd go on. Sometimes, like for instance, at night—by that I mean seven o'clock, seven-fifteen, seven-thirty—I would frequently be sitting at Kenny's desk. I used to do another thing [unclear]. In front of me we'd have a Presidential appointee that had a full-field FBI that was in. Kenny read the full-field FBI. If there was questions in them, he sent them to me, and I would go over them. And then, because it was slower then, I'd come down and sit, and we would chew on them. And sometimes the President would come out of his office and want to know what we were talking about. And we'd go through some of them, and basically we would resolve the problem. One of the ones, though, I remember, is on a collector of [unclear], and we were reviewing the guy's background. It turned out that the fellow apparently used to take his secretary around the state, and used to shack up with her wherever he went. And matter of fact, he got to be kind of notorious. He was a state official, I think it was Louisiana. And he was very highly recommended by Russell Long [Russell B. Long], and it was some recommendation. So we're talking about him, and the President said, "Well, what did he really do?" [Several words unclear], "What the hell. At least he's not queer!"

STERN: [Laughs]

DONAHUE: He was appointed.

STERN: Okay, I've just got like one or two more points on Personnel before we move over the Legislative Liaison. I found some stuff about you being involved in this really—it seemed to me from what I read—a pretty bitter dispute over patronage in New York: Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast], Mike Prendergast coming to the White House?

DONAHUE: Oh, yeah, yeah.

STERN: This was in the spring of '61.

DONAHUE: Yeah.

STERN: Claiming he'd really been shafted by the White House—

DONAHUE: Yeah, he [unclear].

STERN; And apparently he saw you—at least that's what the *New York Times* article said. The two of you sat down, and he seemed to leave—he was a bit more satisfied when he left. Can you give me some details?

DONAHUE: Well, the whole background of it was, it really was Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]. Ethel and Bobby had a terrible fight with him. He was State Chairman, but they just took a, you know, he wasn't very good for us in the election. He was—but he was fair; he was State Chairman. And a decision not made by me was he was to have no voice at all. I never really understood, because I never thought he was that bad. He certainly wasn't that good.

STERN: No voice at all, for a State Chairman, eh? Must have been a little unusual?

DONAHUE: Yeah, it really was. And you know, it's a heck of a big state. But we weren't giving, you know, relatively it wasn't that bad, because no State Chairman was getting a heck of a lot. But they were really—there were a lot of things going in the way to insult them, and the view was to bring them down. And in effect, it did, after a period of time. We had all kinds of stuff out of New York. You know, we had the citizen's groups themselves, and the citizen's groups had access through Bobby and through Ethel, because there were a lot of people that they knew—you know, the vanden Heuvels [William J. vanden Heuvel]. Some of those people are their friends. Plus the fact that you had the [unclear], you know, the Alex Rose's, and all of those things. So those people were having input, and plus the fact we were appointing a lot of people from New York, really, because of the type of place New York is. I mean, there are an awful lot of people who are worthy of consideration. And we had a very, very strong Congressional delegation. For instance, we had Keogh and Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] and those people, who had been very early and very up-front, and so we had a lot of obligations. So the fact that Prendergast wasn't getting a heck of a lot—it was more—it made him look bad, but no one else was getting a lot, either. And I do remember talking to him, and you know, going through the whole thing. And I don't think we ever did anything with him. I did get myself a little crosswise. I took it far and a little more than it would have been politic for me to do, because you know, I, there was a basic antagonism, always, between Ethel and the party regulars. She just couldn't understand party regulars. She thought that everything was done by rallies and storefronts and stuff like that. [Several words unclear]. But he didn't anything.

STERN: How about the press? Did you have any significant problems with the press over personnel issues? Were they accusing you of illegal or—?

DONAHUE: No. If they did, it never caught up with me. No, I don't really think we ever did. You know, I think we did, we were pretty fair.

STERN: Okay, if you're ready to move on to the Legislative Liaison area?

DONAHUE: Yeah.

STERN: Now, there's one question I'd like to clear up right at the start. You mentioned Henry Hall Wilson's thing before, and I think I mentioned my letter to you that I had interviewed him just about six weeks ago. And his

description of his role and your role does not fit a number of things that I found, and I wonder if you can clear it up. He says that he was alone in the House until 1962, when you then came over with Chuck Daly [Charles U. Daly] and joined him. But other things suggest to me that you were very much involved in liaison things from the very beginning.

DONAHUE: Sure. Oh, sure!

STERN: Although you were also working with patronage?

DONAHUE: Let me just explain what happened.

STERN: You were doing two things at once.

DONAHUE: Yeah, I always did. What happened was that—well, you have to really go back in history, and this is, I guess, somewhat restricted. But when the election was over, there was some question about what to do with Larry O'Brien. His relationship with Bobby wasn't always, you know, a thousand percent. Bobby never really understood that much about party organization, or political organization. The biggest thing that they had recommended, Bobby thought a marvelous thing was to have Larry be Deputy Postmaster General, which Larry considered one of the great insults of his life. And there was a big question about whether he was going to go, or stay, or do anything. Then, the real idea was how to carve out a job for him, and it was a catch as catch can thing. The idea was that he would have the job of Congressional Liaison. And there was a dispute. The President really didn't understand what Congressional Liaison meant. It was not a function which he understood from his thing on the Hill. He had never had any contact with any of the Eisenhower people, and he wasn't altogether abreast of what was going on. So Larry was named that, and the question was: would he take the personnel function? At that time, we were sort of trying to match people and function that were on the Eisenhower White House; that was really the ongoing thing. One of the things that they talked about was the Bryce Harlow [Bryce N. Harlow] particular operation, and so the President could kind of [unclear]. So Larry was named head of that. The President was extremely conscious of the fact that Larry had no exposure to the Hill, and didn't know anything about the Hill, or, you know, had spent a couple years in [unclear], but in terms of [unclear], really in work with it. And the President was perfectly fine [unclear], but he kept saying, "You've got to get a southerner. You've got to get a southerner," because all he could think about was how the place was [unclear] southern. And so, he was looking around. He had asked me to go with him--and I was ambivalent whether I wanted to go in government, or what I wanted to do—but, to get a southerner. And I came up with Henry Wilson. Larry had talked to him on the phone, but he never really met him. And I had, in the last days of the campaign, I had been in touch with him all the way through the campaign. I had gone through North Carolina and stayed at his home, and I knew that he knew something about the legislature, and I knew that God, he was southern! I knew him when he was being less than southern. And so I put them together in the Mayflower, and Larry agreed to put him on, take him on. But I don't think—I'm positive he didn't come on board, until, I don't know, when did he start?

STERN: It was just about the time the Rules Committee formed.

DONAHUE: Yeah. And we were trying to—actually, when we started, Larry and I met with Topper Thompson, what’s his name? Elliot from Alabama.

STERN: Oh, yeah, Elliot Bowling Thompson.

DONAHUE: Elliot Bowling Thompson, and we went over all the members of the House, and tried to put people in their places. And Harry wasn’t around then. But that was over at the Mayflower.

STERN: Are you quite certain he was not at that meeting?

DONAHUE: [Unclear]

STERN: Was Andy [unclear] at that meeting?

DONAHUE: Not that meeting—later meetings. [Pause in Recording] But I don’t remember them being there. I remember later meetings, when we attempted again to, you know, go over the members, and try to figure out who was on first, and who was on second.

STERN: There have been some things written about the—there’s a book, I can’t remember what university—he argued that the Kennedy Administration essentially initiated a very different—really changed the whole process of Legislative Liaison from what it had been under Eisenhower and Truman [Harry S. Truman], Truman and Eisenhower, rather, and that one of the things that was most significant was that the people that Larry O’Brien brought in were not really experienced in terms of the [unclear], but were very strong in terms of their party [unclear], and that O’Brien thought—it was very deliberate on this part—because he thought that it was good to get people who didn’t have too many connections and loyalties.

DONAHUE: Well, the first part I don’t agree with at all. The second part does make sense. One of the problems that you find, and I guess [several words unclear], was a very, very well-liked guy who spent a lot of time on the Hill. But if you spend your time in this very competitive role, and everybody likes you, then you haven’t been significant with whatever you’ve contributed. And that probably [several words unclear]. There’s no question that the warfare that we talked about in [unclear] and the network is just very very real. And if you take somebody off the Hill, you take them warts and all. And you take them with all of that stuff, and you never can really shake him, he never becomes clean. He always, you know, so-and-so’s [unclear]. [Unclear] for a long long time. So, the truth of it is [unclear] was trying to protect his own staff. He was trying to reinforce himself for the role of importance of the president and to do something. And to put together a staff that would be helpful. The stuff that evolved, and it did evolve, [unclear]. His view was, originally, was that Henry would be a House man, and that Mike would be a

Senate man, and that I would do what he was not doing. I would really be his number two. Unfortunately, that is how I ended up on a bunch of assignments that [unclear]. The problem that we ran into very quickly with Henry is that he had no courage [unclear]. And what we gained with his access to the Southerners is absolutely lost totally in the North. They refused to talk to him and insisted upon talking to Larry. So Larry says, "Hey, I can't spend my time talking to them." And that's how I got in to talk to them. And by that I'm talking about basically the people from big cities [unclear]... I would not do things that Henry would do. Henry would go up on the hill and visit some [unclear], and I just wouldn't do that because I was doing so many other things, and, well I just didn't do it. By the same token there was another group that Henry didn't relate to too too well, which we would expose for lack for a better of word, a [unclear]. These were sort of the liberal Westerners, and Chuck came in and [unclear]. But Henry... Henry liked to get involved in the nuts and bolts of specific legislation. He basically did what I did. We had to give him [unclear] up and down, if by the time we got involved in a contest, you had to start arguing merit [unclear] knew the pros and cons, the question was were they going to support the administration or not. So I didn't want to talk about [unclear].

[Stopped transcribing, not enough tape was audible for transcription. Please request recording for access to rest of interview.]

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