

**Maurice A. Donahue Oral History Interview – 4/27/1976**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Donahue, Massachusetts political figure, member of Massachusetts House of Representatives (1944-1947) and Senate (1948-1970), and delegate to Democratic National Convention (1960), discusses John F. Kennedy (JFK) and Foster Furcolo's relationship, JFK and Paul A. Dever's 1952 political campaigns, and JFK's 1956 vice presidential bid, among other issues.

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Maurice A. Donahue

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Oral History Interview

with

Maurice A. Donahue

April 27, 1976

Boston, Massachusetts

by William Johnson

For the John F. Kennedy Library

JOHNSON: This is William Johnson of the Kennedy Library. I am in the office of Maurice Donahue. For purposes of background, to go way back to the beginning, could you trace for me the origins of your interest in politics before you first went into elective office?

DONAHUE: Oh, I suppose that I was born into it. I had a rather unusual experience in that both my mother and my father were Hampden County commissioners. My father was for a long period of time, and when he died, my mother was appointed to fill his unexpired term. So that my father had held a number of elected offices before that so that I had it at home, I suppose, since I was born. It was just a natural thing to do to aspire for public office coming from the family that I did.

JOHNSON: Is the story that I've heard essentially correct, that you and Congressman Boland [Edward P. Boland], and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], and Matty Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan], all began as veteran reps in the Springfield area right after the war?

DONAHUE: No, that is not....

JOHNSON: That is not exactly correct?

DONAHUE: The correct situation is this. In the Springfield office of the Veterans Administration, after we had all been out of the service a year or so, they had what they call in the federal government, a reduction in force, and out of that office, five member were elected to the Massachusetts legislature and Larry O'Brien was a guidance counselor and he went to Washington with Congressman Furcolo [Foster Furcolo], whose office was also in that building in the private practice of law. From that office of the Veterans Administration, John Thompson [John F. Thompson] who later became the Speaker of the Massachusetts House, Jack O'Rourke from Northampton, Joe Cullen from Greenfield, Dick Reuther from Williamstown, and myself were elected to the Massachusetts legislature. Larry

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O'Brien was in our office, Congressman Boland was friendly with all of us but he was already an elected official as the Hampden County Register of Deeds, which was across the street.

JOHNSON: Had the men in this group known each other before, or was this the kind of occasion that they first had been thrown together?

DONAHUE: Uncle Sam put us together in he employ of the Veterans Administration. However, I'd been friendly with Boland all my life because we're relatives.

JOHNSON: In '48 when you first went to the legislature, how would you characterize the House, as you remember it when you first went in?

DONAHUE: Well, it was an awesome sight for me because I had never seen the State House before in my life, and it was an unusual experience and I suppose that it bears telling, but the morning after I was elected to the legislature, and that election was not a very hard one, I got a call from Congressman Boland asking me o have breakfast with a guest of his from Boston. I went to the breakfast and there were a number of other members of the legislature there and I'd never met any of them before except for the fellow from Holyoke, and Congressman Boland gave e a pledge card and asked me to sign it. I really didn't know much about that, but I knew that Eddie Boland wouldn't give me a bum steer and the guest from Boston was the now majority leader of the National House, Tip O'Neill [Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.], and that was the first time in the history of Massachusetts that the Democrats had been elected to control the Massachusetts House of Representatives, so that in casting that vote, along with my colleagues, we elected Tip as the first Democratic speaker in the long history of Massachusetts.

JOHNSON: So you think that was almost our first official act?

DONAHUE: There is no doubt about it.

JOHNSON: That's interesting. Is it possible to generalize about that generation of new politicians right after the war who were coming in to state politics about the same time you were?

DONAHUE: You know, they talk in legislature almost like it's a college and they talk about this is a very fine class, of that's a very fine class people to get elected to at the same time. Well, I suppose that... and they have a freshman class that's more of a social

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organization than anything else. Well, I was elected the president of that freshman class. There were a lot of very outstanding young men elected in that year. Joe Ward [Joseph Ward] from Fitchburg, who later went on to be secretary of state and was the democratic nominee for governor in 1960. Judge Cornelius Kiernan [Cornelius F. Kiernan] from Lowell, Judge Mario Umama from Boston, who spent over 20 years in the House and the Senate. An outstanding young man who later got into a little difficulty, but he was a very very bright guy by the name of Jimmy O'Dea [James L. O'Dea, Jr.] from Lowell, who became the district attorney of Middlesex and Andrew Quigley [Andrew P. Quigley] from Chelsea, who served in the House and Senate for many years and became the mayor of Chelsea for a long period of time. So that we were really in there with some fellows that did have a good career ahead of them in state government although none of us knew it at that time.

JOHNSON: Well, to the extent that it's a different question, how would you characterize the Senate in '50 when you first went in there?

DONAHUE: Well, that was an entirely different situation because the Senate was still controlled by the Republicans so that I went from the majority member in the House of Representatives to a minority member in the Senate. It was a much colder place, the members were much older, they had been there a long time, most of them were very conservative and they were not long on speeches. Their attitude at that time was let the kids talk, we've got the votes and so that we had a great deal of experience in debating although we never won a debate. But that year of '51, three of us came from the House of Representatives, together. We had a grand time for the next few years. John Collins [John F. Collins] was later elected mayor of Boston, and the same Andrew Quigley that I spoke about a few moments ago, John Collins had preceded Quigley and myself into the House of Representatives by two years so he was in the House four years when he came to the Senate. Quigley and I were only there two.

JOHNSON: Wasn't the Senate split 20-20 in '50?

DONAHUE: No.

JOHNSON: It wasn't?

DONAHUE: No. That was the... Yes, in 1950, but 11 was in the House then. I didn't go to the Senate until 1951 and it had gone back then to somewhere around 25 to 15, and it stayed that way for eight years, but we were making inroads all the time.

JOHNSON: What was the collection of the statewide

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Democratic Party about the same time?

DONAHUE: The condition of the statewide Democratic Party was excellent because, in my opinion, the only real genius that we ever had who was willing to work at it was the head of the party at that time, and that was Governor Dever [Paul A. Dever] and he raised the money and ran the party in a very sensible way. He was brilliant leader himself, and I don't think there has been anybody like him in Massachusetts since to do that type of job. Nobody could rally all forces around him as he did.

JOHNSON: I really wanted to know your feelings on Dever, but I guess you anticipated me there. What's your first political recollection of John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], the first recollection of being aware of him in the political scene?

DONAHUE: Well, I saw some pictures of his emaciated looking kid running for Congress, but I didn't really know him until after he was elected and he was gonna run for the Senate, and I would expect that his first visit to Holyoke was to my kitchen and we had all, I suppose, the friends and neighbors in and the only problem with that was that although I invited most of the "hep" political people, I incurred the wrath of a number of friends of my sisters, three in number of my sisters, only because they didn't get a chance to get invited to come up and shake hands with Congressman Kennedy. The house wasn't big enough at that time, but that was the first move that we made and from that time on, we worked for him, of course.

JOHNSON: What's your recollection of his reputation as a member of the Massachusetts delegation when he was in the Congress, back here among the Democratic politicians in the state?

DONAHUE: Well, I think that everybody thought that he was a very bright young fellow, but I don't think that they thought that he was paying enough attention to his homework at that time. I think that they thought that everything came easy to him as far as his intellectual capacity was concerned, but I think that at that time there were people and of course, I think a good deal of that came from the fact that he had ruffled some feathers in getting elected to Congress by knocking off a couple of people who thought that they had, you know, divine rights to the chair, and they were apt to spread a lot of rumors. But the only one that I can remember that was detrimental was that he could have



been applying himself a little harder to his job than he was. Other than that, everybody that came in contact with him, you know, was really charmed by him and he had a great

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warm personality and remembered peoples' names, which was very important for the ego of a lot of young pols around at that time so that when they were on a first name basis with him, I think they all thought that he was going to go someplace, even though at that time, there had not been any master plan, so called, come into being.

JOHNSON: You wouldn't have thought of him as somebody who was very interested in the things that affected your constituents in your district, then?

DONAHUE: Well, of course, I was a hundred miles away so that we... I never really looked at the Congress that much because in the first district where I still live, there hasn't been a Democrat in about a hundred and twenty years, and so that anything we got from Congress would be a bonus as far as the Democratic Party was concerned.

JOHNSON: So for you then, it was a problem if you needed Congressional help or assistance on anything that affected your district, or an of your constituents, you had to go to a friend outside your own district?

DONAHUE: Not very far. Just down the road, because Springfield is only eight miles from Holyoke and that's the 2nd district and at any time, Foster Furcolo was serving when I started so that all of the routine errands I used to get accomplished through Governor Furcolo.

JOHNSON: Were you close to Furcolo, politically and personally?

DONAHUE: Well, I was closer personally than I was politically, and when I make that statement, I say shame on his campaign organization. I was friendly, as I said earlier in this interview, with him before either one of us ran for office. As a matter of fact, I can go back a lot farther than that. I used to caddy for his father [Charles L. Furcolo] so that I knew the family very well, and because I was friendly with Senator Powers [John E. Powers] in the Senate, who was the Democratic leader at that time, Furcolo's legislative liaison people wouldn't talk to me so that I was never called on to give the Governor any help then I would say that even though we were in the minority, that was a terrible waste of talent and I think they made a big booboo. So that we have remained, and we are very warm personal friends, but I felt that if I was called on, I could have, done a lot more in the Furcolo regime than was done.

JOHNSON: That's curious. There's the story of the enduring

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bitterness between the Kennedy and the Furcolo people going way back to the very beginning, and I've never been sure to what extent the story is real and to what extent the story is reflection, not the mens' attitude but the attitudes of the people working for them.

DONAHUE: There's certainly no doubt that the stories were all around. I have always found that in public life, that it's easy to make your own enemies, you don't need to inherit anybody else's, so that I was friendly with both Furcolo and Kennedy through the years and would still be if Jack was around.

JOHNSON: What's your impression, thinking back, of the relation between Furcolo and Kennedy, between the two of them?

DONAHUE: I don't think it hurt President Kennedy, but I think it hurt Furcolo when he was trying to take "Salty" on, [Leverett A. Saltonstall]. I don't think there is any doubt about the fact that in a two-am fight, that with a Kennedy and a Furcolo, Furcolo is going to be the loser and I think that was the case.

JOHNSON: The story that, at least part of this bitterness, goes back to O'Brien's decision to leave Furcolo when he was with him down there in Washington, and come back and eventually go to work for Kennedy in the Senate campaign up here, do you think there's anything to that as the source?

DONAHUE: I don't really know. There was some things that happened in Furcolo's office before the break came about and there were a lot of rumors around at that time, none of them that I know of have ever been substantiated, and it's certainly one of the best kept secrets in political history in Massachusetts, so all I know is it happened and I don't know why and I'm not going to add anything to the realm of possibility because there were stories that were harmful to O'Brien to a secretary from Chicopee, who resigned just before O'Brien did and to Furcolo, I don't think any of them came out of it unscathed and all I can say is that it was regrettable because not only were O'Brien and Furcolo good friends, but I think that they were best men when each one of them got married, and it's a shame if something happens to ruin friendships like that because in politics, you really don't make that many.

JOHNSON: What's your assessment of Furcolo as a congressman in the period before he was...

DONAHUE: Oh, I think that he was a very hot piece of

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material and I think if he looked back, and you could run your life over he

probably would have stayed as a legislator because he got picked as one of the seven or ten outstanding congressmen in the country shortly after he was down there, and there is no doubt that Furcolo is the sort of a dreamer, likes to write, likes to be innovative and I don't think he really liked to sit behind a desk, so that as I look at his career now, I would say that he was a much stronger legislator than he was a governor because he delegated too much authority and the people who he delegated it to didn't follow through for him and as a result he got scarred up pretty badly as a governor. But he was an outstanding congressman.

JOHNSON: Yes. Exactly the way I would have asked the question. Do you think, then, that the bad press that he sometimes has gotten as a result of his service as governor, is because of his problems in managing the people that were working for him?

DONAHUE: I think that the bad press comes from a lot of the people that were appointed by him getting into serious difficulties that although they pointed some fingers at him, it was all washed out and it's hard to get your reputation back once somebody takes it away from you. I think that's one of the travesties that we've seen in our lifetime, are the Furcolo indictments.

JOHNSON: What would your guess be as the reasoning behind his deciding to leave that job and a promising career down there and come back and take the state treasurer's position?

DONAHUE: He took the state treasurer's job, I don't know this for sure—you just have to hazard a guess that Paul Dever told him that he'd be the first Italian American governor in Massachusetts history—and he certainly wouldn't have taken it if he thought that he was going to stay as treasurer for a long time because if there was ever a boy scout's job, that's it.

JOHNSON: I think Dever must have done a good sales job because...

DONAHUE: Oh, I'm sure he did. Dever wanted to help the party, you know, to have an Italian on the ticket and all that, he certainly picked one who could—you know, Foster on a given night could, as they would say up on the Hill, "talk a dog off a meat wagon"—a really convincing guy.

JOHNSON: When you first became aware of Kennedy's interest

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in going statewide, I expect this would be about 1951 or early 1952, he started this marathon operation of coming up from Washington every Thursday or on Friday, and then travelling around the state every place that they could get an audience and speaking all weekend, this is when he was first trying to get exposure, before he built up an

organization—do you have any recollection of whether you or other Democratic politicians would have any notice of when he was a congressman, when he was moving through the district on a weekend, would he be in their territory, was this something that his people did entirely on their own at first?

DONAHUE: Probably the best politician of the old school that I ever came in contact with was former Senate President John Powers and he was a great organizer and so forth, and he was in with the Kennedys early although you would think that there were not many things in common with Jack Kennedy and Johnny Powers, I guess the fact that they were both political pros was enough in common so that Johnny had a lot of his youngsters, like myself, in there early so that any time they were coming to our area, not only were we told but we were asked to be there and help with introductions and things of that type so that we all worked you know, early and often for him. And no one felt that he was an interloper or anything like that because most of us were with him long before we knew who was going to be running or if anybody was, because we just thought he'd be good for the party and he was equipped to do the job, if he wanted to buckle down.

JOHNSON: I think part of the explanation for Powers, as you say respect for him as a professional, I think the old man, Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], had a great deal of respect for him, too. When the Kennedy organization first began to develop in towns and Kennedy people began operating towns, were they helpful ever, or useful to Democratic politicians generally or...

DONAHUE: I don't think so.

JOHNSON: ... just serving one...

DONAHUE: One master.

JOHNSON: ... one master.

DONAHUE: I don't think so. I think that—well, it might have not been accepted by a lot of people who were in office—but if you were going to do your job right, you would have your own organization anyway, and if you didn't know the people in your district and you were going to rely on the people that Jack had, you probably wouldn't have

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got elected anyway because they weren't all real down-the-line Democrats that dominated in old industrial areas like I represented in Holyoke and Chicopee and Springfield. I certainly knew all the people that he had and I liked all of them, and in my own district, I got along with them, but when you were out in the country in small towns and so forth, he had people come out of the walls that no other Democrat would have been able to attract and as a result, they concentrated on Jack. There was some flack about in certain areas, it never bothered me

because I always felt that if I were doing my job right, I knew more people in the three cities personally than Jack or any of his secretaries, so that I was able to help them a lot more than they were ever able to help me.

JOHNSON: To you, at least then they weren't a problem. They didn't get in the way, they weren't a source of difficulty.

DONAHUE: Oh, no. They were just....

JOHNSON: I know there all other people who might have had.

DONAHUE: I'm sure a lot of other people did because you know, what the hell, they were trying to sell one product and that's O.K. If you were in office, you had to make sure that your own flanks were covered. During those years, I was able to do a lot of things because for seven straight elections, I didn't have a Democrat or a Republican running against me, so that people were giving me a vote of confidence every two years without having to worry about campaigning and so, as a result, I helped a lot of other people.

JOHNSON: Are there any in that Kennedy organization from the 1952 period, are any people from your area who were particularly visible who come to mind, whose names you might remember as well?

DONAHUE: You know, Larry O'Brien and Boland have always been in the forefront with the Kennedys and they're still active. You know, District Attorney Ryan was active in those early days, probably through Eddie Boland. Eddie Boland is undoubtedly the most respected and admired pol that Springfield has ever produced and all of those youngsters from "Hungry Hill," as soon as they were old enough to hold office, they got elected with Eddie's help, but he was able to, I don't like to use the word deliver, but they were all where Eddie was, and Eddie was always a strong Kennedy supporter. And the fact that Larry O'Brien grew up in Springfield helped some, and there's a lot

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of outstanding labor leaders in western Massachusetts at that time, one that just died recently, Herman Greenberg, and he was a boyhood friend of Eddie Boland's but he was also in the forefront with the Kennedys all of the time, and he was a very effective force with the labor people.

JOHNSON: Coming back to Boston for a minute, did you ever have any reason or any use for his Boston Congressional office that was here in town, close by to handle any of the things that Boston Congressional offices might handle?

DONAHUE: I would think that.... I used to call there from time to time and the service was O.K. but by and large, after Eddie Boland got elected to the Congress, I never

really bothered anybody else and in the Senate, of course, we had another ace in the hole in that of all the Boston boys or even myself if I so desired, could always pick up the phone and talk to the distinguished Speaker down there who would be on the phone in eight seconds and do any kind of stunt for you because he was a member of the alumni from the Massachusetts Senate so that Speaker McCormack [John William McCormack] was like everybody's Congressman. I very rarely bothered because I felt that most of the people that worked for Senator Kennedy would be looking for philosophical approaches to problems and I was, at that time, mostly, looking for political solutions and I found those in Congressman Boland's office or Speaker McCormack's office. And that's not any criticism, it's just that they were more politically oriented than was Senator Kennedy's office. Now, if you wanted issues or speeches or ideas, then you would certainly call Senator Kennedy's office and you could get lots of help in that area, but if you were talking on a concrete problem for an individual, then I think you were better served then going to one of the other guys who's horizons probably were not as broad.

JOHNSON: Do you think that pattern of their political usefulness was the pattern all the way through, to the Senate period as well as the House period?

DONAHUE: Oh, I think he paid a lot more attention in the Senate, and that reputation of not applying himself disappeared after he got elected to the Senate, but I don't really think it changed the climate of the people that he had around him, you know, in other words, they were more concerned about, you know, the Alaskan pipeline, or what's it going to do to the environment, than they were of increasing the minimum wage or something like that, in Massachusetts. As I say, it's just a difference in horizons. Senator Kennedy always, I felt, voted in a way that would make you proud to have elected him, and so forth, but he certainly

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wasn't the kind of guy you'd go up to and say, "Hey, Joe needs a thirty days on the state." And I think he understood that type of thing, but he sort of had an aura around him that would lead you to think that if you were going to be asking him for something, it ought to be on some national problem or global problem or something that required a lot of in depth analysis but not a political solution that could be taken care of by a telephone call, because I don't know that he did too much of that.

JOHNSON: That's interesting, the notion that the people around him weren't so useful for those bread and butter political kinds of things because of an issue orientation. I've heard the other kind of criticism that people like Frank Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]...

DONAHUE: Oh, no .

JOHNSON: ... from up here. They were political, but there was still problems with the kind of service that you were able to get from them, and the kind of...

DONAHUE: There is no doubt that Judge Morrissey was political, sure. And, you know, Larry O'Brien was a political animal, but I suppose they were concerned with "what's the congressman in Oklahoma going to be doing next weekend" or something like that, I know—and as I say this is not meant as a criticism—but if I were looking for a political solution, I'd go to a guy that I'd get it from in five minutes rather than having to track down the Martin Gertzman [Milton Gertzman] or whatever their names are that are...

JOHNSON: Milton.

DONAHUE: Milton, that don't whether South Boston is in Holyoke or not.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you about your assessment of Dever as a political leader and a party leader and you already gave me...

DONAHUE: I think he's the best—in my lifetime—he's the best that the Democratic Party had to offer and performed in that way.

JOHNSON: Now outside—in 1952—outside Boston, the gubernatorial campaign and the Senate campaign were supposed to be run separately with John Powers coordinating both the Dever and Kennedy campaigns in this area. There is some indication that this didn't always work too well outside Boston, and particularly toward the end

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when the Dever campaign began to look like it was in some trouble, that there was difficulty between the Kennedy and Dever people as to how much they were cooperating and how much they should help each other, do you remember anything about that particularly?

DONAHUE: I think that all of the Dever people were helping Kennedy but I don't think all of the Kennedy people were helping Dever.

JOHNSON: Do you characterize yourself as a Dever person helping Kennedy at that time? Do you think most of the legislative Democrats would have characterized themselves that way?

DONAHUE: I never fell into any camp like that. I just felt I was helping both of them because I thought they were both good for the party. I think Dever started to slip before the end. I think that his obituary could have been written when he was the keynoter at the Democratic National Convention and *Life* Magazine ran that picture of the Boston fat boy. I think that probably sealed his doom right there, and I don't think that there was any real cooperation. Once again, maybe in the cities there might have been some, but certainly in the towns, the people that were with Kennedy were not with Dever. And even

though they were both Irish Catholics, and both brilliant guys, Dever was a brilliant organizer and a brilliant administrator, he was looked upon as a pol where Jack never was. And that's the way it is. I suppose it's from the area that he came from in Cambridge, and so forth, he was, there are just certain people that are marked as pols, and....

JOHNSON: It's funny you get an image and it sticks...

DONAHUE: It sticks. I think there is some validity to that fact that those organizations did not work together.

JOHNSON: Was there ever any time during this period that it was difficult for Democrats and particularly Democrats in elective office, to coexist with Kennedy and Dever people, was that ever really a problem?

DONAHUE: Well, it wasn't with us in the Senate because we were in the minority and, you know, we hoped that Senator Kennedy was going to help us to elect Democrats to the Senate, and you know he.... You have to give him credit now—I'm talking about some concrete contribution that he made—but he devoted a couple of days to John Powers and I know on one Saturday that I can remember, he

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went to the 8th district where we thought there was the most trouble and spent a couple of hours in each district and made speeches for each one of our candidates so that in that particular way, there was no better pro than Jack Kennedy.

[Interruption—checking tapes]

[TAPE II SIDE I]

JOHNSON: I was asking about the 1956 convention in Chicago, and that vice presidential drive and whether you remembered it as the crash effort that it's sometimes characterized as or whether you remember it as being more systematic, and more serious than just some last minute, last ditch effort ?

DONAHUE: A couple of things would lead you to believe that it was a last minute effort, one of them was that my good friend and colleague, Senator Andrew Quigley from Chelsea, had brought a number of Kennedy badges out there with him, Kennedy for vice president. Andy probably had the most fertile political mind at that time, and I don't know whether he had any foresight into this or not, but I know that the day before the balloting was going to take place, that Bobby Kennedy[Robert F. Kennedy] came to Andy and Andy had to make some telephone calls back to Chelsea and they manufactured the badges overnight to have out in Chicago the next morning for delegates to wear and so forth, which is one of the indications that there wasn't any advance planning and another was that most of us stayed up the whole night going and bringing the message to all the delegates from other states across the country, and those are two things that would lead



me to believe that it was a crash effort, but then you can never believe that anything that the Kennedys had anything to do with, came off the cuff. Bobby by this time had become too sophisticated for anything like that so I would expect that at least among a few of them, that was probably worked out and the only other indication, as I say, of a crash program, might have been a good facade that it was something that was the spur of the moment, but knowing the profundity of Bobby, I would expect that there was advance planning that never surfaced as such.

JOHNSON: What was it like that night, the night of the crash effort?

DONAHUE: Well, we had a good product to sell, you know. And he was a fresh personality and he was, you know, going to be going against a, well, certainly one of the real spear carriers in the Democratic Party, Old Estes [Estes Kefauver], old coonskin, country boy had been a good Democrat and he'd of course had a lot exposure that Jack Kennedy didn't have, and when Adlai [Adlai E. Stevenson]

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decided that he was going to anoint anybody and throw it open, I think it was good for the party, but I also think that in the history that was written later, that it was better for Jack to have come close with that great floor fight and go down the drain to live to fight another day rather than having gotten the nomination, incurred the wrath of lots of people who liked Estes Kefauver, and also I'm sure that he could not have pulled Adlai over the top running against the national hero, so that I think the whole thing certainly was a memorable day for Kennedy because I think that's the day that really launched him as the national figure that he turned out to be.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what you were doing that night, who you were running around, who you were trying to buttonhole?

DONAHUE: Well, we had little task forces and you know we had lists of all the hotels where the different delegations were staying so that we were all... it was like running for the House of Representatives for the first time; you were ringing doorbells, but you were ringing on doorbells of speakers of the House, Congressmen and United States Senators and you know, in those days, the National Conventions were not like they have been in the last couple of years. They were.... Everybody that was a delegate there had a, what do they call them in the Army, hash marks for longevity. Well everybody that went to the National Conventions in those days, was some kind of a political pro in their own right. I remember spending a good deal of time the day of the—it shows you that I was still a little naive in those days—with the Michigan delegation, and they were controlled pretty much by Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams], and organized labor and I had found from somebody that there were something like 15 past grand knights of the Knights of Columbus in the Michigan delegation so having that exalted title myself, I went over and spent the time of day with my brothers and tried to approach them from the Knights of Columbus point of view and they were all very personable and very happy and what they were saying in effect was,

“Hey kid, we’d like to help you, we like your candidate, but this delegation’s controlled and you’re not going to rock this boat.” Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] and Soapy Williams, at that time, liked Estes and they said that they liked our candidate, but when they went home they wanted to have a job. Well, I think that we ran into a lot of that around the country, but it was you know, it was a learning experience for all of us and I think that certainly it was a great day for Senator Kennedy that he didn’t make it.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you about the press, in

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the western part of the state, particularly in the Holyoke-Springfield area in the ten years or so after the war. Where was the press, Independent, Republican, Democrat?

DONAHUE: Well, in Holyoke the press has always been Republican because it’s been owned by one family for four generations, and that’s the Dwight family, the father [William Dwight] and the grandfather [William G. Dwight] and grandmother [Minnie Ryan Dwight] of the just completed term of lieutenant governor, Donald Dwight [Donald R. Dwight] and the publisher [William Dwight Jr.] is now the former lieutenant governor’s brother so that in Holyoke, the press has always been Republican. In Springfield, well, let me say it’s always been a peculiar thing. It was owned by the Bowles Family for a long, long time, you know the famous family from Connecticut, the Ambassador [Chester B. Bowles], or maybe his brother or something like that. But there are three papers in Springfield and they’ve always been owned—they’re now part of the Newhouse chain [Newhouse newspaper chain]—but in those days, they were owned by the Bowles. The *Springfield Daily News*, you would find it very hard to find a better Democratic paper in the state or in the East. The *Springfield Union*, you would find it impossible to find a better Republican paper in the state or in the East. And the *Springfield Republican*, which was the Sunday paper, you would find it very hard to find a paper that could stand on the fence any better than the *Republican*. So the Springfield papers, at least you get a forum, but they’re owned by the same people and the *Daily News*, the night paper, was Democratic and the morning paper was Republican and Sunday was sort of independent. So that, sort of Mickey Mouse. That’s the way the press in western Massachusetts...

JOHNSON: Did you find them either particularly hostile or particularly friendly?

DONAHUE: Am I talking about me personally?

JOHNSON: Yes. About you, now, in the ten years or so after the war?

DONAHUE: When I was going for my tenth term in the Senate, the *Transcript* endorsed me.

JOHNSON: You didn’t want them to come out too soon? [Laughter]

DONAHUE: As I said however, I was very fortunate and I had seven straight free rides with no Democrat or no Republican, and I assume that they probably could have gotten Republicans to run. They knew that they weren't going to win so that they didn't bother me and when I did

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things for Holyoke like the new Holyoke-South Hadley Bridge or Chmura swimming pool, or getting Chapter 90 money, or stuff like that, they would applaud me, but by and large, they were critical of my philosophical stance. I don't think you should ever let that bother you. It's the people you have to worry about and not the press.

JOHNSON: How were they for Kennedy and the Kennedy people, do you think?

DONAHUE: The *Holyoke Transcript* was a Republican paper. It still is. I mean, just philosophically, they're Republicans. Donald Dwight served in the state government for a while as the D.P.W. commissioner and as the secretary of administration and finance under Volpe [John A. Volpe] and Bill Dwight, Jr. who is now the publisher, went to Washington for two years as administrative assistant to Congressman Conte [Silvio O. Conte] so that they had one with federal ties and one with state ties, but all, you know, Republican.

JOHNSON: A little further west, in Pittsfield, do you have any particular impressions of the paper there, the *Eagle*, the *Berkshire Eagle*?

DONAHUE: Well, that's really a good newspaper and they have a, one outstanding columnist by the name of Abe Michelson I would think, well I think like most reporters, I think their leanings are liberal Democrat, but Kennedy got a fair shake there.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you about him because he's been suggested to us as somebody....

DONAHUE: Abe Michelson [Abraham A. Michelson]?

JOHNSON: Yes.

DONAHUE: I would think it would be worth your while to talk to him. He's a....

JOHNSON: Because he was a political writer there all during that period....

DONAHUE: And his brother was a wheel in Washington at the time, like he might have owned a big national, or a news service for New England, or something like

that so that there was a tie-in there. He's a very knowledgeable guy, who's been around a long, long time and not only has a job with the *Eagle*, but on Saturdays he has a syndicated column with X number of papers and has had for

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years, including the *Holyoke Transcript* and the Springfield papers.

JOHNSON: You said that you think that Kennedy got a fair shake from the *Eagle*, do you mean by that you think that they were really fair, or the they were particularly sympathetic?

DONAHUE: That would be a better question for Michelson to answer. You know, it's 60 miles up the road.

JOHNSON: There was another guy—you may or may not know him but while it's on my mind—there's another fellow who was on the *Eagle* at the time by the name of John Mahan. He was county editor out there. Probably would not have been read outside the county. Well, that was all I had for the moment. Is there anything that comes to your mind that I may have missed or that you think....

DONAHUE: No, I don't think so. I have just one, you know, thing that has to do with the President's prodigious memory. But that was in 1960 and you know, in case you never come back, I would think that this is a, it's such a small thing but it shows the grasp of things. The day before the election for president, Senator Kennedy finished his campaign in Massachusetts. So in the morning of that Monday, he flew into Westover Field for a big noontime rally downtown in Springfield. Well, I decided that, you know, no more work needed to be done then, except the next day to get the people out to vote, but I decided that every pol in the free world was going to be at Springfield and I had a couple of kids working for me that I thought deserved the chance to shake hands with the President, so I went up to Westover Field to greet him as he was getting off the plane and we shook hands, and I said, "How do you feel?" He said fine and said, "I know you've got a tough fight tomorrow" which is, I didn't have any, you know, he was laughing and I said "Well we've done all the work we can, Mr. President, and all we can do now is pray for you," and introduced him to my friends and he's gone, O.K.? The next time I saw him was when he had been elected president, but had not taken office and he was coming to make that famous speech "The City on the Hill," and Johnny Powers was the president of the Senate and I was the majority leader, and the majority leader's job from 200 years back was that you head the committee to go in to notify the distinguished quest that we're assembled as a joint convention, the House and Senate sitting together to listen to it, in whatever message you see fit to give, you know, that's time honored speech, the same words that were used 200 years ago, so that's my job. Now Powers calls me over before I'm going in and he said the *Sunday Advertiser* is going to run this beautiful colored picture suitable for framing of Jack

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and Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] on Sunday and I just happen to have an advance copy. Would you get him to autograph it or me? “Well,” I said, “you’re a cute bastard.” So I sent one of the court officers over to my desk, and I had my invitation to the inaugural, so I go in and I make my little speech and I say, “Mr. President, I have a couple of other chores to perform. The presiding officer of the Massachusetts Senate has made an errand boy out of me and he asked me if you would autograph this picture.” So he starts to laugh and he autographs it and says something nice about Johnny, I’m sure. So I roll that up and I said, “Now, Mr. President, as long as you’re here, I would like to have you autograph this and it goes something like this: To Maurice, thanks for the prayers, John F. Kennedy. You know, that’s a really small thing for somebody to remember, for Christ’s sake, he was flying all over the United States for years.

JOHNSON: That’s good. That’s a good story.

JOHNSON: I would like to, some time in the future, if I get a chance, to talk to you about...

DONAHUE: It’ll probably take you to 1980 to get up to...

JOHNSON: I know, but I came across one thing that’s 1962, but I just wanted to ask you about it. It caught my eye even though I wasn’t preparing for that period. You went to an off-the-record meeting at the White House April 27, 1962 according to the President’s appointment book. A lot of Kennedy political people there, we’ll say with relation to Edward Kennedy’s [Edward M. Kennedy] campaign. I saw that in the President’s appointment book and it just occurred to me to ask you your recollections of that?

DONAHUE: Well, I suppose it was one of the great political thrills of my life. We all got notified that we were expected to go to this meeting and it was a cloak and dagger job. Supposed to be a big secret up here. Everybody took different planes, everybody stayed in different hotels, everybody gets ushered in a different door at the White House and it so happened that when I was walking in, the county commissioner from Hampden County and his wife were just touring the State House and I’m sure that everybody else had some kind of experience like that, that they bumped into somebody that they weren’t going to bump into, but the meeting was held in the cabinet room, and the President presided and it was like, I guess—I’ve never seen a cabinet meeting—like any regular cabinet meeting, when the President came in, everybody stood up and you know, you get that old tingle up and down your spine, that here you are in a room with the President of the United States and when he sits down, he took over the meeting and he was talking just like the guy that

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left from Massachusetts. How’s that son of a bitch from Cape Cod going to be in this fight, and this labor leader and before he’s through, he’s gone over the whole state with who you

should have with you and where's this guy, is he off, is he on, and when it was all over, he said "Thank you gentleman," and everybody stood up again and he waltzed out of there and as I say, one of the great, not only political thrills, one of the most thrilling incidents that I've ever experienced.

JOHNSON: Your recollection is that the purpose of the meeting was to find, to get your reactions to what was going on in Massachusetts and your assessment?

DONAHUE: Well, I'm sure that everybody there was well delivered in advance, that you were going to be with Teddy or you wouldn't have been there.

JOHNSON: O.K. I never got that part of the background, too.

DONAHUE: No. There was nobody that hadn't made up his mind.

JOHNSON: O.K. I did want to ask you about that. It would be fun to come back...

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**Maurice Donahue Oral History Transcript  
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