

Joseph D. Tydings Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 05/03/71
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Biographical Note

United States Attorney, District of Maryland, 1961-1964; United States Senator, Maryland, 1965-1971. In this interview, Tydings discusses meeting Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], campaigning with him for John F. Kennedy in 1960, and RFK's time as attorney general, among other issues.

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Joseph D. Tydings

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Month, Day, Year


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Joseph D. Tydings – RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

JOSEPH D. TYDINGS

May 3, 1971
Washington, D. C.

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: I'll begin just by asking you about your first meeting with Robert Kennedy.

TYDINGS: The first time I ever met Robert Kennedy was at the Democratic National Convention in 1956 when Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was candidate for vice president. I met Bobby at that time just fleetingly. I had known Senator Kennedy because I'd been president of the Young Democrats of Maryland and brought Senator Kennedy in to speak. I never saw Robert Kennedy again until the day after the West Virginia presidential primary in 1960. The West Virginia primary was scheduled in 1960 four days prior to the Maryland primary. I was President Kennedy's Maryland campaign manager. At the time we had anticipated losing in West Virginia and accordingly had planned a vigorous "all-out" campaign in Maryland, not only for the presidential candidate, Senator Kennedy, but for all of his family.

I took Robert Kennedy on a full day's campaigning I delegated responsibility to others to campaign with Senator John Kennedy for part of that day in order to take Bob Kennedy personally. I remember that Bob was dead tired. He'd been working night

and day for weeks in West Virginia. He begged off and his wife Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] asked that he not campaign. They wanted to rest up, not have to campaign. He didn't want to travel way up to Hartford County, which he never heard of, but which also happened to be my own home county and an important political subdivision in the Baltimore region.

GREENE: Is that where Havre de Grace is?

TYDINGS: That's where Havre de Grace and Bel Air are.

GREENE: I didn't know which county it was.

TYDINGS: I was adamant. I said, "No, damn it. We've got everything set up. You've got to come." He did come, and we went through and we campaigned through the county. He was dead beat but he was game. I don't think he made a particularly good impression except that he was a fighter, but he really didn't need to. His appearance was enough to show concern. We were rolling by then. After six hours of hard campaigning I had him driven back to Virginia, and then I went on to campaign the rest of the three days with Senator Kennedy.

Thereafter, within about two weeks after the Maryland election was over, Bob called me up and asked me whether or not I'd be willing to undertake going into Delaware to represent Senator Kennedy at the state convention. And I said, "I don't know anybody there." He said, "Well, Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] has got some files on it." I had to go out to Wisconsin the day before the Delaware convention, but I said yes I'd undertake it, and he arranged for me to be briefed by Ted Sorensen the night I got back from Wisconsin. I drove down to Dover, Delaware, represented Senator Kennedy at the convention and sized it up I think fairly well. I arranged for a big reception for Senator Kennedy prior to the national convention. I gave Bob a pretty full report on Delaware politics and went back to meet with various Democratic Leaders several times.

My next contact with Bob Kennedy was about two weeks after the Delaware state convention. Bob asked if I would be willing to fly with him to Florida to attend the Florida state convention. I said yes, I would. There, of course, he was in the lead position. We flew down together.

I remember our plane ride down and back. We were talking about public life. I told him I'd been in the legislature for seven years. Of course he felt it was just as easy to win for Congress as it was for the state legislature. He had an idea you ought

to go shoot higher initially. I said, well that may be true but I had started when I was twenty-four. We discussed many areas of broad political philosophy. We spent the night in Florida and came back to Maryland--rather, to Washington.

Bob and Ethel invited my wife and me down to their home on several occasions before that at least two occasions prior to the national convention in Los Angeles. We got to know the family fairly well. I had met Ethel during the Maryland campaign when she came over and campaigned for Senator Jack Kennedy. I had requested that all of the family campaign in Maryland, and accordingly I met the entire family.

I went out early to the convention in Los Angeles. I was assigned the Delaware and Florida delegations to look after. Maryland was safe since her delegates were bound under the unit rule to vote for Senator Kennedy. I kept an eye on Maryland too. But Florida and Delaware were my specific responsibilities. We had a system of "coordinators" which Bob Kennedy organized. It was really as tight an organization as I've ever seen, contacting and shepherding delegates. We had meetings every morning at an early hour of 8:00 sharp, early since we seldom were in bed before 2:30 A.M. The delegations were spread out all over Los Angeles and travel took more time than usual. We had a carpool arranged to assist in moving us around, but you would be literally going eighteen, twenty hours a day. I can remember nights when I got no more than two or three hours sleep trying to find out where certain delegates stood. Each morning we had to have a delegate-by-delegate count, and where or why they changed and what might help and who could talk to them and every possible bit of relevant detail. I've never seen quite such an organization. He had subleaders, but Bob basically called the shots.

I remember one morning (of course none of us were being paid, our work was all voluntary; you know, our hotel bills weren't being paid, none of our expenses were being paid. We were doing it all ourselves). When one poor fellow complained a little bit. He said, "God, can't we meet at 8:30 or quarter of nine instead of 8:00? I didn't get back to my hotel until 5:00 and it's the third night in a row." Bobby probably hadn't been to sleep at all, and he said, "Look, nobody asked you here. You're not getting paid anything. If this is too tough for you, let us know and we'll get somebody else." That's where he got the old reputation of being hard-nosed. Well, of course, everybody stuck it through, and we won the nomination for Senator Kennedy.

Thereafter, I worked rather closely with Bob in the general election. He was the principal national campaign manager. He sent me into Florida to try and put together the organization or to recommend the most effective campaign organization for Florida and Delaware. We used the nonresident system for the coordinators, which I'm convinced is best for presidential elections. Of course, you should stay in the background, down-play your own role, up-play the state officials. But you're in a better position to be objective and to recommend to the candidate what steps he should or should not take without the problem of local jealousies and rivalries.

GREENE: And to what extent is it that you also leave at the end of the election and don't have to worry about . . .

TYDINGS: That's right. All sorts of pluses to it. The minuses are that of course you don't know the state as well as somebody that lives there, and if you're an out-of-stater, you have to be very careful that you don't step on toes. You've got to be very diplomatic. I was fortunate in those two states and worked well and I think set up the organization the way he wanted. I would report to him regularly and visit with him personally whenever he came into the states. I spent quite a bit of time with him on the telephone, meeting with him personally in Washington, going over the campaign details. He was very hardnosed as a campaigner-- I mean, absolutely strong, steel-willed. He didn't mind telling the mayor of a large city or governor or anyone else what he thought of him if he stepped out of line. He just was blunt and hard and tough and was of course a magnificent campaign manager.

GREENE: Could you see people being turned off by this?

TYDINGS: Oh, yes. No question they were turned off by him then--particularly high officials. I can remember well in Florida because he came down to Florida and campaigned. I had him under my wing then and we were together for three or four days. I can remember him quite candidly telling off the mayor of Jacksonville.

The mayor of Jacksonville deserved to be told off. I couldn't have rebuked him or straightened him out. Let's face it. I was just a member of the state legislature, a young whipper-snapper. Although Bobby wasn't all that much older, nevertheless he was the brother of the candidate. I'm sure that Hayden Burns hated his guts from that time on, but what Bob told him made

sense. He told him in effect that we knew that he was cutting us, and by God we didn't like it, and that we were going to hold him accountable if we lost Duval County and not for him one minute to think that he was getting away with anything, that we knew exactly what he was doing. This confrontation shook the hell out of Burns. As a matter of fact, I think it may have made the difference in Duval County. It scared him badly enough so that he was afraid to really pass out ballots cutting President Kennedy.

GREENE: What do you mean by I'm not sure I follow what you mean by cutting.

TYDINGS: Cutting? An organization will have a complete ballot printed. In Florida in 1960 the governor, comptroller, secretary of state and all were up for election in November as well as the president. They pass out a ballot, a series of ballots in certain areas where they don't think you're looking and leave the president off; that is, put Nixon's Richard M. Nixon name on a Democratic organization ballot instead of Kennedy's. That's what we mean by getting cut.

GREENE: I never heard that expression. That's interesting.

TYDINGS: Well, when you get involved in the old city organization politics, you'll hear it. Bob was just hard-nosed and decisive. Of course he turned off a lot of people by being that rough and tough. On the other hand he was doing a magnificent job for his brother. That's why to be a campaign manager for president or really for anyone else, you can't be a nice guy. That's something the present presidential candidates better learn--you cannot afford to be a nice guy as a campaign manager.

GREENE: What about the lower echelon people, not city officials but the volunteer campaign workers?

TYDINGS: Bob was always great with volunteers. He was super with everybody, but he was fantastic with particularly with younger people. Women and minorities he always related to. No, the only time he ever got rough was with the top managers, the high echelon, the top level. He was never unkind or inconsiderate of anybody who was down in the lower echelons. He was never unkind to me.

I really should relate a personal incident going back to the 1960 Los Angeles convention. I made a tremendous error in judgment in my handling of the Delaware delegation. The

Delaware delegation was very evenly divided between Johnson Lyndon B. Johnson and Kennedy. We figured it was almost even. A question arose as to whether or not we should permit a unit vote in the Delaware delegation. I had a very close personal friend who was a member of the Delaware delegation from Sussex County. On the surface he was committed to Lyndon Johnson. He had been a schoolmate of mine at the University of Maryland. He told me that if we could get the delegation to vote by secret ballot, in the secret ballot he would cast his vote for the unit vote to go for Kennedy. Based on this knowledge I told the "Kennedy delegates" to agree on a secret ballot for a binding unit vote. I believed I would get this extra vote for Kennedy and bind the entire delegation to Kennedy. But a couple of the other men who said they were for Kennedy voted in the secret ballot for Johnson--I won't mention their names on this tape, but I believe I know who they were.*

GREENE: Well, you should. It's confidential.

TYDINGS: You will never release these names?

GREENE: Well, some day . . .

TYDINGS: Some of these men are still active.

GREENE: You have control over it. You can close it up until they're out of office.

TYDINGS: Well, I'd just rather not say because some of these men are still active in Delaware politics and they may be delegates this next convention.

Now I'm trying to work as you know, for Senator Muskie Edmund S. Muskie. But they ostensibly on the surface were for Senator Kennedy. They advised me to go ahead and have the secret ballot; they allegedly agreed that this other delegate would vote for Kennedy. And they advised me to go ahead with the unit vote. I waited and I decided to follow this course of action. Well, they were too smart for me. Although the delegate I was counting on to switch from Johnson to Kennedy did, there were two other delegates who couldn't have voted for Johnson had they been voting in an open ballot, who switched on the secret ballot. Rather than having a split delegation four-to-four, which I would have had on an open vote--four votes for Kennedy and four votes for Johnson--I lost the whole damn thing and we wound up with eight votes for Johnson bound by that Secret Unit Vote Ballot.

Well, I remember the minute it happened I went right posthaste up to the headquarters and told Bobby what happened, why it happened. It was my fault, my decision solely. You know, I'd made a judgment, and it was wrong. He was really great about it.

*He later identifies these men as William S. Potter and "his law partner who was the city chairman" in Wilmington.

He said, "Well, the important thing is you told me right away so that we knew it, so that we're not counting on them. You'll know next time; you'll be a little bit wiser." That meant a lot to me, because I was heartbroken at the time. Here I was blowing a major assignment which conceivably could have cost the nomination for the president of the United States--but he was very, very kind the way he treated me. He never treated any of the juniors or the lesser lights as he did some of the top echelon that gave Senator Kennedy the runaround. Well, I'll get back to after the election. . . Yeah. Okay right.

GREENE: Before you proceed, I had some questions on things that you've already covered I just wanted to come back to. The day that you spent with him in your area, did he actually do public speaking or was it . . .

TYDINGS: Oh, Christ, yes. He delivered three speeches, and I had him shaking hands through all the shopping centers in down town Aberdeen, Havre de Grace, and Bel Air. Oh, yeah, I had him. . . Listen, we're not going to let him off without making speeches. Now, they weren't big audiences; they were luncheons. I had two luncheons in Aberdeen and I think a meeting in Havre de Grace.

GREENE: And how did he do, do you think?

TYDINGS: He wasn't a very good speaker. He wasn't a very good public speaker at that time. He gave a stereotyped, "Support my brother because he is a dedicated, hard-working, young man," etc era. Glad you brought that up. I also brought him in to Maryland in order to deliver a speech the Sunday before the election in Baltimore at the big tea for the Democratic ladies of Baltimore. Senator Kennedy had gone out to Oregon Saturday night. We'd had him campaigning in the state for three days. This was a big tea we'd been working on for weeks. We estimated that three thousand women were there. Mrs. John F. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], Jackie, Ethel, Joanie [Joan Bennett Kennedy], and Robert. The ladies (We didn't have many chairs) had been standing up waiting for at least an hour and a half before they got there. And then the Kennedys came up and they were going to each speak. Each of the ladies got up and said something, except Jackie who wasn't feeling too good. Since I was emcee I was able to let her off the hook, for which she was very grateful. But then Bobby got up to talk, and he talked and he talked and he talked, and he was going on at least fifteen minutes. The ladies had been standing up continuously, some of them for almost two hours. So finally I wrote a little note to him--which I should have kept--and I said, "Bobby, these ladies have been standing for two hours, and you're not that good a speaker." That was the time to sit down, and he did. He took the

note, the message, and as a matter of fact, that may have been one of the reasons that we got along so well thereafter, because I always told him what I thought basically, and he appreciated that, as most of us do. If you have got any sense at all you appreciate people who are not sycophants, who tell you what ought to be told.

GREENE: How did you think he handled the political contacts on those occasions in the '60 campaign, besides the ones which you've mentioned before?

TYDINGS: Well, the person-to-person contact with the ladies, of course, he was fabulous. With young people, volunteers, he was very good. He was not an especially good speaker. As the campaign got on, wore on, he improved. He was much better in the general election than he'd been in the primary, but that's always true. When I campaigned across Florida with him, he did a good job speaking, good job meeting the people, much better than he had done in Maryland in the primary, but then it was two or three months later. You find that true of candidates in any election; they get warmed up and do better as they go along.

GREENE: Righto. And what about with political people-- not necessarily the top officials, but delegates, and county leaders and people like that?

TYDINGS: I thought he was good with them.

GREENE: He didn't seem impatient? Some people say he was.

TYDINGS: Well, I didn't. . . . He was impatient with the political types. He could spot a phony a mile off and of course in the delegations, the national convention, you've got an awful lot of them. Those were the days when they were all appointed by the party chieftains. They weren't elected. They're appointed because of their fund raising or because they thought they were big wheels or what have you, and a lot of them were much talk and little action. And of course, he didn't give this type too much time, those that were the phonies.

The thing that always got him mad was to have a man lie blatantly to his face telling Bob he was going to vote for President Kennedy on the first ballot. Many times a delegate or the person wouldn't realize that Bob knew when they were lying because of our accurate and detailed head/counts each day. We had terrific information--we had a rundown on what that delegate had said to two or three people the night before, and then when you see the delegate the next day and he'd tell him how hard he was working for his brother, I mean, you know, you couldn't help but be a little bit short. He wouldn't

say anything, but he wouldn't be effervescent and bubble over. He was not the bubbling type anyway. Bobby had a great sense of humor, incredibly good sense of humor, but you had to get to know him a little bit. He was very good with the press, great with the press, press all loved him, because he was honest with them and he didn't take himself too seriously. His great redeeming feature, if you were critical of him for being too blunt or too hard, was that he never took himself seriously and always had the ability to laugh at himself. Anybody that can laugh at himself is a remarkable person, particularly in public life.

GREENE: There was an incident that you discussed in your JFK--do you remember you did a tape for the JFK project--a disagreement over whether or not to pay election day or walkaround money to various Baltimore City Politicians.

TYDINGS: That was in Maryland, but that didn't directly involve him so much.

GREENE: It didn't. I didn't know whether it did or not.

TYDINGS: No, that involved--that was my decision to make, And, incidentally, the fellow who ran against me in the last primary, George P. Mahoney, went dash- ing to West Virginia to tell Senator Kennedy how I was blowing the election for him.

GREENE: Didn't he also go through the father?

TYDINGS: Yes, he went through the father, Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. That's right.

GREENE: Was there any kind of general policy on this type of thing. . .

TYDINGS: Election day money? No, they would have to leave it up to the individual campaign manager as a question of judgment. In many cities you always have election day money. My God, Marvin Mandel, the governor of Maryland, in the last election (1970) spent a quarter of a million dollars in election day "walking around money" in Baltimore alone. I didn't spend one tenth of that. On principle, I don't believe in "walking around money". I might have spent five or ten thousand dollars on rallies or something beforehand. It amounts to buying votes and I'm not too keen on it. In Senator Kennedy's campaign such expenditures would have been a complete waste of money. You know he had the election won, no way he could lose, and I just felt he could spend the money better in other states. They were

going to hold him up for exorbitant amounts and they couldn't control the people. Baltimore City Democrats were going to vote for Senator Kennedy anyway. The only opposition he had in Maryland was Wayne Morse and once JFK won the West Virginia primary, everybody was rushing to get on the bandwagon. Bobby almost invariably would back up his individual state chairman. He would back us up, which was nice. He never tried to second-guess us. If you make a mistake, so you made it, you know. I told you how he reacted.

GREENE: Right. In selecting you to go to Delaware and Florida, besides the reasons that we talked about that they liked outsiders for a variety of reasons, was there any possible pressure from Tawes [J. Millard Tawes] and Mahoney to have you out of the state?

TYDINGS: Well, in the general election, not in the primary because the primary was a moot question. The primary was over. We won it. In the general election, after the nomination was completed at the convention, most of the tax state organization leaders in Maryland told Bob that they didn't want me working in the general election in Maryland. Well, bear in mind, I was a Democratic reform leader and they felt I gained too much face already being Kennedy's man. As far as I was concerned, Senator Kennedy was going to carry Maryland easily in the general election. We'd done a good job in the primary and they didn't really need me any more. I wasn't about to make a fuss anyway. If I had made a fuss, it wouldn't have made any difference, because Bobby would have made a judgment and he would have been right to have me out of the state working elsewhere. I don't know why he picked me to go into Delaware or Florida. I guess because he thought I did a good job in the Maryland primary and they could rely on me and we got along.

GREENE: Can you remember anything specific, maybe anecdotes, of the Florida state convention? You said you were working for a couple of days on it.

TYDINGS: Oh, I can remember one presidential candidate who was a leading state elected figure in Florida who was a very charming personality who was ostensibly a very close friend of Senator Jack Kennedy--Bobby had his number. But some of the comments he would make about people like this who thought they were pulling the wool over Bob's eyes. If they were high enough up he would let them think they were pulling the wool over his eyes, but they really weren't. He'd break you up with some of the comments afterwards.

GREENE: I guess you don't want to mention his name.

TYDINGS: I'd just as soon not. He's still active.

GREENE: That's all right because you can close it up for one hundred and fifty years if you want. It just makes makes it eventually more . . .

TYDINGS: It was George Smathers [George A. Smathers], "Gorgeous George."

GREENE: I suspected that.

TYDINGS: Well, if we can close it up for a little while, for another ten years, in Delaware it was [William S.] Bill Potter, the state national committeeman, senior partner of Berl Potter and Anderson, a big prestigious law firm in Wilmington.

GREENE: You said there was a second fellow too.

TYDINGS: Well, I think it was his law partner who was the city chairman. At least that's my supposition. I've never been absolutely certain, but that's who I think it was. See, there had to be two. There could be any of a number who would owe a great deal to Potter. Potter was a rich man, he represented duPont, [E. I. duPont de Nemours and Company], you know, was in a position to do a lot of favors.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Robert Kennedy about the fight between Collins [LeRoy Collins] and Bryant [Cecil Farris Bryant]?

TYDINGS: Yes. You see, I was the one advising Bob and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] on the whole campaign organization down there in Florida.

GREENE: How did you finally decide what they should do?

TYDINGS: Well, we had to--this was a hard decision for me to recommend because I was a great admirer of LeRoy Collins. He's a great guy, a great governor, a hell of a man. But the political climate was such down there that Doyle Carlton [Doyle E. Carlton], his candidate for governor, had lost; Farris Bryant had won; Collins was considered too liberal in Florida; the state legislature was in session; they were threatening to remove Kennedy from the Democratic ballot

there and permit third-party Wallace [George C. Wallace] or something. In my judgment, the best way to put the thing together down in Florida was to pick someone from the Bryant camp rather than from the Collins camp. The Bryant leaders suggested Bud Dickinson [Fred O. Dickinson, Jr.], who's now state comptroller of Florida, and who was considered a Bryant man rather than a Collins man. I told Bob and Senator John Kennedy--in that initial part of the campaign I was actually reporting directly to Senator Kennedy--I told him that as far as I was concerned, Collins was my type of man; he was Jack Kennedy's type of man. He was worth four or five of a lot of them down there, but we had to think about winning the election, and it was my judgment that the Kennedy organization ought to work with Ferris Bryant as they did; that they had to play ball with the "pork-choppers," and they followed my advice. Although we didn't carry Florida, where Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] lost it by a quarter of a million four years before, we only lost it by fifty thousand, so it was, you know, quite a improvement.

GREENE: And in a case like this, if they had faith in their coordinator, they were more than likely to go along with his decision?

TYDINGS: Well, yes. Of course, I think, in all fairness that they would double check me and they would talk with other people there. They had some faith in me because of what I'd done in Maryland and the Mahoney incident in Maryland, his telling them how I was blowing the election, you know, and they saw I hadn't blown the election, and had saved them an extra hundred thousand dollars not wasted on election day money. They saw what I'd done. At least they did what I recommended. It was a tough decision to make though. I'd spent a lot of time in Florida going all over the state talking with all sorts of people, spending time with Governor Collins, whom I love and admire, and Ferris Bryant whom I get along with, and all sorts of political leaders.

GREENE: What happens in a case like that when you have to make a choice that may not be your real first choice?

TYDINGS: You have to tell Bob and Senator Kennedy why, tell them why and explain it and give them all the facts. I did it in memos. I did some lengthy memos on it, put it down in writing.

GREENE: Do you have them, by the way? That may be something you'd want to give to the library eventually, or at least copies of them if you want to keep the originals.

TYDINGS: I don't know whether I do or don't. They're memos that ought to be in their files if you can get them. I gave on Florida to . . .

GREENE: I suspect Collins. I'm not sure, but I think he was going to be interviewed for the JFK project, so he might . . .

TYDINGS: No, Collins wouldn't have them. These memos would be in . . .

GREENE: Oh, to the Kennedys.

TYDINGS: . . . possession of Larry O'Brien or the Kennedy campaign.

GREENE: I really was driving at, how do you handle it as far as Collins goes because you want to keep him . . .

TYDINGS: He never knew what I said. He didn't know why we made the decision we did.

GREENE: And you didn't make any effort to explain it since he was someone you probably wanted to keep as a friend?

TYDINGS: Well, yes, you made an effort to explain. You had to be very--you had to be diplomatic. You'd go into it and say that, under all circumstances, we think that this is the best way, and of course, Collins was a big enough man to appreciate it. Collins is not a little man; he's a big man. Yes, sure, he understood he realized. You don't want to say to Collins that you feel he would be a serious liability. You know, we just say that, under all the circumstances, we feel that this is the best way. And Collins saw it. He was aware of it, and he stayed close to the Kennedys.

GREENE: So those memos would then be in the Kennedy files?

TYDINGS: They would be in Larry O'Brien's campaign files or Bob Kennedy's campaign files.

GREENE: Is there anything else you can think of up to the time of the election?

TYDINGS: Oh, we had some fun campaigning over Florida in the campaign.

GREENE: Was he pretty optimistic?

TYDINGS: At that time it was nip and tuck there. Yes, you always are optimistic. You have to be optimistic in a campaign. You've got to always say and think you're going to win. But he was not what you call very optimistic. We knew we had a hell of a fight. Jesus, we were behind for the longest time. You know, if Nixon had stayed away from the debates he'd have won. Just everything went well. Where are we now?

GREENE: Okay. Again, I'm referring to your JFK interview. You said, I think somewhat facetiously, that you were recruiting for the U.S. attorney's job during the transition between the election and the . . .

TYDINGS: Yes. During the transition period right after the general election, I had occasion to visit with Bobby and he'd ask me if I'd like to work, you know, in an administration job. And I said, you know, there's only one job that I would want, the United States attorney for the district of Maryland. And He said, "Okay, I think that's fair. I think we can work that out for you." And nothing more much was said.

In the meantime, the legislature went in session in Maryland. The year before I'd fought hard--two years running--to get savings and loan reform in Maryland, inspection of savings and loan associations. We were the only state in the Union which had no, you know, provisions to protect the depositors. And unfortunately there were a lot of top Democratic politicians, all tied up in the worst types of conflicts of interest, including the state chairman, the chairman of the house ways and means committee, (Marvin Mandel) the next speaker of the house, all of them tied up in it. I don't know whether the governor was or not. But anyway, I just won't go into how rotten the whole thing was. Anyway, I got into it and I exposed a lot of it in the press and I was persona non grata with Maryland's top Democrats a vengeance.

At that time, we had two Republican U.S. Senators and about six or seven Democratic congressmen. The state chairman, the state national committeeman who was also tied up in the savings and loan fight and all the Democratic congressmen got a hold of John Bailey [John M. Bailey], the new national chairman, called him over and said, "We object to the consideration of the Tydings as U.S. attorney for Maryland." I had told a number of people that I thought I would be named U.S. attorney. By this time I'd served as marshal of the second division in the inaugural parade and I'd been to all the presidential parties in Washington. Everybody knew that the president thought highly of me, and Bobby did too. The delegation of top democratic leaders from Maryland told Bailey that I was absolutely unacceptable as United States attorney. They said they'd support me for any position over in Washington or any ambassadorial job, et cetera, away from Maryland.

GREENE: Get you out of the state.

TYDINGS: That's right. But not U.S. attorney. And the next thing I knew I got a . . . I'd begun hearing rumors on this so I tried to get Bobby on the phone. I didn't, but he called me back. I can remember, well, I think it was a Saturday night, Friday night. My father had been very ill, very sick. He [RFK] called me and he said, "What in the name of heaven have you been doing over there?" He said, "I can't get one single Maryland congressman to even say that you're not personally obnoxious. I mean, can't you do something, can't you get one congressman to say that you're not personally obnoxious to them?" And this sort of hit me hard. I said, "I can't believe it, you mean Brewster [Daniel B. Brewster], Danny Brewster said that, an, old, old friend?" "Yes, Danny Brewster said it. You're personally obnoxious to him." I said, "So-and-so?" "Oh, yes, yes, they just. . . ." Danny Brewster's law partner was Gordon Boone [Gordon A. Boone], then majority leader, who was also involved in this savings and loan scandal. Boone was later indicted and sent to prison when I was U.S. attorney. But that's another chapter. Bob said, "For goodness sakes, do something. We've got to find some support for you--you've got to do something. It's an impossible situation." Well, it was.

GREENE: Had you expected it to be rough?

TYDINGS: No, I hadn't thought it at all. I hadn't thought there'd be any problem. I thought there'd be no problem at all. And Bobby hadn't thought of any problem because he hadn't even told me to lobby for the job or try and line anybody up. Well, the congressmen, when I went to them, all said, "Well, gee, if you'd just told us you wanted this, Joe, we'd be for you, but you know, we just got lined up for old Herb O'Connor [Herbert R. O'Connor] and. . . ."

GREENE: Is that what it really was?

TYDINGS: Well, it involves a lot of things. It involves foretelling the future in a sense, not wanting anybody checking into things. I had no idea of some of the skeletons that were around. But they had good reason, some of them, not to want me as United States attorney or anybody who was independent, anybody who was not subservient to the organization. Well anyway, I won't go into the entreaties I made trying to persuade even one congressman to give me mild support. Finally one congressman agreed to say I was not personally obnoxious. To give you the real picture, however, Bobby just told the president that I deserved the post, that I would be an outstanding U.S. Attorney, and I ought

to get it and it didn't make a damn what politicians opposed me for political reasons. This is the important thing because this really tells you more about Bobby Kennedy, the man, than any other incident I was ever involved with him, save maybe one.

Joe Curnane [Joseph Curnane] was the Boston politician who'd been down here in Maryland with me during the primary and to whom I'd grown very close. He had known Jack Kennedy and the Kennedy family for years and worked for him. He was made collector of the port of Boston. He'd worked for Jack Kennedy since the first time he ran for Congress, knew him well. I called Joe in Boston to ask for his advice. And he said, "Let me tell you this to you. If the decision were up to President Kennedy, I'm afraid, Joe, that you'd be long gone. They'd get you a job in Washington, assistant attorney general or something, but you would not get the job of U.S. attorney. But Bobby Kennedy will never let you down. Jack will do the politically expedient thing in this type of setting but Bobby won't. And he won't let Jack do it with you." And Joe was right; Bobby wouldn't. He stood up to the entire top democratic leadership in Maryland who opposed my nomination.

GREENE: Curnane was very popular with the Baltimore politicians, wasn't he?

TYDINGS: He got along well with them, but he was out of state, just like . . .

GREENE: But couldn't have picked up the phone and had some influence?

TYDINGS: No, no, because they were too strongly opposed to me as U. S. attorney. They would do him a favor on a lesser matter. He helped with that one congressman. He helped with the one congressman. But we still had six of the seven congressmen, the attorney general, the national committeeman, the state chairman and the governor, all opposing me for this post. Supporting me for any other provided it took me out of Maryland.

GREENE: You'd have been better off in an all Republican state.

TYDINGS: Oh, yeah, yeah. But, thank God, President Kennedy appointed me U.S. attorney. During that period, during those three years as U.S. attorney I got to know Bobby very well.

GREENE: Before we get into that, I have one question, because I imagine there's going to be a lot in the next chapter, but did they consult you at all in that period on appointments from Maryland?

TYDINGS: Yes, on all the appointments. All appointments in Maryland were reviewed with me, and I had a big hand in the ultimate decisions. We blocked the appointment of the mayor of Baltimore as a federal judge because although we liked him, I went over with Bobby the type of federal judge we had appointed in the past--the qualifications, the history, the background--Maryland has the reputation of having really the finest federal bench perhaps in the entire nation. Lawyers from all over the country, if they can, will file complicated antitrust cases, patent cases, in the United States District Court for Maryland because of the calibre and credentials of our federal judges. And this particular man Harold Grady J. Harold Grady, just didn't have the background and experience, even though he was a mayor and had been an early supporter of President Kennedy. I outlined the whole historical and factual situation with Bobby, and it was sufficient. Grady wasn't appointed. Bob let Mayor Grady name or have a hand in naming the man who ultimately filled the post, which was good. Later on the mayor became a judge for the Baltimore Supreme Bench which was fine. We persuaded the president to nominate for U.S. marshal a supporter who drove Bob the day he came to Havre de Grace to speak in the Democratic presidential primary.

GREENE: Was there anyone else that you blocked that they wanted to appoint? Not block, but . . .

TYDINGS: Discourage?

GREENE: . . . suggested they didn't take?

TYDINGS: No, well, I was very instrumental in getting the two judges that were named appointed. I went to bat for both of them. Eddie Northrop Edward S. Northrop, who is now judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. I got Harrison Winter appointed to the court of appeals when Johnson was president. No, but on all of Maryland appointments they listened to me.

GREENE: Anything else that's worth putting down about them that you can think of?

TYDINGS: No, except that I conferred closely with them on Maryland matters.

GREENE: Was there anyone that you did want that they objected to?

TYDINGS: No.

GREENE: I think it's sort of interesting that your career as sort of a reformer in the state legislature led you to . . .

TYDINGS: Overlapping, you mean?

GREENE: Well, sort of paralleling Robert Kennedy's career as a cleanser of labor.

TYDINGS: With the house committee. Yeah, that's right. And that may be . . .

GREENE: Was he understanding about that?

TYDINGS: And that may be one of the reasons why he fought for me, you know. I think he realized. He saw through, you know, the opposition I had. He was great, and I think, sure the parallels were rather obvious.

GREENE: And that he knew to do a good job, you frequently had to make enemies, like he did.

TYDINGS: Oh, sure.

GREENE: Yeah.

TYDINGS: And it was fairly . . . And then also during this bitter fight, in a sense, for the U.S. attorney's job when everybody was going to see the president and saying what a disruptive figure I was in Maryland and how much they wished that I would be made an ambassador to Timbuktu or any job in the cabinet but just out of Maryland. And then my father died right in the middle of all that, and I don't know. The day after my father died they sent the message, they sent the nomination in. It shocked the hell out of all the politicians in Maryland, you know, because they thought--well I thought so too, everybody thought--that they had killed my nomination that I was dead. But they reckoned without Bob Kennedy.

GREENE: That's very good, because it's a lot more complete than it was in the JFK interview.

TYDINGS: Yeah, well . . .

GREENE: Maybe because time has passed.

TYDINGS: Well, that could be, but you see if it had been up to the president and John Bailey--and I loved the president--I'd have been long gone, you know. They'd have had me as an ambassador or as assistant to an assistnat somewhere, something like that.

GREENE: Okay, then let's get into the administration period when you were U.S. attorney and he was attorney general. You want to . . .

TYDINGS: Yeah, he's probably the best attorney general, maybe one or two exceptions, in the last fifty years--worked harder, the only one to visit all the U.S. attorney's offices. He made a great hit coming into Baltimore. As U.S. attorney, I had a dinner for him with all of the federal judges and leaders of the bar. And we had a great senior federal judge, judge of the United States court of appeals, the senior federal judge in the United States judicial system named Morris Soper Morris A. Soper, ninety years old, great mind, had been a great reform Republican, the only Republican mayor of Baltimore for a fifty-year period there. He had been United States attorney, the chief judge of the supreme bench of Baltimore chief judge of the United States district court, and just a fabulous, wonderful man. At ninety he was keen, perceptive and sharp, and he and Bobby really got along--although Soper was a very conservative person. They just had a great time. Bobby arranged for a special medal to be struck for him by the President and a special presentation scheduled to be made by the president. Unfortunately they gave Judge Soper his choice of receiving it in the fall or in the spring, and he elected to get it in the spring after he came back from his annual vacation in Florida. Unfortunately in February he had to have a gall bladder operation. He didn't come out of it, which was tragic. But Bobby loved the old man so much that he went right back and we worked the whole thing out. And ever since that I learned one lesson: If you've got a man that's getting along in age and you're going to do something nice for him, don't wait. Do it.

Bob went all through the U.S. attorney's offices in Maryland, as he did all over the country. He set up the organized crime section. Really he cracked heads, made the FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation cooperate with the other agencies. He brought in better qualified men to be assistant attorneys general than you've had at any time since 1932 and probably even before that. Objective analysts, I think, are universal in saying that he had the best assistant attorneys general in memory in the Department of Justice. I think we had some great U.S. attorneys as well. He let you run your own boat.

I think I may have mentioned in the JFK interview that when the postal inspectors brought us in the information that two congressmen had been involved in some pretty rotten bribery situations, and the time came that we developed really an open-shut case on them and Katzenbach Nicholsa deB. Katzenbach, wanted to put off the indictments until after the 1962 general election as a courtesy to the congressmen. We'd been trying to bring the indictments for months.

The congressmen themselves demanded the right to appear before the grand jury. We'd been inviting them, trying to get them to come in since July and they'd stalled it off for three months in an effort to delay the indictments until after the election. I finally went to Bobby and said, "It's really unfair. It's a basic affront to justice to let these men get away with this delay just because they're congressmen. And when the chips were down, he said what few other attorneys general would have said in the last hundred years, "Go ahead and treat them like anybody else." And I know that's a fact because the chief of the organized crime division and the general crimes division both; who were old time Justice men, told me that no other attorney general that they'd ever served under would have let a U.S. attorney go ahead under similar circumstances. And of course his faith in us was redeemed. Congressman Boykin [Frank W. Boykin] retained Edward Bennett Williams as his chief counsel and Congressman Johnson [Thomas F. Johnson] retained George Cochran Doub. We tried the case before a jury for weeks. It took the jury exactly two hours and twenty minutes to render a verdict of conviction on all counts.

GREENE: He seemed fated to always be against Edward Bennett Williams. He defended Hoffa [James R. Hoffa] and . . .

TYDINGS: Well, Williams just, you know, is a tremendous lawyer and he . . .

GREENE: Those who can afford him, get him.

TYDINGS: That's right. Those who can afford him, get him.

GREENE: Did you have contacts with him at all on the desegregation of Route 40?

TYDINGS: Yes. I was sent by Bob to the big meeting at the ARC with all of the Route 40 restaurant owners--this was in my home town, Aberdeen. I helped persuade them and helped organize the committee which voluntarily desegregated Route 40. I went up there with Pedro San Juan from the Department of State. Yes, I remember that well.

There were some other remembrances which come to mind which may be interesting. I've got to tell you about playing touch football with him one-on-one, with each of us having one youngster with us, one of his kids. What a rugged competitor! I don't know if you've ever played two-man touch, but it kills you. It's like running the mile.

The, oh, he came up to Hartford County to go Fox hunting with us. When I say hunting, that is chasing foxes on horses. And my former wife was a big fox hunter. Bob and Ethel came up twice. He'd never been hunting. He'd ridden quite a bit. His wife was a fine rider, Ethel; they came up. And I won't forget, he had jodhpurs on, rather than boots and breeches. Our hunt, the Elkridge-Harford, is somewhat of a proper hunt. We ride over rugged country, one of the great hunts in the United States, but still sticky on matters of dress, manners, and et cetera; proper. One older lady named Mrs. Dean Bedford who was married to one of the Standard Oil Standard Oil Company Bedfords was rather upset that Bobby's attire was not proper for the hunting field so she sent me a book of hunting etiquette to give to him. Needless to say, I never gave it to him.

GREENE: Seriously?

TYDINGS: Oh, yes, seriously. Then he came once again there and this time brought Teddy Edward M. Kennedy along. Bobby was not nearly as good a rider as he thought he was, although he had ridden more than Teddy. Well, my God, he got dumped and he lost the field. When you lose the field, that is, they go on.

GREENE: Right.

TYDINGS: Of course, you're hunting over many, many miles and sometimes you cover fifteen, twenty miles even thirty in a four, five-hour stretch. It was not his moment of glory coming back in, and everybody of course went on with the hounds. You know, when they start blowing that old horn and everybody going off, they're not going to stand around waiting even for the attorney general.

GREENE: How did he even find his way back?

TYDINGS: Well, the roads are marked and you can just inquire. He did make it back, but that was sort of amusing.