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Leonard F. Woodcock

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Oral History Interview

with

LEONARD F. WOODCOCK

January 27, 1970
Detroit, Michigan

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Mr. Woodcock, let me ask you how -- as these interviews have a habit of starting off -- do you recall when you first met John F. Kennedy?

WOODCOCK: Yes, very distinctly. It was on the floor of the Convention in 1956. The Michigan delegation, it so happened, was right alongside the Massachusetts delegation. Just before the open roll call for the vice presidential nomination was to begin, Bill Belanger [J. William Belanger], who was then the president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations], brought Jack Kennedy over, introduced him, and said, "You can do a lot for us in the Michigan delegation." And I just smiled and said, "Well, you can do a lot for us in the Massachusetts delegation." Jack Kennedy just laughed and just walked away. At this point Michigan was locked up for Kefauver [Estes Kefauver.] This had come about because we'd had a very hectic time inside our delegation on moving to Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], peculiarly enough, particularly with the blacks in our delegation, and in order to get as big a majority for Stevenson as possible, we had made commitments to the Kefauver people that we would go with Kefauver on the vice presidential nomination. Of course there was that very exciting roll call.

I didn't see the Senator again then until October 1959, when he came to our convention. We had invited all the known major candidates to come to our convention. We invited Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]; we invited Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]; we invited Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], Kennedy and Symington [Stuart Symington]. None of the other Republicans came and Johnson didn't come, but the other three Democrats -- Humphrey, Symington, and Kennedy -- all accepted. I told Walter Reuther that I wanted to introduce Jack Kennedy to the convention. Now, frankly, at that point in time, I made this request not out of any admiration particularly for him, but because I felt very keenly that he was being treated most unfairly inside the labor movement. He was at that time one of the Senate members of the Conference Committee on the Landrum-Griffin bill, and I knew that he was one of the most hard-working and diligent people in taking out of that legislation its most repressive items. Yes, there were those inside the labor movement and inside our union who were dubbing it the Landrum-Griffin-Kennedy bill and really doing a job on him. Some of this was based on anti-Catholic bias, and because this was so unfair, I asked to be allowed to introduce him.

And then the day before, we had a political debate on the political resolution, and I went out of my way in remarks on that resolution to talk about Jack Kennedy's role on that legislation. So that when he came to the convention, we had an escort committee, of course, and we arranged a breakfast with the Senator and with the committee. After the committee had gone, the Senator and I were left alone. We had a very brief conversation, and I remember saying to him did he really think a Catholic at this point in time could be elected President of the United States. It's almost impossible to put into words, but the way in which he said, "Well, I'll know that by March, and if that's so, wll, there are other ways in which I can serve my country," and in his saying those few words, very frankly -- maybe it's my Irish mother in me -- I was his man from that point on.

[-3-]

MOSS: This is in October 1959.

WOODCOCK: This is in October 1959, right. We went to the Convention. We took care to walk down a particular side because on what would have been the left-hand side as you face up from the platform there was a concentration of anti-Kennedy delegates, so we went down the other side so that there wouldn't be any untoward events. He made an excellent speech, but when you think back to the reception, he spoke the day after Humphrey, and Humphrey had torn the place apart. The delegates were up on the tables and they were pounding. Their response to Kennedy was polite; it certainly wasn't enthusiastic.

And that leads me to a little story. Dough Fraser, who is one of the members of our international executive board, afterwards was a Kennedy supporter to get the nomination. And of of the people in his region said to him, "How can you possibly support Kennedy as against Humphrey when you saw the way our guys reacted to Huphrey?" And so Doug Fraser said to this guy, "Well, you go and read those two speeches, and then if you don't

come back and admit to me that Kennedy said something and Humphrey didn't, I'll give you a dollar." And he forgot the incident. A month later he ran into this guy again, and the guy handed him a dollar and said, "I read the speeches. It's true Hubert didn't say anything. We were just responding emotionally." So after that day I was strongly and personally committed to Jack Kennedy as a Democrat and as a citizen.

MOSS: Let me go back a minute to the 1956 Democratic Convention. Do you recall exactly what moves there were that turned the tide on that second ballot from a close thing to Kefauver?

[-3-]

WOODCOCK: Well, actually it was the first ballot still.

MOSS: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

WOODCOCK: The roll had been called, but it had not been closed. Tennessee, as I remember it, switched the tide. And the story goes (I don't know how factual it is) that the editor or the publisher of one of the, I think, Nashville papers called over -- who would have been the chairman of the Tennessee delegation? Clement [Frank G. Clement], Clement, I think it was Clement -- called over Clement and said, "If you keep doing this to Kefauver, we'll cut your throat from one end of Tennessee to the other." In any event, whatever caused it, ultimately the Tennessee vote switched, and then there were other switches and it was over. Of course, the curious thing about that was that Kennedy had almost the solid South support. It was a little hard for us to understand.

MOSS: This caused some consternation later in 1960, didn't it, among Michigan Democrats, that he'd been so strong in the South, affecting his liberal image?

WOODCOCK: It was one of things used, yes.

MOSS: Let me go to 1959 and Michigan really and ask you to talk for a moment about the favorite son candidacy of Mennan Williams [G. Mennan Williams]. How was this developing and why?

WOODCOCK: Williams didn't go to the Convention as a favorite son in '60.

[-4-]

MOSS: Well, the state convention passed a resolution -- this was the 7 May convention here -- passed a resolution, a favorite son resolution, for Williams for any office. But there was a developing favorite son atmosphere around Williams prior to that.

WOODCOCK: Well, Williams was for Kennedy privately at a very early stage.

MOSS: This is what I now understand, but I hadn't gotten this from anybody else.

WOODCOCK: In fact, I think I can… [Interruption]... of April I was in a meeting with…

MOSS: Excuse me. Would you begin again? As early as the 11th of April…

WOODCOCK: As early as the 11th of April in 1960 I attended a meeting in Lansing with Governor Williams; Neil Staebler, who I think was then still the chairman of the party; Gus Scholle [August Scholle], who was President of the Michigan AFL-CIO; myself; and I think Phil Hart [Philip A. Hart] had a representative there. We discussed the national situation at some length and agreed that we were for Kennedy. And the question of how it would be done and so on would be a matter of tactics. And at that point it was not for publication, although the Senator's people were aware of this.

MOSS: Okay. Now, back on the second of March, Governor Williams announced publicly that he would not seek another term as governor. Do you know the background of that decision? How early was that decision?

WOODCOCK: I don't know.

MOSS: You don't know. Okay. Now, do you know anything of why he decided not to run?

WOODCOCK: Not really. There was speculation to the effect that in '58 he had not headed the ticket and they had done a horrendous job on him politically with the payless pay-days and the whole tax situation.

MOSS: All right, now going into the state convention, do you recall why this favorite son resolution for "any office" came about?

WOODCOCK: As I was telling you, that was just a holding thing. We did that to avoid any splintering at that time.

MOSS: All right. And at that time there was a professional poll amongst Michigan Democrats showing Kennedy with a sizable lead -- I think 63 percent or something of that sort -- among Michigan Democrats.

WOODCOCK: I think so. That's right.

MOSS: But you all were already committed to him, and you had made this known to him privately.

WOODCOCK: Yes, well, of course, I went to this meeting on April 11th. I was known publicly as pro-Kennedy.

MOSS: Now between…

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WOODCOCK: The big thing at that meeting was the Governor Williams said, "Yes, I am for Kennedy."

MOSS: He said this at the April 11th meeting.

WOODCOCK: At the April 11th meeting. I'm quite sure of that.

MOSS: But it was not until the second of June up in Mackinaw that you came out with a public announcement.

WOODCOCK: That's right.

MOSS: Now, what was the strategy and tactics on this timing on the second of June? And why do it in the formal way that it was done, having Kennedy come out to Mackinaw?

WOODCOCK: See the… When was West Virginia?

MOSS: West Virginia was May 10th.

WOODCOCK: Was May 10th. Shortly after that there was sort of a sag and a lull, and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was…. He and I worked very closely in this whole period. The feeling was that the campaign needed that kind of shot in the arm to give it some forward thrust and momentum.

MOSS: All right, now…

WOODCOCK: And the business of Mackinaw was to give it a little more color, I guess.

[-7-]

MOSS: Okay, but following the Mackinaw meeting and the announcement of the endorsement on the part of several individuals because the state delegation could not go committed, is that correct?

WOODCOCK: We did not have the unit rule, no.

MOSS: Right. But following the Mackinaw meeting there was some kind of reaction among some Detroit liberals, particularly blacks, to the endorsement, and Governor Williams arranged for the Kennedy plane, the *Caroline*, to come and pick some of them up and take them into Georgetown. Did you go on this trip?

WOODCOCK: No, I did not.

MOSS: You didn't. Do you know the background of it or were you in on the meeting in Detroit between Governor Williams and the blacks?

WOODCOCK: No. No, I was not.

MOSS: All right. Can you think of anything else around this time that would be significant, before the Convention? Now, considerations, for instance, of the possibility of another run by Stevenson. Did this enter into your calculations at all?

WOODCOCK: On the 18th of June in Lansing we had a caucus of the delegates in which we had a prolonged debate that I took a major part in, and we then took a straw poll.

MOSS: I believe I have the figures here, as a matter of fact. There were only a hundred and ten out of a hundred and fifty-to delegates and alternates who actually voted in the poll: eighty-four for Kennedy, ten for Stevenson, eight for Synington, and eight abstentions.

WOODCOCK: Right, and of course our main theme at that point was unite behind Kennedy to stop Johnson.

MOSS: Backing up just a moment, something you may have an insight on, I've been given to understand that there was some Johnson pressure -- I don't know whether you could call it pressure or not -- that Walter Reuther was somewhat upset at the timing of the Mackinaw thing because it might jeopardize the Medicare bill.

WOODCOCK: There was some concern about that. There was some concern about that.

MOSS: You don't know of any direct threats by the Johnson people on this, do you?

WOODCOCK: No, none that I know.

MOSS: Okay. Now, anything else going into the Convention?

WOODCOCK: Well, to back up, after the Wisconsin primary was over, of course, Humphrey and Kennedy were then locking horns in West Virginia. I was not one of those who believed in miracles, and I thought that would be a very bad result. Jack Conway and I, who was then on Walter Reuther's administrative staff, talked to the Senator, then did what we could with the Humphrey people to try and get him to withdraw -- that is, Humphrey to withdraw -- from West Virginia. But, there seemed every evidence -- and this is not anything I know; it's pure speculation, obviously -- is not anything I know; it's pure speculation, obviously -- that at this point Hubert was no longer running for himself; he was running as a stalking horse just to stop Kennedy.

The strong public appeal that the Senator had was also shown. It was during the Midwest Democraticc Conference -- when would that have been, in February? Again we had Symington, Kennedy, and Humphrey.

MOSS: You had stand-ins, I think, for Stevenson and for Johnson. There was somebody…

WOODCOCK: Yes, yes, and then the meeting was long, and of course these people, some of them, had been there a long time, old people. You'll call the meeting for 11; they'll come as early as 9. It was quite late before I got a chance to introduce the Senator, which I did very quickly, obviously, and the electric response and the way he was mobbed as he left the platform was a sure sign that he had the necessary magic. There are no other things that I can particularly remember prior to the Convention.

MOSS: Let me ask something in a general political way. Was there any concern on the part of Michigan Democrats that Kennedy would support the kind of strong programmatic stand on Civil Rights that you were used to?

WOODCOCK: I wasn't personally concerned about that, no.

MOSS: Was there concern in the delegation that you know of?

WOODCOCK: Well, there was expressed concern. Whether it was real or just for the argument, I don't know.

MOSS: Okay, going into the Convention, do you recall any favoritism on the part of, say, Paul Butler, towards John Kennedy in the way he set things up?

WOODCOCK: No, no, because when the galleries were so thronged with Stevenson people…. I'll tell you, if it was rigged for anybody, it was rigged for Eleanor Roosevelt and the Stevenson crowd.

MOSS: Were you involved in the Kennedy delegate roundup business, keeping head count and this kind of thing? Could you say something about the way the Kennedy staff operated at the Convention?

WOODCOCK: No. The strange thing is I never met Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] until after he was Attorney General. My whole contact had been with primarily Ted Sorensen, to a lesser extent Mike Feldman [Meyer Feldman]. We had waverers in the Michigan delegation who had gone on record for Kennedy, but it didn't take much to push them off.

MOSS: Who would they have gone for?

WOODCOCK: Oh, some were for Symington, quite a few were for Symington, so that I spent all my time in our delegation.

MOSS: Trying to keep it in line.

WOODCOCK: Right.

MOSS: Did the vote go about as you expected it to, or was there any doubt in your mind that…

WOODCOCK: You mean inside the Michigan delegation or totally?

MOSS: Both.

WOODCOCK: In Michigan, I think in the event we did a little better than I had at one time expected. I was very relieved when it went over on the first ballot because I was concerned that if we didn't make it on the first ballot that erosion would begin to set in immediately. I think there I was reflecting more some of my colleagues on the Michigan delegation, particularly some of the labor colleagues.

MOSS: Did you communicate this in any way to the Kennedy people, this

uneasiness about some of your delegates?

WOODCOCK: They were aware of it.

MOSS: Now, how about this whole business of the selection of Johnson as Vice President. Did you get involved in this at all?

WOODCOCK: No, no.

MOSS: How about the reaction to it? For instance, let me ask under what circumstances you first heard that Johnson was the choice.

WOODCOCK: We had a meeting of our Michigan delegation the morning following the presidential ballot. Are you pressed for time?

MOSS: No.

WOODCOCK: Williams was our chairman and reported that he had just come from or was just going to a discussion about the vice presidential nominee but it was quite certain it would be Symington. So we broke up. We were housed in the Statler. I went down to have lunch at the Biltmore, which is four or five blocks away, and I'm sure you know, came strolling back -- and I was with Milly Jeffrey [Mildred Jeffrey] -- came up the escalator to the lobby of the Statler, and the first person I run into is Joe Rauh [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] who has tears literally rolling down his cheeks. Have I heard the news? I couldn't possibly imagine what was causing such consternation. And it seems the news was that Lyndon Johnson was Jack Kennedy's pick and that Kennedy had betrayed us all. Well, I, very frankly, was shocked, because our whole theme had been unite behind Kennedy to stop Johnson.

I went upstairs to Walter Reuther's suite, and quite a few of our people from across the country were sitting around with their chins hanging on their chests. Alex Rose was there, too, the Liberal Party and the Hatters' Union in New York. The whole business was, "Oh my God, what are we going to do?" We were all sitting around as though it were a wake. At this point one of the girls stuck her head in and said, "Mr. Dubinsky [David Dubinsky] is calling from New York for Mr. Rose." I remember Walter saying, "Well, Alex, you're going to get your head taken off. As a matter of fact, just open the window. You'll be able to hear him."

So Rose goes out to take the phone call, and at that point I said, "Well, I was a delegate in '52, and I voted for John Sparkman for vice president. Lyndon Johnson isn't a John Sparkman, and Texas isn't Alabama. And I'm not so sure that this is all that bad. As a matter of fact, I think that this may make a great deal of sense in the national ticket and so on." Walter picked it up, and some of our number were unimpressed by that approach, but some sort of rallied around. We were just about to break up because we had to get back out to the Convention because we were concerned about the Michigan delegation making a scene,

and Alex Rose comes back in. He'd had obviously a lengthy conversation. And he said, "Dave Dubinsky thinks that this is the smartest thing that could ever have happened. It's wonderful! It's great!"

[-13-]

So, we go out to the Convention, and the Michigan delegates want to caucus. A lot of them were very unhappy. Let's see, we were meeting out at the Sports Arena, weren't we, which had no caucus facilities whatsoever. We wound up in a boiler room. It was a most unsatisfactory thing. There were people crying and oh, there were really emotional jags. I made a speech to try and convince them that this made a lot of sense and that we should unite behind the ticket. What was important now was what the continued session of the Congress did, quite obviously, since both of our nominees were going to be from the Congress, in the Senate.

The upshot of it was that on Neil Staebler's suggestion a committee was appointed to try and work something out. There were about seven or eight of us, as I remember it. Harriett Phillips was one. She was an ardent Stevenson person. Of course, this delighted her because it just proved all the things right that she had been saying about Kennedy. I remember then we were looking for a place to meet. We met in the men's rest room. We agreed that everybody would be left to his own device.

Then I'm not too sure how it happened. We're back on the Convention floor, and it's tremendously crowded. A sheet is passed around; we're supposed to say yes or no to this proposition. I assumed it was the proposition that this committee had just come up with, and so I said, "Yes." The proposition was that Williams do what he did: to take the floor and, very frankly, in my opinion, make a jackass of himself. The result was, to my great astonishment, the next thing is that Williams is on the mike bellowing the position, supposedly, of the Michigan delegation.

[-14-]

Well, later that night, when it was all over, we were back at the hotel, and we then had a caucus in decent surroundings. I got a chance to talk to the delegates in a way that I didn't get a chance to earlier, reciting how back in 1948 I'd sat up until the early hours of the morning listening to the radio, worrying about the return from a Senate race in Texas that Lyndon Johnson won by an eyelash. Here was a man who…. After all, he had a Texas constituency; there are certain political facts of life to which he had to accommodate himself. And he had done quite a remarkable job as Majority Leader. And then at that point somebody gets up and makes a motion that we vote, which was a vote of confidence on the ticket. Then Phil Hart said that he wanted to say some words, and he made a very moving speech about his personal relationship with Lyndon Johnson.

The result was that -- after the event, unfortunately -- the overwhelming bulk of the delegation were in much different spirits than they had been. There was some worry by some who were running for offices as to what impact it would have politically in Michigan with Johnson on the ticket. I don't think that had any substance. I think it was just the reverse. I

think there were substantial areas in the state where he brought strength to the ticket because in the state we have a lot of transplanted Southerners, many of whom voted against Kennedy for Catholic and other reasons, but many of whom, I think, who did vote the Democratic ticket did it in part because Johnson was on there.

MOSS: Okay. A little digression here, coming back to Michigan and Michigan politics. John Swainson and Jim Hare [James M. Hare] were jockeying for the gubernatorial nomination in the August primary. It's my understanding that most of the Democratic party leaders were convinced that Hare had it wrapped up. Is this correct?

[-15-]

WOODCOCK: Yes. As a matter of fact, again, as I was glancing through this engagement book for the year of 1960, the Governor and Neil Staebler and Gus Scholle and Adelaide Hart, who was the vice chairman under Staebler, and myself had a meeting. I think it was in March. And out of that meeting we told John Swainson, "Look, you're young. You've got lots of time. This isn't your time. You should step aside gracefully." And John just said, well, he wouldn't, he'd take his chances. An, of course, T.V. is what made the difference there. The two of them were on television together quite a bit, and Swainson is a very attractive personality. And he had a lot of secondary leadership lined up, so that by the time we were at the Los Angeles Convention, he had entirely on his own hook gotten most of our activists solidly in his corner. It just proves, I guess, that we were pretty poor bosses or pretty poor judges or both.

MOSS: Okay. Coming back to the national thing again, what did you and the Democratic leadership in Michigan decide had to be done in the way of campaign strategy to carry Michigan for John Kennedy, do you recall?

WOODCOCK: No, not specifically, because in my capacity as a union official I have responsibility for General Motors and also for our aerospace section. 1960 was an aerospace bargaining year, so that I was out on the West Coast a very great deal, and I was only peripherally engaged in it. The chief feeling was that it was very important that the candidate personally be here. I don't believe it's true that the feeling was that Johnson shouldn't come here, as has been alleged. Now, whether or not Johnson felt he didn't want to come here after what had happened at the Convention is something I don't know about it.

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MOSS: Do you know if there was any active attempt to get him to come into the state?

WOODCOCK: No, I don't know. I was told he had been invited and just couldn't make it,

but….

MOSS: Do you know anything of the, I suppose you'd call it the compatibility between the Kennedy operation and the state operation?

WOODCOCK: Well, a lot of the political activity in Michigan is also oriented to the UAW [International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America]; so there, of course, it was completely compatible. No, I know of no particular difficulties that developed.

MOSS: Now, do you recall any of the activities of, say, John Carver, who was a Kennedy coordinator, or Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno], his advance man?

WOODCOCK: Only incidentally.

MOSS: Okay. Now let's see, the candidate came in three times, as I understand it. Once was really a labor show since it was a Labor Day opening.

WOODCOCK: Kick-off, yes. Truman [Harry S. Truman] had started that tradition in '48.

MOSS: Right. Do you have any insight on that, any sidelights or anecdotes? It's public knowledge and so on, but is there any local color that you could contribute on that particular trip?

WOODCOCK: No, no.

MOSS: Okay. And then the second time was when he came and did his Peace Corps thing…

WOODCOCK: On the train swing.

MOSS: … on the train swing, who had the idea for the train swing, do you know?

WOODCOCK: I think that came from the Kennedy people, the national.

MOSS: And then the final one was very late in the campaign. He came to Detroit, I think to the Coliseum, wasn't it?

WOODCOCK: The State Fair grounds.

MOSS: The State Fair grounds, right. Now, do you recall why he was brought in the last time? He'd already been twice.

WOODCOCK: Well, there was worry about Michigan being very marginal, very close, and in fact, of course, it was. There was a great deal of pressure to get him back. We did not have too good a crowd at the State Fair, and I'm not too sure it was a wise thing to do because I think it had some of the opposite effect. It seemed to indicate a weakness rather than a strength. The train swing had been very good. There were some very good crowds. I went as far as Grand Rapids, and I dropped off there. I remember being quite surprised at the turn-out in Grand Rapids which, of course, is a very conservative, Republican town.

MOSS: What would you say were the issues, both good for the candidate and bad for the candidate, on which the election turned in Michigan?

[-18-]

WOODCOCK: The religious factor was a very heavy influence, no question about it. The things going for him were not so much issues, as his personality. the note that he struck of facing forward, and of course, here as elsewhere, the tremendous impact of the television debates, particularly the first one. Of course, the religious factor cut both ways. I remember standing in line (I lived out in Grosse Pointe) and two elderly women just ahead of me talking to each other -- Belgians, I would guess -- first time they had voted in years. They turned out because they were Catholic, and they were going to vote for Jack Kennedy because he was Catholic. That helped in areas like Detroit, but in Flint and other places where it's heavily non-Catholic then it was a negative factor. I think, had he lived and been able to run in '64, that would have more than washed out.

There was one item during the campaign. I was over at the General Motors building this particular morning, and there was a man on the phone -- one of the girls who's still here answered the phone -- and he said, "This is Jack Kennedy," and she said, "Yeah, and I'm Gloria Swanson," or whatever. And it was Jack Kennedy doing his own telephoning from Chicago. After she realized that it really was the Senator, she was appalled at what she'd done. He just laughed. He had been trying to reach Walter and couldn't. Walter was in a meeting of the executive council of the AFL-CIO in New York. I remember him saying, "We're running out of money. My dad's check book is running down, and we need money desperately for (this was very late in the campaign) the television program." So I said I'd get the message through. But he was that kind of person.

MOSS: How were finances going, both in Michigan…. For instance, did much national party money come into Michigan, much Michigan money go out?

[-19-]

WOODCOCK: I don't know.

MOSS: Okay. Let me shift to after the election now, and the President-elect

selecting his Cabinet and so on. Did you or other members of the Michigan Democratic party have any role in advising him on his choice of Cabinet members?

WOODCOCK: No, no.

MOSS: Not Arthur Goldberg as Secretary of Labor or Bill Simkin [William E. Simkin] as the Mediation and Conciliation Service man?

WOODCOCK: I know that Walter was consulted. To what extent, specifically, I don't know.

MOSS: Okay, can you recall what contacts you had with the President after he was sworn in?

WOODCOCK: Well, indirectly I was asked between the election, obviously after the election and before the Inauguration, would I be interested in one of the upper level posts that were suggested in Commerce, which didn't have too much attraction for me. Most of my contacts continued to be through Ted Sorensen and then, on a couple of occasions, through Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan], I was asked to consider the ambassadorship to Pakistan on one occasion and to Taiwan on another. I remember the second time going to see Walter to tell him. Walter was sitting in his chair, which had castors on -- this was Taiwan -- and he stands up, shoots his chair back, and says, "Jack Kennedy is out of his mind!" I said, "Well, that's not very flattering." He then proceeded to tell me what he meant by that: that obviously, anybody, to be an effective ambassador to Taiwan, had to be a conservative to have any restraining influence on Chaing Kai-shek. And frankly, I wasn't considering it anyway. I was just doing this to see what reaction it would get.

The President was most helpful to us in the aerospace negotiations of 1962. Of course, Bill Simkin was the director of federal mediation, and he and his colleagues were very jealous of their jurisdiction, but we were working through Arthur Goldberg. We were able to make what was at that time a historic agreement with the then still the Douglas Aircraft Company, which was historic in the sense that it established in southern California, in California-based industry, a full union security contract for the first time. We got an agency shot rather than a union shop, where an individual doesn't have to join but is required to pay the same fee as if he were a member, so in financial terms it's exactly the same. That was made possible in part because the younger Donald Douglas was quite open-minded, but, too, the Secretary and the President made this a possibility.

MOSS: Do you recall what the President did specifically?

WOODCOCK: Well, the younger Douglas knew that if this -- what was happening was

that Douglas was breaking the front of the industry in southern California. He clearly understood that if they did this, this had the sympathy of the President. Then when, in fact, it was done, he went to the White House and was congratulated by the President. And then after that, when North American Aviation and Lockheed, primarily, and General Dynamics for its Convair division would not follow suit, the President then set up a presidential commission which turned off the strike. And at one of his press conferences he answered a question which was very favorable to our cause, so that he was of great assistance in a very proper way, a very proper way.

[-21-]

The last time I saw the President I went along with Walter to the White House. It must have been…. This was just a short time before the AFL-CIO convention in New York, which was the last time I saw him in person. We went to the White House. I remember he was having his hair cut. We had gone because the Douglas Aircraft Company was in very difficult straits because of the over-commitment they'd made on the financing of the DC-8, which was not at that point doing well, and they had launched the DC-9. Our purpose was to hope that the government might announce the purchase of some DC-9 as personnel carriers so that they could go ahead with it. The other thing was that…

MOSS: Was this put to the President in terms of "Look, we really owe Douglas something?"

WOODCOCK: Well, let me hook up the other piece. The British Aircraft Company had just sold American Airlines -- what was it -- the BAC-110, which was a jet in the same class as the DC-9. Our concern was that that would spread and that the DC-9 would be snuffed out, so we talked about the balance of payments problem and so on and so forth. Well, the President said to us at that time, he said, "There's nothing I can do about the British thing because Macmillan [Harold Macmillan] called me to ask did we object to BAC trying to sell the American companies and we had told him no." And he said, "I had to tell them that after Nassau and the ditching of Skybolt." And then he said something which I've often wondered since…. He said, "If I had unknown then what I know now, we would not have ditched Skybolt." He just said that and let it hang there.

MOSS: Your implication is that he was having his pound of flesh taken from him by Macmillan?

[-22-]

WOODCOCK: No. If you remember, as I understand it, when the President went to Nassau…. Well, the ditching of Skybolt caused Macmillan severe political problems back in Britain, and I don't think it was so much a pound of flesh as that he felt an obligation to the man. Anyway, the Prime Minister of England calls up and wants to know can a British company sell on the open market in a free enterprise

economy. [Laughter] I would think, in any event, it's a little difficult to say no. And then he said something to the effect that, "We would like to do something for Douglas if we could properly do it." But he said, "McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] keeps telling me they're so goddamned inefficient." Then he just laughed and it was left there.

Well, it so happened there were never any orders for personnel carriers, but Douglas turned the corner. Of course, there is a little footnote to that. They then got into the opposite end of the difficulty. They sold too many DC-8's that they couldn't finance them, which is what ultimately led to the McDonell-Douglas merger. When he spoke, when the President campaigned in Long Beach, the Douglases appeared on the platform with him. I don't think they have any background of Democratic politics, so that he had this memory, too, with regard to that.

MOSS: Now, do you recall his activity in support of candidates in Michigan in 1962?

WOODCOCK: Not particularly, no.

MOSS: I know on one or two occasions he came into the state, at any rate.

WOODCOCK: I think he had a warm regard for John Swainson and did what he could for him.

MOSS: Was there anything at all to the suggestion that Mrs. Williams [Nancy Lace Quirk Williams] run as Congressman-at-large instead of Neil Staebler very early in the game, before it was really considered?

WOODCOCK: If that were so, I was not too much aware of it.

MOSS: Okay. Now speaking of 1962, to what would you attribute the decline in the Democratic Party's fortune in Michigan, the loss of the governorship and so on?

WOODCOCK: Well, Romney [George W. Romney], of course, as a personality had a great deal to do with it. He beat us at our own game, which really now is the old politics, but at one point was relatively new politics, the personal involvement and so on. I think that that was probably the biggest factor.

MOSS: Okay. Let me ask another question, as a general one this time, and that is: what was there about the presidency of John Kennedy that made a difference to Michigan, politically or economically?

WOODCOCK: Well, of course until the economic policies there had never been two good

automobile years back to back. It was axiomatic that if it was a good sales year then the next one would be mediocre if not bad. Of course, starting with 1961 when we were pulling out of the recession, '61-'62 being explained by the cycle, then the tax cut and so on, which kept the boom going until just very recent months, it has just been one prolonged spell of good business, which of course says everything for Michigan, in economic terms at least.

MOSS: How about political terms? What advantages was there to Michigan in having Jack Kennedy in the White House?

WOODCOCK: The full dividend of that value would have been realized, I think, in '64. I know that in some of the conversations that the President would say, "Well, after the next election." He seemed always so conscious of his paper-thin mandate of 1960 that, had he been the candidate in '64, I think there's little question that, even if the Republicans hadn't been so thoughtful as to nominate Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater]. he would have done amazingly well. and I think would have tackled some of our gut problems in a very meaningful way.

MOSS: Let me ask you this, is there anything else you can think of that is significant and we ought to get down on tape that you can recall?

WOODCOCK: No.

MOSS: Okay. Fine. Thank you very much then, Mr. Woodcock.

[END OF INTERVIEW]