Wilton Vaugh Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 5/11/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Wilton Vaugh
Interviewer: Edwin Martin
Date of Interview: May 11, 1964
Place of Interview: Boston, Massachusetts
Length: 25 pp.

Biographical Note
Vaugh, Wilton; Massachusetts political figure; Kennedy Family neighbor, East Boston; correspondent, political editor, Boston Post (1917-1956). Vaugh discusses his role as an editor for the Boston Post, the Kennedy Family's early years in Boston, and John F. Kennedy's [JFK] time as a Massachusetts senator, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation
Wilton Vaugh, recorded interview by Edwin Martin, May 11, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

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Wilton Vaugh

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Oral History Interview

with

WILTON VAUGH

May 11, 1964
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Wilton, your memory of the Kennedys goes way back to the Jeffries Point section of East Boston when you were still a youngster. Could you tell us about those days?

VAUGH: Yes. I was living on Sumner Street, East Boston, and across Belmont Park on the next street which is Webster Street, the Kennedy family lived and that included a gentleman named Patrick J. Kennedy.

MARTIN: He was the father of Joe Kennedy?

VAUGH: He was the father of Joseph and the grandfather of the President. Now in his day, he was really one of the outstanding political leaders of the nation because he was the chief executive, really, of the city of Boston. We had a mayor at that time but the city was run by a Democratic city committee and P. J. Kennedy was the boss of that committee. And you couldn't get a job at city hall as a lamplighter or streetsweeper, or anything else unless you got the O.K. of the city committee headed by P. J. Kennedy. Now, at that time, Kennedy had a lot of money. He ran two liquor stores and he was able to give his children things that he hadn't been able to get when he was driven from Ireland by the Irish famine, the potato famine. And I remember John F. telling me that in the

old days, John F., of course, being the former Mayor, John F. “Honey” Fitzgerald, grandfather of the President on his mother's side. John F. told me that in the old days they had signs in the windows in State Street and the banks, "No Irish Need Apply." And he said that he spoke to some of the bankers and wanted them to hire some of these fine

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clean-cut young boys, the second generation of the Irish families, to give them jobs in banks, anything, messengers, clerks or anything like that. And the bank president said to John F., "Look, we'll let the Irish take care of the bars and we yankees will take care of the banks.” So, later, of course, John F. told me that Joe Kennedy who had married his daughter, Rose, was forced to leave Boston in order to get anywhere. He was a brilliant young man, out of Harvard, where he was a great athlete, wonderful first baseman, captain of the Harvard team. But he couldn't get going here although he became the youngest bank president in the United States. The mayor and other friends were able to buy out the controlling stock in the old Columbia Trust Company. At that time, there was rivalry between the Kennedy family and the Sullivan family for the first family title in East Boston. And the Sullivans wouldn't sell out to the Kennedys and the Kennedys wouldn't sell out to the Sullivans. So Mayor Fitzgerald came in and said he was interested in the bank and would like to get into business and he was able to pick up enough stock to give the Kennedy family control. And Joe, just fresh out of Harvard, was elected president, the youngest bank president in the United States. Shortly after that he married Rose Fitzgerald. When he found out that there was no chance of getting anything done here in Boston, a city whose wealth had built all of our great transcontinental railroads and built up the middle west, built up Chicago and even Portland, Oregon, San Francisco…. All of those great cities and all of those great railroads were built by Boston capital. Yet Mayor Fitzgerald and the Kennedys couldn't get the people here on State Street to risk any capital to promote New England. They were willing to send it anywhere, but wouldn't spend it here at home. So Kennedy left here and went to New York and became one of the wealthiest men in the world. And he was undoubtedly delighted to see his boy become president, because he had a great deal to do with Franklin D. Roosevelt becoming president. He backed Roosevelt when Roosevelt needed it, in his first campaign. Then, of course, Roosevelt appointed him ambassador to Great Britain and Kennedy, being a red-headed Irishman, wouldn't stand for it when Roosevelt used the hot line to 10 Downing Street and was doing business directly with Winston Churchill. Kennedy got sore and quit. He wasn't going to stand for anybody by-passing him when he held the most important ambassadorial post in the whole world. Everybody wanted to be the ambassador to the Court of St. James and a great many famous New Englanders and Bostonians never attained that ambition. I know one man when I was at Harvard, President A. Lawrence Lowell, would have given his shirt and all of his mills and all of his degrees if he could have been appointed ambassador to Great Britain. But he never made it even though

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he knew President Wilson who had been president at Princeton University, or professor of government at the university, very, very well and he knew President Taft, who was a professor at Yale. Lowell never could get to the Court of St. James, his one big ambition. He died without attaining it. And yet Joe Kennedy, one of his Harvard boys, was able to do it. John F. Fitzgerald, the mayor of Boston, was really way ahead of his time in making friends in South and Central America. I remember I was just a kid when he started that campaign of the four B's, bigger, better, busier Boston. He was responsible for building the Boston High School of Commerce, and he was also responsible for setting up the traveling fellowship with the Boston Chamber of Commerce. So they picked two boys from Boston to go to South America and after an essay contest, these boys went down there and they established good working relations. And when I went to the high school of commerce, we used to write to boys in Spanish all over Central and South America and they'd write back in English. They'd correct our papers and we'd correct theirs. But even this wonderful work that John F. Fitzgerald started was allowed to drift. The Germans went into South America and built up the country and made millions in trade . Then the Russians have been in there and the communists have been in. It remained for President Kennedy himself to try and stop the mad march of communism in Central and South America by developing the countries and trying to do a little for the poor people down there and trying to convince the extra wealthy that they should take care of these people and give them work and give them land and give them farms so that they wouldn't fall for the phony communist culture. And speaking about culture, President Kennedy developed a culture that was given him by all his ancestors. He had a great love for music and particularly, he had a love for Irish music and almost every place he went he carried these tape recordings with him. And he would play that music and later developed the famous Lincoln Cultural Center that we now have. And his wife too, Jacqueline, is very much interested and had a great deal to do with making that, the White House, the center of culture in America. And the President went right along with it because their ideas coincided. He had everything he needed to make good in politics. He had the background. He had the political acumen of his two grandfathers. He had his own father's experience in Washington and the Court of St. James. He had his own experience, personally, when he was over these with his father and saw the great second World War building up. And he wrote some marvelous articles and sent them back to the *Boston Post* when I was a reporter there. Young John really learned an awful lot about writing and about politics and about culture while he was over there with his dad in England. And, of course, he always had that love for athletics that he

inherited. I know Grandpa Fitzgerald used to go down to Apple Island on Sundays when we'd have picnics and John F. was a pretty good ball player, as well as a good singer. He was famous for "Sweet Adeline" and that song went round the world just on John F. 's rendition. But John F., too, was a good baseball player, although people never knew about it, except those who used to spend their summers down on our beautiful harbor islands in Boston. And then, of course, Joe Kennedy, as I said, was a great ballplayer at Harvard. Then when Jack came along, he was a good athlete, a great swimmer and he played a little football. He didn't

have the weight that the new giants of collegiate football have, but he had the courage and he had the backbone to get out there and do his best. That courage came to him in good stead later when his back was injured in the Pacific, when his PT boat was cut in two by a Jap destroyer. I remember one time he was in the hospital for ten days packed in ice and couldn't move. And his father sat beside him and didn't sleep a wink for all that time. The kid had courage and that was what brought him through. A man who would give up and quit never would have survived what he went through in that operation. So he was a good athlete and he loved sports. He loved to go out and throw the first baseball when he became president in Washington, or if he happened to be in Boston, he might call on the Red Sox and he really enjoyed it. And he enjoyed the football games. He loved to see Harvard play football and he also loved to see the army-navy games. He was very fair. He would sit on one side of the field with the army for one half and then he'd cross over and sit with his own gang in the navy for the other half. But he really enjoyed it. And if you notice in the pictures in the newspapers or on the TV, you could see that he wasn't there, because it was part of his job as president. He was there, because he loved it. He was surrounded by the people that he loved and the people who loved him. Now, there's one thing about this Kennedy family: they are devoted and they are loyal, not merely to one another but they are loyal to their friends. I think that this came down through the ages, also, because Joe Kennedy who was one of the most brilliant financial minds in the history of American business, started out with the boys that went to Harvard with him and the boys that lived near him up there at Belmont Park in East Boston. When I say park--it was just a little square. It wasn't a real park with flowers and everything. It was just a plot of grass surrounded by four streets and they were busy streets.

MARTIN: This was back in your early boyhood, Wilton. Can you go into a little more detail on the circumstances of what that district was like in the beginnings of that Kennedy family. Was that area also an area

where there was a preponderance of Irish immigrants? And how about the English people, the sailors and the crews that came into the Cunard piers and left the ships and started families here in America?

VAUGH: Well, of course that’s true. From my house and from the Kennedy house, you could look down over the harbor and see these transatlantic liners come in from Germany, Holland, Russia, everywhere. They came in from Ireland. And the reason we had such a tremendous growth of population in Boston was because all of these folks from Ireland, were people escaping from the potato famine. And then later years, those that had come earlier sent back for their sisters and brothers and other members of their families. They'd land at the Cunard docks in East Boston. That's as far as they got. They loved Boston, they stayed here, they built up East Boston, and they built the churches and built the playgrounds and the beaches. I think we had a better time in those days than the kids have now. That is, we had beaches all around East Boston. We had public landings and we

had vacations down the harbor. Of course, there was a tremendous majority of Irish people in East Boston. A Republican was practically unknown over there although they had founded what was called Noddle Island, but as these people came from Ireland with their broad love for the neighbors and for other people, they embraced the Democratic Party and really became a force in the government of our city and then, later on, in our state and then in our nation until later on Kennedy became the first Irish Catholic president in the history of the world.

MARTIN: Well, Wilton, you mentioned the Kennedy family and suggested they were somewhat a cut above the other families in the area due to their financial advantage?

VAUGH: Well, as I say, there were a few wealthy families there but there were only a few like the Kennedys and the Sullivans and the Arthurs. Most of the wealthy families there owned barrooms, because that was the only thing that they would be permitted to operate. They wanted to make sure that their children wouldn't be limited to that one field. But it was a very lucrative business and Kennedy was able to send his boys to Boston Latin School. Of course, there was no cost there, but he was then able to send him to Harvard and to go to Harvard from East Boston was a tremendous leap. Most of the kids over there were lucky to be allowed to go to high school. They had to quit school after they got out of the Xaverian Brothers School or the Notre Dame nuns school. Very few people went to public schools. The Irish insisted on sending their children to the parochial

schools. And just as soon as they were able to get out of school, they went to work. And the Kennedys were a little different. They had money. And as a result, the other kids used to take advantage of the Kennedy wealth. When Joe would leave Webster Street to go over to Boston Latin where he was also a great baseball player, the kids would go up and go into the basement and see the maid and say, "Joe said we could use his bat and his ball and his gloves." His baseball property got more exercise from the kids of East Boston than it ever did on the Boston Latin School diamond or even in the stadium. The kids used the stuff all day long and when Joe was due to get back from Latin School, why they'd return the bats and balls to the maid and she'd pack them away in the cellar and out they'd go. And Joe, I don't think ever knew or if he did, he was tickled to death that somebody was learning to become a better baseball player up around Belmont Park.

MARTIN: Well, he never had any leanings in his younger years to a political career?

VAUGH: Oh, no. No, of course not. He never even thought of becoming a politician. He went to Latin School which is a wonderful school for people who want to become doctors and lawyers and educators, teachers and professors. But when he got into the banking business… Of course, at the time his marriage, it was John F. Fitzgerald, and I think it was John F. that insisted that he go into the banking business, just to

show, as you might say in New York, the "damn Yankees" that they were not going to keep the Irish out of any field of endeavor for which they were eminently qualified by their brilliant minds and by their intelligence. And I think perhaps that's one reason he got into politics, because once you get into banking, you're in politics. You've got to watch the legislation that's going through at the state house. You've got to watch the legislation in Washington, and where the big banking money in those days was invested in transcontinental railroads and in public utilities, which were coming along, public life and politics and government were very much a part of any man who was in the financial field, so I think that was the reason Joe Kennedy became a politician, if you want to call it that, or a statesman.

MARTIN: Wilton, the Kennedy family left East Boston. Where did they go?

VAUGH: They left East Boston and went to Winthrop where most of the wealthy East Bostonians or Noddle Islanders went. They had nice houses down there near the water.

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MARTIN: This was before World War I, wasn't it?

VAUGH: Oh yes. And then after that the family… Well, Joe got married to Rose Fitzgerald and moved to Dorchester where the Fitzgeralds had been born and brought up and where Rose Fitzgerald had been a Sunday school teacher and established a wonderful record at the school. And then Joe and his wife moved to Brookline and that's where the president was born. That's where they now want to make his home or his birthplace, a national shrine. I think they'll do a good job out there without any doubt. But Joe never forgot the people that grew up with him in East Boston. He carried them all along with him wherever he went; fellows like Joe Sheehan and the other boys that went to Latin School and then went to Harvard with him. Whenever he needed some good men to go along with him, he'd pick these fellows from East Boston. He took them to Fore River with him during the First World War, the greatest need of the nation was to build ships and to get them out. He was down there with Matt Brush who later ran the Boston Elevated Railway, and other famous businessmen. Joe did a good job down there at Fore River. He was assistant superintendent at the start and he turned out the ships that licked the U-Boats and in the end won the war for us. But in all his travels, he always took care of that old gang that went to school with him. When he went with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington under appointment by Roosevelt, he brought these boys with him. Then he went to reorganize the U.S. Maritime Commission, so that we could regain the mastery of the seas that Boston once held when we built the famous Clipper Ships in East Boston under the leadership of Donald McKay. They were the ships that sailed the seven seas and they were the fastest afloat. And they brought East Boston a great record. We hope someday we'll be able to restore Boston as the greatest port in the world, because we have all the natural advantages now but we don't have the shipping that we used to have when the Cunard Line and the Leland Line and the Red Star Line and the White Star Line and almost any line you

could mention came in here every day, not just on Sundays. On Sundays, we'd have twenty ships going out loaded with passengers for all the ports in the world. The newspaper waterfront men had quite a job covering them all and seeing that they got away and the photographers were awfully busy getting the pictures for the Monday morning editions. Why, there was a booming port then and had they taken John F. 's advice, it would still be booming. But now all we see coming through are a few tankers from Texas or from the oil fields or Central America.

MARTIN: Wilton, you went on to Harvard and while you were at Harvard, you began a newspaper career. Can you tell

us about that?

VAUGH: I wanted to talk about Kennedy and the Kennedy family more than about myself. I was very proud to get to Harvard. Not many boys from East Boston went to Harvard or could get in. I was just lucky to get by the entrance examinations the first year they took the new tests. We took a general comprehensive examination all in one week. In the old days, you would take half the exam in your junior year and the other half in your senior year and you had to have Latin and Greek. I got into Harvard from the Boston High School of Commerce which John F. Fitzgerald founded. Even though I had taken all of these commercial courses like bookkeeping and Spanish and other things that would help us in our trade with Central and South America, I was able to do work after school with some of the old teachers at Commerce and I passed the entrance exams to Harvard and was admitted. The first year I was on the Dean's List which was unusual for a boy from a commercial school. But I got interested in news- paper work and became editor and president of the Harvard Crimson. That's like editor-in-chief. And it was while writing for the Crimson, that I became so much interested in newspaper work that I changed my idea of teaching mathematics and became a correspondent for the *Post* at Harvard. Then I stayed with the *Post* for thirty-nine years as a newspaperman. I started out as a Harvard correspondent and I ended up as political editor of the *Boston Post*. And it was while I was covering city hall and the state house and the national conventions all over the country, presidential campaigns, and covering the presidential candidates, riding their campaign trains, two weeks at a time, that I got to know John F. and Joe Kennedy and the Roosevelts and Al Smith and Dewey and Taft and Truman, then Eisenhower and Kennedy. Of course, I did know Jack from the time he was a boy at Harvard until his tragic death.

MARTIN: Well, Wilton, as *Post*'s political editor back in 1946, about the the president began his career in politics, what was the city of Boston like from a political standpoint?

VAUGH: Well, the Democrats, of course, had gained control in the city and were in control. But there was no organized party. Every candidate had his own group.

Curley had his following and Mayor Hynes had his following. And secretary of labor, Tobin, had his group. But there was no unit, no leader to organize the entire group into one Democratic organization, until Kennedy came along and he decided to put them all together. He brought all warring groups together. I think I had a little unknown part in

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bringing them together, too. Kennedy, of course, was a very independent young fellow. He was called the first Democratic Brahmin by former Governor Dever. And all of these fellows, all of these leading politicians had a lot of Irish blood in them. They were proud and they didn't want to kowtow to anybody. And I was partly responsible to get Governor Dever to to down to Hyannis Port and see Kennedy and talk to him for the benefit of the party. And I was partly responsible for Kennedy making up with Governor Furcolo after they had a little spat at a radio station. They were all willing to forget their private squabbles and keep them under cover and apparently work together for the benefit of the party.

MARTIN: Well, wasn't it somewhat unusual back in 1946 for a young veteran, somewhat unknown and quite rich, to come into Boston and decide, "I'm going to be a congressman from a certain district?" Now how could that be brought about?

VAUGH: Well, of course, that could only be brought about by organization. And he didn't indicate that he'd come into Boston. It looked as though he'd always been there and always voted there. His grandfather, John F., lived at the Bellevue and young Jack Kennedy and young Joe Kennedy and all the kids used to go into the Bellevue and chat with their grandfather. Of course, they were steeped in this political background, and political sagacity that Honey Fitz was able to transmit to them. Young Jack really learned an awful lot about politics from the grandfather and from his father. Of course, everybody knows he didn't want to be a pol. He wanted to be an educator. He wanted to write books. He showed that when he was writing over in Britain as war seemed to overwhelm all of Europe. And when he came home and was sick he wrote *Profiles in Courage*. That's the life he really loved. He was not a pol. He was really a bit of a shy kid. And when he started in politics for Congress, he didn't make a good speech at all. He had trouble making a speech and collecting his thoughts and his words because he was really a retiring sort of youngster. But when his brother, Joe, was killed in the war over there, he had to pick up the mantle and carry on, because his father felt that someone in the family should give back to the country something for what the country had given them for three generations. He wanted them to take an active part in public life and as I said before, he contributed immensely to Roosevelt and was partly responsible for Roosevelt becoming president. So the boy stepped in and took over and by hard work, he campaigned harder than anybody I ever saw in my life, for a retiring youngster…. I know we were waiting one time outside Springfield for Stevenson, the Democratic presidential candidate,

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to arrive from Connecticut. And we were waiting there in a long line of cars and young Kennedy was up and down the line shaking hands with everybody, "I'm Jack Kennedy and I'd like you to support us." And I said to Governor Furcolo who was sitting in the car with me, "Why don't you get out there. Look at the kid out there shaking hands with everybody. Let them know you're here." And Furcolo too was shy, but he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't get out. And I said, "That kid is going places, you watch and see." And he did. He was on that train with Adlai Stevenson. The whole family, all the handsome, beautiful girls of the Kennedy family, they were all on the presidential train. They went through for Stevenson lock, stock and barrel. I was at the Chicago convention and the Kennedys didn't let up around the clock, trying to make Stevenson president. And, of course, it was an old political error. I think the one thing that ruined Stevenson right here in Massachusetts, was the fact that his wife divorced him. That wasn't his fault, but people here don't believe in divorce. And they couldn't go for it and I told Stevenson he didn't have a chance. Similarly, I told Dewey that he didn't have a chance here only because on the ballot the same time he was running, we had a birth control repeal measure on there and we had another bill to repeal the Barnes Law, which restricted labor unions just as the Taft-Hartley Act had done nationally. Incidentally, one thing I could tell you to show how young Kennedy angered sometimes the old political leaders. He was appointed to the Committee on Labor in his first term in Congress, by really, John McCormack who spoke to Sam Rayburn and asked Sam to put him on labor. So that was quite a thing. Sam said, "Sure." He'd do anything for McCormack. He put him on labor and the Committee on Labor came out with a bill, a recommendation. Young Jack stood up in the aisle and Sam Rayburn turned to McCormack and said, "Shall we recognize him?" "Oh, sure, he's on the Labor Committee. Sure! Fine! Of course recognize him." And Kennedy got up and offered a substitute bill. Well, Sam almost dropped dead, because nobody in Washington ever gets the floor if he's going to attempt to overthrow a committee appointed by the Speaker. So for about a year it was tough sledding for young Kennedy and the leadership of the national House, because they don't forget or forgive very quickly. But the kid was sincere. He thought that the bill recommended by his committee wasn't exactly what he wanted. Of course, they were old time pols down there and they knew what was good, but they also knew what they could possibly get by in that particular year. So McCormack didn't care too much about him for a while. It took him a long time to get over that, because Rayburn blamed McCormack for recognizing the young congressman from Massachusetts. He was congressman, of course, only after a tough independent fight. He was fighting every political organization, I think, in the

district. You see, Curley had been congressman from that district and he decided he wasn't going to run again for Congress. And everybody knew that Jack Kennedy wasn't living at 122 Bowdoin Street in back of the state house. They knew he wasn't living at the Bellevue with his grandfather Fitzgerald. They knew that. But the kid came in and he organized and he got all these young fellows with him in the different districts and he did a whale of a job. But important, too, in politics is money. If a good candidate and a brainy candidate can't dig up the money to pay the bills he cannot win. Usually, that's a rule. Kennedy had the money. He

was able to set up headquarters. He was able to pay the Post Office Department for a lot of stamps. He was able to pay the TV and radio stations and the newspapers for all this advertising. And he did have the luck of having all of the leaders split with somebody else, and the result was that he was able to come through and win the fight. But they went door to door. They used the phone to call every house in the district. And they were successful and they were successful only because they had the organization, only because they had the money, and only especially, because they got the women's vote. And they did that, I think.

MARTIN: And they had a pretty good candidate.

VAUGH: Oh, well, they had a kid who was handsome. He had all the beautiful features of the Kennedys and the Fitzgeralds too. The women went nuts over him, because they'd look at him, that mop of hair hanging down over his head, over his forehead. I know my wife said to me, I said, "What's the story of this guy? How does he do it?" She said, "Well, it's the women. Every one of them wants to mother him." He was single then. They all want to comb his hair. His hair is tossed and he looked as though he didn't own a comb. And they'd feel he's a nice boy and he's a good boy and he's intelligent; and he needs somebody to help him. So they all went out and helped him by voting for him. I think that the relatives of some of the candidates running against him actually voted for him. And the thing to remember is, of course, these women do run elections. They have the majority not only in Massachusetts, but all over the country.

MARTIN: Well, Wilton, the president also demonstrated a family trait of loyalty, which was manifested by his father. Can you tell us about that?

VAUGH: Oh, yes. Loyalty was one of his greatest characteristics. He was with his friends through thick and thin. And I think I told you about his father.

Always loyal to the boys who went to the Assumption School with him and Boston Latin School and then to Harvard. Wherever he went, he took them with him, the FCC, the Maritime Commission. Whenever he had a good tip on the market, he passed the word down to all these boys that grew up with him and many of them were able to make a little money in the market to send their boys to school or to help the family in one way or another. And similarly, the president showed that wonderful quality of the ambassador. Everyone knows how devoted Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien and Chuck Roche, and Dave Powers and Ted Reardon are. Oh, I could go on any length of time. I don't know of a single man in all my political experience that had more really dedicated friends than President Kennedy. He was tops in that line. He never gave up on them and went all the way for them. Now, if there was anyone that insisted on being paid in the campaign, the president had a marvelous memory. They'd come around looking for a big appointment or a big favor after he was elected and he'd say, "Well, we paid you in the campaign, didn't we? Didn't you get $75 a week?" "Oh, yes, sure. But now I understand this job is open and I want the

appointment." “Well, I'm sorry; we owe a lot to people that were loyal to us and worked for us without any salary or without any pay at all and we want to take care of them in view of' the fact that they're especially qualified for these vacancies. So, so far as you're concerned, we're even.”

MARTIN: Incidentally, during his congressional days, there were many who said his leanings were national and international. As a result of this there was criticism, Wilton, that he kind of overlooked the affairs and the interests of his own district. Did you find this to be true?

VAUGH: Oh, no. We wouldn't have any of the things we have here now if it hadn't been for Kennedy. Of course, he had a tremendous knowledge of international affairs. Don't forget he slept in the embassy in London and he lived in Ireland and he wrote articles about Ireland, and he traveled far. Don't forget that he was in the war and he knew the story of Japan and he knew the story of their people and he knew the story of the islands. He was in the service on both coasts. He met people from all over the world while he was in London. And on top of that, don't forget he was a great scholar and read history, not only ancient history, but modern history and he knew the lessons that history taught. Oh, I wouldn't say that. I'd say that he brought more to Massachusetts and New England than any president we ever had and I’ve watched them all. We wouldn't have just that very latest thing that opened, that five million dollar Cape Cod

seashore national park. Although he lived at Hyannis Port, a great many of his neighbors didn't want the federal government in there at all. They wanted the old town meeting to run everything. They wanted to run things even though the president wanted to give it five million dollars in benefits to develop that tremendous stretch of sand from Provincetown to Orleans, one of the greatest vacation spots in the world. He had to give it to us over the protests of some of these picayune politicians who wanted no part of it. Similarly, he brought other great industries here through the aid of Washington, all along Route 128 and into the Connecticut Valley and into Worcester and southeastern Massachusetts. He brought business. He brought jobs. And like his predecessor in Congress, he brought work and wages to the big cities through government contracts. He brought business. He brought ships to the Fore River shipyard. We can't forget all those wonderful things that he did. And anyone that thinks that he neglected his home community doesn't know him and doesn't know his record. He did know international affairs as well as any man alive I think. Going back, I think perhaps the only man that can compare with him on that was Senator Taft who was defeated for the presidency in the Republican convention by General Eisenhower only because Eisenhower appealed to the women. They thought he brought their boys home. But I think Kennedy knew as much about international affairs as any man in the Congress of the United States and any man in the White House.

MARTIN: Wilton, the *Boston Post* right up until the very end of its publishing in 1956 was a potent, political force in Massachusetts and perhaps somewhat in the region. At the time in 1952 when the then Congressman Kennedy decided to go for the Senate seat held by Henry Cabot Lodge, what was the *Post*'s position and what part did it play in that campaign?

VAUGH: Well, the *Post* had always been a great mouthpiece of the Democratic party. At its masthead it claimed to be an independent Democratic paper and it was true. In my association with the paper we had the greatest daily circulation in the United States. We sold six hundred thousand copies of the *Post* every morning and that was twice as big as the *New York Times* of that era. The power trust tried to buy the *Post* for twenty-two million dollars, but Mr. Grozier wouldn't sell. He loved the paper and the entire staff of 850 people loved the paper. And they loved it not only for what it brought them, wonderful jobs with a wonderful editor and a wonderful publisher, but they were proud of its principles. The *Post* always fought for the people. In every endeavor, they didn't care how big the opposition was. The

Post didn't owe a dime to any bank or any insurance corporation in the country. It paid all its bills cash on delivery. And, it took care of the little old merchants who took care of the *Post* when it started in the tough days. And even the big oil companies couldn't get the contract to supply the oil to the *Post* building. We had a reserve fund of six million dollars to put up a new building. And then when the depression came, Grozier wisely decided to wait a little while. And then he died and the paper was taken over by a man named Fox, John Fox, who was supposed to be a financial wizard. The *Post* exposed the last great financial wizard in 1920. His name was Ponzi and that helped us to increase our circulation. But this Fox came in and he was going to do wonderful things with the *Post*. He called me in. I was the political editor of the paper. And he said that we're going to endorse Eisenhower and Lodge and Fingold. Now, Eisenhower, Lodge and Fingold were all Republicans. And I said, "If you do that, Mr. Fox, you're going to put the *Post* right in the graveyard. You'll ruin the greatest paper that ever existed." And he said, "Well, that's what we're going to do." He said, "I want you to go over to the Parker House. Cabot Lodge is sick in bed and he's over there with his brother-in-law who's head of the state committee and with Max Rabb, his chief advisor, and I want you to take over his campaign." And I said, "Look, Lodge and I were reporters together at the state house. He worked for the *Transcript* and I worked for the *Post*. He knows as much about writing a campaign, writing political stories and about politics as I do. And he doesn't need me and he can't get me." The *Post* has always been fair and square with everybody. We've always given the opposition as much space as we gave people we were endorsing and seldom have we gone out of the way to endorse a Republican. We've done it when we thought we were right. Now, we endorsed Calvin Coolidge for president. He was a native son. And we were right in endorsing him at the time, considering the opposition. And we also endorsed Cabot Lodge' s grandfather, the senior Henry Cabot Lodge, because the *Post* at that time felt that Lodge was against the United Nations and the United Nations

through England was against freedom for Ireland. There was a great fight over Article Ten. We had big debates in Symphony Hall between Cabot Lodge and President Lawrence Lowell of Harvard. I always felt, and I was there that night and covered it for the paper, that President Lowell won the debate against Lodge, but both of them were brilliant debaters. But at any rate, Lodge, the grandfather, and Cal Coolidge were the only two Republicans I know that we ever endorsed. When we did that we were supported by the people of New England. They wanted Cal and they wanted Lodge, because they were against England, at that time, and they wanted freedom for Ireland and England wouldn't give it to them. If we were fighting for small nations, Ireland

was one that had been fighting for its freedom for 700 years. So as a result, the *Post* did. We were successful in electing Coolidge and Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr. Now, this was a different situation. Young Lodge was running against young Kennedy and both of them were Harvard men. Both of them were steeped in politics. Both of them were good men but I felt that for Massachusetts that young Kennedy was a better man. I felt that if we endorsed three Republicans…. It was bad enough to go out on a limb for Eisenhower. And then to go for Attorney General Fingold who was running against a good Democrat at the time was also going out pretty far. I said, "But to endorse young Lodge against a man like Kennedy would ruin the paper." So he said, "Well, will you go over and see Lodge?" And I said, "Yes." And I went over and true enough Lodge was in bed in the Parker House and with him was Mason Sears, the chairman of the Republican State Committee, and Max Rabb, his advisor, and his personal advisor now in his fight for the White House. I said, "Listen, Cabot, what are you trying to do, ruin me with my new publisher?" He said, "I told him you'd never go for it. And he said you would." And I said, "Well, I won't. I'll give you a square deal and that's all you're going to get. And Kennedy's going to get the same thing. But if I have my way, the *Boston Post* will stay Democratic and endorse Kennedy for the Senate against you. Now, there's no ill feeling there, Cabot. You and I worked as reporters, but I think Kennedy is a better man for the state and a better man for the *Post*." So I called up Kennedy. I didn't have to call him up, because I went to the headquarters of all the candidates at least twice a week. If things were running hot and good debate was on, I went there every day to see them and see what was new. I went to the radio stations, television stations, was in constant communication with them. So I said to Jack, "Listen, Fox is going to endorse Lodge for the Senate. Now call up your old man and get him on his horse and get that nomination, the *Post* endorsement. Otherwise, I think it might be just enough to tip you over. You'll lose. And you can't take a chance. So, call your father. Have your father get after Fox and get that endorsement." Well, as it turned out we endorsed Eisenhower, Kennedy and Fingold, two Republicans and a Democrat. And all of them were elected. And I think the fact that we did endorse the two Republicans had a great part in bringing about the end of the *Post*. I know it brought about the end of my collaboration with Mr. Fox, because I refused to take any advice from him or any orders from him. I did my work and turned my copy in and we had a good managing editor who carried on the old *Post* principles by giving everyone a square deal. But the

damage was done. And the *Post* finally went out of business and I was so brokenhearted that I wouldn't take a job with any other paper. And I ended up at the state house as the press

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secretary to the governor. Then when this new boating division was organized to save lives on the water. With a tremendous increase, the number of boats in Massachusetts jumped from thirty thousand to eighty-two thousand in three years. People going out in the water without knowing anything about it. We created this division to take over the work of the Coast Guard on our state waters. As a result, I think, we've done a good job, because since then we've had forty-five out of the fifty states approved by the federal government to take over the Coast Guard work. As I say, that was the end of the *Post*. It really was one of the worst things that ever happened in Massachusetts, because it was the last independent voice of a great journal that knew no bosses and owed no money anywhere.

MARTIN: Wilton, when you mentioned boating, the president, in fact, his entire family are boating enthusiasts, have been for years. In your new role, have you had any association with the family?

VAUGH: Well, no. They are always very nice. I wanted to make sure they didn't get any bad publicity, so I sent a copy of the law down to the man in charge of the boats in Hyannis Port, because our rules are not the same as the rules down in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia has yet to be approved by the federal government under the Boating Act. And I wanted to make sure. I knew that the president would be criticized so severely and so would his brother, Ted. And so would Bob, because they all had boats and they all loved the water. And they loved to ski and their wives loved to ski. Every chance the president got he was out on that water. I think he was more at home in a little sixteen-foot outboard motor boat than he was on the big yacht, the Marlin, which is owned by the family, and then the government yacht which is assigned to the executive department. Out in the little boat, the little motor boat, and out in his little sailboat he could go skimming along and have a good time and nobody bothered him. When he was out in the big boat, all the little boats came around with the curious to see the president.

MARTIN: On the subject of boating, wasn't there some issue involving a tax to be placed on boats?

VAUGH: Oh, yes. There were some members of the Senate and other people in the Department of Interior were looking for a big boodle in order to go out and buy land and to develop state parks and federal forests rather than federal parks for recreational purposes. And they had a bill pending to levy a federal tax of $1.00 a foot on motor

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boats. Well, now, in the United States we've got about eight million motor boats. And we figure about five people in the family for every boat. That would be forty million people that would be hurt. So, I got in touch with the White House and said that I thought that it was a very bad thing. The Association of Boating Administrators at a meeting in Washington put me on the Resolutions Committee to draft resolutions to oppose this. And I said, "Well, look, we haven't got time to study this thing entirely. I'm sure that the president will be glad to do anything he can to help boating, because he's been a boatman and all his family has been devoted to the sea and to the water and they love boating." Every chance he gets he's out in his little sailboat or his little motor boat. Even when he has to take his work home with him out on the Potomac or Hyannis Port, on the Marlin, or the other boat there, he always brings his work along with him and he holds conferences with his secretary of state and his secretary of defense. He really does his best work, I think, on the water, just as he did in the Pacific when he was on that little PT boat. He's always been on the water since he was a kid. His greatness in the water at Harvard was his swimming records over there, I knew he'd do anything he could to help. So, I called the White House and said that forty million people were going to be disappointed in the president if this bill should ever get through. And I hoped if it reached his desk that he not sign it, that he veto it and send it back. But he did better. He had so many friends that served with him in the Senate and the House that he was able to kill it and have it knocked out right there in Congress. As a result, the bill was defeated and the $1.00 a foot on motor boats went into the discard. And we've always considered that the president was one of our best friends in the boating field. Of course, I knew that all the time, but now the whole nation knows it through the National Association of Boating Administrators and the Advisory Panel of State Officials to advise the Coast Guard on safe recreational boating. Everywhere I've gone I've told these people, national authorities, how much that meant to the boating people. A dollar a foot is a lot of money every year.

MARTIN: Well, Wilton, you mentioned that after the demise of the *Post* that you became associated with Governor Furcolo as his press secretary. At that time, the president was a United States senator. There was a movement under foot for him to exercise pretty rigid control of the Democratic party organization in Massachusetts. What were the circumstances surrounding that move?

VAUGH: Well, of course, you usually consider that the governor in a state controls the party machinery,

because he has the jobs and the contracts and the appointments and the honors to hand out. And usually your senator and your congressmen are far away in Washington where you can't sit on their doorstep and you can't hound them in their offices. But Kennedy had built up such a tremendous organization, a personal following right here in the state that his group was becoming even more powerful that the state committee or the personal following of any leader such as Curley and, as I said before, Furcolo had his own personal

following. But young Kennedy had really dug in and gone to the grass roots and got everybody lined up. The women and the young women, the college boys, and people that were new and vigorous and would work and were willing to ring telephone bells and ring doorbells and lick stamps and lick envelopes and do the hard work that you needed in a campaign--that personal touch. And Kennedy really was becoming the number one power not only in Washington, as it developed at the national conventions, but also right here in Massachusetts. And the old line politicians, of course, didn't like this too well. He did have his spats, as I told you, with McCormack, with Furcolo, and with Curley and with some of the other old-time leaders.

MARTIN: Was this the basic cause of his drifting apart from Governor Furcolo or were there other factors involved?

VAUGH: Well, there were so many other factors involved, it would be hard to go into them. Of course, Kennedy's right-hand man, Larry O'Brien, in the campaign--Larry used to be with Furcolo. He was Furcolo's secretary in Washington--came out of Springfield. And sometimes when a man breaks away from another man, he never forgets it. And Furcolo, himself, as I said, he was a lot like Kennedy at the start. They were both sort of timid and they were both very very proud and still were proud until the very end. Furcolo still is very proud. When he thinks he's right, nothing will ever stop him. Of course, Kennedy thought he was right and Furcolo thought he was right. The real jam, as I remember it, was that Kennedy was paying for some time on television and Furcolo had a busy calendar and he got there late and he didn't want to go on. He's very meticulous and he's always been very suspicious anyhow. And he insisted on O.K.ing everything that was ever written. Any time I'd write a proclamation from him, he'd want to go over a proclamation. We used to get out about two hundred a year. No governor ever could take the time to do that, but he'd take it home and even if he just changed the exclamation point. Furcolo would have a real personal contribution in that proclamation and nobody could ever say that somebody else had written it. He'd say he'd finished it. And, of course, every governor and every president and every man in public life and almost everybody everywhere has to have

ghost writers who dig the dope up and whip it together. Then they give it to the man who's going to deliver it. He goes over it finally and gives you the O.K. He's the final judge. So he wanted time to read this spiel that he was putting on TV with Kennedy. Kennedy said, "We haven't got time," told him how much it was costing a minute--to stop and read it before they went on. Kennedy was furious and Furcolo said, "All right, cancel the thing." And here they were waiting to start the cameras and there was no way out. They had paid for the time. So Furcolo read it and made a few minor changes and then delivered it. But from that time on, young Kennedy was still angry and then Furcolo was mad, because anyone would want him to deliver something he hadn't handled himself. They both were right, of course. Furcolo did have a knack of just getting everywhere right on the dot, never five minutes in advance. He

used to give us the horrors wondering, "Gee, is he going to make it or is he tied up in traffic?" He had a tremendous schedule, just like Kennedy. They were everywhere all the time, working hard, around the clock and I loved both of them. And I felt sorry to see them have any feeling, and I did everything I could to try and smooth it out. I went with Furcolo. And the late Mrs. Furcolo was a darling, wonderful woman. She did so much for the sick in the hospitals and scholarships for the poor. I know of no woman who worked harder for any man in public office than Kay Furcolo did. And I went with Kay and the governor to the Kennedy home in Georgetown and we had a little reception there. We'd gone down to Eisenhower's inauguration. I did everything I could to smooth out Kennedy and Furcolo. The women, of course, didn't know what it was all about and they were very happy together. Bobby was there with his wife and Ted was there. I spent practically all my time just trying to smooth things out and tell them how necessary it was for all good Democrats to get together, because the only time the Republicans ever won in Massachusetts was when they could get a couple of Irish candidates fighting in the Democratic primary or even after the primary was over. So on the surface they all do get along together and I don't think the public knows even yet how ill feeling persisted between the two. Furcolo would go down to Washington to attend these big events only, so that people couldn't say Massachusetts wasn't represented by its governor. All the other governors were there. So we'd go down to all the banquets down there, all the big party pow-wows and have a table or two just to show that there was good feeling or make it appear as though both of them loved each other.

MARTIN: Well, there came an occasion during this feeling, as you describe it, in which a favor had to be sought by Senator Kennedy from Governor Furcolo. And this was the matter of the Senate seat. What are the details of

that, Wilton? Do you recall?

VAUGH: Well, I don't know. There's more than one. Maybe they haven't told about all of them. But I know that Kennedy never hesitated to call the state house any time day or night, Saturdays or Sundays, days of obligation or anything else, looking for something for one of his loyal followers. I know he wanted to put Ben Smith of Gloucester into the Senate and Furcolo, I think Furcolo would rather go to the Senate himself if he could have worked it out, because he is a great legislator. Furcolo has a marvelous brain. He's got marvelous ideas. He'd be worth a million dollars to private industry just on ideas. But in politics some of the best ideas in the world are not political and won't work. They may be good for the people. They may be fine but you could never get them across. You could never get them through Congress. But even so, Furcolo would fight to the last even though it's a losing fight as he did here in the sales tax which we've got to come to sometime if we're going to bail the cities and towns out of debt and take care of our children and give them a decent education. We've got to come to a sales tax. Now, he knows that the sales tax is good and he went out and built up a million enemies all along the line for the sales tax. Similarly, he went to bat for other things when he knew they didn't have a chance. So Furcolo really

would have made a good man in the Senate himself, except Kennedy wanted to save that seat and keep it warm for the family. They sent Ben Smith down there and when Ben was supposed to come in and be sworn in, why, Furcolo left him waiting out in the corridor with his family, waiting for a picture. Similarly, the president called up and wanted Droney appointed to fill a vacancy over in Middlesex County as district attorney, I think it was. And they let him cool his heels for about four hours out in the corridor, which is something you wouldn't ordinarily do. But Furcolo had other people in mind for those two jobs and he wanted to take care of them. He didn't want Ben Smith. He didn't know him, had no connection with him. He knew he had been the mayor of Gloucester and knew that he went to Harvard and ran a sailboat. But he never knew that he was entitled to anything from the Democratic party, either on his record at Gloucester or his record at Harvard or anywhere else.

MARTIN: Well, since Governor Furcolo decided it would be unwise to appoint himself to the seat, did he have a particular candidate in mind?

VAUGH: Well, they named everybody, but that was just publicity. No, he really wanted to go himself and what he could have done if it would have worked out was

to resign himself and have Bob Murphy governor and then Bob would appoint him to represent the State of Massachusetts in the Senate until the next election. But Bob was then lieutenant governor and they hadn't treated him as well as they should have as lieutenant governor. That is, the governor would go out of the state sometimes and wouldn't let Bob know he had gone. Bob was supposed to be acting governor and he wouldn't even know the governor was away. And Bob is a proud little guy, too and he didn't like that. And now I understand that Bellotti up there in the state house feels that the present governor is not telling him every time he crosses the state border to go to Washington or go somewhere else on state business, because he can fly back in no time. So Bellotti's people are supposed to be angry now because the governor isn't taking them into his confidence. So naturally, Furcolo had to go to the lieutenant governor and the council, because the lieutenant governor has a vote in the council, presides when the governor isn't there. And he needed Murphy's vote, so there wasn't that feeling of cooperation. As a result, Furcolo did not get back to the Congress.

MARTIN: During his years as senator and then as president, Wilton, you had many associations with him. Can you recall some of those?

VAUGH: Well, I was on the air with him a number of times, interviewing him for the *Post*, and also on newspaper panels on which he appeared. And, you know, newspapermen are very friendly with these people in public life and we don't want to embarrass them in public, as some people might. So I said to him before we'd go on, "Now, are there any special questions you'd like to ask?" Rather than ask an embarrassing question, I might put them over to the side. "Oh, no, no," he said, "It's perfectly all right. Ask me anything that comes into your mind. I'll be very frank and willing to answer any question

at all.” And I said, “Well, sometimes you fellows have a pet project that you'd like to put before the public and I'd be glad to ask you about it if you want to." And similarly, when I was the governor's press secretary, I used to get up a list of questions that I thought the press might ask him and give him the answers, too, so that he would know what to expect and oftentimes I asked him more questions than came up at the press conferences. Because, of course, I covered the state house for twenty-five years and covered politics all that time and knew what I would ask, if I were still a reporter, instead of being the governor's press secretary. But Kennedy was always fair and very independent and never would grant quarter to any rival in politics and would give none in a debate or in a campaign or anything else. So on the radio and television he was always ready to go in

with all hands swinging. Then, of course, I remember one time I had to go over to the Harvard commencement with the governor. Of course, the governor goes over with the National Lancers and with one or two secretaries who happened to go to Harvard. And Kennedy wasn't coming over, because he was busy in Washington. But then he got word that Cardinal Cushing was going to be given an honorary degree by Harvard and that was quite an honor. Of course, as senator from Massachusetts he wanted to pay his tribute to the prelate of the Church, or the Prince of the Church and he flew on from Washington and arrived at Harvard . Of course, over there they had everything mapped out and everyone had a certain place for lunch and the marshal said, "We're sorry, Senator, but we got your telegram saying you weren't coming. So, we don't know what to do." So I was always accustomed to getting plenty of room and when we filed the invitations with the Harvard marshal, I said we'd need six seats for the governor's party for the president's luncheon which came between the commencement exercises and then the alumni meeting in the afternoon. So Chuck Roche was with the president and Chuck had been my associate on the *Post* and also my associate at the state house when I was political editor. He was my first assistant. And I told Chuck, "Look, we've got all the room in the world. He can sit here at one of the governor's spots, because I got more than we need.” So the president was able to sit down and have lunch with us. Of course, if they knew he was coming, they would have had the red carpet running all the way into Logan Airport. But to come in at the last minute at Harvard and expect to even get by the gate was something, without a ticket.

MARTIN: What year was this, do you recall?

VAUGH: Well, I've forgotten. It was the year that Cardinal Gushing was given the honorary degree, Doctor of Law, which is the highest honor Harvard has. And, incidentally, Harvard never announces the honor until the person actually arrives on the scene. And if he doesn't arrive, he doesn't get it. The press don't get it. And all the releases are torn up and a new one is gotten out. I remember one time they said that MacArthur was going to get an honorary degree from Harvard, but he hasn't got it yet. He had had a wonderful campaign, great success out in Japan. He really deserved it and had earned it and Harvard wanted to give it to him, as I understand, but he didn't show up so he

never got it, even to his death. But that's the way they operate. You can't change the plans in the middle of the procession.

MARTIN: How about the legislature? Did Senator Kennedy work close with them? I recall one time he invited them down to his home in Hyannis Port for a day's outing.

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VAUGH: Well, that's true. He was smart. He always kept very close with the legislature, because the legislators come from every city and town and hamlet and post office in the state. And to reach into the 361 cities and towns, you're really on third base, on the way home if you can get legislators on your side. So Kennedy was always smart enough to make friends with members of the legislature in every county. So the time came, if you will remember, when Jack had been in the hospital down in New York after the outstanding specialist here at the Lahey Clinic and other places said he couldn't be operated on. His father took him down to New York, New York hospital surgeons. They did operate and when he got out, he was on crutches and people thought he'd never get better, because they'd heard about the local diagnosis of spine trouble and they thought he'd never walk again. But the kid had courage and he came back home and he was taking baths in the pool down there at Hyannis and getting treatments and when he felt he was well enough and was able to partly get off the crutches for a little while, he invited the entire Massachusetts legislature down to Hyannis Port. They had a special train to take the legislators dovm and on the way down, the New Haven Railroad put on a nice bar for everybody. And when they arrived there they had a big lobster dinner. Everybody could have all the lobster he wanted and they could go out to the country club right next door. They went in swimming. The water was very cold as I remember, although it was summer. They played softball and touch football and all the other Kennedy sports and had a marvelous time. And everybody was so delighted to see that he was well again. And I said to him, "Why did you invite all these people down here? I've never seen anybody invite the entire legislature to a party like this. Did you really want to show them that you were healthy enough to carry on your duties in Washington and possibly move up to president?" He just looked and smiled, but he never told me why he brought everybody down there. Well, they got on the train. Some of them had to be poured on. And all the way back they had a good time, from Hyannis Port to South Station, when they got off. Well, then Kennedy told the railroad that he wanted the bill and the lobbyist wouldn't send the bill. They wanted to let the railroad pay the freight. I suppose then they'd be around looking for favors. Kennedy refused and insisted that he get the complete bill for every dime that was spent on that trip. And he did, for everybody that went down there.

MARTIN: Wilton, was there any other association you had with President Kennedy?

VAUGH: Well, he was president. One honor he bestowed on me, was an unpaid honor but it was a great tribute. He

appointed me to the White House Conference on Conservation. And the reason for that, of course, was that I was the Massachusetts director of Motorboats and the boating and conservation programs worked very closely together. The conservation program has to do with the building of wildernesses and also setting aside parks and facilities for boating all over the country. I was very happy to serve on that simply because I thought it was a great honor and gave Massachusetts some recognition down there on the committee. That was really the one thing that I remember him doing for me. Although, I didn't even ask for it. But he just happened to pick me out, because I was the boating director here. And then later, of course, I became president of the northeastern states, which were all the states between Canada and Carolina, and a member of the commandant's committee, Advisory Committee on Safety to the Coast Guard. There were only eighteen people on that. So, of course, I didn't see the president as much as I would have if I were in Washington covering the White House with the other newspapermen, but I did enjoy riding with him on the trains on the campaign and I enjoyed meeting him when he was here. I remember one funny thing about him, to show you his memory. My wife and I went to the airport to meet Governor Furcolo who was coming in from Washington on Kennedy's plane. And, of course, Kennedy got off the plane first and everybody else held back and the TV and cameras and everybody got whatever pictures they needed. We stayed on the outskirts, because I wasn't working as a newspaperman any more. I was the governor's press secretary. And the president was coming by and he saw my wife. Her hair had started to get a little gray and she decided to bleach it and everyone in Washington was kidding the president about the mop of hair that came down over his forehead. His Madison Avenue press agents advised him to get a haircut and to comb it and to slick it down. And he reached through the crowd and shook her hand and he said, "Well, Dorothy, I see you've changed your hair, too." He never missed a thing. That's so. There was the crowd there and he was coming home and, oh, they had a band and everything else there. We must have been ten rows back in the crowd where we wouldn't be noticed at all and he spotted us. That was the kind of a guy he was. He never missed anything and as I told you earlier, with those crowds at Springfield waiting for Adlai Stevenson when he went through for Stevenson for two big campaigns, he never missed anything and never forgot anything.

MARTIN: That's amazing, isn't it? Wilton, it was a long and successful road that began overlooking Belmont Park in East Boston and all the way to the Court of St. James and the White House. Looking back at it, and especially from someone who saw the beginnings of the Kennedy family in

East Boston, if you were asked to name one single family trait that is responsible for all this success, could you do so?

VAUGH: I would say, I think, perseverance more than anything else. Of course, as I started off, he had everything. He had the wealth, he had the education, he had the political acumen that he inherited from all his forebears. He had about everything you could think of. But his perseverance and his courage through all those sicknesses when everybody else thought he didn't have a chance, when he was run down by the Japs and the ordinary guy would have thrown up his hands and quit; that boy just fought all his way through. And talk about courage. I was at a national convention of the state boating administrators in Miami for a convention the day after he told Castro where to get off. And we expected those guns to start booming right across the Strait there right into Florida. Our wives were calling up saying, "Come on home. It's dangerous down there." They pulled out the entire Coast Guard operations division. Every major officer of the Coast Guard was out there ready. And Castro didn't have the guts to go through. He quit cold and I was never prouder of Kennedy that I was at that moment, with these men from all over the United States and the territories all there, sitting under those guns and those planes and not knowing what was going to happen. I felt if it had to happen, I was still proud of our president. Let it happen. He's got the stuff and I'd rather be bombed or shot right out of Miami than to quit. And, as I say, all through his life, I think perhaps the one thing is the courage the boy had more than anything else. All the way through school, through college, through the war, through his adversity, through his operations, and when people thought a Catholic never had a chance to become a president, he had the courage and the persistence and the perseverance to go through and win over almost insurmountable obstacles. He was really the wonder of the age.

MARTIN: This has been an interview with Wilton Vaugh, Commissioner of Boating for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The interviewer has been Ed Martin. The place Boston, May 11, 1964.