

Myer Feldman Oral History Interview – JFK#4, 3/13/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Feldman, (1914 - 2007); Legislative assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1958-1961); Deputy Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964); Counsel to the President (1964-1965), discusses the Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries, working out of Charleston, West Virginia, and Hubert H. Humphrey's campaign objections, among other issues.

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Myer Feldman – JFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

March 13, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Was it ever a likelihood that Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] would try to get the nomination without traveling the primary route?

FELDMAN: Of course that was a possibility. But we believed almost from the beginning – and I can't really say how far back this goes....Certainly by 1959, we decided that unless he demonstrated his vote-getting power, he could not win the nomination. He could get a certain number of delegates to vote for him, but they would not be enthusiastic about him. There would be considerable currency – by currency I mean discussions among the party politicians – about his inability to attract voters because he was a Catholic and because he was young. And all of the myths – and I call them this advisedly – surrounding the Kennedy candidacy, about his lack of ability to win an election, would probably prevent him from getting the nomination. We all felt that if he got the nomination,

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he had an excellent chance of winning. Secondly, we all felt that you take one step at a time. The first step was to get the nomination. Now, in answer to all the arguments we would make about what a great candidate he would make, there was this nagging doubt in the minds of all the politicians about one, his youth and two, his religion and three, his lack of universal

appeal. The only way to disabuse people of that was to run in the primaries. So from the very beginning, we knew we had to run in the primaries.

We knew even more than that. We knew that he probably had to win all of the primaries. If he lost any one primary, he was in serious doubt as a candidate. Now I wasn't intimately involved in the selection of the states in which he would run. I did discuss these general things to which I have referred with the then Senator. And occasionally Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and I would discuss it. But I didn't discuss the actual states in which he was run. What I did do was to get together with Ted a list of all the states in which there were primary elections, together with the date of the primary, the date you had to file by – we put this on a table – then, in remarks, any significant facts. So we did it

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in a pretty orderly way.

Now the decision was made to run in Wisconsin for very obvious reasons. This was a hotly contested state. It was a state in which almost every candidate in the past had run. Perhaps most important, it was the state in which we could challenge Hubert Humphrey. He had many disadvantages by reason of these facts, too. One was that Hubert Humphrey was considered the third senator from Wisconsin. He came from a neighboring state, and he took care of the needs of Wisconsin as well as the needs of Minnesota. In fact, I think the Fifth District of Wisconsin and the eastern edge of Minnesota are practically indistinguishable. The people have the same type of background; they have the same needs; they follow the same occupations; they have the same religion. So that Hubert Humphrey who was extremely popular in Minnesota, was also extremely popular at least in that district. He also was popular in the rest of Wisconsin because he paid a lot of attention to it. This obviously made it difficult for us. And we recognized that it would be a tough race.

On the other hand, we had to make this race in order to demonstrate our vote-getting ability. This was a state where

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there were a lot of farmers and one of the arguments against Kennedy was that he was from the city; he had had in his legislative record a good many votes against high rigid price supports. He had not been as anti-Benson [Ezra Taft Benson] as most of the Democrats had been. His record and that of Humphrey diverged in some areas of their farm votes. So if he could win in a state like Wisconsin with a large rural population, it could once and for all kill the theory that he did not attract any farmers. Secondly, because he had substantial opposition in Hubert Humphrey, he could demonstrate his ability as a campaigner. So it was a test, and it was one that we didn't take lightly. But it was an essential test of his ability to carry the voters with him. I think all these things were discussed. Some of them I discussed with Kennedy in very brief conversations but these theories and thoughts were around the office all the time. I did discuss them also with Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy], with Steve [Stephen E. Smith], and with others, very briefly.

MORRISSEY: My impression is that this was a difficult decision.

FELDMAN: Oh yes, yes. The other way of handling the problem was to stay out of Wisconsin and to say that Wisconsin was not a fair test, point to the history of the vote in Wis-

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consin which did not indicate how the nation would go, and also to say that we're going to let native sons run in their own states, and Humphrey was something like a native son of Wisconsin. We had good reasons for not running in Wisconsin.

MORRISSEY: I can recall people saying that for Kennedy to run in Wisconsin was like Humphrey running in New Hampshire.

FELDMAN: That's right. Well, we made that point. But we started behind. We were way behind with all of these things against us – race, religion, background, non-identification with some of the national issues, perhaps only the mild support of strong factors in the Democratic party like the REA's [Rural Electrification Agency]. There isn't any REA in all of Massachusetts, and the REA's are strong in a state like Wisconsin – and the REA's are strong all over the nation. During the election, later on, Clyde Ellis and his group became one of our big supporters.

MORRISSEY: In a decision like the one concerning entrance into the Wisconsin primary, how important would public opinion polling be beforehand?

FELDMAN: Well, we did a lot of polling. We used Lou Harris [Louis Harris] largely. As of that time, prior to the Wisconsin race,

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we, I suppose, relied on Lou Harris a great deal. We later on became disenchanted with Harris. But prior to Wisconsin, the Lou Harris polls were handed around the office as something that really indicated how we were likely to do and what the thoughts of the people were. The polls, as I remember it, always were fairly good. As I remember the Harris polls, they showed that we were, as I said, in fairly good condition. It didn't show, at first, that we were at all well known in Wisconsin. Humphrey was much better known. But it showed that we had a fairly good image, and we could build on that. And for that reason, we thought we could win. As the campaign progressed the polls got better and better, and we were encouraged more and more. Based on these polls, when we had an office poll in which Ted Sorensen and Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] and I all predicted how we would do in Wisconsin, I predicted that we would take, as I remember it, nine out of the ten districts in Wisconsin. I predicted that we would get over two-thirds of the vote. I was the most optimistic of the group.

MORRISSEY: When was that poll taken?

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FELDMAN: This was my prediction on the trend of the polls. This was not a poll.

MORRISSEY: I see.

FELDMAN: No poll gave us quite that much, but they showed that we could get that much.

MORRISSEY: I meant the poll in the office.

FELDMAN: Oh, just before the election, everybody in the office – no, not everybody in the office, but all the men in the office and around the campaign – had a poll in which we each put a dollar or two. I've forgotten whether it was one dollar or two dollars. Whoever came closest, first, in the number of votes that we would get at the Convention and second, in the percentage of votes that the electorate gave us would win the whole pool. I analyzed the districts on the basis of the Harris polls, on the basis of what I knew we might get from reports I heard in the field and so on, and I was very, very optimistic. Everybody, I think, felt we would win. I've forgotten who won that poll. Even the Senator made a prediction. I think he was closest. It just occurs to me. I think he said that he would win six out of ten of the districts, and that's just exactly what he won, six out of ten. All the rest of us were much more optimistic.

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MORRISSEY: Who was the most pessimistic, do you recall offhand?

FELDMAN: I think he was. That's why he won. I know that nobody thought that we'd just get a fifty-fifty break. In Wisconsin we were fairly confident. I'd say from a hindsight point of view, we were overconfident. We got labor to go our way despite Hubert Humphrey's labor record. There was just one automobile union, I think, in Milwaukee that supported Hubert, and that union served as a focus for his pro-Humphrey labor following. We had the rest of the labor unions despite what I think was a remarkable pro-labor record that Humphrey had and a pro-labor record that Kennedy had which had some overtones that weren't that exciting to them. In fact, Wayne Morse campaigned against Kennedy in Wisconsin. Wayne Morse developed a film – I think the Humphrey people paid for this – in which he charged Kennedy with being the real author of the iniquitous Landrum-Griffin bill and said that Kennedy should not be supported by any self respecting labor union man. It was full of the usual Wayne Morse kind of diatribe against Kennedy. But that didn't have much of an impact. Kennedy did get the endorsement of most of

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the labor unions, and by the vote, apparently he got the vote of most of the laboring people despite his identification with the Landrum-Griffin bill which was very unpopular.

We countered the argument that he was responsible for the Landrum-Griffin bill by pointing out that it would have been a much worse bill if it hadn't been for John F. Kennedy, by pointing out the job he did on the Senate floor to beat back the so-called bill of rights amendment proposed by John McClellan and various other people. We used all of the Senate debate and everything that he had done in opposition to the more extreme proposals to handcuff labor that were on the Senate floor and in Congress at the time the Landrum-Griffin bill was passed. We showed that by taking the leadership in getting this legislation through, Kennedy watered down the extremists. We had testimony from labor union people about the kind of proposals that went into the conference between the Senate and House and how Kennedy had fought those amendments which would have most seriously jeopardized labor. So I think this was fairly effective, and we did have labor support.

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Secondly, there were large Catholic populations in Milwaukee and in some of the other big cities. We had solid Catholic support. This was counterbalanced to some extent by the Lutheran support that Humphrey had in the rural areas. I think there was a little bit of anti-Catholicism there, at least from a hindsight point of view. We felt after the primary that this played a large part in not giving him a greater plurality.

Wisconsin also showed us a lot of mistakes that we'd made – the mistake of overconfidence and taking things for granted. There were mistakes in perhaps not concentrating on groups which we should pay more attention to. There were mistakes of organization and not doing the kind of direct solicitation of voters that we did, for instance, like around in West Virginia.

MORRISSEY: What kind of groups do you think were overlooked?

FELDMAN: Well, I think we tended to overlook the farm groups more than we should have. We didn't schedule Kennedy as much in the dairy country as we should have. Part of this was because it would be a little bit embarrassing. He could be charged – as Humphrey did during the campaign – with being an advocate of flexible price supports,

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something that Humphrey had been charging Benson with for a good many years. If he could identify Kennedy and Benson, Kennedy would obviously suffer. But we should have countered that. Humphrey also put out a lot of brochures contrasting the Humphrey and Kennedy votes on selective issues. We thought we should have done more of that. We didn't do a great deal of newspaper advertising; we did more in West Virginia. Although Kennedy campaigned very actively, very arduously, and very strenuously throughout Wisconsin in all kinds of weather, I think the support could have been a little bit better. I think Wisconsin was really a personal victory for John Kennedy. Anyhow, the results of the

primary, I think, shocked most of us. We still thought, though, with the victory over Hubert Humphrey we, thereby, really had achieved the purpose that Hubert would drop out and that we could go on to the nomination.

MORRISSEY: Were you with Kennedy when those Wisconsin returns came in?

FELDMAN: No, I was not with him when the returns came in. I was at headquarters. I was with Steve Smith and other campaign workers in the Esso building when the returns came in. We celebrated; we thought it was a good result,

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but we were proved wrong in our analysis of it. We believed that Hubert would drop out, but Hubert didn't drop out. In fact, he considered it a victory. He charged that Kennedy had won because of superior money, and he hadn't won as much as he had predicted he would win. Actually, Kennedy never predicted he would win by more than the margin he achieved it, but the newspapers all built it up into an eight-to-two victory in the districts or something like that. So Hubert thought that he could rehabilitate himself, apparently, by going into another primary. I guess that was a disappointment to use because we had to reappraise the whole situation all over again.

MORRISSEY: I've heard two versions of that: one, that it was a disappointment, but two, that you were grateful that Humphrey would go into West Virginia.

FELDMAN: I think they're both true. I think it was a disappointment. We all felt that Humphrey would drop out. We all felt that he should have dropped out. We all felt that as a good sportsman he should have taken the loss and congratulated the victor and then supported Kennedy. Then we were in. But he didn't so that was disappointing.

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From a hindsight point of view, however, I think if he had dropped out when Kennedy could never have won in West Virginia over opposition, and we could never have made the claims that we later made. I think that Lyndon Johnson would have been a much stronger candidate if Hubert had stayed out of West Virginia, and if he came in. So, as I say, both statements are correct. I think we were disappointed. And yet I believe that Hubert going into West Virginia gave us a strong leg up on the nomination.

I guess Hubert went into West Virginia for two reasons – one, because he believed that all of the factors in West Virginia politics would favor him. I don't know this but we figured that he re-examined his position, decided that those factors he felt were going for him in Wisconsin really didn't because of the labor support he didn't get and because of the large Catholic population that he didn't count on. Now in West Virginia he felt that everything

would go his way. Indeed, the first poll supported him. The first poll showed that in a state like West Virginia, where they, I think, are 97 percent Protestant, only

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about 3 percent Catholic, that most of them would be anti-Kennedy. Apparently there's also a great deal of bias, a good deal of anti-Catholic feeling in West Virginia. Secondly, he felt that West Virginia, a poor state, would respond to the essentially populist arguments of a Hubert Humphrey, somebody who was a poor boy, who was brought up in the depression and never had anything, and that they would resent rich Kennedy coming in there. I guess he felt that he could talk their language while Kennedy couldn't so that his chances in West Virginia would be superb. All that's part of his thinking and what we recognized when we went in.

We had had Lou Harris poll sometime before we had decided to go into West Virginia, and the Lou Harris poll had showed that Kennedy and Humphrey were pretty even, Kennedy perhaps would come out a little bit ahead. Immediately after taking the decision to go into West Virginia, we had another poll taken. This showed that Humphrey had about 60 percent of the vote, and Kennedy had about 40 percent of the vote. That's when there was considerable consternation both in the Kennedy political office and in the Kennedy office in

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the Senate. We were all quite depressed. We wondered whether we hadn't made a mistake. The Senator himself wondered whether or not he hadn't been misled. This was the first... I guess this was the second quick series of doubts we had about the Lou Harris poll. The first arose from Wisconsin where Lou was pretty far off in his analysis of the various districts. Now this second Harris poll in West Virginia was so different from the first we decided it cast some reflection on the entire Harris polling system.

We continued to use him, but we used him with more skepticism from then on, and we used it for different purposes. Senator Kennedy said to me when he would hand me one of these polls that I should read it and not pay too much attention to the percentage figures. Whether or not there was 15 percent or 20 percent or 50 percent or 60 percent for Kennedy against some other candidate was not the real value of the poll. From then on, our theory was that the percentage figures, though more dramatic, weren't the significant part of the analysis. We used the polls from then on, instead, to get some understanding of what the issues were and what people were talking about and how people would feel about it. I think that's a more

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sophisticated approach and a more accurate one.

But anyhow, to come back to... I said there were two reasons why Hubert Humphrey went into West Virginia – first, because he thought all of the factors favored him in West Virginia while they didn't in Wisconsin and I confess that we had those thoughts, too. The second reason was that he would be the heir to all of the anti-Kennedy support. Now Kennedy was really the front-runner. Now Kennedy was the man to be stopped. Up until

Wisconsin people thought that he would settle for second place on the ticket. I had conversations with Lyndon Johnson's supporters and, as much as I would insist to them that Kennedy was going to be number one and perhaps Johnson could be number two, they didn't believe me. I remember a luncheon with Don Cook [Donald P. Cook] and with Jerry Seigle, both of whom were strong Johnson supporters. I remember discussing it with Walter Jenkins. In each instance I got the same story. "We know that you're running for president because nobody runs for vice president. But it'd be a good ticket if Lyndon Johnson were the presidential nominee and Kennedy were the vice presidential nominee."

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So it wasn't until after Wisconsin that they began to take Kennedy seriously, and they recognized that Kennedy might just pull it off, that he might be the presidential candidate. That meant that every one of the other candidates would focus their attack on John F. Kennedy. He was definitely the front-runner; he was the man to beat.

Johnson's hope lay in killing the hopes of Kennedy in the primary so he would support Humphrey completely in West Virginia. He had no fear of Humphrey. Humphrey, by losing in Wisconsin, really lost in the Convention. He couldn't win, even if he won in West Virginia, California, and every other state. Losing in Wisconsin, he was through so Johnson could support Humphrey. Indeed, one of Johnson's close friends, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, did support Humphrey. There was no reason for Robert Byrd supporting Humphrey because Humphrey didn't think the way Byrd did, he didn't belong to the same clique in the Senate, they weren't particularly good friends. Byrd's choice was either to stay out of it or perhaps support Kennedy. Preferably, he should have stayed out of it; however, I'm reasonably sure to this day it was the Lyndon Johnson pressure. Byrd was a good friend of Johnson's, owed a lot to Johnson. I'm reason-

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ably sure today – and I was then, too, and we would discuss this quite freely – that Byrd was the Johnson lieutenant working for Humphrey in order to reduce Kennedy's chances at the Convention. Byrd was a strong political force in West Virginia and this, too, gave us considerable concern. Secondly, with candidates like Symington [Stuart Symington, II] or Meyner [Robert B. Meyner] or even Adlai Stevenson or any of the other possibilities, their only chance for the nomination lay in having a deadlock at the Convention. If Kennedy won in West Virginia, he was well on his way. Everybody recognized that. If he lost in West Virginia, he still had substantial strength but probably couldn't get the nomination. Then you'd have Humphrey who would win in West Virginia would then get a sizable block of votes and get the liberals; and you'd have Lyndon Johnson obviously with the solid South. So the chance of the dark horse would improve. So all of them supported Humphrey, too. In any way they could they would help him. I know that they raised some money for him. Apparently they didn't raise very much because all through the campaign Humphrey complained that he couldn't match the Kennedy wealth.

As we saw it, and I think as Humphrey analyzed it,

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these were the two factors in his favor and these were the things that we had to fight against. With the polls showing us behind, we began talking that way to the press. We were encouraged to do that by Senator Kennedy. He didn't want us to repeat the mistake in Wisconsin because we were too optimistic. Even though we scored a magnificent victory in winning in a state that was contiguous to Humphrey's own state, it was considered kind of a loss because we didn't win in the proportions that had been freely predicted by the press. So we, in fact, told the press what the difficulties were now. We switched from an overly optimistic point of view to a doubtful point of view – just enough optimism to get funds and to get people to support us, but not so much optimism that if we won, we'd have to win by an enormous margin for it to be considered a victory.

I remember also, along these same lines, that after Kennedy won in West Virginia some of the newspapermen came around to me and charged me with deliberately falsifying our feelings and deliberately throwing them off the track. That was not true. We actually felt that way in the office about West Virginia. We know it was tough. In fact, I think an indication of this

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was the fact that even before Kennedy moved into West Virginia to begin actively campaigning I moved from Washington to Charleston to open an office there with the campaign headquarters. I stayed there throughout the campaign. My normal job would require me to be in Washington, I acted as a kind of coordinator, even then, and with information and with statements and answering questions and so on. But the fact that for that period – I think it was only three weeks or a month, the period between the Wisconsin and the West Virginia primaries – I lived in Charleston indicated that we wanted everybody to be there, even Mike Feldman. We had quite a bit staff there.

MORRISSEY: Had you not gone out to Wisconsin?

FELDMAN: I only went out to Wisconsin once for a very brief period of time. Otherwise, I stayed in Washington. But in West Virginia, why, I was there the entire time.

MORRISSEY: Were you still trying to serve as coordinator of information even though you were physically located in Charleston?

FELDMAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Wasn't that difficult?

FELDMAN: I was handicapped, yes, because in Washington I have at my fingertips all of the materials that were needed.

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If I needed the Kennedy record on a particular issue I could get it very quickly. I couldn't physically take that many books and that many records and periodicals and so on to West Virginia. Well, I could take his record; his record was fairly easy, but I couldn't take copies of all his statements. For instance, if there was a vote on the Atomic Energy Bill, which was an issue in the Wisconsin primary. If I had been in Wisconsin, it would have been difficult for me to say why he voted that way. It appeared to be contrary to the interests of the farmers. That Atomic Energy Bill, I remember, had in it an appropriation for REA [Rural Electrification Agency] for the farmers. It appeared to be a vote against them but, by looking into the Congressional Record and seeing the speech he made, I could make it into a vote against them. Similarly, you get into problems of when the vote is for them or against them if it comes up on a motion for reconsideration or if it comes up on a motion for final passage or if it comes up on a motion for an amendment, it's construed differently. Well, all these nuances you had to rely upon your memory for. That's much more difficult than having it right there. It was

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easier to work out of Washington if you're carrying out that aspect of the campaign. Moreover, we still had, in addition to the primaries, a responsibility to the whole nation. We were still running for president of the whole country. We weren't just running in Wisconsin or in West Virginia, and we had to keep alive the Kennedy image and Kennedy thoughts in the other primary states and throughout the nation generally. So it's better to do that in Washington where the press corps is. A lot of them followed the candidate in the primary, but it's still better to do it in Washington than it is in the primary state. However, West Virginia was so important and things were developing so rapidly, and I suppose it looked so hazardous that practically the whole Washington office was moved to West Virginia, and I went along with them.

Let me interject, also, that the primaries were of a good many different types. Now I'm assuming a knowledge of this throughout. Some of them we knew would be contested; some of them weren't contested; some of them were in states that had favorite sons; and some of them in states that didn't have favorite sons. It soon became evident, though, that if we took on Wisconsin

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and West Virginia, that's about all we would have to do. All the rest of the primary states we would win anyhow just by brief visits. So, even though the California primary, as I remember, was after that, at this point we regarded the West Virginia primary as the critical one. And this was the one we had to win.

MORRISSEY: That surprises me because in Oregon you were going to confront a favorite son, and if you hadn't won big in West Virginia, that Oregon primary would have been very important and very difficult.

FELDMAN: Well, the Oregon primary, though was not only a favorite son....It was a favorite son primary, and for that reason it was not particularly important. But in addition to that, it was a primary in which a candidate doesn't campaign who doesn't have to campaign. The names are put on the ballot by the Secretary of State, and you can take the position that you don't wish to become involved in it and, therefore, it doesn't represent anything. So we didn't think of that as important. You also have a District of Columbia primary. That one we just refused to participate in at all because we felt it didn't mean anything. I've even forgotten who

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won the District of Columbia primary. Was it Morse or Stevenson or Humphrey?

MORRISSEY: Humphrey with an undertone of Johnson support.

FELDMAN: Yes, then Johnson did for Humphrey in the District of Columbia what he did for him in the West Virginia primary. But we came to the conclusion that winning in West Virginia would enable us to demonstrate that we had all of the abilities that we would need in running for national office; that this was a winner. In politics the most effective argument you can make is that your candidate is a winner. If he won in West Virginia in spite of all the odds, then we had a winner there.

Now the primary itself was quite an interesting one with lots of problems daily. In addition to the usual scheduling problems and the usual speeches and the usual releases which I worked on, it had problems of a special nature. Kennedy found when he first went to West Virginia, in a good many of these small towns, all of which were rather run down, and in a good many of the little houses, miners' shacks, they still had a picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt. They still idolized him as the person who had last done something for them. He said both publicly and privately that he would do something for West Virginia,

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he would see that the state was the fiftieth, perhaps, in per capita national income but was either fourth or fifth in the number of Congressional Medal of Honor winners received more attention from Washington; he would see that the state that was well down at the bottom – I think near – or very close to fiftieth – in defense contracts received more defense contracts. He also campaigned on the ground that he would increase the extent of the food and other direct federal assistance to the needy, such as the school lunch program as well as surplus food there. So he committed himself to assist West Virginia in the same way that Franklin Roosevelt had helped West Virginia, and he continued to refer to what Franklin Roosevelt had done.

It was for this reason perhaps as much as for any other that he decided to accept Franklin Roosevelt, Jr.'s offer to campaign for him in West Virginia. And Franklin Roosevelt drew enormous crowds; he was a most effective campaigner. Just the name

Franklin Roosevelt in 1960, without any knowledge of what Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., stood for, was enough to draw crowds, to get newspaper headlines, and to attract attention. So we used him. I guess he would draw crowds almost as large as those with the can-

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didate himself. Franklin said this was an exhilarating feeling for him. The only problem with Franklin was that we had to keep moving on schedule; he's a tough fellow to keep on a particular program.

We also had the one major flap during the campaign as a result of one of his speeches. Of course you know what I'm referring to; I'm referring to the criticism of Humphrey for not being in the army during World War II. Now I confess – and I assume this isn't going to be released for a while – that I knew that Franklin was going to make that speech before he delivered it. There were serious doubts in my mind as to whether he should or should not. I remember discussing it with Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and with Bobby Kennedy. In fact I have all of the documentation for that. It was kind of mean I thought and probably should not have been used. I did not know whether Franklin was going to use it. All I knew was....The only question I had was whether it should be made available to Franklin. Franklin had been in the war, and he was the kind of fellow who could make a war hero statement about somebody who had not been in the war. And this was obviously a weakness of Humphrey's in a state like West Virginia where they think that

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soldiers or all military people are objects of reverence. Now it was decided to make it available to Franklin. I honestly don't think that John F. Kennedy knew Franklin was going to use it. I think this was a decision made by his campaign aides. All I know about it was that here was the material; it was decided that Franklin could have access to it. We had lots of material that we didn't give any. I have lots of material from every campaign I've been in that we just wouldn't give speakers because it wasn't proper political campaign material; it was kind of hitting below the belt. John F. Kennedy believed in a pretty high level kind of campaign. I don't know of any other politician that stuck as rigidly to principles of fair campaigning as John F. Kennedy, and I've seen a good many of them. So I would be prepared to believe even now that he did not know that Franklin was going to use that material. As far as I know, also, it's the only instance in which material of this nature was given to a speaker to use.

MORRISSEY: To use or decide if he wanted to use it?

FELDMAN: Well, it's the same thing. If you give it to a speaker, in most instances they're likely to use it. So if I were to guess now, I would guess that he didn't know that

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this was going to be given to Franklin. I often had material that was nasty, was personal, and John F. Kennedy usually decided against – always decided against, not usually – using that kind of material. He didn't believe that he could improve his chances by tearing down the personal character of the opposition. This went for Richard Nixon later on as well as for the people he faced in the primaries.

Obviously there was a secondary reason for not using it in the primaries because if you're successful you're going to want the help of these people so I think it was poor strategy to do it. From a hindsight point of view it was unnecessary, and it did leave a residue of very bad feeling between Humphrey and people in the Kennedy camp. I don't know whether Humphrey to this day believes that John F. Kennedy didn't know about it; he was told that Kennedy didn't know about it. But whether or not he believes it, I don't know. I hope he does. They later on became very fast friends.

MORRISSEY: What was Kennedy's response to Roosevelt's using that information?

FELDMAN: I talked to him. He said, "Let's get him out of West

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Virginia." He felt that he had served his usefulness. This was toward the end of the campaign. I don't think Roosevelt made a great many speeches after that point. I think it was a mistake, but it was the only major flap in the campaign. We did a couple of other things that Humphrey objected to, as I remember, but they weren't of that nature. One, he accused us of falsifying our voting record in the House and Senate. Some license is permitted any politician in the selection of the votes that he uses.

One of the most effective pieces of campaign material that Humphrey had in Wisconsin was a vote comparison between Kennedy and Humphrey on certain selected liberal issues that would involve farmers, mostly. It was just a one-page document with six or seven comparisons. He used it widely and he used it just on the day of the election as people went to the booths. Well, we did the same thing with a good many of Humphrey's votes in West Virginia. Well, he challenged these as unfair. He said that we shouldn't select these votes, that really there were other votes that counteracted them, and that this wasn't a fair representation of what he stood for. So he objected to that. The other thing he objected to,

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as I remember, was what he called "unusual expenditures." He said we were spending more money than he could afford, and that we were trying to buy the election by that. This was completely untrue of course, and we'll come to that later and discuss what happened there.

We also did something else in West Virginia along these lines that might be classified as an unfair comparison of voting records by Humphrey. I thought it was eminently fair. In West Virginia, unlike in Wisconsin and perhaps unlike any of the other campaigns, we embarked on a pretty extensive advertising campaign in the newspapers. In the advertising

campaign we would compare Humphrey and Kennedy on issues and use cartoons to attract attention. We did it in series form. I think we must have had six or seven of them. Humphrey said these cartoons didn't accurately reflect Humphrey's position and they certainly didn't accurately reflect Kennedy's position. So he thought we weren't engaging in proper campaign practices. However, I felt this was correct, first, because I had a good deal to do in drafting these things, and I was scrupulously careful to make them accurate. Again, by the process of selection, you can get something that's accurate

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that gives the impression you want which the other fellow might object to. Now I think that's what Humphrey objected to. But he objected to them during the campaign; he objected to the amount of money spent during the campaign. These things I believe he would have been prepared to forget very quickly and very readily. The one thing he resented so deeply that he didn't forget it for a long time was the Franklin Roosevelt statement.

The other part of the campaign I suppose that was interesting was the massive efforts that we made in every conceivable way to get into the "hollers," as they called it, of West Virginia. Not only did John F. Kennedy make twelve to twenty speeches a day, making stops at all these little towns, but we had other people, other speakers, who we scheduled in these little towns. We did a lot of advertising and had a lot of leaflets. I would guess we spent...I don't know how much money we spent in West Virginia.

Let me just relate one incident during the campaign which I thought was pretty funny. At one of these little towns, I was present when John F. Kennedy was making a speech.

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There was a whole group of Negroes and whites listening to him. To indicate the kind of democracy they have in West Virginia, I heard one of the people at the edge of the crowd say he was very impressed by this "young feller." He said, "You know, I usually vote three times in an election. This time it's two to one for Kennedy." I actually heard that statement. [Laughter]

I don't know what else you want me to tell you about the campaign headquarters. You'd probably get that from other people.

MORRISSEY: I was going to ask: What was accomplished by moving you to Charleston?

FELDMAN: Well, I think it was essential that I stay in Charleston because we had to react too quickly. We would draft these advertisements, for instance, the evening before they would appear in the newspaper. We only had three or four weeks altogether and there would have to be a plane running constantly between Washington and West Virginia. I just wouldn't get the feeling of the campaign in Washington. There just were too many questions – that's all – that had to be answered, too many things that had to be done so I think it was essential that I be in West Virginia.

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That was a wise move.

The campaign headquarters were in a hotel. I think we took over the mezzanine floor of that hotel; I've forgotten the name of it. We used that floor with its telephones for the last few days of the campaign to get the voters out. Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] had that telephone campaign which went very well in West Virginia and did get the vote out. Humphrey says that we got the vote out, and that we were successful – he said; I don't know if he says it now – because we could spend all the money that was necessary. Now I said I thought we spent some money, but we didn't spend nearly as much as we would spend in a state race, say, in Massachusetts.

We had West Virginia divided into districts, and we put a different person in charge of each district. In most instances they were not West Virginians. We used as general advisers two West Virginians who would advise everybody. They advised me, and they advised each of our district directors. I think we had five or six district directors. Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith, II] was one of them I remember. But we used two West Virginians to advise us largely. One was Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough], and his memory of that campaign would be interesting if you haven't gotten

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to that yet. The other was Matt Reese [Matthew A. Reese, Jr.]. Matt Reese had an office in the basement of the hotel in what used to be a barber shop. You couldn't talk in there without your voice echoing back and forth so badly that it was hard to carry on a conversation. They weren't very luxurious quarters. In fact, every time Humphrey would say something about the lavish expenditures I'd look around that office and that hotel and wonder what he was accustomed to. We used Bob and Matt to a great extent and the rest of the people were mostly Kennedy people – Eddie Boland [Edward P. Boland], Ben Smith and others who'd been through Wisconsin and moved down from Wisconsin to West Virginia. Steve Smith, of course, and others who had been with him in Massachusetts and moved from Massachusetts down there and that didn't prove to be a handicap. West Virginians, we were told – and I think this was verified – are pretty clannish. You have to be a seventh or eighth generation West Virginian in order to gain their confidence in many respects. We wondered, with that kind of attitude, how they would accept strangers, some of whom were Catholics. They were all Protestants. But they did, and I think the campaign did them some good as well as doing us some good. They

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found out Catholics didn't have horns and people from outside the state could be genuinely concerned about their interests. So, as an organization I think we did fairly well. Now let's see what else about that.

MORRISSEY: A question that's foremost in my mind is the confrontation with the religious issue.

FELDMAN: Well, we had to meet the religious issue in three ways, I guess. One, he made a couple of speeches – just like that Houston minister speech during the campaign. The precursor for that speech was a speech in West Virginia which dealt with the religious issue; it was as full, just bore upon it. He didn't try to hide the fact that he was a Catholic, just met it head-on. Secondly, he would answer the questions on a kind of a conference – not a news conference but an issues and answers kind of a session – on television. A favorite television device was just putting him in front of a camera and having questions from the audience or questions that had been submitted in advance presented to him. Some of these questions we'd write out ourselves; we'd make them just as tough as we could get them. We found that the tougher the question, the better the response. We wouldn't tell him what question we were giving him,

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either. He would meet these questions for the first time, and he just hit a home run every time. We'd make them as nasty as we could because it was only the nasty kind of question that'd get a favorable response from the audience. So we put religious questions in there which he could handle very well. And thirdly, we had people like Frank Roosevelt and others talk about religious questions. We did not have a religious unit in West Virginia; we were just feeling our way at that time. We were still in the stage of wondering just how this was going to affect the people generally. It wasn't until after West Virginia that we felt convinced that we could answer any questions dealing with religion and perhaps, if not benefit from it, at least neutralize any opposition based on this ground.

MORRISSEY: I would assume there that there wasn't much serious consideration to trying to bypass that issue, that you were almost forced to meet it head-on.

FELDMAN: No, no we had to meet it head-on although we didn't want to emphasize it. As I say, we were a little bit unsure of ourselves in West Virginia, I thought. We didn't want to emphasize this issue, but we had to answer it so we answered it as it arose. Later on during the campaign

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we established our own religious unit which I've described to you. We didn't do anything like that in West Virginia. I think the vote of West Virginia we considered a tribute to the broadmindedness of people. The candidate considered said it was a tribute to the West Virginians themselves. They had shown that they didn't have any bias; they were unfairly accused of bias, he said. And by this demonstration, they showed they could be free of bias.

MORRISSEY: Did you anticipate the results?

FELDMAN: The results were better than we had anticipated. There just is not doubt about that in my mind. In spite of the fact that the newspapers reporters accused us of deliberately underplaying our knowledge of what the results would be, I was pleasantly surprised by the substantial size of the plurality.

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