

John Monagan Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 8/03/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: John Monagan

Interviewer: John F. Stewart

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Biographical Note

John Monagan (1911-2005) was a Representative from Connecticut from 1959 to 1973. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign in Connecticut, foreign aid during the Kennedy administration, and relations between Congress and the White House, among other topics.

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John S. Monagan
John S. Monagan

December 26, 1972
Date

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PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

File: John Monagan

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Oral History Interview

with

JOHN MONAGAN

August 3, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

- STEWART: First question I would like to ask you sir, is when did you first meet John Kennedy?
- MONAGAN: The first time I met him I think was about 1954, and it was in Waterbury, Connecticut, it was before I was in Congress, and he was coming through there. He spoke at the open space by the library and then came into the city hall and there was a reception for him at that time. And I remember that I had a copy of Profiles In Courage, which I brought along and he autographed for me. But that was the first time that I actually met him.
- STEWART: What was your impression of him at that time? This was in 1954?
- MONAGAN: Yes. Well, that he was certainly extremely well received from a political point of view; that he was young and good-looking and handled himself well, and that he was a very great force in American political life.
- STEWART: Were you a delegate to the 1956 Democratic National Convention?
- MONAGAN: No, I wasn't.
- STEWART: Were you involved at all in any of the preliminary work that Governor [Abraham A.] Ribicoff was doing to try to get the vice

presidential nomination for John Kennedy?

MONAGAN: No, I was not in Congress at that time and I didn't have any involvement in any of the national activity. Just, as far as Connecticut was concerned there wasn't very much required because the people there were with Kennedy anyway and certainly the Democratic party was strongly for him. He had been in the state several times speaking at state conventions and his relations with the Democrats in the state were quite close.

STEWART: When did you initially announce your support for Kennedy for president? In, I assume, '59 or '60?

MONAGAN: Well, I remember there was a public meeting in, I think January of 1960, in Derby, and I recall making a statement at that time and I also remember getting a letter from John Kennedy soon afterwards, even though it wasn't a terribly widely advertised declaration on my part. This showed the detail work that was being done by his organization.

STEWART: Was there any opposition among Connecticut Democrats at that time to his nomination?

MONAGAN: There was very little opposition, there-- Senator [Thomas J.] Dodd was in favor of Lyndon Johnson. I don't know just when the opposition became apparent. I, offhand, would say it would be sometime when there was a formal meeting of delegates or something like that.

STEWART: Were you a delegate to the 1960 convention?

MONAGAN: Yes, I was.

STEWART: Was there ever any doubt that the Connecticut delegation would go to Los Angeles totally committed to Kennedy?

MONAGAN: Well, not totally committed, because Senator Dodd was a member of the delegation and I believe seconded the nomination of Lyndon Johnson; but for all practical effects it was totally committed, and I believe we were under the unit rule. I wouldn't swear to that, and, except for Senator Dodd I don't believe there were any others who didn't go along with the majority opinion.

STEWART: At what stage of the initial campaign were you aware of the significance of Kennedy's solid block of 114 New England votes? This has often been referred to as a very significant political coup because he came into the convention, and a long time before the convention, he had this 114 votes pretty solidly wrapped up . . .

MONAGAN: It's hard to answer that question in specific terms, of course, the New Hampshire primary was one watershed time, I suppose. There was never any doubt in my mind that Connecticut and Massachusetts would be for Kennedy and probably Rhode Island as well. I don't know when I was aware that the block was solid and legal and tied in every fashion, but I always thought that New England would be with him and certainly in their calculations they always felt that.

STEWART: What role, if any, did you play at the convention gathering support among other delegations for Kennedy?

MONAGAN: Well, I knew, of course, other people who were in the Congress and there was nothing that had to be done, or could be done in Connecticut or in New England and there were certain states--New Jersey, I recall, they were having meetings and we were trying to help with that delegation which [Robert D.] Meyner held back actually beyond the point of no return. Why? There are different conjectures, as to that, but I recall that particularly.

STEWART: Who among Kennedy's immediate staff do you recall working with at the convention?

MONAGAN: Well, more with people like [John] Bailey, Ribicoff, people that--those people.

STEWART: What was your reaction, general reaction of the Connecticut delegation to the selection of Johnson as the vice presidential candidate?

MONAGAN: Well, mostly favorable. I know, I remember very well John Bailey speaking to me about it and I said I thought it was the only thing that could be done, that Kennedy had to have the south or he was licked and that Johnson could do the best job of anybody in lining up the south. I suppose there might have been some objection to it

in the delegation; Walter Reuther, some of those people, possibly some of their friends might have objected, but I don't recall that being voiced at any meeting or anything like that.

STEWART: There was certainly none within the Connecticut delegation?

MONAGAN: It wasn't formally expressed by calling a caucus or anything like that.

STEWART: To what extent did the Kennedy campaign help the Democratic ticket in Connecticut in 1960?

MONAGAN: Well, I think that with Kennedy running most people felt fairly confident. Now it is true that we did lose two seats, so that you might say that the effect of it was not evenly spread throughout the state. One of them you might explain in the sense that the incumbent had been Ambassador [Chester] Bowles, and then he pulled out. It was still a pretty close race but we did lose that seat. Then we lost in Fairfield County, which is a strong Republican area. So his appeal, while strong in a place like Waterbury, was not universal; but overall it helped the ticket because we're a Democratic state now.

STEWART: This happens in a lot of areas especially considering 1958 was such a Democratic year that the . . .

MONAGAN: I can remember men that came to the Congress with me. We had two good fellows from Nebraska, they both went down. And then there were some in Indiana who went down. The religious element I think came into it to some extent there. I don't know whether it was religion or economics that came in in those areas of Connecticut, probably the latter more.

STEWART: Did the fact that Governor Ribicoff and Mr. Bailey and Mr. Bowles were playing such key roles in the campaign have any impact on local and state-wide Connecticut races?

MONAGAN: I don't think so, I mean they were just doing what comes naturally from the point of view of what was good politics in Connecticut. I don't mean to say that they weren't sincere or anything like that, but I think they

wanted the organization to be active and the people wanted to go out and vote and everything combined so that it did help the overall picture too.

STEWART: A number of people who were with the Kennedy campaign during the entire campaign felt that the [Naugatuck] Valley trip was absolutely the high point of the whole campaign. Were you in Waterbury on that morning, that Sunday, November 6?

MONAGAN: I was not only in Waterbury, but I got in the car with the senator in Shelton and I rode all the way up the valley to Waterbury that night and when he went to mass the next morning, I went to mass with him and then I rode out to the city line the next morning. So I remember it very well. It was certainly one of the historic days in the life of the city of Waterbury.

STEWART: Could you give us some more of your reactions?

MONAGAN: Yes . . .

STEWART: Were there any reactions that you might have gotten from the senator?

MONAGAN: Well, it was a cold and rainy night and he was in New York City. He was delayed there. They went through extra streets and their rallies were longer than they expected, so that we were waiting a long time in Shelton for the cars to come. And where we should have picked him up at, let's say ten o'clock, it was past midnight before he actually reached there. I remember it was extremely difficult even to get in the car, because the people were pressing up to it. I finally squeezed in over the back and got into the car. We went through Shelton and across the river into Derby, and then into Ansonia, and then up the valley through Seymour and Beacon Falls, Naugatuck, and Waterbury. There were big--for instance, in front of the city hall in Ansonia there was a big, big crowd of people. I'm sure that all the crowds stayed there all the way through that period. In Westbury, Victor Borge was there and played the piano, and I guess he had to keep on playing and playing and went on and on. But there was a very good spirit among the people. I remember that the president--actually he was a senator then--didn't stop to make any speeches.

He might have extended greetings or something like that, but he kept moving along. I remember one interesting incident. We were going through a part of Seymour up on the hill and there were people out on the porches in their night clothes, and kids were out. But there was one sign there and it said, "These Kennedys are for Nixon." It was apparently a Republican family. I can remember that really hit him; he said, "How could that be? How could that be?" He couldn't get over that. It was so cold that we finally had to put the top up. There's an area in the valley that there are no houses and it's all rocks and it seemed forever that we were going up there. I also had an autograph book with me and he autographed this for a little girl who was in the hospital and who was dying, and did die not too long after that.

I said to him, "Remember, be sure and pronounce my name Monagan because sometimes people don't pronounce it that way." He said, "Oh, you're one of that kind of Irish, are you?" We did stop at Naugatuck and he did say a few words there, which were more or less the standard line: "Get the country moving" and "We're not doing enough." Then we got to the outskirts of Waterbury. Well, you could see the people already in such volume there, the cars, and so forth, that you realized that this was something extraordinary. It was beyond any experience. And then, of course, once you came up into the center part of the city they just jammed up to the car. I don't know how those cops, the state police, ever survived. I don't know, they just kept jamming against the crowd like the prow of a ship and all. The people were rushing up to the car and--sort of irrational almost. This was after one o'clock in the morning. There were people up in the offices and just a mass of people in the main square. We went into the [Roger Smith] Hotel, I guess there were about twenty or thirty thousand people there. It was almost two o'clock in the morning by this time, and we went upstairs on the balcony and he came out.

STEWART: Was this the initial time for him to speak from the balcony?

MONAGAN: Yes. Yes, and there was a loudspeaker up there. Well, Governor Ribicoff introduced him and--of course, they went wild--then he spoke and he said, "Either this city is the best Democratic city in the country or the

easiest one to get a crowd together in." As a matter of fact, the remarks are in that volume of his speeches and there is a transcript of all the campaign speeches. He spoke for a while, and then he stopped and they called him back, and he spoke some more. Finally, of course, he supported me and the candidates that were running at that time. Then he went to bed, and the next morning he went to mass in the church next door. There was a crowd, not quite the same size, but was just packed all the way from the hotel over to the church. Then there was some kind of a party reception in the hotel for him and then after that he got in the car and we rode off through the city and out.

I remember, there was a picture that was taken, it was all over the country, of a dog running across the front of his car. You've seen that.

STEWART: I think I have.

MONAGAN: And that was in the Chicago papers. He was standing up in front so that his hips were about even with the windshield, and the fellow driving the car jammed on the brakes and he knocked him up against the shield. I remember the look that he gave the driver. At that time I didn't know anything about his back trouble, but often thought of it afterwards. We went up the hill and I had told my wife and my brother's wife to be out there. They had all our kids and all their children there and it's been about fifteen I guess. So I said to the senator, "Say hello to the Monagan family." He said, "Stop the car!" The car stopped and they all came running over and he shook hands with them. And of course, that was something that they would never forget. That was, I think, a characteristic of his, to do things like that. And then we went on to Prospect and [Robert N.] Bob Giaimo got on, he was running from that district, and I got off. They went down to New Haven from there.

STEWART: It has often been said that Kennedy picked up physical strength in those last few days and certainly just enjoyed it so much that he was . . .

MONAGAN: Well, I was . . .

STEWART: . . . by the time he got to Boston.

MONAGAN: Yes, when you consider, he went to bed there at, well, I suppose 2:30 or something like that. I don't know what time he was at mass, maybe nine o'clock, certainly no

later than ten, and he'd had breakfast and everything. Well, there were a few lines under his eyes, but the main thing, he certainly looked better than some of the others that were with him.

STEWART: Could you name any people who had some responsibility for organizing the function either in Waterbury or in any of the cities along the way?

MONAGAN: Well, I think that Mayor [Edward] Bergin was the one who was responsible for the formal part of it. He was the mayor and a prominent member of the party. Kennedy always afterwards said that he would go back to Waterbury, and he did. He did come back in 1962.

STEWART: Right, he spoke on the green.

MONAGAN: He spoke, on the same green, that was in a different time of day, it was late afternoon. And that was right at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, although we didn't realize it. He later cancelled his engagements. I think he went to Chicago but cancelled them elsewhere after that time.

STEWART: How significant nationally do you feel that . . .

MONAGAN: Then, at that time he said he would come back in '64 which . . .

STEWART: That's right. I read that speech when he . . .

MONAGAN: . . . of course, he never was able to do.

STEWART: That's when he made reference to Waterbury being such a great town to get a crowd. How significant nationally do you feel the early returns from Connecticut were?

MONAGAN: Well, I think they had some psychological effect. I know a lot of people listen for them. I know that congressmen listen for them particularly, because some in New York can tell from the way a district goes in Connecticut, how close it may be for them in their own districts. So I think it has some effect. I think you might overestimate the effect, like editorials. I mean, I think the number of people that wait to see what

the editorial's going to be before they vote is pretty limited actually. Probably it's the same way in. . . . But it's a psychological boost.

STEWART: Is there anything else now before we move on to the administration that you'd like to comment on regarding the campaign or the election in 1960?

MONAGAN: Well, I don't think of anything offhand.

STEWART: What effect, if any, did Kennedy's stand on foreign affairs have on your campaign during 1960? Were there any problems whatsoever?

MONAGAN: I don't recall any. I think his personality was important. They got, of course, into kind of an exchange on Quemoy and Matsu and a little bit on Cuba, but I don't really think that made a great difference. It isn't on a specific issue but it's the general impression, people got the impression that he knew his stuff and he could stand up to [Richard M.] Nixon in those debates and that was the important thing.

STEWART: Before January of 1961, did you foresee any major change in our approach to foreign affairs in general and foreign aid in particular? For example, the change to handling foreign aid generally as long-range economic planning as opposed to short-term politically expedient type of projects. Did you foresee this?

MONAGAN: Well, I . . .

STEWART: That this would come about in the Kennedy administration?

MONAGAN: Well, I couldn't say that I did. No, I wasn't particularly involved in those problems at that time and didn't get into that in the campaign or anything like that.

STEWART: When did you become a member of the House [Committee on] Foreign Affairs?

MONAGAN: Well, I went on after 1960, '61 I went on.

STEWART: Were you . . .

MONAGAN: Yes. I had some connection my first two years through the Government Operations Committee, in the foreign operations, but more in the management and operational end of it than the broad policy.

STEWART: What particular foreign affairs problems were you concerned with during the initial Kennedy period when you initially were on the Foreign Affairs Committee?

MONAGAN: Well, of course, that Foreign Assistance Act was the biggest issue that we had in committee. The Government Operations Committee had quite a bit of dealings with Kennedy as president because we were trying to get into different problems, some of which ran up against the obstruction of the executive branch. I remember one conference we had with him when we were interested in going into the question of the background of Cuba and how the decisions were made, who made the decisions and so forth. And finally we went down to the White House, Porter Hardy and I went down, and we had a meeting with him down there. He sort of sweet-talked us, you know. We had in mind an alternative job that we might do and he said, "Well, don't go into Cuba, that's sort of on the back burner, and Castro's in trouble and I'd rather not give him some more fuel." And so he suggested something in Laos. We didn't want to do that, and we had in mind Angola which was a rather inactive thing at that time. He suggested, "Well," he said, "maybe that would be a good thing to do." He at least got us to agree not to go into Cuba, which may or may not have been a good thing from his point of view. I often wonder about that.

STEWART: When was this, in October, or . . . ?

MONAGAN: No, this was later on.

STEWART: Well, according to our record, you met the president at the White House on three occasions. On July 14, 1961 with other members of the House Foreign Affairs . . .

MONAGAN: Yes, I remember that, that was on the foreign aid bill.

STEWART: This was a general . . .

MONAGAN: This was a more or less confidential meeting that Porter [Hardly] was interested in, because we were running into this trouble in the executive branch. They wouldn't give us any information, and we finally got an agreement that we could see the president. Then we went down to talk to him about this thing.

STEWART: I listed here two meetings, one in October of '61 and one in March of 1962, both with Congressman Hardy.

MONAGAN: Yes. Then there's one here July '61, that's the one that the Foreign Affairs Committee . . .

STEWART: Perhaps you could say a few words about that one . . .

MONAGAN: Yes. Well, of course, he was trying to get us to go along on this long-range authorization. I had been in the Hardy subcommittee, and I said that at the meeting. I said, "I've served on this Hardy subcommittee and that isn't a very good indoctrination for long-range authorization for foreign aid." There was no arm-twisting, it was a bipartisan committee, and I remember [William S.] Bill Mailliard of California, who's a Republican, was talking about getting good people to serve. The president said, "Well, if you have any good people, give them to Ralph Dungan, get in touch with Ralph Dungan." And he was, at that time, trying to get people in the Alliance for Progress. I later got in touch with Dungan because I had two rather outstanding people, both highly qualified and who spoke Spanish, whom I was interested in having them know about. And we had a terrible time getting them considered. One of them they never would take in. I remember when the president was up in New Haven to get that honorary degree, I rode down on the plane with him and he came over and sat with me and we talked about it. He took the names down again at that time. I know that he spoke because I would get a reaction from some agency, but even his influence wasn't enough.

STEWART: Nothing ever happened?

MONAGAN: One of them is now working in the State Department as a Spanish language officer for all of Latin America, but he got that on his own. When this great rush was on he couldn't get in. The other one later went to work with AID [Agency for International Development] as a private enterprise man, you know, stimulating private enterprise activity. He said they were--he knew about the work the Hardy committee had done, but they were trying to get better men. He spoke of the committee with [Thomas J., Jr.] Watson who was supposed to get fifty young executives from industry (remember that?) to go in for two and a half or three years.

STEWART: This was called Operation Tycoon or something like that.

MONAGAN: Yes. That never got too far. [Thomas E.] "Doc" Morgan and Mailliard were there, [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien, [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell. There was also some discussion about getting agreement in the committee and then going to the floor with something everyone would be agreed on. Morgan and [Cornelius E.] Gallagher came in with a party line that we should pass the bill in committee and then we'd be in better position. That was the line. I said, while waiting I was looking in the books in the bookcase and there was one about every president in history, as far as I could see, including Washington, Lincoln, Polk, Hayes, Wilson. I wondered who read them, Lyndon Johnson? or [Arthur M., Jr.] Schlesinger? [Laughter] So there was no arm-twisting, and no rhetoric, or no oratory, just a nice gentle reminder that the boss wanted it this way. I wasn't particularly persuaded but I couldn't help but feel some qualms about resisting.

STEWART: Along with Congressman Porter Hardy you had a meeting with the president on October . . .

MONAGAN: Tenth.

STEWART: Tenth, 1961. Could you tell us what was discussed at this meeting and what your reactions were to the way the president handled the particular problem?

MONAGAN: Yes, I thought it was very interesting because it demonstrated the way he operated.

In other words we were down there to try and get executive cooperation for an investigation into the background of the Cuban invasion, the Bay of Pigs. He didn't want us, he didn't want to go into that, and he told us at the time the reasons for it. At the same time we figured that he probably wouldn't do that and we had in our minds this alternative of Angola and when we were there he tried to shift us onto Laos, which was primarily a Republican operation, among other things, and we had also done some investigation of that. You could see the way other people might take as gospel things that he said, when they were said for the particular audience, that is, he was critical of his State Department. "I know how the State Department is." Porter said, "Well, we wanted to go into this thing and try and determine where the responsibility was for the things that had been done." "Well," he said, "the trouble is that some people take subordinates and they ascribe to them the responsibility for things that are the responsibility of the president and the secretary of state." It isn't the Bay of Pigs, it was the takeover of Cuba by Castro and so forth, and so then he said, "I know how they are in the State Department, they're not queer, but, well, sort of like Adlai." Well, that wouldn't be his final estimate of Stevenson or of the State Department; it was sort of said because, I think, he thought that's the way Congress thinks and he would sort of say something that was supposedly acceptable to us, would put us in harmony, you see. So then he talked pretty rough too, you know. I mean the language that he used was not rougher than you'd use in a barracks or anything like that, but that was, I think, maybe put on a little bit too, to show he really sympathized with us and at the same time was going to try and prevent us from doing what he had in mind. So finally he said he thought that maybe Angola might be a good thing to go into and we backed down on the Cuban thing and he gave up on Laos. And we all thought we were happy at that time. He had just gotten back from seeing Sam Rayburn that day who we talked about . . . [Interruption] He had gone down . . .

Porter told him of our plan to examine the State Department personnel practices, hiring-firing policy decisions for the focus on individual areas.

He said that he approved of such an idea, but he didn't want to kill every underling for decisions for which the secretary of state and the president were responsible. He said Castro now appeared to be in trouble and he'd rather let him simmer than put him on the front pages again, which is what the son of a bitch loves. He said that State didn't have anything to do with Cuba, except that Rusk acquiesced and it was all CIA and army. He said [Chester] Bowles didn't have anything to do with it, he later said.

STEWART: This was the Bay of Pigs?

MONAGAN: The Bay of Pigs, yes. He said it's easy to take something after the fact and be critical, it can be done in the military as well as the State Department. He said he knew there was plenty wrong in the State Department, they're all a cut of that pattern with a lack of masculinity. "No virility," I said, "No they're not queer," he said, "but they're like Adlai." Was he sweet-talking us, I wondered, getting down to the congressional level, or was he being more Irish than Harvard? I said "some of his critics," but that was Robert Frost who used that description. He said of course the Republican responsibility in Cuba would be very strong, if we went back to Batista where they should have told him he had to go and put in a military junta. They merely let things deteriorate and disintegrate. And he said they'd been trying to take the measure of [inaudible] and they hadn't gotten a fix on him yet. I said that in Cuba our investigation could forestall any other more political ones that might be launched and our type would be better than some others. He agreed, but we finally decided at that time that we would go into Angola. Porter told him a story, not naming names, of how a meeting was had and agreement reached on a policy of the president, and then how he found the State Department sending out the exact opposite. "That's that story of Shep (Samuel) Morrison's," the president said, "Well, he'd better get another one, it's been all over town." I don't remember what that was now.

Then he asked about Waterbury, how John Dempsey was doing. I had a special copy of the inaugural address that had both his speech and Robert Frost's. And I had previously had Frost sign it, so I had the president sign it. So I got that autographed by both of them, which is a unique thing to have.

I'd say we got what we wanted and he got what

he thought he wanted; to get us off Cuba, but he didn't get us on to Laos. He did agree to let us have a shot at Angola. Maybe he was wrong on Cuba, but probably not. Maybe we were wrong on Laos, but probably not. Maybe he was wrong on Angola. We never did get into it, as a matter of fact, but that's neither here nor there.

STEWART: Were you more involved with aid problems than with general foreign affairs problems, or what . . . ?

MONAGAN: Yes, in the first two years because I was in on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of Government Operations and we were entirely on management practices and that sort of thing. So I didn't get into the foreign affairs policy part of it until 1961.

I was not too keen about that long-range authorization but I finally did agree to go along with it. That was the time that Judge led the troops in opposition to it.

STEWART: How successful was the new administration on explaining the need for a complete administrative overhaul of the aid program?

MONAGAN: Well, they tried at different times. I gave you some examples of people that I was trying to get in and couldn't get into the program. I suppose my experience could be multiplied many times--some people they got in weren't too good. There was the--well, of course, they wanted to get that fellow from New York, not George Woods, but he turned out to be mixed up [inaudible]. He couldn't get him confirmed in the Senate, because [Estes] Kefauver and Frank Morrissey were all against him. Anyway . . .

STEWART: He later took another job, he was appointed to something else.

MONAGAN: Well, George Woods, if that's the same. . . . No, he did have another job. And he put in [Henry] Labouisse. He really wasn't suited to the internal strife and he went to Greece. Fowler Hamilton came. He was supposed to be a big New York lawyer, and he found a different atmosphere here. If he's in his law office and something was decided everybody would go out and do it; but in this job, he'd say something should be done, they'd

probably all go out and do the opposite. I remember going down telling [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy--Bobby was attorney general--that the thing was getting way way out of line. Then they got [David E.] Bell. Bell had the thing fairly well in hand. And, of course, in the middle of it you had the [Lucius] Clay committee.

STEWART: I was going to ask you about that. What was your reaction and the reaction of some of your colleagues on the committee to this?

MONAGAN: Well, it was supposed to be a committee that would--see, the president had come out with a big, I think, \$4.8 billion dollar request and this was calculated in some ways to take him off the hook. I think they brought it down to \$4.5, or perhaps even more than that. I thought that some of their recommendations were sound. There's been a gradual disenchantment with the aid program as time has gone by, when people wonder whether it's actually having any effect at all. That was what Kennedy was fighting against and I think perhaps he was a little over enthusiastic about some of the things. The Alliance for Progress, for example, which has probably done some helpful things and some good things, but basically can't do the job in and of itself. So that he had to put on quite a bit of heat to get that through, and then of course, [Otto] Passman with the appropriation would go through with that job of knifing the whole thing. It wasn't until George Mahon became chairman--because [Clarence] Cannon wouldn't even go down to the White House to talk to the president.

STEWART: Can you give me any examples of the pressure that might be put on people to support the proposals?

MONAGAN: I don't think I was ever directly called by the president personally. Of course, we were brought down, some of us, on that 1961 bill, but that was pretty high level and it was in a group. Now you would get calls, that is, I might get a call from John Bailey or O'Brien or some other people like that. I remember getting a call from Bailey on that particular bill.

STEWART: What was the basis of your opposition, or what specific aspects of it were you opposing?

MONAGAN: Well, I think we're doing more and more as time goes by. We're doing more this year, long-range authorization, which means you're turning over to the executive the control of the program. Now, constitutionally we have some obligations and I think that certainly this program hasn't operated so well, and it isn't because it's magnificently administered that you want to give it a long-range authorization. I think that we ought to keep an eye on it. That's my reason for . . .

STEWART: Do you feel that your position on foreign aid has had any influence in your congressional campaign?

MONAGAN: Very little.

STEWART: It's often said that this is a very difficult subject to discuss in local campaigns.

MONAGAN: I find it difficult to recall any correspondence except from the League of Women Voters, or some organization like that, on foreign aid. You do get a few letters that are pretty strongly against it but I would say that I could do almost what I wanted on foreign aid and it would have very little effect on my election.

STEWART: Did the administration try to point this out to people in selling their proposals, that in fact people back home didn't follow this program that closely?

MONAGAN: I don't recall that, no. Of course, I did go along with Kennedy on several things that ordinarily--you know, when he first came in you want to give him the benefit of the doubt and that sort of thing--some of the farm legislation I went along on. I think he certainly went out of his way to try to placate people like Otto Passman, invited him down to the Aga Khan gala down there at Mt. Vernon and really Otto just whacked him right over the head just the same. Of course, Cannon was behind Passman and he was the chairman of the committee. That was proven as soon as George Mahon went in and he put on some members that Passman couldn't control and then his fangs have been withdrawn completely now.

STEWART: What other foreign affairs problems were you involved in in any depth as you can recall during the Kennedy years?

MONAGAN: Those aid bills are the big thing. We did get through the educational and cultural exchange legislation which our committee and subcommittee were concerned with. I remember going down to the White House for a signing at that time. I think the president of Peru was down there, he had to be shepherded out and we were shepherded in.

STEWART: Do you have in your notes anything relating to the March 30, 1962 meeting with the president?

MONAGAN: No, I don't have anything about that. As I said before, I think that must have-- we were concerned in the Porter Hardy committee with access to executive records. I think we must have had a meeting. I can remember going down there with Porter, and the president finally made a commitment that access would be given and executive privilege wouldn't be asserted, except as I recall it, by the president. He was to give a letter to that effect and finally a record, he did do it, but it took a long while to get it. I'm quite sure that that was the reason we were down there.

BEGIN SIDE II TAKE I

STEWART: You don't have any notes . . .

MONAGAN: I don't have anything about that. I notice, I mentioned the books that were in the cabinet room. I also noticed in his office, he had Profiles in Courage and Why England Slept that were bound in maroon leather and down near the front of the desk into the phone cord was a small copy bound in leather of the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu classic. I didn't have a chance to find out, I often wondered why that was there, what use he made of it.

STEWART: Well, unless there's anything else you feel you'd like to comment on in the foreign affairs area, why don't we move on to something else?

MONAGAN: Okay.

STEWART: Did you on any occasion feel that the administration, particularly the president, was bending over backwards to avoid the

charge of favoring New England in such matters as defense contracts and location of research sites?

MONAGAN: No, I didn't have occasion to run into that. Certainly his attitude toward trade problems and tariff matters and things like that had changed very greatly from the time that he was in the House. He wouldn't let New England interests, if you want to describe them in that way, prevent him from doing what he thought should be done, as with the Trade Assistance Act. I remember that very well. I voted against it, because I thought that there weren't sufficient protective aspects of it. I never got a call on that from the president and I know, cause John Bailey told me, that someone had asked--now whether it was the president or someone at his direction--had asked him to call me and he said he wouldn't do it because my district was such that I shouldn't be put under any whip on it. So you'd have to give the president the credit for that position, if credit is due on it, because--it wasn't too tight on that one.

STEWART: Did you find that the type of cooperation you got from various agencies on local problems changed to any extent after 1961, as opposed to . . .

MONAGAN: Well, yes. I mean an obvious example would be the Post Office Department, of course, that's political, you would expect it. We never got releases while Eisenhower was in but we did get them after Kennedy was in. On the other hand the White House treated us as--Dick Donahue had a very unfortunate description of the executive and the Congress holding one another in mutual contempt which may have described his attitude. A lot of that came through. I think any executive probably has times when they want to whip the support of the Congress but Kennedy was so strong in New England and Connecticut that he could do more harm to us than we could do to him. In fact the worst thing would be, if he ever would say, well, these guys are out trying to give me the business, or something like that. So we certainly didn't get the deference that Otto Passman or someone else like that got.

STEWART: Were there any major local problems that you were concerned with during either '61 or '63?

MONAGAN: I had done a lot on flood control and was able to get--we had bad floods up there--and previous to my service I was able to get quite a bit of, well, all the legislation and appropriations that we needed for that. I think that probably was the largest item which was confined to the district itself.

STEWART: Moving on to another topic, in 1961 you had an exchange of letters in the New York Times with Professor Dickson regarding the appointment of judges. Do you recall that? You were defending the . . .

MONAGAN: Yes, I remember the exchange but I'm trying to think what point he made.

STEWART: He was arguing for a greater nonpartisan approach to the appointment of judges and you were maintaining, by citing a number of examples, that it was good practice to make these appointments to a certain degree on a political basis.

MONAGAN: Just why it came up at that time has gone from my mind and there may have been some surrounding circumstances.

STEWART: Kennedy, of course, had an unusually high number of judicial appointments to make . . .

MONAGAN: Yes, because of the increase in the number of judges. The increase of the number of federal judges in the federal courts. In Connecticut there were two men appointed there who had political background but they were extremely well qualified and proven to be very good judges. The then judge of the district court was a congressman for four years, but he served about twenty years on the district court bench and is now in the circuit court of appeals, is doing an excellent job there. What I object to is the automatic reaction that people sometimes have, as if, when you turn it over to this group and everything is going to be **fine**, and to say that everybody that has any contact with politics is automatically disqualified.

STEWART: You didn't have any specific objections to the way the administration handled judicial appointments?

MONAGAN: The ones that I know about in my own state were everywhere well received. The men had legal experience and have since done a good job. I don't think there is anything wrong with the fact that they may have had some contact with politics, in fact I think it's an additional qualification, myself. You have more understanding of how things operate, you've had contact with people, I think it's a very valuable quality. We've seen judicial scholars who get on the bench and they're way out in a never-never land. Especially on a court of first instance it's practicality of approach and willingness to work that are the main qualifications I think.

STEWART: Moving on to another area, when did you become chairman of the donable property subcommittee, was that during the Kennedy administration?

MONAGAN: When John McCormick became speaker, this is when it happened, so it would have been after Sam Rayburn died. Yes, it would have been.

STEWART: Were you involved in any of the changes that were made in the categories of organization that were eligible to receive surplus property? I understand there were some changes made at that time.

MONAGAN: We tried to make some that we were not able to make. The Red Cross and the Boy Scouts had been listed and were getting donable property as being military organizations. Actually, as it turned out, the Red Cross never got very much. The Boy Scouts did get quite a bit and we wanted to change that just on the grounds of good practice, but they started a backfire and, of course, if it gets around that you're doing anything contrary to the Scouts why it might as well be against motherhood. So that one went out. Yes, we did increase the category slightly. We put in civil defense and was it volunteer . . . Oh yes. That's right, so it did increase them a little but, but not really too much. The education and health, they're still the main areas.

STEWART: Who in the administration did you work with in any of these areas?

MONAGAN: Well, I used to work with the Speaker. He's always been very much interested. In fact the committee was set up really for him and he acted as its chairman. Then when he became Speaker, he turned it over to me.

STEWART: Was there anyone in the White House or in the administration . . .

MONAGAN: No. They weren't too much concerned with it. There did develop a conflict as to the distribution of some of the excess items. That is, the army likes to sell them and to reduce the number of categories that can go for donation. They've been back and forth on that but it's pretty much on the lower echelon. We never got to the secretary or anything.

STEWART: Well, those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else in any other areas that we didn't get into that you feel you'd like to comment on? Any other visits to the White House that . . .

MONAGAN: Well, I think that the decoration of the White House and some of the events that were held there. I particularly had in mind the ball that we had, the congressional reception which was in 1961. In fact, that was the night of the Bay of Pigs; we didn't know that at the time. I think that gift between the president and Jackie [Jacqueline B.] Kennedy of giving some quality of glamour and of good taste and of elegance was extremely important and I wouldn't doubt that that had a lot to do with the way he was received in Europe. An appeal to the intelligentsia I guess it would be. Certainly it didn't appeal to the majority of the congressmen, because they all raised hell about the fact that they had to get tails and white ties. The next year was much less formal with black ties. I don't know whether there was a dance. I think there might have been, but it was handled very differently. But I thought it was great that they did it the way they did. Then, of course, the paintings that you would see in the White House, and the repainting of the rooms. The president's--of course, his own interest was in those maritime pictures and things like that, although he did have on the wall a Jefferson statement of some kind that, I think, appeared in Profiles in Courage. I can't say what it was now, but I recall that. He was

remarkably well tailored. That was something that always made an impression on me--his shirts, his ties, his suits and shoes and everything--I think all those things combined.

STEWART: What was the occasion when that picture was taken?

MONAGAN: Well, that was the cup races up at Newport. I wasn't there. Those people that are there are friends of mine. The girl lived with the Kennedys, Mrs. [Oliver] Brooks, for awhile. He was interested in--they're very wealthy--was interested in getting a job in Rome, and he finally did get into the embassy in Rome. He wanted to have some ministerial rank. I remember on one of these occasions, I was in the White House--and I said to the president, "You did a good job for Ollie Brooks." He said, "Oh, my father took care of that one." Mrs. Brooks lived with the Kennedys and was quite close to old Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. I remember the Saturday morning after he was nominated there was a breakfast and the members of Congress were there and Sam Rayburn was there, and Lyndon [Lyndon B. Johnson]. Sam couldn't quite get over the thing. He was speaking about this fine young man and all that and he said, "There's one thing." He said, "I haven't seen old Joe, but I know he's in the woods around here somewhere." He said, "I can feel his power here."

STEWART: Had you had any contact with the father at all?

MONAGAN: No. I didn't know him.

STEWART: Well, unless there's anything else you would like to contribute now. . . .

MONAGAN: I think that's probably as much as I can think about.

STEWART: Okay. I want to thank you very much.

MONAGAN: I'm glad to do it.

