Horace Busby, Oral History Interview—5/26/1982
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Creator: Horace Busby
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Biographical Note
Busby was an aide in Lyndon B. Johnson's House and Senate Offices, (1948-1950); staff member, U.S. Senate Armed Services Preparedness Subcommittee, (1950-1953); consultant, U.S. Senate Armed Services Preparedness Subcommittee, (1957-1958); advisor to the Vice President, (1961-1963); and special assistant to the President and secretary of the Cabinet, (1963-1965). In this interview, Busby discusses Lyndon B. Johnson's relationships with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., Robert F. Kennedy, and John F. Kennedy (JFK), among other issues.

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Horace Busby

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Oral History Interview

with

Horace Busby

May 26, 1982

By Sheldon H. Stern

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

STERN: I wonder if you have any recollections of the relationship between JFK [John F. Kennedy] and LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] in that period when Kennedy was still in Congress?

BUSBY: Yes, I do. Kennedy's election in 1946—that was the Eightieth Congress and it was his first Congress—his election out of which I had carried a memory of that photograph that was in all the newspapers of him walking in a parade—at the head of a parade—I think of Irish, something to do with Irish.

STERN: Charlestown, right.

BUSBY: It stuck in my mind for a particular reason. I was at the time working in Austin after, my first job after college, with International News Service. I was political correspondent at the state capitol. Well, we all knew in INS that Jack Kennedy had worked for INS, and, you know, this was intriguing. And also you could not—of course I was in grade school and finally became a teenager and was in high school in the thirties and through the war—and you could not go through that period and have any kind of an interest in politics without understanding the very strong feelings that existed at different places against the father, Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. And the death of the—well, as a matter of fact, the brother [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] who was killed in the war, the pilot,

his co-pilot was from Fort Worth, Texas, which was where I was, which was my home. And so, you know, you had a certain amount—you merged

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after World War II with a certain amount of knowledge in your head about the Kennedys and all like that. My attention focused on Jack Kennedy because of the [laugh] nominal relationship through INS, so I was quite aware of him. And when I came to work for the President—I mean I refer to him as the President, it was Congressman Johnson—in March of 1968, I mean '48.... As a footnote, I arrived in Washington on March the sixteenth, and the next day I had my first great political—non out-of-Texas—political discovery when I went to report to work and the Congressman took me to the dispersing office to be sworn in and get on the payroll. And there I saw in full flower, for the first time in my life, Irish politics. Everybody in the dispersing office was an Irishman and all were wearing green and their green was all over Capitol Hill that day. And it was readily identifiable in most instances that the wearer of the green was indeed Irish. And I had just never.... In Texas you had Irish, but you thought of Irishmen as these roly-poly faced tenors who came through in vaudeville, you know, and you'd never seen them in a political sense.

One of the—I have a very distinct memory that one of the first things I did was to, during the first week that I was here, was to find out where John Kennedy's office was and, you know, walk past it hoping to see him, something like that. Well, I didn't see him in those circumstances. But I did. My very first encounter with him just spoke a lot about the kind of things that you're interested in. First of all, precede the encounter with this: when I was a—when I entered Mr. Johnson's life, one of the things that from which my close relationship with him evolved, was that I as a kid had just become a buff on Washington, on national politics; read everything I could about it; knew all the actions that had been taken, you know, and all like that. And the New Deal period, the thirties, more than any other period since, was full of memorable episodes and events and even antidotes for one reason: it was the first time we had a national government in any real sense. It was all a new experience and it therefore was ingrained in the minds of everybody for a number of generations because nothing like this had happened before. My father, for example, voted for president three times before he ever heard one speak. And I heard Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] both make his New Deal speech to the Chicago convention in July of 1932 and then, in the third grade, sat at home and listened to his inaugural address.

So, the whole business of a president, a national government of Washington in our lives, was all new. And I think people remembered better. And it's still, I would say as an aside, that it's still capital for me in what I do because there are all so very, very few people left in Washington who have any memory of that period. There are many who were here, but they don't, they're not focused on politics in the way that I was. But, anyway, the President could sit in his office—everyone else had gainful tasks to pursue—and my principal task was, it turned out to be, was to talk with him and let him relive the years which he thought were the best years of life and that nothing would ever equal it and—because of his own involvement in it—and perhaps that was true. But we went on and on through the late afternoon and early evening hours. And of course, I was learning from him and, because I knew as much as I did, it drew things out of him, I mean it remembered as much of the

history. Anyway, as part of this, he would relate to me these dramatic episodes out of his own life, from the time principally that he came here as congressman and fell immediately.... You know, when Lyndon Johnson was elected to Congress it was in a special election upon the death of the chairman of the Appropriations Committee named Buchanan [James Paul Buchanan]. That attracted national attention in itself. It also—the election

occurred in April of 1937, and that was in the middle of the Supreme Court packing fight. And from the 1936 election forward, instead of things going well with Roosevelt as they had in his first term, everything had gone against him. Johnson ran on a platform of being one thousand percent for Roosevelt. This attracted attention. The *New York Times* even sent a correspondent to Texas to cover his campaign, which was unusual in Texas. And so when Johnson ended up as the victor, it was something that Roosevelt wanted to call attention to. So by coincidence he was fishing off the Texas Gulf; came ashore at Galveston and had the Governor of Texas, who was a New Dealer, bring Lyndon Johnson down there. They took an instant liking to each other and he asked Johnson to ride the presidential train with him back to Washington, So he made a thunderous entrance up here. And from then on he had a relationship—some of his retelling of it I have always been suspicious of, but—you know, that he was putting himself in closer than maybe he was. Some New Dealers, now dead, had told me that was the case, others have said no, that Johnson was that close. But Johnson did have one thing that was unusual in that he saw Roosevelt in what at the White House you refer to as the mansion. I mean the White House is a complex; it has wings, and then the house itself is the mansion. And he was in the, he was frequently received by Roosevelt or he sent for him in the bedroom, which was unusual. Very few members of Congress ever saw, had ever seen Roosevelt in the bedroom and this was the cause of a great deal of animus on the hill against Johnson because he was twenty-seven years old and what the heck is he getting so close? But Roosevelt, my image of it is that Roosevelt, that Johnson was a good audience and Roosevelt, not being mobile, would sit in the bed and he would concoct things; he would scheme. I mean he's running the scheme past for his own, you know, thinking out loud, but Johnson made the kind of audience that he wanted. Well, the key, the relevant episode did not actually occur in the bedroom but it was the same nature. Johnson alleges that he alleged that he was at Roosevelt's desk in the oval office—it could have been the oval office or it could have been the bedroom—he received a telephone call. It was Joe Kennedy, who had just—ambassador to England—who had just arrived on one of the big ships with his family in New York. And he called the President because it was proper, and he said, "I am Ambassador Kennedy"—according to Johnson, said to the President that—"I am going up to the Cape with my family and I will get them installed and I'll be down in a couple of weeks to see you." So, as Johnson would retell the story, Roosevelt, in his most charming voice, most elaborately charming voice, "Oh, Joe, I can't wait two weeks to see you, you must come here before you go to the Cape," etc., etc. Kennedy, being a strong-willed man, strong man, he resisted this blandishment for awhile, and Roosevelt kept [unintelligible] to go through the whole conversation, you know, getting more and more syrupy in his need to see Joe Kennedy. So Kennedy finally said, "Okay, I'll take the congressional special down this afternoon,"—the Pennsylvania Railroad—"and I'll see you tomorrow." "Oh fine, I'll be

looking forward to it," and all like that, "and then you can spend a lot of time with your family." So Johnson says he sat there and he listened to this. At the end of the conversation Roosevelt put down the phone and said to Johnson said he was puzzled because he knew that Roosevelt didn't really feel quite this way about Joe Kennedy—and when he put down the phone he turned to Johnson and said, "When he gets here I'm going to fire the son of a bitch." Well, Johnson had carried.... There were other associates with whom he, Lyndon Johnson, had fallen in, wealthy New Yorkers and others who had a great animus against Joe Kennedy because they had lost money or because as SEC [Securities And Exchange Commission] chairman he had put them out of business.

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STERN: Right.

BUSBY: You know. There's no novelty to the fact that Joe Kennedy made his way to wealth making many enemies along the way about which he didn't seem to care at all. But I found in my conversations with Johnson, very early, within the first two weeks, that just one of the symbols of things that were wrong with politics was Joe Kennedy. And that was, as I emphasize, it was not really a personal thing, it was—he was reflecting feelings from Roosevelt, he was reflecting feelings from all the most ardent of the New Dealers.

STERN: He ultimately came to know Joe Kennedy.

BUSBY: Oh yeah, he knew him at this time. He met him. And, you know, there are some things on display in the Johnson Library of—or there were, I don't know where they are now—letters from Joe Kennedy about how my son and I think you ought to be president, and that sort of thing.

STERN: Right.

BUSBY: They came to, I think both Johnson and Joe Kennedy came—as often is the case between strong adversaries—they came to a great mutual respect. And.... but that's neither here nor there. Anyway, at this time, at this point in time, in 1948, while there was an acquaintance between them—and there could hardly have missed being one—there was, there was no warm feeling at all on Johnson's part toward Ambassador Kennedy.

Well, in this context and my first encounter with Jack Kennedy. I had been over in the Capitol with Congressman Johnson and we met—I mean I had some kind of special information relevant to a meeting he was having with somebody in a anteroom of the House [House of Representatives]. And so at the conclusion of the meeting we started back to the House Office Building. And of course.... Let's see, yeah, the subway was there, the—no, the subway is on the Senate side—you come down from any elevator to the basement floor where the tunnel is under the, under Independence Avenue, to go back to the House Office Building. And so congressmen, or whomever, converge in a round area before entering the

tunnel. As we approached from our corridor I noticed, off to the left, Kennedy—whom I knew from photographs—was approaching from the other corridor. He was.... And Johnson didn't hail him or anything. Well, there were many congressmen down there. The hit on Jack Kennedy was that he was never around, that he was always off in the sun. And that's the way—the times I've made inquiry around there about Jack Kennedy, that's what you were always told, and it was substantially true. He's much younger than the—Congress was a much older body of men then than it is today, and Jack Kennedy was virtually the baby; he wasn't the baby, but virtually so. And Lyndon Johnson had been the baby of the House when he came in at twenty-seven. Anyway, it, they were both going to the Old House Office Building, as it was then called. What is that now? That's the Longworth Building, but it was called the Old House Office Building. And so in the flow were we, we were converging, going—we were both going the same way. And so Jack Kennedy, who was walking in his characteristic rather—it wasn't a brisk stride but he walked leaning forward and he walked on the balls of his feet much more than most people, very graceful—

and he was catching up with us. So he finally came alongside. My congressman barely glanced at him, or.... Jack Kennedy caught up and said some greeting; my recollection is that he called him Lyn instead of Lyndon. A few people did that, I guess under the impression that must be his nickname, but it wasn't. Anyway, Jack Kennedy called him Lyn; later in life he always, it was always Lyndon. But he said just—he gave a smile. I was of course watching him closely, never—having wanted to see him. And he said, "Hello Lyn," or something to that sort. Johnson looked straight ahead very proper. He could, he—Lyndon Johnson was tall, six feet two, and taller, several inches taller than Kennedy. And he kept looking straight ahead at.... Oh, I started to say, he had an ability to acquire instant dignity, high propriety, you know, just be very erect and correct. And he—I saw that, that trait come out instantly there. He said, "How are you Jack?" or something back to him like that. And so at that point Kennedy quit forging ahead and chose to walk right beside Johnson, for at least for a moment. Jack Kennedy said something, I don't remember now what it was, it was inconsequential, it may have been about the weather. And he said, and so Johnson—again he just barely looked over at him—he said, "You've been in the sun." [Laughter] I wanted to wince because I know it was occasioned by this attitude that prevailed among, at least among the Democrats on the Hill, about Kennedy always being in the sun. And he had been; he was quite tanned. And he said yes, he'd been to Florida at his father's place. So with ultimate propriety and dignity Johnson drew himself up and said, "Give the Ambassador my regards." [Laughter] And I was wanting Johnson to introduce me to him because I took an immediate liking to him, to Kennedy. And he didn't make a move to introduce me. And I realized much, much later that he, the reason Kennedy went on ahead was not that Kennedy was walking faster, but that my congressman had begun to drag his feet a little bit. He didn't want to walk with him. More particularly, he didn't want to get in the elevator with him for some reason. I don't know why...

STERN: You don't know why though?

BUSBY: No. Just, you know, just didn't. It's just.... I could tell because I had to slow down myself. And what he was watching—there were—you could go up in either of two elevators; you could walk the full length of the House basement. That's where both Kennedy's office and our offices were served really, by those elevators. Kennedy went in to the first elevator though, at the Independence entrance. And so then we didn't walk on down, we went, we missed his elevator and then we took the next. Why that occurred, I don't know.

STERN: Apparently there must have been some change because there is some indication at the Library that on election night in '52, when Kennedy defeated Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge], that Johnson called him all the way from Texas to congratulate him.

BUSBY: [Laughter] Well, Johnson had a little something going then; he was running for democratic leader. But that wasn't the reason for the change. Now, Johnson, in 1948, this same year, was elected to the Senate.

STERN: Right.

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BUSBY: In—and entered the Senate in 1959.

STERN: Wait a minute. '49.

BUSBY: I mean '49, excuse me. At the end of 1950, Johnson had been in two years. In 1950 the Democratic leader in the Senate was defeated, Scott Lucas [Scott Wike Lucas], Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois. This created a severe problem of succession. There was not a northern senator acceptable to the southerners, and there was not a southern senator at all to the north, and so they compromised on Senator Ernest McFarland [Ernest William McFarland] of Arizona, who was not a very adroit leader. He was a judge much more than he was a political man. And so one of the, you know, real turns of events, having put this westerner in, they had to find somebody to be whip. And it was the turning point, basically, in Johnson's national stature, or what became his national stature, that the, there were enough southerners who trusted him. Well, I don't know that I can say that the southerners trusted him; they never had a doubt in their mind—Dick Russell [Richard B. Russell] and the others—that if Johnson ever got the opportunity he would pass the civil rights bill. They knew he was not one of their own, for various reasons. But at the same time, I always felt that Dick Russell, who was an enormous senator, an enormous figure in the Senate, and a very, very able, intelligent man—that Dick Russell looked far into the future and said, "If I've got the—if I'm going to have to settle on this issue, on the racial issue, this is the man I'd rather deal with. I'd rather have one of, who understands us in the deep south. A Texan is not a deep southerner by any means, but I'd rather this type of person than to have to deal with somebody from Pennsylvania or New York." And so for reasons of mutual self-interest, both North and South, Johnson was made whip, which was—and McFarland's

leadership was such that in effect, in very short order, Johnson was the leader; he didn't have the title, but he was the leader. And now, in that atmosphere, Johnson's own horizons broadened, you know, businessmen, Wall Street types, defense contractors, labor leaders, anybody that wanted to get something done in the Senate, they came to see Johnson, which to an extent had been the way he was in the House. He was back into a familiar role. I think, I can't tell you, but I think that in that period there probably was the first overture toward him. Yes, as a matter of fact there was—and I can't remember the circumstances—by Joe Kennedy, who wanted something. I mean, when I say wanted something, you know, it was some kind of business legislation...

STERN: Right.

BUSBY: ...something that he was supporting. He had no personal, special interest that I know of except in terms of thinking that something ought to be done. He—I was not—I left Congressman Johnson at the end of 1950, just as he became whip, and I was not here to—which is the reason I don't remember what it was. But he told me either concurrently or subsequently about meeting with Kennedy. And was, Johnson by then was rather proud of the fact that Joe Kennedy had sought him out and that they had had amicable discussions and, you know, it was a turning point in his relationships with the Kennedys. And kind of the old New Deal fervor thing died down; it didn't die out, but it died down.

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STERN: Well the evidence is certainly there that Joe Sr. did support him in '56 for president.

BUSBY: He did, yeah.

STERN: He had no stomach for Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] that's for sure.

BUSBY: Besides, Joe Kennedy, in Johnson's estimate of him, had a good political mind. Johnson didn't say that about very many people. But he—Joe Kennedy apparently had been absorbed enough with his own ambitions for his family in politics that he had acquired a, you know, far more knowledge, I don't mean knowledge, but understanding of politics than a businessman or a financier would normally acquire. And Johnson.... Of course partly that was his background in Irish politics in Boston. But Johnson liked people who showed any kind of understanding of politics where he was, where Johnson was, and he was very near a political genius of sorts. Anyway, the next period—and there are several developments in there that I can't speak to very much but I know about them, it was reflected from Johnson—the 1952 Massachusetts Senate campaign was of course consequential to Johnson because it was clear fairly early that that department store man in Phoenix, Barry Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater], was going to defeat Ernest McClelland—I'm not saying the name right—Ernest McFarland, and the—when this became evident, a good many of the northern, not a good many but a segment of the senators from the North,

began to ring their hands a bit about the prospect of somebody from a southwestern or a southern state becoming the leader of the party. They did not regard Texas as a border as they had regarded Kentucky as a border state which made Alben Barkley a leader. So, there were moves to get together—now, some of this appears in various memoirs—mostly the moves weren't made until, they couldn't make any kind of a move until McFarland was in fact defeated. I mean he was the leader and his troops couldn't go around holding meetings about his imminent defeat. Johnson, foreseeing the problem that he would face, I don't know, he never did anything overt; he didn't go out campaigning. As a matter of fact, he went out to Arizona and campaigned at McFarland's request for McFarland. And, but anyway, he was, you know, he was focused on who would be in the Democratic caucus from the northern states.

STERN: Sure.

BUSBY: And, of course, he wanted the Democrats to be in the leadership, so the Kennedy-Lodge race was important to him that way, as a contribution toward a majority. See I only lost the Senate by one vote, one seat. Secondly, because it was Joe Kennedy's son and all like that, he took more interest in that race, not only in a high level but just more interest than he did in races where the figures were unknown to him.

STERN: Right.

BUSBY: And I'm sure, again I wasn't in on his presence, but I'm sure that on the night of

the election that he must have called daddy and called Jack, and.... So then when I came back to Washington in 1953—I was away two years—I came back in 1953 as the administrative assistant to Johnson's colleague from Texas. Colleague is an ugly word to use about senators who get thrown off the floor; you say colleague or gentleman, you know. But anyway, he was the other senator from Texas. So I was thrown back with Johnson and followed then some events of Kennedy's first year in the Senate. It went this way: first of all, I left Austin on the train to come up here for that administrative assistant's job in like the day after Christmas. Congress was not convening until later and then that was the month of the inaugural. But I came anyway, and it happened that I was on the train with Lyndon Johnson. Now Lyndon Johnson thoroughly disapproved of me coming to Washington to work for the other senator. It was kind of an insult to him of greater magnitude than I realized at the time. But he happened to have accompanying him was his secretary who—personal secretary—who liked me and all like that, and so she finally forced us together on the train. And we, on the two-day train ride, we spent many hours talking. So among various things that we discussed we had one discussion relative to Jack Kennedy and his father. I don't know, we were steaming along across Ohio or in Indiana I think, and he said, "I want to tell you something that's happened to me." I could tell from his tone that he was just shocked. He said, "Over the past month"—which I, he may have meant two months but I think it was a

month, probably in December; he had been in Texas. He said, “I have had visits from two Supreme Court justices, from three senators, from six former cabinet members going back to the Roosevelt cabinet, the heads of—I don’t know, one of the biggest New York banks, had a very prominent chairman, it wasn’t a Rockefeller. But they had, you know, these guys had made a pilgrimage down to Texas to see Lyndon Johnson. It was just an unheard of list that he was rattling off. And I thought that, you know, they’d come to say, you know, the nation’s in danger or something like that. And he said, “Now, just take a guess,” he said—just playing a, you know, just playing a game on a train to pass time—he said, “I’m going to give you three guesses as to what they would come down to see me about. What would bring them together?” Well, I made a guess that they were disturbed about the Russians or something like that. “Oh,” he said, “no, no, hell no, it’s nothing like that; you’re off on the wrong track.” And it’s funny, I was, I don’t—when he would play one of those kind of games, I didn’t like to just be out in left field with my answer, I tried to think like him and—I hadn’t been around him for a while—but I got intense about it. And when he said the Supreme Court justices, well you know a Supreme Court justice; I know what it takes to get a Supreme Court justice to be interested in talking to a political figure.

STERN: Mr. Douglas. [William O. Douglas].

BUSBY: I was sure it was Douglas because Douglas is one of his friends. And the other one I’ve—if he were still alive then and I’ve forgotten, I think he was—it would have been Fred Vinson [Fred M. Vinson].

STERN: He was. He swore Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] in.

BUSBY: Right. Okay. ‘Cause, you know, he came out of Congress and was.... Douglas and Vinson were the two members of the Supreme Court who were

close to Johnson. And, but they would not have come on something, in my view, of their own volition. So, I was, you know, my, the wheels were spinning in my head. Now what would send them to Texas? That’s a very, very extraordinary thing to do, to have done. And let me amend this story slightly; not all of the meetings had occurred in Texas. He had been out on some speaking...

STERN: Uh huh, okay.

BUSBY: ...engagements and sometimes some of these people, I don’t know who, had showed up, I don’t know, Indianapolis, other cities. They weren’t all, they didn’t all come all that great distance to Austin. He, so, thinking of Vinson and Douglas, that they had to be the two that came to talk to him, or sought him out, I don’t know, I don’t remember quite what little detail there, I think it was just Douglas [inaudible] who could get those two to do something. I said, I said to him, I said, “They came to see you about Jack Kennedy.”

STERN: I'd guess this now.

BUSBY: Yeah, well that'd be obvious in your case, but it wasn't at all obvious then. And it flabbergasted him. He had to, before he went on with the story, he had to sit there and make me relate how I had, why I had guessed that, He wanted to know what was I seeing in his story because he, of course, naturally wanted me to not have the right answer. And I told him, I said, "Well, you've got—you are chiefly responsible for what committee assignments Jack has. And he said, "Well, you," he said, "you know, I thought that the old man," meaning Joe Kennedy, "was smart. I sent word to him that he'd be as dumb as hell." And I said, "Well, you know, what does he want?" He said, "Jack doesn't give a damn what committee he gets on." But he said, "This is just all Joe's doing." He said, "Joe doesn't care what second committee he gets on. He just absolutely wants Jack Kennedy on the Commerce Committee. And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Shipping." And he named off a whole bunch of things, and he said, "I told him. I've sent word to him." Another fellow who came was Bim Cohen [Wallace M. Cohen].

STERN: The old FDR….

BUSBY: Well, both Bim Cohen and Tommy Corcoran [Thomas G. Corcoran] came separately. And Johnson always had an enormous respect for Cohen, who incidentally still is alive. I saw him the other day and two people were carrying him, but he's still alive here. But anyway, he said, "I told Bim, because I know the old man respects Bim, not to talk to him on the phone and not to write him, but go see him and tell him, 'Look Ambassador, you already have many enemies, and your political actions are suspect and everybody understands that you are pushing—that Jack is in the Senate because you want him to run for president.'" He said, "Now, you got lots, you know, lots of built-in resistance already." He said, "If we put him on the Commerce Committee," he said, "the press, and especially the liberal press, will immediately identify that the reason he is there is to tend to your interests, to

serve your financial interests." And he said, "Tell him that if I put Jack Kennedy on that committee, he will never be president of the United States; he has no hope of being president of the United States." He said, "He will be smeared; the family will be smeared; he will be perceived by all the liberals"—and Jack Kennedy in the House was not regarded by anybody as a liberal.

STERN: He wasn't?

BUSBY: And he didn't get to be a liberal until about 1960, '59. I mean, he didn't have an identification as a liberal. And so in other words, there in 1950—this was

‘52, ‘53, the beginning of ‘53, January—there we were riding across Ohio talking about not killing off Jack Kennedy’s chance to be president. Which I find quite a fateful conversation I guess you would say.

STERN: That’s an absolutely astounding story.

BUSBY: Well.... And so he said he was not going, you know, he was not going to do it. Well we went on, got to Washington and I was busy setting up the office for the, for my senator, the new senator.

STERN: Whose name was, by the way?

BUSBY: Price Daniel.

STERN: Oh.

BUSBY: He was later governor of Texas, and later on the Supreme Court down there. He called me into his office two or three times before the caucus met. At the caucus, the Democratic caucus, he, Johnson, appeared with recommendations for committee assignments. And he’d gotten himself into another—Johnson seemed to seek things that could cause, that would be the heaviest and hardest tasks around. He got it into his head.... Immediately after the election he said, “If I’m majority leader, I’ll be majority leader”—I mean Democratic leader, in this instance it was minority leader—“under one condition; that every man that comes into the Senate is going to get at least one good committee assignment, important committee assignment, instead of the rule of seniority prevailing by which the incumbent members could claim all those good seats. Dick Russell said, begged me, not to do that. He said, ‘The Senate will never yield on seniority.’ He said, ‘That’s the single most sensitive thing in this body, either party.’” And he said, “If you do this, you will not be leader.” Well, you didn’t tell Lyndon Johnson something like that. He set to work on that. He said.... See, he had an extraordinary class of senators coming in; Symington, [Stuart Symington, II] who had been Secretary of the Air Force and was a good friend of Johnson’s. He said, “I’m not going to have the Secretary of the Air Force sitting on the Post Office committee. He’s going to be on Armed Services.” And he—I forget who all the other senators were, but they all had, nearly every one of them, had some kind of prestige in some field. So he took this position. And he also had taken the position, in one of the messages he sent to Joe Kennedy, that the committee for Jack Kennedy was Foreign

Relations; that he could become a national figure on Foreign Relations. And of course that’s what he did get. I don’t know what Kennedy’s second committee was, but it was, I think it was Government Affairs, but, seems to me it was. But anyway, he got him on, he ultimately put him on Foreign Relations. But Johnson, when he got here, had to, one by one, persuade senators to go along with his change in the rule, which was, as Senator Russell said, a very horrendous task. But he succeeded.

In the midst of what he was doing, and before my senator got here, he called me to his office several times and talked to me, and raised questions about how would you handle this senator, how would handle this senator? Which was as though I was still working for him. And I would talk with him, and on those visits—this information about Kennedy was by no means the reason he called me into his office—but on those visits he told me, he said, "The old man just won't go down." He said, "Since I got here, and since Bim Cohen and perhaps others had delivered his message back to him," he said, "he's just bringing down the House on me." He said, "He's got senators coming in, he's got everybody that he can influence, everybody he can pull the plug on." Abe Fortas [Abraham Fortas] had been to see him, all the old New Dealers who were very important to Johnson were around, and, you know, "you've got to give Jack Kennedy Commerce." Now he identified some self-interest on the part of some of these guys who had been big New Dealers, that they were now lawyers; I mean had law, growing law firms here, and that they wanted Kennedy on there because they had a claim on him. But that was exactly what he was trying to protect Kennedy from.

STERN: Yeah.

BUSBY: And he said—I said, "Well, I'm sure you're not going to do it." And he said, "Well, damn right I'm not going to do it." He said, "I just—it doesn't mean anything to me to save the Kennedys from themselves." He said, "I have no self-interest in Jack Kennedy being, which committee he's on, except that, under the general rule, I want him to be on a good one." He said, "I'm trying to do them the greatest favor"—he referred to 'em, he used the "them," he didn't say "him," he meant the family—"I'm trying to do them the greatest favor you could do 'em and they won't, you know, they just won't take it." He said.... I said, "Well, how does Jack feel about it?" He said, "I've talked to him and said—he just," he said, "he agrees, he listens to me." And he said, "I know he's, he's a hell of a smart fellow." And he said, "I know he agrees with me, but said, 'It's just, you know, my father thinks this would be a better committee.' And he said, 'You know, I can't move him.'" He said, "Now, I have found out that Jack himself is not out lobbying." He was not trying to put pressure on Johnson. And the decision was not, would not normally just have been Johnson's alone; the Senate Policy Committee, I think it was, would have made it. But the way the actual dynamics of it worked, Johnson was not, at that point, had not yet been elected majority leader.

STERN: Right.

BUSBY: The election, his election as majority leader, and then the committee assignments all came in one package one day. So he....

[BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II] ...I don't have any idea what the date was in January. I would raise a caution I might be off, this could have been occurring right at the end of December. Today's Congress' Democrats, I mean the Democrats in Congress today caucus before Christmas. That caucus in '52, '53, did not occur before Christmas, but it

could have occurred conceivable outside January 1. It could have been in that week between them, I just don't know about that. But anyway, when, you know, when the time came, he did indeed, he was elected majority, I mean, minority leader. Let's see, who was his whip? It wasn't Mike Mansfield because Earle Clements [Earle C. Clements] was ahead of him.

STERN: Mansfield was later.

BUSBY: I do not remember who it was, and, but anyway, he also succeeded. This thing, can you stop it? [Interruption] But he.... I just had stopped at ...

STERN: You were talking about the possible dates.

BUSBY: Oh yeah. Well, so anyway, that concludes that element of it. Of course I was around the Senate that year, saw Jack Kennedy frequently. I did not have any acquaintance with him. There was.... Are you, do you do Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] sidebars?

STERN: Yes.

BUSBY: Okay, there's a sidebar that fits to the general story line of my experience. Because the story line that began, that I began with, threads all the way through it up until '60. But yeah, I was in the Senate and I was Price Daniel's assistant. But as habit would have it, I would go to the.... In the morning, Senator Daniel tended to arrive at the office rather late in the day—he read a lot at home—pretty late in the morning, in time for the committee meeting, and I arrived earlier to get the staff started. And I went to, would go to the office, look at the mail which had been sorted since seven o'clock, and then go to the cafeteria which is, that is what is now the Old Senate Office Building. And Johnson's office was 232 and ours was 252, and so we were a corridor away. But at the corner next to the original Johnson office there—it is now I think the Space Committee—there was the Senate Office Building cafeteria. And purely by chance I would frequently end up arriving there at the same time as Senator Johnson. So we would sit and have rolls and coffee together, and he would smoke cigarettes like I'm smoking them now; he smoked four packs a day in those days. And so a something not.... I've seen Jack Kennedy in there a few times, even at lunch, but what became a feature of the year for me [laughter] was that sometime in the spring, March or April, who appears there.... Well, every morning that I was ever in there in that year of 1953, Joe McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] was there. In fact he was there so regularly that nobody dared sit at the table. There were no reserved tables at breakfast, but there was a Joe McCarthy table

over by the door, and he was always in there every morning with three or four of his staff. He was, you know, kind of in his prime at that point.

STERN: Sure.

BUSBY: And so one morning in the spring there appeared at that table, Robert Kennedy. I knew him by sight because he had just been elected one of the ten outstanding young men—no he hadn't been elected to that yet, but I knew him by sight anyway. And so he started appearing there. And I didn't, I missed a number of mornings of encountering Senator Johnson. So finally one morning he and I were there, we were back together. And McCarthy came in, and Bobby came behind him carrying his tray—just joined McCarthy's Investigating Committee, Government Relations—and Bobby was carrying his tray. And then before long two of these other, two ex-communists who were big in—many of the McCarthy people were former communists, and some of them were people I thought were pretty disreputable; journalists, one of them was a journalist. You just kind of let that little table stay off to itself over there, you know, and people gave it a kind of a wide berth, the McCarthy table, because by that time he was a folk hero to some people but he had become a villain to, or not so much a villain, kind of sleazy to a lot of people. Well, Bobby was there with him. And I had seen, as I said, I had seen Bobby a few times but I had not been present with Lyndon Johnson. So when we got up to go out.... Johnson always maintained his relationship with McCarthy, and in fact McCarthy was scared to death of Johnson. Johnson thought McCarthy would someday come up with a big exposé about Johnson's past association with communists in the thirties, which he had many. McCarthy was too scared of Johnson as a skillful politician ever to bring any of that stuff up. He never did, and wisely so. He could never have made it credible. So he, you know, you couldn't be in Washington in the thirties without knowing people who later turned out to be in some cell. So, we got up from the table and we started out and he, I saw, was heading over toward McCarthy, and I, of course, stayed a few feet back, having no need to become involved. And when McCarthy saw him approaching and saw he was going to speak, oh, he jumped to his feet, which was unusual, and jumped to his feet. "How are you Lyndon?" And, you know, all this kind of thing. And so they talked about some issue that they—for a few minutes, and then Joe said, "Oh, I want you to meet my staff here." And the two, two of the guys stood up to meet the imminent leader; and Bobby didn't stand up. But Joe introduced the two who stood up, and they shook hands with Johnson, and then he said, "And Senator, this is the newest member of our staff, Senator, I mean, Robert Kennedy." Kennedy did not stand up. And when he looked up at Johnson, I was just startled, because it was, it was contempt.

STERN: It started early didn't it?

BUSBY: Yeah. You know, later on he once, he twice looked, Bobby looked at me that way because we were in opposite positions, once alone in a hotel room and once somewhere else. And it was frightening. I'd say that to Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]. When Bobby had this thing on about you, he was a frightening person. You know, you just didn't like—I don't mean I was scared of him—you just didn't like to see somebody, you know, hate that much. That's the only thing I—it may not be what he was feeling, but that's what

you, that's what you got. But it was just almost a tangible thing when he looked up at Johnson. And Johnson said, "Hi, Bobby," and just kind of waved his hand. Bobby made no move either to speak or shake hands or anything. And so when we got out in the hall I said—I walked with the Senator back toward his office—and I said, "What the heck was that all about?" And in his own good way of summarizing things and getting to the point of them he said, "The New Deal, Roosevelt, Daddy, and liberal." And I, you know, he didn't have to say anymore, I understood what he was saying. Now that attitude on Bobby's part later softened, it didn't last to '50. But this was possibly his first encounter with Johnson, and he knew where Johnson came from. But I throw [Laughter] that in, as a bonus for your tales.

STERN: That's fascinating.

BUSBY: Later on in the, near the end of the fifties when Bobby was helping his brother on that labor legislation?

STERN: Right.

BUSBY: I've seen him in Johnson's office and they had quite friendly, animated, serious discussions. And so it didn't last, but that's he way it started. What year was it that Kennedy almost died, '55?

STERN: '54.

BUSBY: '54? Well, that was my next detail in this story. I was in Washington, and Senator Johnson—I didn't, I wasn't there to see him, but he heard I was here and called and asked me to come to the hill. And I did, and we talked about Texas, and we talked about some other things, and he was answering phone calls, transacting business—he was then majority leader, had just become so—and he just punctuated the conversation. He said, "You know they tell me," he said, "I find it hard to believe, but they tell me that young Kennedy is near death." And I said, "Not really? I didn't know anything about it." And he said, "Yeah, they tell me he'll be dead in a matter of a few weeks." And that's all I know, I mean, I don't know what the reaction was, but it was the way I learned about that illness. And so then time passed, and it was, in fact it was '59,'58 or'59 that Johnson worked with Kennedy on the, on that labor bill.

STERN: Landrum-Griffin?

BUSBY: Yeah. And he, I happened to be, I was, again I emphasize, I was not on Johnson's staff. I was not from 1950 until 1964. But this relation....

STERN: I'm curious, were you at the '56 convention?

BUSBY: No, I was sixties.

BUSBY'S GUEST: Was that one held in Atlantic City?

BUSBY: No, that was, it was in Chicago. It was when Kennedy was almost, thought he was going to be nominated for president.

STERN: Johnson cast the Texas delegation's vote very enthusiastically for Kennedy.

BUSBY: And lost the liberals in Texas for doing so. But anyway, during the Landrum Griffin thing I was in Washington by Johnson's arrangement as a consultant to his Space Committee. But I went over to the Senate to see him in the afternoon, and sat in the gallery while that was going on. And I saw him before the meeting too. He and Kennedy and Bobby were working together very well. And he kept telling me, he said about Jack Kennedy, he said, "Now this is a good senator because he knows where his votes are and he counts them." By contrast, he always felt that Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was an exasperation to him, although he had great affection, because he said, "Humphrey never passes anything. If you want to help him, you got to go do his work. He doesn't pay attention to getting the votes." But I knew then that they were on a pretty good wavelength between the two men. Well, subsequently in 1959 it became apparent that Kennedy was going to run for the Senate, and Humphrey was going to run. Very few of the, of the senior....

STERN: You mean for president?

BUSBY: Yeah. Very few of the senior senators, of which Johnson was the dominant figure, thought that Kennedy would have any chance. They felt that he would—well they just didn't credit him. They felt he would be perceived by the country as they perceived him: that he was young, that he was not necessarily a serious senator, had no demonstrated ability to run something, and was a man who wanted his pleasure more than he wanted to be president. That was their attitude. Some of them, a number of them in the top positions, were uncomfortable with the thought of Humphrey being president. But by that time Humphrey, under Johnson's tutelage, had become popular with the southern senators and all like that, and they would not stand in his way. But the prospect of Jack Kennedy being the nominee did not really become apparent—you didn't have the kind of primaries that you have now—it didn't really become apparent until, you know, until after the West Virginia primary in May I think it was. Sometime, but rather late.

Well, naturally, there were those of us involved with Johnson who began to be involved in maybe late '59, with the potential of him becoming president. He called me out to the ranch—I then lived in Austin—in November of 1959, and we were detecting problems, potential problems, in his Senate, his race for Senate re-election in 1960. Because he had become a national figure he'd become a national party factor. He had passed the civil rights bill; he passed a number of other things that were anathema to a portion, I emphasize only a portion, of the Texas electorate. But you could see that the right kind of candidate, somebody that wasn't known, not an Allan Shivers, not some big name, but an unknown candidate could close in on Johnson and defeat him in 1960. And the Republicans up here, the National

Committee [Republican National Committee] talked about it often enough that you knew that it was likely to materialize if they

could find somebody. Well, you know who they found. They found John Tower [John G. Tower] who was a formerly liberal economics professor who had become a conservative economics professor. Tower would never have beaten him. But anyway, he called me out to the ranch and we went off on one of his fifty-mile rides over grassy pastures, and we got out to—there's a fascinating geology in that country—we got out to a rock formation that rises up, you know, 100, 200 feet in the air. This was kind of a boulder there, and we got out and started walking around. And he stopped and I knew we'd arrived at the moment of why I was there. And he said, he said, "What should we do about 1960?" And he used "we" not in a royal way but it was encompassing a certain group of close people. Arthur Krock once wrote a column just raging at Johnson for saying "we" because he said it's a royal "we" and it's presumptive and all, and it was silly, but you know.... [Interruption] He, anyway he.... I said, "The best way to be sure of winning the Senate is to run for president." He said, "That's strange that you'd say that." He said, "I asked John Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.] last week, the same question and he gave the same answer." And I said, "Well, it's the way to do it." But he couldn't.... John and I differ, John Connally and I differ on whether Johnson did want to be president or didn't want to be president. I thought that he was afraid of being president and John says he's, he never has another thought, another waking thought except to lust after the office. Anyway, he would not let anybody organize anything, Johnson wouldn't. And so John finally took over and said he was going to organize a campaign and conduct a campaign with or without the Senator. And so by January, that effort was trying to get off the ground. It's pretty handicapping when you don't have a candidate, but [laughter] nonetheless we were trying. So from January, you know, on through for quite a long time we were active, some of us were actively engaged basically trying to counter Kennedy. And so you became specialists in anti-Kennedy information and all like that. But you couldn't talk about it around Johnson, you just didn't talk about it. Well, the major candidates by then were all senators. He couldn't let a word pass his lips about anybody, and that's not the way he felt. He maintained the position he was the leader, and he couldn't go out and engage in a partisan campaign, and he did not finally, in fact, announce that he was a candidate until three days before the convention began.

STERN: No, a week.

BUSBY: Okay, a week before. So, there was nothing out of that campaign that I recall. It was, we crossed trails with Kennedy fairly often and, you know, maneuvered to beat him out of the—when all the candidates were speaking together we maneuvered to be last and all those good things. But it was not, there was no animus between the men themselves. There was some animus between Humphrey and Kennedy because Humphrey was running such a poor man's campaign, and they beat him with money in West Virginia. But people here were pleading with Humphrey to go out into West Virginia and bring up Kennedy's conservatism: his farm record which was abysmal, he

had no—I mean he voted against everything the farmers ever wanted, and his labor record, and something else, I don't remember what the other thing was. And Humphrey would sit there in the, off in the policy committee offices, and I've seen him, and tears would come to his eyes—you know Humphrey would cry at the drop of a hat, either over joy or sadness or just emotion—and he, and tears would come to his eyes and he would say, "I can't do that. I can't do that. I can't talk about Jack. Don't you realize this man

[-16-]

might be the nominee?" In other words he didn't want to destroy his chances of being elected if he were the nominee. So that campaign was never made about Kennedy by anybody. The basic thrust of that campaign which was—now the people that were talking to Humphrey were the liberals—it was basically that Jack Kennedy—it was somewhat like a refrain that played against Johnson—that Jack Kennedy was too conservative to be the Democratic party's nominee or to be a Democratic president. So anyway, we went on, finally, to the Los Angeles Convention which was, what month, July?

STERN: August, I think. No, no, no. It was July.

BUSBY: It had to be July.

STERN: Because Johnson announced on July 5th.

BUSBY: Yeah. And we went to the convention and—now, you know, in the strategy of the convention this is a perspective that is not something that has grown in my mind through the years, but I'm relating what it was that night, at that time. Our basic theory—and it wasn't just something that the staff people or Connally thought of—it was the other senators who, a great many of the senators were for, you know, thought it important that Kennedy not get the nomination. And I will now back up to something. Johnson made no move of any kind out in the field until May of that year. He did not wish to make a move because of his stance of neutrality. He wasn't going to run against the people that he was the leader of. Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] made his "We will bury you" speech, and then the.... Where was it? He did something in Paris. That's where he on went and harangued and harangued, and harangued.

STERN: After the U-2 plane...

BUSBY: Yeah.

STERN: ...was shot down.

BUSBY: At that point, the senior Democratic senators, the committee chairmen that—in those days the committee chairmen as a whole were the power structure of either body—one by one those senators came to see Johnson. It picked up on an episode out in Oregon in which the press had asked Kennedy when he was out

campaigning in Oregon: “What would you have done when the U-2 plane was shot down over Russia? How would you, what message would you have sent to Chairman Khrushchev?” And he said, “I would have apologized.” That’s in all the books. This must have sent a chill down the spine of all of those people in, the elders of the Senate. They began coming to Johnson—I was present once or twice—and they were saying, “You have got to make this race for your country. We’ve got to have an alternative to Kennedy. We cannot have him as president. He’s weak; he’s inexperienced. A remark like that by a president, or an action like that by a president would tilt the balances of power.” They went on and on. Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] joined in this. Rayburn had had a

still stronger feeling about Kennedy, and that was from 1928. He and Morris Sheppard, who was a senator from Texas, had gone out on the stump in Texas for Al Smith [Alfred Emanuel Smith]. And Texas, you know, surprised everybody by being one of the southern states—not all the southern states—that voted for Hoover [Herbert Hoover] over, presumably over the Catholic issue, the stronger issue in the rural areas than it was in the city area. But then the rural area had a lot more votes.

STERN: That’s for sure.

BUSBY: And Rayburn would relate to him the story. He said, “You go out and you talk about ten-cent cotton, twenty-five cent wheat, and you about give it up from that level. You talk about all that and they’re listening to you. And then you start talking about the candidate, and so they start looking at the clouds.” And Mr. Rayburn said, “Anytime a political audience starts looking up at the ceiling or the clouds, you’re in trouble.” And he said, “That happened in ‘28. I could see it, I could feel it, and it’s gonna happen again.” And Mr. Rayburn felt it was one of the most crucial things in American history that the Democrats have a nominee who could beat Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. He was just consumed with this. So he began to lay into Johnson, and as a result we made one trip out west, into the northwest. There were some delegates loose out there. Bobby preceded us. Every place we stopped to see a governor, Iowa, several other states, governors who had communicated or demonstrated friendship, go in to see them and they were not exactly unequivocal. Well, we finally figured out what it was. Bobby visited everyone of them just ahead of us and said that his brother had his name on the vice-presidential list. We got to Idaho, that’s where Frank Church is from, isn’t it? Frank Church had been a liberal, strong supporter of Johnson ever since he’d come into the Senate. Johnson was even thinking of having, or some of us were thinking of having Frank Church put his name in nomination at the convention. But Frank Church had won as a boy a national declamation contest. He was a golden throat, or felt he was. Frank Clement you know—you don’t remember him but he keynoted the ‘56 convention and just flamed right out. He was another national declamation champion. And the style—they hadn’t learned how to speak on television, you know—the florid oratory which became a caricature. Well anyway, Frank had become that. And everybody knew—he put it out a bit—that he really would like to be the keynoter at the 1960 convention. We put down in some small town in Idaho—I guess they’re all small—and there

were, we had flying ahead of us a group of women who were "Lyndon's ladies," or something like that, "Ladies for Lyndon." And they carried uniforms, and they'd recruit some other local ladies and so on. When he, when the candidate—well, he wasn't a candidate—but when he came off the plane, here were two rows of ladies in red and white, well, principally blue, dresses. And he came down through that. You know, "politics." Okay, we got off at this place in Idaho, I can't remember the name, and, of course, standing at the foot of the ramp—we were flying in Johnson's Convair—standing at the foot of the ramp, the first person was Frank Church, and then the ladies, and then the local officials were back here. So I came down behind him—he was shaking hands with Church and speaking to him—and I came down and went around the ladies, rather than through them, and was waiting down at the end. I could tell instantly when he turned around from Church that he was, one: looking for me, I thought. He was looking around; he wasn't looking at the ladies. You know, "Hi, hi," looking around. He

was looking for somebody to say something to. And he finally saw me, and he ignored the mayor and the governor and everybody else, and he came over to me and he said, he said, "The little son of a bitch has already sold out. They bought him." I said, "What?" He said, "Bobby's bounded in through here and told him he could be keynoter."

STERN: Which is what happened.

BUSBY: What he did, he looked in Frank Church's eyes, and Frank Church, you know, looked—there is some Texas expression used at him like a sheep dog caught killing lambs or something like that, I don't know what, it's something to do with that—but anyway, he saw the change in expression and knew that. And forever after was just delighted that he, you know, that Church had changed because he'd demonstrated his character. [Laughter] But we kept, we kept having these encounters. And they, both Kennedy and Johnson spoke at the same state convention in Washington, and they spoke at a testimonial for Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] in Los Angeles. And the staffs were just bristling at each other. I mean, I didn't really consider myself staff because I was traveling around in an advisory way, but it was funny to watch our staff and the Kennedy staff when they crossed trails; just grrrr, you know, hate each other.

And so then we came back and, back to where I was a while ago. We went to the convention and it was the assessment of everybody that if Kennedy did not win the convention, win the nomination on the first ballot, it was conceivable that he could never win it. There still was a chance that he might win it on the second ballot if he missed on the first. But if he hadn't got it on the second ballot, he would, in fact, never have gotten it. So we, we, I went, George Reedy [George E. Reedy] and I went to the suite—we were in a little room next to the suite—to watch the roll call. When they—the last state called, I guess, was Wyoming—and when they turned the television camera to Wyoming, Kennedy still didn't have it. There was Teddy Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] standing in the middle of the Wyoming delegation smiling. And so both Reedy and I said. "Son of a bitch, you know, it's over." And he won it; he got over the half very narrowly. So we thought what we had for our

mementos was that we'd gotten the largest number of votes that any southern candidate for president had gotten since the Civil War, and all that kind of stuff. But, you know, okay, good show and all like that. Johnson called for us. He was in his bedroom. We went down there and he was already in pajamas. He said, "I want to send a telegram to the nominee and pledge my full support." He said, "Write it out," and then he said, "I'm going to sleep. I don't want to talk to anybody, I...." He didn't go to sleep, but that's what he said he was going to do. So we went back to the room. We had two typewriters. George started, he—George was an old newspaperman and he could write, he wrote fast, and of course, I did too. I couldn't get anything to come out. I just didn't feel that way. George went through a routine telegram, and so we went back to the room. The President said to me, the Senator said to me—he read George's—he says, "Where's yours?" I said, " Well, I'll just go along with what George said." And he saw through me completely, and he said something to the effect that "you don't want to say this." And he said, "You're gonna, you gotta learn that this is the way you do it in politics." I said, "Well I, I don't disagree with the thing, I just can't write it." So we start out of the room and he said, "Send it out to Connally who is on the floor, and tell him to deliver it to the candidate when he gets there." And then he, we got to the door and he stopped

us and he said, he said, "Send a second copy of that to the candidate." I don't know what inspired him to say that. Well, about forty minutes passed. Kennedy was not yet there at the convention hall. The phone rang in our room; George picked it up and handed it to me and he says, "It's for you, it's Connally." And I, so I picked up the phone [Laughter] and Connally said, "I want you to"—oh, he was furious—he said, "I want you to know what I did with that goddamn peacemaking message you wrote."—I kind of specialized in bi-partisanship, and John didn't have much of it in him—[laughter] and he said, "I tore it into a thousand pieces, and don't you ever send me anymore of that rotten stuff!" That's all, oh, he just was awful. I said, "John, John, that wasn't me, that wasn't me, John! I didn't do that!" He said, "Like hell it wasn't you; nobody else could write that." And he was livid with me for several days; he wouldn't listen to me that I didn't do it. But Kennedy subsequently.... There's a story in *Look* magazine about how—in an old *Look* magazine—about how he made his decision on vice-president. And in that story, which was as far as we ever heard from it, he said that that telegram was what told him. He'd been afraid to approach Johnson about vice-president. He thought it was an insult to a man of Johnson's stature in Washington.

STERN: So he got the copy.

BUSBY: But he got the copy. And he said in that story—and they had a quote from him—that, that it was that telegram that told him it was all right to come over the next morning and see Johnson about the vice-presidency. So, I went out and stayed up all night and got back down to the hotel about nine o'clock, I guess, in the morning, or ten-nine. And I went to George—that same room—and there was a hell of a crowd of reporters around the entrance to Johnson's suite. And I asked what that was about, and he said, Kennedy's in there." And I asked George, I said, "Why is he in there?" And he

said, “Well, it’s obvious,” he said, “he’s come to say, ‘I’d like to have you as vice-president,’” and, you know. And so, I said, “Oh well,” you know, [laughter] “that will all be over in a few minutes.” And Kennedy did, in fact, leave and, and, uh, I assumed that nothing was happening. But the longer the time passed the more I was worried that something was happening. Sam Rayburn came hurrying down the hall and went in there; Bob Kerr [Robert Kerr] and several other senators; and John Connally went back and forth. George Reedy and I were not told anything. We didn’t try to find out. We wouldn’t have believed it if we had been told. But we sat there watching all this and wondering, you know, why was this still a center of action? Well, nobody explained anything at all to me. So, out of the clear blue John Connally came literally running down the hallway—his suite was around the corner, Johnson’s was at the corner, and where I was was on the corridor, and John was on the other corridor—he came literally running up to the room where I was and said, “Come with, come with me.” And so I came with him. And he said—he went in to his suite and there was a, there were two bedrooms, and the door to one bedroom was shut—and he said, “Bobby Kennedy’s in there.” He said, “You go in there and make sure he doesn’t leave until the Speaker gets here.” Well, I opened the door and started into the room and there was Bobby Kennedy pacing furiously, just furiously, you know, just, almost at a trot. And he looked up at me and it was the same expression that I told you about in 1953, you know, I was a Johnson man and I was in the way. And so I came back out. I was—there wasn’t a point in me saying anything to him, I could tell. And I came back out into the anteroom and told John—who was on the phone—I said,

“I’ll try to tackle him from out here, but I’m not staying in there with him.” And at this moment though the Speaker arrived—you know the Speaker was a short fellow and bald-headed, completely bald—and he arrived and, and looked at me and he said, “Where is the little son of a bitch?” And I said, “He’s in there.” And he said, “What the goddamn hell is he trying to do now?”—meaning that he’d been trying to do something else. And so he went in. He was in there less than a, certainly less than a minute—I’m tempted to say, you know, twenty seconds—it was an extremely brief period. The door burst open, Bobby sprinted past us out in the hall, disappeared. Rayburn came out right behind him. And John Connally and Homer Thornberry [William Homer Thornberry], who is a congressman from Austin, were standing there. And they said, “Mr. Speaker, what did he say, or what did you say?”—‘cause they’d apparently expected a negotiation or a conversation, and there wasn’t. He said, “I went in and I said, ‘Are you authorized to speak for your brother?’ And he said, ‘Not yet.’ And I said, ‘Come back and see the Speaker of the House when you are.’” And that was it. He was—Bobby was trying to, you know, what Bobby was offering was Johnson could be the chairman of the Democratic National Committee if he wouldn’t take the vice-presidency. Well, that seemed—I accept what Jack Kennedy’s various, is variously quoted as saying; that this really wasn’t, that Bobby was just out of touch. This was certainly not Jack Kennedy’s operation.

And so I then asked John, I said, you know, “What, what are we into?” Because it was not apparent to me what the negotiation was about. I had no information. And he said, “He’s gonna, Kennedy wants him as vice-president.” So I go sprinting back down to George

with this news. George wouldn't believe it, [laughter] being George Reedy. And about that time the press began to resound down the hall, and the lights went up and all like this, and—no, no, I still didn't know that, vice-president. I take that back, for this reason—but, no, I did, I did know it but I didn't believe it anymore than George did. And I didn't believe it would work out. I went into, with George, sat down about four o'clock in the afternoon, no, it was about 3:58. It had been announced on the networks that Kennedy was having a press conference at four o'clock. At 3:58—to announce the vice-president—the television camera on NBC [National Broadcasting Company] cut in and there on the screen was Scoop Jackson's [Henry M. Jackson] face, unshaven. I knew what he'd been doing, he'd been out working the delegations all night. He was unshaven but he was smiling. And he was standing in front of, you know, at a podium, NBC podium. And I looked at George, and George looked at me and said, "Well, I guess you had to figure that would be who he would get." And so then they had Scoop, and he was still smiling, reporters crowding around, and they said—and he came on and he said—they said, "What are you going to do now?" That was the first question they asked him. He said, "Well, I'm going to go to the hotel room and shave and try to get a little bit of sleep, and then I'm going out to the convention hall tonight, and at the request of the presidential nominee I'm going to place in nomination the name for vice-president, the name of Lyndon Johnson." We [laughter] were just completely floored! What a hell of a way to learn it, you know. I mean we were sitting there evaluating Scoop as a candidate—main liability being he was a bachelor—and so we, you know, that's what happened. Okay, there's one, there are one or two other stories.... I'm running over my own time, but have you got time?

STERN: Umm.... [Interruption]

BUSBY: Two interesting episodes. Okay, we came back from the convention—I'm not going into why Johnson took the nomination and all like that, I don't have that in focus in my mind—but we came back from the convention, and then he came to Washington for that truncated post-convention session and asked me to come. And he and Kennedy had a number of meetings with different prominent people important to the candidate. Quite a number of businesses came down to see them and they arranged the meetings through Johnson. And they pledged their support to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, in part because Johnson was on it, but also because they did not trust Richard Nixon. An awful lot of that's never, that's escaped historians. But one of the reasons Nixon didn't win was the businesses didn't trust him. And.... But anyway, the first such meeting, I was in the majority leader's office and Kennedy came there 'cause he felt that was a better place to meet than his senatorial office. He came in; he was looking very, very glum. And Senator Johnson asked him, you know, "What are you unhappy about today?" He said, "I just got the Gallup"—either Gallup or Harris, maybe both—"that will be published in two or three days; the first reaction since the ticket was formed." And he said, "We're down five points"—as I recall it was five points. And Johnson said—I think probably a lump in his throat, afraid that the answer to the question would be "you"—he said, "What's caused that fall off?" And Kennedy said—he could be kind of wistful, as a man, at times; he was sitting and said this,

and he was wistful, he was kind of looking out into space—he said, “They say, they tell me it’s the face we show.” And Johnson said, “What, you mean our faces?” He said, “No, the Democratic Party. That when the country sits and looks at us through a convention, that they, they don’t think we’re presidential.” And I’ve seen that since, it’s been marked at the other conventions. But that was just, that was about all there was to that episode.

But then—no, actually this occurred prior, before that session—Johnson thought it was important for him to go to Hyannis Port and meet with Kennedy and make a show that there were no hard feelings and, you know, all like that, which there weren’t between them. He also was still thinking back to ‘28. So he chartered a plane and brought seventy-five or forty-eight or something, basically rural, Texas weekly and daily editors with him. Wanted them to all come up there and meet the Catholic nominee. Of course, some of the editors were from the—parts of Texas are heavily Catholic now and were back in the past, but some of them weren’t Catholic; it wasn’t a Protestant conversion we were on. And so we went to Hyannis Port to meet with, to meet with Kennedy. And it would take about forty-five minutes to retell all the episodes involved in that meeting, and I’ll do that with you some other time.

STERN: Okay, why don’t we...

BUSBY: But it was, it was so fascinating.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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