

**Andrew J. Houvouras, Oral History Interview – 7/10/1964**  
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**Biographical Note**

Houvouras served as one of the three co-chairman for Cabell County in the 1960 West Virginia Democratic primary for John F. Kennedy (JFK). In this interview, he discusses JFK's appeal to labor businessmen during the 1960 Democratic Primary in West Virginia, the religious issue in the presidential campaign in West Virginia, President JFK's economic policies and New Frontier programs, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

Andrew J. Houvouras

July 10, 1964

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Mr. Houvouras was one of the three co-chairmen for Cabell County in the 1960 West Virginia primary for the Kennedy forces. Mr. Houvouras, will you tell me how you first became interested in Senator Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] campaign and the West Virginia primary?

HOUVOURAS: Well, I first was very much interested in the fact that after the 1956 campaign when President Jack Kennedy, who was then Senator Kennedy, came so close to the vice presidency. I followed his career after that with great interest and when Senator Kennedy decided he was going to run in West Virginia we were first contacted by Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough] from Parkersburg and asked if we'd be interested in helping Senator Kennedy. We said we would, of course.

We came to Charleston shortly after the Wisconsin primary and there we met the three brothers: Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy], and the President. He was Senator Kennedy—he was not President at that time. Polly Fitzgerald, who I think was a relative, a cousin, of Senator Kennedy's, came to Huntington and met with our wives that evening and we journeyed back from Charleston with all the information of how the Kennedys wanted to put on the campaign.

At that meeting the religious issue was hit very strongly by some of the friends of Senator Kennedy. They felt coming to West Virginia was a great error, that the religious issue here would be too hot to handle, and that they should withdraw from West Virginia. Bobby Kennedy expressed the Senator's wishes that he would not withdraw from West Virginia, that he felt he'd be treated fairly in West Virginia, and so the battle was on.

The following week, after some preliminary organization setting up headquarters here in Huntington and recruiting volunteers—we went back to Charleston and Jack Kennedy then flew in. He was at the Ruffner Hotel and I was privileged to drive him back to Huntington. We made a lot of stops. He hit the religious issue the first day with the statement that the slogan of West Virginia was “mountaineers were always free,” free to make their choice, and he came to West Virginia because he felt that he would be treated fairly. He said that he didn't feel that the day he was baptized that he was refused the presidency or the Democratic nomination. That was the theory that he carried throughout the campaign.

He was received well at the factories as we journeyed from Charleston to Huntington. We stopped at Marshall University and a spontaneous reception of about 1,500 students were in the streets to

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block the caravan of cars. He got up on the hood of the car and was unique in the off-the-cuff speeches as he always was. I think he said there that it was too bad that college students didn't have two votes—this statement appeared in the papers a little bit critical the following day.

Then he went on to the reception and, of course, he handled himself beautifully at all of these places. He was a charmer. He had a unique memory. He met me the first day I drove him back from Charleston and I would say that it was a week later I saw him again. He called me by my first and last name—he asked me about my family and my wife. So I think the whole West Virginia campaign in Cabell County was one of personal contact between Kennedy and the volunteers who really did the work. He was the type of man that you had great admiration for; he didn't evade anything; a man that you really wanted to make a sacrifice for and would.

YOUNG:                    Would you explain just exactly what role or what roles you played then in the primary and in the general election of 1960?

HOUVOURAS:            Well, in the primary I was Assistant Chairman, along with David Fox [David Fox Jr.]; and in the general election I was co-chairman for the county but also State Chairman for the Businessmen for Kennedy in West Virginia.

The primary campaign really got underway when Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] came from Chicago down to Charleston and into Huntington to take over the southern area. He brought with him Jim McKay from Chicago; Mary Anna Orlando [Maryanne Orlando], his secretary; and Bill Battle [William C. Battle], the son of the ex-governor of Virginia. And they stayed from that day until the end of the primary.

It was mainly through Sarge Shriver's efforts that the organization functioned and functioned well. There were teas given, interviews, press conferences arranged, tours of the city, the factories. The then-Senator Kennedy and also Shriver and myself and Dave Fox and a group of us went to the factories—even Senator Kennedy passed out his brochures and literature.

But then we thought that in the general election we needed something more. We had to generate businessmen's interest again, because the Republican Party had put out the word that Kennedy was anti-business and pro-labor. So we immediately put out a mailing to all businessmen in West Virginia with the article from the *New York Times*—I think it was written by Mr. Koch. He explained why Senator Kennedy was not anti-business and why it was good business to follow his policy. We mailed these out throughout the state in about four or five thousand mailings, got volunteers set up in all the major counties, and began to function. Outside, I would say, of personal contact with the business people explaining the Kennedy program, mailing literature and brochures, that was about all that was done as the Businessmen for Kennedy.

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YOUNG:                    Could you suggest any specific details with respect to the appeal to businessmen—any particular issues that only businessmen or especially businessmen might have been interested in?

HOUVOURAS:            Well, I think that the main line of attack was that what was good for business was good for labor and what was good for labor was good for business. I believe that the slogan that was used more thoroughly than any other was the fact that the country had to get moving again.

In West Virginia this had a great appeal because West Virginia had been depressed under the Eisenhower Administration [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. We had ranked fiftieth in defense contracts, we had ranked fiftieth in the number of defense installations within the state, we had ranked fiftieth with the amount of payroll—government payroll within the state. We had only one government installation in the State of West Virginia.

YOUNG:                    Which one was that, do you remember?

HOUVOURAS:            It was the Green Bank Listening Station. We'd had one called the South Charleston Ordnance but it had been inactive for a great number of years. That was the only one.

So, the appeal to business was that we'd been shortchanged all these years. West Virginia had been first in the nation in volunteers in World War II; we lost more men per capita in Korea and in World War II than any other state. We were first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of our countrymen, but last in the hearts of the Pentagon!

We were unable to get any assistance whatsoever. Jack Kennedy—and what Kennedy told us he would do—generated a great amount of interest within business and the business people—I think they supported the President.

YOUNG: Do you have any way, or did you have any way, of measuring the effectiveness of your appeal to the business community?

HOUVOURAS: Yes, we did. There were many business people here in Huntington who were not for Kennedy in the general election, both Democrat and Republican. Shortly after he became President and he brought industry into West Virginia they changed their tune real fast. Those people who criticized his Area Redevelopment Program began to participate in the Area Redevelopment Program—made applications for loans and were granted loans, were negotiating contract work with the government, were given special privileges of interviews and appeal in Washington. Actually the White House door was open to the businesspeople of West Virginia for those who wanted to come and take advantage of it. And many did.

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YOUNG: Would it be safe to say that the business community then came to scoff at the polls but stayed to be converted after the election?

HOUVOURAS: I would think that would be a very good statement. Many people have asked the question, "Did he fulfill his commitments to West Virginia?" I say he more than fulfilled his commitments to West Virginia because West Virginia received the Food Machinery Plant in South Charleston; the Naval ordnance plant was sold by direct order of the President to the Food Machinery Corporation. They now employ some two thousand people. I believe their payroll is in excess of \$38,000,000. It was a tremendous boon to southern West Virginia. North American Aviation opened up in Princeton with about two or three hundred employees. Lockheed opened in Clarksburg, and then the present industry that was here began to participate in main contract and subcontract work to the tune of millions of dollars and the economy of West Virginia caught hold.

I think it would be safe to say that one man got behind the economy of West Virginia—and that was President Kennedy—and gave it a shove and it started to move!

YOUNG: Well, I have heard, and I'm sure you've heard the statement that President Kennedy was looked upon as a West Virginian in the White House. Was there any feeling in West Virginia about President Kennedy's Harvard accent, his Eastern appearance and, perhaps, something of the Eastern aristocracy that found disfavor in West Virginia or was this generally overlooked?



HOUVOURAS: Well, I feel it was generally overlooked. However, I think it was a bit humorous one time when we had him scheduled to go to Salt Rock, which is an outlying community here in West Virginia and which is the old-type country store and farmer and hillbilly West Virginians. It was a small area and we cancelled it out; but Bobby Kennedy had come in early that morning and, meeting in the hotel, he wanted to know why Senator Kennedy's schedule had been changed and I explained to him that I didn't believe that a visit to Salt Rock would be effective: we could place him elsewhere. And he said, "Well, I noted that my schedule had been for Salt Rock and you've changed that too." And I said, "Well, I know and I don't believe you'd be effective either." I said, "I think Senator Kennedy would be more effective." He said "Why? Because of my accent?" And I said, "Well, frankly, yes. I think your accent would be...." He said, "Is it worse than Jack's?" And I said, "Yes, I think so." He said, "What would they call me—that basta'd from Ha'va'd?" That was a little bit of the humorous side. No—I think it was generally overlooked. I think that the West Virginia people who supported Kennedy looked upon him as a West Virginia president.

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YOUNG: Well, I've heard that statement many times in interviews and in public discussions. Let's go back to the primary, if you will please. I understand that you not only worked for Senator Kennedy but were an astute observer of the local scene and had some contact with the forces working for Senator Humphrey. Could you describe the difference between the two groups and a little bit of the nature of the battle in this particular county?

HOUVOURAS: Senator Humphrey didn't have much appeal here in West Virginia and he had very little support. It was the forces really of Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], the political forces of Johnson, I would say—and some of Symington [Stuart Symington II]—some favored Symington—but really the forces of Johnson who jumped on the Humphrey bandwagon. I don't think in behalf of Humphrey but I mean to block Kennedy.

YOUNG: Was this generally known in the state at the time?

HOUVOURAS: Yes—very much so—along with Senator Byrd's [Robert C. Byrd] opposition and his "Stop Kennedy" attempt.

YOUNG: In other words, you feel that most voters with any political astuteness realized that there was a possible alignment, a future alignment between the Humphrey-Johnson forces? This was not a well-kept secret at all?

HOUVOURAS: No, it was not. And they were very prominent in Humphrey's campaign. As a matter of fact, the Johnson forces moved in early—

before Kennedy came into West Virginia—and lined up some of the members of the Democratic Committee here in Cabell County. Before Kennedy even had a chance to approach them, they were committed to Humphrey because of Johnson.

YOUNG: In terms of the primary campaign, did there seem to be any real difference in terms of political platform or possible future program as articulated by either Kennedy or Humphrey or was it a battle pretty much of political personalities?

HOUVOURAS: Well, I see it as both. I'd say it was more political personality but Kennedy had a definite program to offer. He offered defense contracts to the factories in West Virginia that were inactive. He offered coal by wire to the mines; he offered immediate assistance and better food for the unemployed; he had Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr. with him and the name Roosevelt was magic in the coal fields of West Virginia. Kennedy campaigned intensely in those areas. I think that Kennedy had a much more definite program than Humphrey. Humphrey, running in West Virginia, I think to most observers—political observers—was really a “Block Kennedy.”

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YOUNG: Did Humphrey, however, make any promises? Did he make any commitments?

HOUVOURAS: No. No, I can't recall a definite program of Senator Humphrey's to alleviate the unemployment situation or actually the strife in West Virginia at all. His campaign, as I recall, was mostly based on the fact that he was a local grocery store merchant fighting the chain and his attack was mostly against Kennedy rather than an affirmative program of his own.

YOUNG: If you turned again to the nature of Senator Kennedy's campaign, other than simply the personal touch, what would you list as his most important campaign techniques other than the economic which you have already gone into in detail?

HOUVOURAS: Well, advance organization of volunteers. I think that was the secret of his campaign. I think this is what won him the campaign. He had, literally, thousands of people like myself who were willing to get up in the morning and not go to work for weeks and to make telephone calls; men and their wives to knock on doors and ring doorbells; to have teas to try to explain what he was trying to do for the country and for West Virginia.

YOUNG: Did the volunteers come from any special group anywhere, any particular section of the State, or...

HOUVOURAS: No—all over.

YOUNG: Pretty universal?

HOUVOURAS: Pretty universal. What was surprising was Wayne County. I happened to have Wayne County along with Sarge Shriver—I more or less assisted Shriver—he had the whole southern counties. But in Wayne County there is not even a Catholic church. They had a minstrel at the Wayne School. Shriver attended that minstrel. He went out himself. I went with him. Afterwards he mingled with the people. He went out with them afterwards to have a coco-cola at one of the local places and talked to them.

Kennedy carried Wayne County where there's not even a Catholic church. And I would say that there isn't over twenty-five Catholic families. This was mentioned in Huntley-Brinkley report when he was here at Wayne. And he carried that county! Now, he carried that county because of vast organization and because of personal appeal.

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YOUNG: Since you've mentioned the matter of religion, would you say—answer this question, if possible. Did the religious attack on Kennedy seem to be an attack on the kind of vague, mysterious Catholic Church, or were the attacks on specific policies?

HOUVOURAS: Well, most of it was on bogus information. It was really a very low grade attack upon the Catholic Church itself, not on Kennedy so much as a Catholic, but what a Catholic president might do. The bogus oath of the Knights of Columbus was circulated, put in people's mailboxes. There was literature that said that if a Catholic was president that they would split open the bellies of Protestant pregnant women and dash their babies heads upon the stones! Now, this wasn't just hearsay. This literature was passed around. It was picked up and given to the prosecuting attorney. They had Maria Monk literature—I don't know whether you are familiar with this or not—passed out in great detail...

YOUNG: The diary, I believe, of Maria Monk.

HOUVOURAS: Right. It was really an all-out religious attack that was based on false information. Now, the newspapers here in Huntington refused to print the bogus oath. They also refused to print the real oath of the Knights of Columbus. We spent most of our time in the campaign—that is, one group—trying to counter all this anti-Catholicism.

YOUNG: You mean the newspapers refused to print the correct oath as a paid political ad?

HOUVOURAS: That's right.

YOUNG: What methods did you use in attempting to counteract the propaganda—the anti-religious propaganda?

HOUVOURAS: Well, wherever we knew—wherever we found the literature being circulated—it was in some churches—we visited the minister of that church and tried to straighten it out. We tried to show him where the fallacy was. Most of them told us—well, it's in the *Congressional Record*—this is the old excuse. And, of course, we told them that even cake recipes could be in the *Congressional Record*. And we offered to give them the real oath. In some cases we got some cooperation and apologies and in some cases we had to threaten prosecution. And we would have done it, had they not withdrawn.

YOUNG: On what grounds did you threaten prosecution—on what legal grounds?

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HOUVOURAS: Well, they were putting out information against the Knights of Columbus and the Knights of Columbus took up the fight, with nothing mentioned of a political fight or in behalf of Senator Kennedy, but the Knights of Columbus felt that they could bring suit and could prosecute this false information about them.

YOUNG: Well, could you make some kind of an analysis in terms of the denominations that were more active in this kind of campaign and the denominations that were aloof and said nothing—in terms of the various Protestant organizations?

HOUVOURAS: I don't believe that there was any that were aloof. I think that there were some that were more predominant than others. You see, West Virginia is unique in that it has all of the religions that I call non-affiliated religions. You have, for example, the South Side Baptists, the High Lawn Methodists—they have ordained ministers. But the Westmoreland Holiness, the Fifth Street Church of Christ and all these different Christian denominations do not really have, in most cases, ordained ministers. We have one more church in Huntington that we have industry.

YOUNG: By unaffiliated do you mean also not affiliated with a national organization?

HOUVOURAS: Right.

YOUNG: Well, were they more prominent than those that were affiliated with national organizations?

HOUVOURAS: They had a more direct campaign. The campaign of some of the other

denominations was on a very high level. Recordings were sent down from what I would call their central organizations. Very, very well done. Anti-Catholic recordings were played at their meetings after their services.

YOUNG: Would this be true—I don't know whether there is a Unitarian Church in Huntington—Universalist, Episcopalian. Would you find this sort of thing done there?

HOUVOURAS: Well, I would say that the Episcopalian participation was very minor, if any. We were very fortunate in having, I think, the Episcopal Bishop of West Virginia. I don't recall his name. He came out and said it would be criminal if a man were denied the presidency because of his religion. The Episcopalians more or less did anything they did as individual members, but not as a church group. But the Methodists were very strong; the Baptists and the Presbyterians were very strong from the pulpit and from the church organizations.

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YOUNG: I know this would have been an impossible thing to measure, but if the activities of both camps had been exactly equal do you feel that West Virginians still were not showing religious prejudice by voting for Kennedy? In other words, if you can take into account organizations and that sort of thing, do you think that the state still by its vote, indicated that it was not denying Kennedy the nomination because of his religion? Were we being genuinely broadminded—that I guess is the...

HOUVOURAS: No, I don't think so. I don't think West Virginians were being genuinely broadminded, but I think West Virginians instead of voting their religion, voted their pocketbooks. They felt that Kennedy was the man to get West Virginia out of the doldrums, to get the country moving again.

YOUNG: The economic issue far outweighed the religious?

HOUVOURAS: Yes—it does every time.

YOUNG: Would you like to turn then from the matter of religion for a moment to some of your other personal experiences with the candidate himself?

HOUVOURAS: Approximately two weeks before the primary, Senator Kennedy flew into Huntington and I picked him up at the airport. As usual, he was late—always running behind schedule. We had a breakfast for about fifty to sixty prominent businessmen that he was to address.

So while we were coming down, Bobby Kennedy talked to them and the question was asked just as the President walked in—the question was asked—why West Virginia was fiftieth in defense contracts and Bobby Kennedy was explaining it and after he had explained it very thoroughly, someone asked where did Massachusetts stand, and he said fourth. And they said—how do you figure that—and he said, “Why, that’s because they have such a good senator.” And then in walked Senator Kennedy.

He made a short talk of about five or six minutes and then threw it open to questions. Tom Campbell [John Campbell] of Huntington, president of the J.C. Penny Company, asked him about the minimum wage law for clerks in his store and similar stores. In answering that question, he was trying to give him every detail so he finally said, “Tell me, if you don’t mind, do you do over a million dollars worth of business, Mr. Campbell?” Mr. Campbell said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, then, you’re just not going to like it.” And after the meeting, Tom Campbell came to me—because I had invited him—and he said, “I wasn’t going to

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vote for him but any man who would give me such a direct answer has got to be dead honest. And I’m going to be for him.”

YOUNG: It was the Senator who said this—Senator Kennedy?

HOUVOURAS: Yes—this was Senator Kennedy. Then that afternoon we asked all members of the Cabell County Executive Committee to attend a meeting at the Prichard Hotel. Coming down from the airport, Senator Kennedy asked what I thought he should stress the most at this meeting. I told him that I felt that he should stress the fact that this would be the first time that a state the size of West Virginia would have the chance of nominating, and perhaps electing, the next president of the United States—that was the thing he should play upon—and he did. He came to that meeting of the Democratic Executive Committee saying that this would be the first time in the history of the presidency where such a small state had an opportunity to nominate and perhaps elect the next president, and if they did, he would never forget it, that the doors of the White House would be open to all problems of the people of West Virginia, and that he would never turn his back on them. And he was genuinely sincere in it and I think they accepted his sincerity.

He told them that if West Virginia gave him the election in the primary that he had committed to him Pennsylvania and California and that would put him in. We polled them afterwards and I’d say that 90% of the committee said they’d support him. I don’t believe that 90% did but I believe that 75% did.

YOUNG: Well, during the campaign in West Virginia, was the parallel with the election of 1928 mentioned much or considered? The election in which Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith], I believe did win the primary nomination against the favorite son, John W. Davis, but then lost the state in the general election in the fall. Did this enter into the discussion of the campaigning as you remember it?

HOUVOURAS: Never. Never once that I have any particular knowledge. Never once—never as a particular point at all.

YOUNG: Perhaps in the background, but not publicly at all. Are there any other items, perhaps in connection with religion since we've come back to that subject, that you'd like to talk about?

HOUVOURAS: Well, during the general election, after the Houston Conference—the ministerial conference where Senator Kennedy was invited by the churches to make a speech—he was so well accepted that the campaign chairmen asked the local committees to see if they couldn't

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put it on television. It cost \$965 to do it. And I might add here that, contrary to what the national publicity was on it, there was very little money spent in Cabell County. I can't speak for the rest of West Virginia, but we operated with nothing. The only money we had for headquarters—the telephone bills, the mailings—was money that we'd had to raise ourselves by selling hats and buttons, and donations.

So we put on a pretty vigorous campaign to raise enough money. We needed \$965 to put on the ministerial conference show on WSAZ-TV. We asked everyone for donations. We were delighted to find people who said, "Although I am not going to vote for Senator Kennedy, I'm sick and tired of the religious issue; I have heard about this interview or this conference and we want to see it"—and they gave us as much as twenty-five or fifty dollars. In a matter of about forty-eight hours we raised eleven hundred dollars to put on the show, and we got nothing but fine comments throughout the state. WSAZ-TV covers almost the complete state of West Virginia and we had letters from all out in the fringe areas saying how much they enjoyed it and that they were much clearer now on the religious issue. They heard his statements that the Pope would not dictate to him, and his answer as to why he refused to make a speech at the...

YOUNG: Four Chaplains...

HOUVOURAS: Four Chaplains.

YOUNG: It was a national meeting, I believe, of some kind in Philadelphia.

HOUVOURAS: He explained why he didn't and felt that he was being asked as a spokesman for his Church which he was not, and also the fact that the chapel had never been consecrated, et cetera, and this—the rumors as to why and so forth, and the influence of the bishops and the Pope upon him was actually not true. He explained it so well that people here were generally pleased with it.

YOUNG: I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the reaction to the New Frontier and the Kennedy Administration after the Inauguration. Do you have

anything more either in connection with the primary or the general election which you think might be interesting?

HOUVOURAS: No, I don't. I believe that's about it.

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YOUNG: I think you've already partly answered the next question in your discussion of the way in which West Virginia businessmen reacted to Kennedy's support of the state's economy. Could you, however, talk about broader Kennedy policies which affected the business community in general and not specifically West Virginia? The thing I have in mind is the President's activity at the time of the increase in steel prices, or the threatened increase, and the President's handling, which was considered rather rough in some quarters, with the president of U.S. Steel. Now, how did the West Virginia businessman react to that, aside from his own interest in improving the state's economy?

HOUVOURAS: I think his first reaction was that Kennedy went too far, and that although they deserved it in some cases, they felt that the power of the presidency was being brought to bear upon an industry which could be *their* industry or *their* business and therefore he overstepped his grounds.

However, as time went on—and I don't know what period of time—pretty soon they realized that although they didn't like the influence of the President being brought to bear on business, that he actually did the steel companies and the nation a favor. I've heard many of them speak now about the fact that he forced them into improvements which made them more competitive and that they are making more profit. The only argument in behalf of the President's move was the fact that a lot of business people played the stock market. Part of them knew that some steel companies were operating at twelve percent—the ones who needed a raise were at three percent; let them go ahead and raise the prices, but why should the others? I think they felt it was the best thing to do. There were mixed emotions but they didn't like the fact that he brought all this pressure to bear to get them to do it.

YOUNG: Do you feel that the West Virginia businessman was slightly more tolerant of the President than, perhaps, other businessmen because of this earlier close connection with the campaign?

HOUVOURAS: No—I don't think they were more tolerant.

YOUNG: They reacted as businessmen rather than West Virginians?

HOUVOURAS: Right. I think once again the economy became... [Laughter]

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YOUNG: O.K. Could you talk about some broad general policies of the New



Frontier that West Virginians approved or disapproved of? In other words, omitting the particular West Virginia consideration, what New Frontier policies received general approval and what New Frontier policies, perhaps, were criticized by some West Virginians with whom you had contact?

HOUVOURAS: One that comes to mind that they were genuinely in favor of was the Peace Corps. Of course, Sargent Shriver had been a native of West Virginia, so to speak, or of Huntington, and I was very fortunate to volunteer my services for recruiting for the Peace Corps.

YOUNG: You mean during Sargent Shriver's long residence in Huntington during the campaign?

HOUVOURAS: Right. He was well-known in southern West Virginia. When he was made director of the Peace Corps, why everyone wished him well and offered their support. I happened to offer him my support, and being very close to him during that period, he appointed me volunteer field representative without pay. I spoke to different schools. Rotary clubs, and so forth in behalf of the Peace Corps.

Everywhere I went teachers, doctors, professional people, all actually supported the theory of the Peace Corps although they didn't all feel that it would work. They just didn't think that there were enough dedicated young Americans to do this job. When they found out—that there were—they were even more behind it and approved.

YOUNG: You don't know what success you had, do you, in getting individual recruits?

HOUVOURAS: No—it's hard to measure although I know that in Wheeling College where I'd spoken maybe two and a half years ago, two of the young boys who were sophomores then graduated this year and they both went to the Peace Corps—now there was one other one too I think—three from Wheeling. That's the only place. . . . You really don't know how many because you speak to a lot of people and you get a lot of mail asking for information and so forth. It's hard to measure your effectiveness. But I think West Virginia has done well in the Peace Corps. I think they have their percentage in.

YOUNG: I think another thing that you might be interested in as a West Virginian is the fact that we have had a great many young people leave our state and this tends to make our population a little older, perhaps, per capita. This then might reflect some interest, or lack of interest, in the Kennedy medical proposals. Do you have any feelings on that—state reaction to any of the proposals of the Kennedy Administration with respect to medical aid, medical care, medical health?

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HOUVOURAS: Well, I feel definitely that had Medicare, under social security, been

put to a vote in the State of West Virginia it would have won unanimously. As a matter of fact, I think that Senator Randolph [Jennings Randolph] did himself a great deal of harm when after proposing, I think co-sponsoring the bill, he then voted against it for some unknown reason. I think this brought the wrath of a lot of Democrats and a lot of voters in West Virginia really down on Senator Randolph for his stand.

Yes, I think definitely that West Virginians, and particularly the older people and underprivileged, would have supported medical care under social security without reservations. The medical associations put out a tremendous propaganda campaign against it, even in your monthly doctor bills. They would send you a statement and then enclose some propaganda about socialized medicine and so forth.

Certainly West Virginia supported the civil rights program. I think West Virginians would have supported the tax cut that he proposed. I don't know very many programs that Senator Kennedy proposed that West Virginians would ever have fallen below 60% in favor of, 40% against.

YOUNG: In other words then, criticism of the Kennedy Administration was at a relatively low level you think during the President's tenure in office?

HOUVOURAS: Yes, I'd say very low.

YOUNG: If, then, you were to describe the President as a practicing politician, what factors did you notice in the West Virginia election that seemed to contribute to his victory?

HOUVOURAS: Well, he had a tremendous drive, tremendous energy; he seemed to have conviction of purpose, he had an appeal to young people, and he was very unique that he never spoke too long—always the right time, and he said the right thing at the right time. He had a genius for this. He didn't come to Huntington and speak about the coal problems because we were not directly affected by coal. When he came to Huntington he spoke on the problems affecting business and business people for which Huntington is predominant in the state of West Virginia.

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When he went to Logan County he spoke of coal by wire, of getting the mines back to work, adequate housing, adequate food for the unemployed. He said many times that West Virginian men wanted to work; they wanted the opportunity but they were denied this opportunity—it was not their fault. And when he came to the areas, he could pick out of his pocket what he was going to say. I've seen many times the advance copy of his speech which was good. He might use about two minutes of it and then go off the cuff to something that was directly of greater interest to that area.

Also, he had a tremendous memory for people. I'd not seen him for three months. Dave Fox and I went down to Lexington, Kentucky, with our wives. We happened to stay at the same hotel. We were invited to his room. He walked out of his bathroom and we were sitting in the reception hall there. He walked in and said, "My goodness, Andy and Dave, how are you?" "How's everything in Cabell County?" And I hadn't seen the gentleman in three months.

YOUNG: Was this before the general election?

HOUVOURAS: This was right during the general election. After he'd received the nomination. And he was so gracious. Now, this is where he varies with Bobby a little bit. If I were to make a mistake, or some other volunteer, and he felt that the emphasis should be put in another area, he'd very nicely say, "I think what you are doing is fine. Perhaps though what's more important, we should stress this". And he'd very nicely get you into the area where you belonged. Where with Robert—he'd say, "That's terrible. Who the hell thought of that?" And, "Let's get this thing off of here." Of course, he had a different role.

But Kennedy was a charmer and he had a radiant personality. That really made people want to work for him.

YOUNG: Did you have any contacts with President Kennedy after his Inauguration—any personal contacts?

HOUVOURAS: Yes—on just one occasion. In Charleston, West Virginia. Dave Fox and I (Dave and I were his co-chairmen) saw him during the West Virginia Centennial Celebration; he came to Charleston in the rain and we met him at the airport. He was greeting the people along the fence and we were standing in the back. He recognized the both of us. This was after three years. And he came over and shook hands with us and once again asked us how everything was, and wanted to know if we were coming over to the reception.

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Then one other time in Wheeling when he spoke in behalf of Bailey's [Cleveland M. Bailey] candidacy when Bailey was running for Congress. He went up to Wheeling and again it rained. I was standing out in the crowd and I knew that everyone had his hand out—but those that didn't have their hands out were the ones that Kennedy wanted to shake hands with. So I didn't put my hand out and he came by and he recognized me and he shook my hand. I said, "Andy Houvouras, Mr. President." And he said, "Did you journey all the way up here from Huntington?" I said, "Yes, sir, I did." He said, "And how many came with you?" And I told him about twenty or twenty-five. And he said, "Good grief! I'm going to tell Bob and Ted that I saw you. They certainly always like to remember the old campaigners."

And of course, you see, this makes you feel like a million dollars! This would make you ready to work again.

YOUNG: That was a very interesting election because as you remember, Congressman Bailey, of course, was defeated. Do you feel that President Kennedy at the time thought that his personal popularity might rub off on Congressman Bailey? Any analysis of that particular election?

HOUVOURAS: No, I don't believe so. I believe that President Kennedy—and, of course, the Kennedy forces—knew well that Bailey couldn't make it. The poll was just overwhelmingly in favor of his opponent. But I feel that he felt a definite responsibility or commitment and he fulfilled it.

YOUNG: Can you think of any other personal touches in which the President was involved?

HOUVOURAS: Well, immediately after the primary Senator Kennedy wrote personal letters to every member of Cabell County and, I'm certain, throughout the state of West Virginia—thanking them for the work they did in his behalf. My wife and I personally received a letter thanking us for everything that we had done and in the letter he said, "Knowing that it was a hardship for you to have to spend as many hours away from your family." We happened to have six children and I'm sure that Sarge Shriver had told him about that but, you see, once again the personal touch. Not just a, "Thank you, Andy. I appreciate it very much," but a personal note of warmth, bringing in the fact that even my wife helped and knowing that it was an extra hardship having taken the time away from the children.

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YOUNG: You mentioned the personal touch in one other way—that when the President came to this particular area he didn't talk about depressed areas but he talked about business conditions. One of the things that were interested in in these interviews is just this question. Can you think of any other way in which the President, so to speak, pitched his appeal to the needs of this particular area—and by particular I mean the immediate area—Huntington and Cabell County—other than appeals perhaps to the business community which you mentioned some time ago.

HOUVOURAS: Well, other than the fact that he didn't wait for the questions to be asked on the religious issue. He met those first head-on and got them completely out of the way. Then he asked for questions from the audience. Those questions were never rigged. Those questions were always genuinely asked by people who were there who showed great interest.

I might tell you one humorous aspect of a reception line. When he was here during a tea there was a young lady who came through the reception line with her hair all done up from the beauty parlor and she'd wrapped her scarf around it. She was so anxious to meet this man and she told him, "Senator, I'm awfully sorry—I'm embarrassed but I just stepped out of the beauty parlor with my hair still up. I wanted to come over and shake your hand and meet you and tell you that I'm for you." He looked at her and said, "You couldn't have been more charming any other way." Now, this young lady's name I forget. Let's call her Betty Smith. She walked out of the line. She waited. There were approximately six hundred people there. Then she waited to go through the line again—to shake his hand—she did. And when she got back there, he said, "Oh, Betty Smith. Nice to see you again."

YOUNG: He remembered her name...

HOUVOURAS: He remembered her name!

YOUNG: Although six hundred had gone through...

HOUVOURAS: Right.

YOUNG: In connection with this appeal to the business community, how did the President and his appeal balance the interests of the business community as to those, say, of organized labor in the area?

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HOUVOURAS: Well, it wasn't too hard to do here in Huntington because organized labor wasn't for John Kennedy, nor were they for Humphrey. They were divided pretty much. They really had no reason to support Humphrey because of his pro-labor stand—nor Kennedy; both their records were published, both their brochures, pamphlets were put out how Kennedy had voted labor-wise and how Humphrey had voted labor-wise. There wasn't very much difference. At the start there were a few of the union officials who were mostly for Humphrey. They were strictly neutralized real fast, particularly the garment workers by Mr. Dubinsky [David Dubinsky] who sent word down, "How can you be supporting Humphrey when I'm for Kennedy?" So they had made themselves some commitments to Humphrey for which I think they traded off and were neutralized so there wasn't really a labor or business division here in Cabell County. There may have been throughout the state, but I'm not aware of it.

YOUNG: What is the local garment industry?

HOUVOURAS: What is the local garment industry?

YOUNG: Yes.

HOUVOURAS: Let's see. Well, we have a lot of dress factories here, pants factories, a

few brassiere factories in Huntington.

YOUNG: Well, could you name specifically the union and the union leaders and the stands that they took during the primary?

HOUVOURAS: Well, there was...

YOUNG: Teamsters as opposed to steel workers.

HOUVOURAS: Well, the Teamsters were never for Kennedy. I don't even think they would be for him in a general election. The steelworkers were pretty much divided. There were a couple of leaders here. Cecil Dean was the leader of the Political Action Committee, I think, for the steel—for COPE—he was for Kennedy. I'd say members of the committee though, of the steelworkers, were for Senator Humphrey. Henry Glacier was the head of the garment workers here in West Virginia. He was pro-Humphrey but was quickly put on the track by Mr. Dubinsky to get on the bandwagon for Kennedy but which I don't believe he ever really did. I think he more or less divided it.

YOUNG: Well, how do you think Senator Humphrey was successful in sewing up this labor support?

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HOUVOURAS: I think strictly on his record and on the fact that they didn't think a Catholic could win. I don't believe that steel—the unions—thought that a Catholic could win in West Virginia. They were badly fooled.

YOUNG: In other words, their support of Senator Humphrey may have been a support by default rather than an active support?

HOUVOURAS: Right. I believe that Henry Glacier or Dean—I think it was Dean—said that if they had to vote because of record they'd have to vote for both men. They couldn't divide one man against the other. But I believe they felt that Humphrey would never be the nominee. But their strength lay in supporting a winner in the primary and they felt that Humphrey would win.

But you know Kennedy's advantage, prior to his coming to West Virginia, in a poll that was taken, was 60-40; sixty percent in support of Kennedy and forty for Humphrey. I think this was one of the reasons why Kennedy came to West Virginia—because this poll had showed that he was going to win by this margin. I think this was one of the major decisions why he came to West Virginia. Then that really fell. Once the decision was made, there was publicity on the Catholic issue in Wisconsin and it was played up on television and so forth and when he came into West Virginia I think he was behind. I don't think there was any doubt about it. But then the poll prevailed because that is what he won by—60-40.

YOUNG: Now, those were the final figures in the primary?

HOUVOURAS: Right.

YOUNG: How do you think the Democratic Party then behaved in the general election—did they then close ranks and support the Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

HOUVOURAS: No—no, they didn't. Not in Cabell County. No, sir. Not in Cabell County. In Cabell County they were afraid—as was the state. I can tell you that Governor Barron [William W. Barron] was scared; Jennings Randolph—Senator Randolph—actually quaked at the fact that the religious issue would take the Democratic Party as a whole down to defeat. He even said so in Washington. As a matter of fact, some of Senator Randolph's cohorts, including Senator Randolph, thought that Catholics should not play prominent parts in the campaign headquarters. We actually worked individually and independently of the Democratic Committee. You see, there was a volunteer organization in

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Huntington for Kennedy, Volunteers for Kennedy-Johnson, that was set up separate from the Democratic Party because we knew this feeling existed, that it was going to exist, but we closed ranks and used the same headquarters. In many cases they dropped the President in behalf of the local candidates because they were afraid he'd take them down to defeat.

YOUNG: Do you have any knowledge of President Kennedy's—or candidate Kennedy's reaction to this anti-Catholic propaganda that you've been talking about through the evening?

HOUVOURAS: Well, yes. One morning I picked Senator Kennedy up at the airport and was driving him back. Usually we had a group with us but this time we were alone. No—we weren't alone either. Roach [Neale Roach] from his headquarters was with him—I forget his first name. He was driving and I was in the back seat. Senator Kennedy was in the front seat. He turned around and said, "Andy, is there anything new here on the religious issue?" I said, "Yes. I think I've got one that you probably haven't heard." He said, "What's that?" And I said, "The local minister here in Huntington has told a member of his congregation that he doesn't fear you as President because of the fact that you are a Catholic or the influence the Catholic religion itself would bear upon you, but he was worried of the fact that you would popularize the Catholic faith as Eisenhower had popularized golf." And he turned around and said, "That man is a first class ass," or words similar to that. [Laughter]

YOUNG: Well, simply for the record, do you think that once the religious issue has been fought out in the hills of West Virginia that it will ever be fought out again, or is the issue dead now as a political issue?

HOUVOURAS: In West Virginia I feel it is a dead issue. I believe it will never play an important part in the State of West Virginia again.

YOUNG: It has been wrung through the wringer and it is finished....

HOUVOURAS: And thank God for that.

YOUNG: Well, before we conclude our interview, do you have any final generalizations about the Kennedy years from the early interest in 1959 to the President's death?

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HOUVOURAS: Of course, I'm a bit prejudiced. The time of the campaign was a time for greatness. When I looked in that man's eyes, I saw greatness. Personally, I felt he was a man of his time—for West Virginia and for the country. And as his term in office went along, I thought he was the man of his time for the world.

I think probably it was the greatest tragedy that has ever happened in our lifetime, and I feel we lost possibly the greatest leader that this country will have in many years to come.

YOUNG: Do you think that many West Virginians were aware of the way in which the President in Washington had tried to cultivate the arts and raise the stature of writers and scientists in the eyes of the nation? Did this receive much publicity in West Virginia? Were West Virginians generally aware of this?

HOUVOURAS: Yes, I think so. I think they felt that he brought a great amount of dignity into the White House, and, at the same time, I think that West Virginians were genuinely fond of his family, and his children, and the way they conducted their lives. If the election were held again he'd carry West Virginia ninety percent. That is my personal opinion, of course. He was conceived in Boston but he was politically born in West Virginia. [Laughter]

YOUNG: There is one thing that we haven't talked about that has turned up in a number of these interviews and that is the effectiveness of the role of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., and the tie-in between the New Frontier and, obviously, the New Deal. Do you have any observations on that point?

HOUVOURAS: I don't believe that Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. could have helped Kennedy, for example, in Cabell County, nor could he have helped



him in Kanawha County; but he definitely was a great help in the coal areas. There is no doubt about this. The name Roosevelt is the fourth person of the blessed trinity—if there's such a thing—in the coal areas. A lot of them told him, "Now, Franklin, we liked your old man and we like you, but we can't buy that man because he's a Catholic." And, of course, Franklin went on to explain that this would have had nothing to do with it, that if his father were alive, this was the man that he would choose. And, of course, Franklin—and I don't think it hurt anyone—called Humphrey a draft dodger in West Virginia. You know that happened?

YOUNG: Yes.

HOUVOURAS: Of course, it happened in Wisconsin too. Of course, the veterans organizations throughout West Virginia were for Kennedy. I think this added a great deal to the appeal too.

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YOUNG: You mentioned a minute ago that you didn't think that FDR, Jr. would have done much good in Cabell or Kanawha County. Would you explain that in a little more detail?

HOUVOURAS: Well, Roosevelt wouldn't be too popular in Cabell County or Kanawha County—what I think they call the independent or silk stocking counties. Business wise, I don't believe that Franklin Roosevelt would have had the appeal in business that John Kennedy would have. You see, although a lot of people knew or felt that John Kennedy was pro-labor, they knew that he came from a very, very conservative father. They didn't feel that all this liberalism could have been rubbed off on Jack himself. But the Roosevelt name just didn't mean too much down here in this area. Franklin, Jr. and the rest of the family had not enjoyed a great deal of success in political life or business life after their father's tenure in office—or after his death. The Kennedy family had, I think, more appeal than the Roosevelt family would have had except in the coal fields where, as I say, the name Roosevelt was magic.

YOUNG: Is this term—silk stocking—one that is reserved for just Democrats or may Republicans be silk stocking Republicans too?

HOUVOURAS: Well, it mostly refers to just Democrats. I've never heard too much about the silk stocking wards in the Republican Party.

YOUNG: In other words, the term would imply the more conservative Democrats, is that correct?

HOUVOURAS: Right the more conservative. Those Democrats that vote Republican. [Laughter] And shouldn't, of course.

YOUNG: You did mention some time ago the general approval in this area of the civil rights program of the Kennedy Administration. You didn't speak specifically on the subject of the Negro in the primary campaign or in the general election. Do you have any reflections on that?

HOUVOURAS: Well, yes. The support we had from the Negroes in West Virginia in the primary was very, very good and particularly after the Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] incident. In the primary Sargent Shriver really coordinated the Negro effort throughout the State of West Virginia. You know he was very active in the interracial council in Chicago. I think he was actually president of it. But the Democratic Negroes gave very generous support to Senator Kennedy in the primary. Then in the general election I feel that the predominant registration of the Negro in West Virginia, particularly in Cabell County, was

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Republican. But after the Martin Luther King incident they voted Democratic. We published the statement of Martin Luther King. He said that although he did not intend to support Senator Kennedy, anyone that had Kennedy's courage would now get his vote. So we had that published in the paper and we also passed it out in the community.

But in the meantime prior to this, we had received a publication from the United Auto Workers, 5,000 copies, which showed a picture of the Statue of Liberty on one side and the Ku Klux Klan on the other side and the caption underneath read "What do you want—Liberty or Bigotry?" But I was told by Bob McDonough, the state chairman, to sit on it and we finally destroyed it and didn't pass them out. I don't know why. I wish we had used them now and I think Bob does too.

YOUNG: That takes me back to something you mentioned earlier that we might clear up. You mentioned that the Huntington papers did publish the Martin Luther King statement—is that correct?

HOUVOURAS: That's correct.

YOUNG: But that earlier they would not allow you to publish the true oath of the Knights of Columbus. What grounds did the local newspapers give for refusing publication?

HOUVOURAS: Well, although they made the statement that they felt that this was the true oath of the Knights of Columbus that we were giving them for publication (it was the true oath), it was a controversial subject; they wouldn't print the bogus oath and therefore they would not print the real oath.

YOUNG: In other words, they would not print controversy?

HOUVOURAS: Controversy—that's correct.

YOUNG: Now, can you say a word about the management and the ownership of the papers? Indicate their names, the relationship of the—two papers, I believe.

HOUVOURAS: Yes. There are two papers under one publishing company. The morning paper, predominately Republican, was under the directorship of Bill Birke [William D. Birke]. The evening paper—the Democratic paper of much less circulation—was under the directorship of Walker Long. Although

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Walker and Bill were not asked to come in on this—we actually went to the editors of the papers—they both agreed that it should not be published. It is a monopoly paper. It's the only paper in Huntington and they can set their own policy—which they did.

YOUNG: Did you do any paid advertising on the television or radio stations in connection with these items—either the Negro problem or the Knights of Columbus?

HOUVOURAS: No, we did not.

YOUNG: Well, then, in other words, when the two papers both refused advertising space, you did not then spend the money on other media?

HOUVOURAS: No, we did not. Once again on the religious issue—it is hard to look back and actually believe what happened. People whom I had associated with for many, many years—I had been in their homes and they had been in my home—voiced derogatory remarks; would not let their children play with my children because I was active in behalf of Senator Kennedy.

As a matter of fact, one of our very best neighbors told my little girl that Catholics should vote for Catholics and Protestants should vote for Protestants. People who I am associated with indirectly in business, in other corporations, said that you must remember that he is a Catholic candidate, not the Democratic candidate.

It was awfully hard for me to believe that we could be friends. “Now, Andy, we’re friends but we shouldn’t let the fact that we can’t support a Catholic interfere with our friendship. This has nothing to do with you and ourselves and our families.” And, of course, I couldn’t agree to this. I mean I just couldn’t buy this and I told them quite frankly that if they actually felt that way about Senator Kennedy who is a Catholic but the Democratic candidate—not the Catholic candidate—if they felt that way about him, they had to feel that way about me and they said, no, they didn’t see it this way. It had nothing to do with our friendship although I took it very personally. Maybe I shouldn’t have, but I did.

YOUNG: In other words, what they were trying to say to you was “Look, we’re not attacking you because you happen to be a member of the Catholic

Church but you are a bad guy because you are supporting a Catholic presidential candidate.” Is that correct?

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HOUVOURAS: Correct. That’s how they were trying to explain it but I couldn’t accept it. I lost some friends. Matter of fact, one time I had a black list—I’d made a list where my wife and I wouldn’t go into certain restaurants and we wouldn’t buy from certain stores, and we weren’t to purchase anything from this man, and so forth. It was quite an extensive list, believe me.

YOUNG: In other words, this became a very personal thing as well as a political and professional matter.

HOUVOURAS: After a while it did. I supported Senator Kennedy because I thought he was the best man, because I thought he was dynamic, because he was the best man for our country. But after awhile I found myself feeling this way: even if he wasn’t the best man, after all that had taken place, I would have supported him because he was a Catholic.

YOUNG: Well, do you feel that these wounds have healed in the last four years?

HOUVOURAS: Oh, yes—very definitely so. Because they came around to the fact that the Nation made the best choice. He was a great man. They didn’t see this greatness. They were all very apologetic—“I didn’t vote for him, but if I had a chance to I would now.” I forgave some of them—not all of them.

YOUNG: Did you get any particular reaction at the time of the President’s assassination from Protestant friends?

HOUVOURAS: Oh, yes—very much so. As a matter of fact, I had people call me saying—we feel terrible, we know it’s killing you. And they attended a lot of the services—no anti reaction at all. A terrible thing. I had people who had worked for him tell me that they got sick over it. They all came to realize that Kennedy was really a great man.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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