

Thomas R. Pattison Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 1/15/1966
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Biographical Note

Thomas R. Pattison was a delegate to the 1960 Democratic National Convention from Wisconsin. This interview focuses on the 1960 primary and general elections in Wisconsin, anti-Catholic sentiment in Wisconsin, and the 1960 Democratic National Convention, among other topics.

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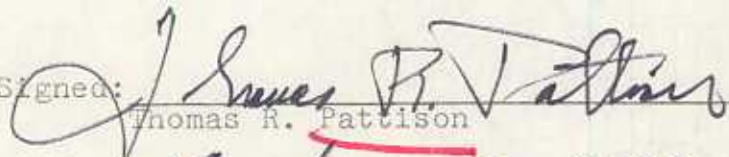
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Oral History Interview

with

Mr. THOMAS R. PATTISON

January 15, 1966

Lorraine Hotel, Madison
Wisconsin

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Let's start somewhere in the late 50's when the Kennedy-Humphrey race began to shape up, and what you were doing, and the side you decided to support.

PATTISON: Well, actually I had run for public office in 1956, on the Democratic ticket when Democrats were very hard to find. I was a farmer, and it was almost a losing battle politically. But with some conviction, we felt that there ought to be at least nominal opposition, and I found that supporters were pretty meager. But I became acquainted with a number of people who were active in the Democratic Party. One of them was Frank Nikolay. Frank Nikolay is the majority leader in the Wisconsin assembly at the present time. We became quite close friends. So at the time that the primary was in its very earliest stages, when we barely knew who was committed to run for President, (it was at the rumor stage still) I was working at a church dinner in the kitchen

at Durand, Wisconsin, when Frank Nikolay called me and said, "I want to ask you if you will support Hubert Humphrey for the Presidency." I had known Hubert Humphrey, because he had been mayor of Minneapolis. He had been assisting us as Democrats in the ninth district, where we had Lester Johnson, a Democrat, as a Congressman, and very little else. And his election was kind of a freak, as you recall, that occurred early in the Eisenhower Administration. So, when I committed myself at that time, I had to live with it from then on. Then when President Kennedy who, because he was Irish, and because he was Catholic, and because he had a nice appearance and represented a kind of a new look as far as politicians were concerned, did come out, I had some personal doubts as to where I ought to be. But by this time I had kind of listed the things that I thought were important. One of them was knowledge of the candidate; second, the issues that he was most concerned about which were parallel with the ones that I thought were important, which would be of help to the Midwest and an objective program as far as farmers were concerned. Of all the things that President Kennedy stood for, I think that his viewpoints as far as agriculture were concerned were probably his weakest field. He did correct this in time by getting assistance from strong people, But I felt that it was very weak in the beginning. So, when the campaign got under way, we supported Hubert Humphrey, in this district which is primarily Scandinavian with some

Germans. I felt that, since I was running for the State Senate, it would be better for me to be allied with a man who was not a Catholic, in order to prove to the public that I wasn't a religious bigot or partisan. Well, as the campaign went on, I began to see more effectively that there were people who didn't share this viewpoint; that I was surrounded by a great many people who were for Humphrey purely because they were opposed to a Catholic running for office. As such, I began to get in the mail box all kinds of left-wing literature. I began to get things telling about the Pope and Catholics in general, and a great deal of it was published in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our mail box was filled with this sort of thing. They no doubt wanted me to run on the ticket as a delegate, because I was a Catholic, and this didn't delude me any, because we had a caucus for the ninth district in Eau Claire, and I was put on the ticket without asking for it, but was selected at that point, and was nominated without any question. Shortly after this, they asked for our support in the community and, when Humphrey came through, why the Kennedy delegates--because there weren't too many of them--they came to our meetings and we went to theirs. Because we were few in numbers, we wanted to put up as good a showing as we could. We had more or less decided who was going to support who, and our feelings were more that we wanted to see a Democrat elected as President. We knew very little about Stuart Symington, something about Lyndon Johnson, and we didn't think that (Adlai E.) Stevenson could win. So with these things in mind, the question

became a matter of big interest in the territory between Humphrey and Kennedy, especially since a Catholic was running for President. Well, one of the things that happened after this, of course, was the fact that when they felt that there was some weakening, they would ask me to go into Catholic communities to help the Humphrey organization. This I did on a number of occasions. I also asked a Catholic priest in our community to come and listen to Hubert Humphrey, which he did. And we were made aware of the fact that Humphrey didn't have too much money to carry on this kind of a campaign, but he did have more than he had later, because his support was quite strong at this point in the Minneapolis area.

MORRISSEY: Let me ask you a question here. Did you find that many of these Catholics you talked to were already predisposed towards Kennedy?

PATTISON: Yes, to quite an extent, and they also didn't bring me in until they thought there was a question of trying to do something about it, to try to convince these people to move the other way. And I think that most of these people were not Democrats as such. They were probably Catholics who were interested in this because they wanted to see what was going to happen. There was a great deal of doubt in their minds that this could actually be achieved, but they thought it was a good try. But actually in numbers in the ninth district it was not possible to do this job with just Democrats. And I might point out that we ran into Presidential campaigners many times. They criss-crossed this district more than they ever did the United States afterwards.

We had more exposure to Presidential candidates than anyone will ever see again, I'm sure, because we had almost a criss-crossing of these people. Every week or ten days you'd know that they were in the territory going through. They worked very hard. I recall, of course, meeting them in the Durand High School, and one of the doctor's wives was very concerned with what President Kennedy thought about Medicare as it is today, I guess, but this is the thing that she was concerned about. And he was very forthright. I remember that at this meeting in the school President Kennedy was asked some questions on agriculture, and our judgment was that he was not too strong in the statements that he made at that time, at least the public was not satisfied with his viewpoint, although they were charmed by him and thought that he exhibited a great deal of determination and poise. I've heard many conservatives and Republican people who were quite delighted with his personality and interested that he would be willing to come into a community like this. After the primary election, we were elected; that is, the slate of Humphrey delegates in the ninth district, and they were elected in the tenth, and they were elected in the second, and I think in the third. I think these were the four that he carried out of ten. And of course these were the rural, thinly populated areas which were in the West and closer to Minnesota and closer to Humphrey's home territory. And I guess it kind of reminds us of the run that old (Robert) Bob La Follette made for the Presidency years ago. He carried this Midwest liberalized

area. Probably the heart of liberalism up in our district was the ninth. And Lester Johnson, a Democrat, was Congressman there. But he had been elected on a fluke some years before by running against a Catholic whom the Republicans had nominated from the ninth district, and had won. So my wife and I had always suspected that he felt that bigotry was one of the strongest political weapons that you could use. And he proceeded in various ways to exhibit this to us underneath, but never actually admitting to it. He courted us diligently, because we were Catholics and were willing to become Democrats openly, when there were a lot of people who didn't think it was too popular to be a Democrat.

MORRISSEY: Did he endorse one candidate or the other in that primary?

PATTISON: Well, he was for Humphrey. He was not even willing to put Kennedy's bumper sticker on his car after Kennedy was nominated for the Presidency. And his personal campaign man, who was a railroad man from Maltoona, Wisconsin, diligently stacked up Kennedy campaign material in the garage, so that it wouldn't be tacked on cars, because they thought that you could lose by being too close to this man.

MORRISSEY: Did Johnson lose in 1960?

PATTISON: No, he didn't. No, he won. He won by habit. Because he's a notoriously poor public speaker. It's one of the things that's wrong with politics, is the fact that if a name becomes fairly well known, there's always a tendency to reelect a man, because the public assumes that if he's in office, he must be all right,

until you can find some good reason for kicking him out. Well anyway, the interesting part to me is what happened after the election. Then they went on to West Virginia. I didn't go there, but some of the people from Wisconsin did go. And Kennedy, of course, won a great victory out there. And we were uninstructed delegates, because Humphrey had withdrawn. He said, "You people can support whomever you want." He gave us no instructions. So at this point before going to the convention, I said that I was an elected Humphrey delegate, and because I was that, the first ballot that I cast at the convention would be for Hubert Humphrey, whether he was a candidate or whether he wasn't. I would be fulfilling my obligation. But the second ballot that I would cast would be for John F. Kennedy. And one of the hardest things that I ever did was to stick to this, because I felt that the public would say to me when I came back, they'd say, "You forgot and you ran under a wrong guise," and so it was up to me to try to prove that I was willing to stick with something, because I felt that if I went into the legislature, I would have to do the same sort of thing, and not vascillate in my ideas.

MORRISSEY: Did many emissaries from the Kennedy camp try to unstick you from that commitment?

PATTISON: Oh, I'll tell you there were other people that tried to unstick me too.

MORRISSEY: Representing whom?

PATTISON: Oh, Lyndon Johnson's people were fairly effective. The fact is

maybe I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit. I'd like to tell you about one thing that happened before that, and that was when John Kennedy and Rose Kennedy asked us to come to a breakfast which was held at the Eau Claire Hotel, to which they had the delegates from the ninth district at breakfast. And he flew into the airport, and Pat Lucey, who is from this town, whom you've probably talked to and know very well, and Peter Dugal, who was working for the Kennedy organization, they said that they wanted to see me downstairs and talk to me a little bit in the car before this luncheon started. So, I had gone there with a fairly open mind. When I got down there and got in the car to talk to Pete, Pat happened to come along there and he climbed right in the car with me and it looked like it was quite--nothing prearranged, or anything like that--but the next thing I knew I was on my way to the airport. And I said, "Where are we going?" They said, "We're going out to meet the President." Well, I said, "Hell, I'm supposed to be back upstairs in the room with the rest of the delegates." They just said, "No, you're going along with us. We're going to see him come in and then you'll see him back down here." Well, when we got out there, we drove up, and the President walked right straight out of the airport and right into the car and got in with Pat and Pete and me, and the idea was that this kind of exposure would lead me to commit myself to him, and then when we got into the meeting, I would do this. Well, I felt that he was weak in agriculture, and I felt I wanted to help him in some way. So when we got back to

the meeting we sat down and we had this breakfast, and he threw himself open to questions. I asked him what I had thought were three leading questions. One of them was about whether he believed that some kind of management should be exhibited in the production of agricultural products. He said that he did. This satisfied most of us. I mean, we felt that this was one thing that he ought to do. I asked him if he believed that the farm programs as such should be continued, or whether they should be dropped or eliminated. Well, this was the contrast. He believed that they ought to be. We should have the programs. And I've forgotten what the third one was now. It's a ways back. I could go back and refresh my memory. But the three questions that I asked him convinced most of the people that were there, and I think that this is one of the reasons why the tenth district as a group, before this thing was over, decided to support Kennedy, and this is what he had come there for. I did not change. I didn't commit myself to anyone. But after this was over, I went to a newspaperman who was a friend of mine, and I very carefully told him that I would support Kennedy on the second ballot, but that I would honor my commitment through the election on the first ballot. Well, everything from there on....I mean, I think this is the most interesting phase of what occurred at that time. In addition to that there was this conversation between the President and me in the car going down, in which I told him about my running for office, and the fact that I was in a predominantly Protestant, predominantly Norwegian area in which I thought

that maybe an S-O-N on the end of my name might be of some help running there. They might think I was Scandinavian or Danish. And the President told me--Senator Kennedy at that time--told me that he was sure that no one with the name of Kennedy could ever delude anyone into voting for him on that basis, and I agreed with him, of course. Another thing that happened was that on one occasion I went into Eau Claire, and Mrs. (John F.) Kennedy came in exhausted and tired and talking about this matter, and had been standing and was half frozen to death and wondered what kind of a country this was. So I guess that this has been published many times in the paper. Well, from these points then there was all kinds of information that came from Stuart Symington. There were various functions in this state in which Lyndon Johnson who....Is it India Edwards? Wasn't she the woman who supported him? And at one meeting that I was at, I was much impressed by what she had to say and how she stood for Lyndon Johnson. And I thought that this was so far out, so much of a contrast, that I was amazed that she would even come here and try to do it. And I was quite impressed by her courage, and I was quite impressed by what she had to say. It was felt up here that Lyndon Johnson was a man who you could easily oppose, because he was a long ways away. So you didn't have to worry about him too much. And his viewpoint contrasted quite a bit with what ours would be up here. I mean it was the South versus the North, and the

East versus the West. And he had a kind of a conservative image. Well, when we got to Los Angeles, we were lodged in an old hotel down there, and we found out immediately that everyone was concerned about what we said and what we did, and where we went. So the newspaper people from Wisconsin were publishing things that we said on the bus on the way out. Little remarks that you thought that you were making to your wife or to a friend would show up strangely in the newspaper. And you'd be having a beer, and you'd find that one of the Senators who started in as a friend to discuss something with you, you'd find out pretty quick--as Senator (William) Proxmire was--spent three hours trying to persuade me to vote for Kennedy. The result of going over all this thing was that I finally said, "By God, Bill, you have run for office before, and you know that when you make a commitment you have got to face the public with it after awhile. And I'm telling you just as honestly as I know how, that this is the only reason, and this is why I'm doing it." He said, "That's good enough for me, I'll leave you alone." Well, then we went around primarily to go to some of the other meetings and rallies that were held around for various people. I remember we were going up to visit the Minnesota delegation at the hotel. My wife and I came down and got into a cab, and a gentleman stepped up just as we got in, and said, "Please be my guest. Where are you going?" And we told him, and he climbed right in and said, "I just happen to be going to this hotel too." And he said, "We just figured this would be one occasion which we could tell

you a little bit about Lyndon Johnson." Well, there wasn't much chance to escape, and we were kind of delighted. It was quite an interesting way of doing things anyway. So, we thought, well, the man that has skill enough to do this has got a pretty good thing going for him. So we had to listen, and I think it was a man who was in the Texas State Government--but he did a pretty good job. Well, one of the high points was to meet--who was the Speaker of the House who is now dead?

MORRISSEY: Sam Rayburn.

PATTISON: Sam Rayburn, Speaker Sam Rayburn. And I met a lot of the Southerners whom I had always thought were quite terrible people politically, and I found them quite charming and quite delightful. I got to see labor leaders. I ran into Walter Reuther one evening, and his wife, whom I think is quite a heroic individual. And I found out that he was one of the strong, powerful forces for Kennedy in the State of Wisconsin, through Harvey Kitzman and through Pat Lucey. Of course, I knew some of this background from my being on the State Administrative Committee. Pat Lucey in our state had set up a three or four-man advisory committee to help him as State Chairman. One man represented labor, which was Harvey Kitzman, and one man represented agriculture, which was myself, and he had a couple of men who represented business variously. And so through this relationship I got to hear and know quite a bit about what labor was doing. And this wasn't generally known, I don't think, because Kitzman is quite

a skillful man himself, quite a powerful man. Well, there was a man by the name of (Sam) Rizzo from Racine or Kenosha, I'm not sure which. But I at first quite thoroughly detested him, because he was such a drastic individual. We had a meeting in which we were going to pick out the alternates for the convention in Los Angeles, and he wouldn't give any quarter at all. He felt that if you were going to have delegates, the State Administrative Committee, who are in power you see, and which is elected, was peopled by our Humphrey people. And because we had the power, he wasn't willing to surrender, and he was going to fill all the alternate positions with just people who were Humphrey delegates. Well, to me, I didn't think that this was fair play. I felt that if a Kennedy man could not go, that he ought to be succeeded by a man who had that kind of sympathy. And I was quite disillusioned in this kind of power play, and I had thoroughly detested Sam Rizzo for it. But he was very skillful, and I can tell you he'd make a terrible adversary in any kind of a meeting, which was evidenced in his use of parliamentary procedure. When we got into Los Angeles, of course there were various friends of mine who were Kennedy people. And of course, they worked on us. And even I remember when we walked over to the hall the night of the voting, we recalled what had happened the night before. There had been times in which the Kennedy organization had gone up and then it had gone down, and they had played on us at all times

saying, well, this is going to fail, so we need more help now. We need your help in order to get this done. Well, we kind of took this with a grain of salt, and just thought we'd move along and watch what happened. Then our Congressman, Lester Johnson, from the ninth district, was supporting Stevenson. He thought this was a good, neutral position that he could get into. So, we began to get some telephone calls from back in the ninth district. Two or three people called me, and finally about the third call came in, a Mrs. (Margaret) Segerstrom, a very nice old Norwegian lady, I think, that's a regular saint. She's got a crippled son, and she's dedicated as can be. And she said, "Tom, you better think about voting for Stevenson. We don't think that you can win this Kennedy thing, and our folks back here in the ninth district think this is the thing that you ought to do." I always liked her, but it kind of stunk as far as I was concerned, a little bit. So before I got off the telephone, my wife was right outside, in the bathroom or someplace like that in the hotel room, and I said, "Marge, come in here. I want you to talk to Margaret Segerstrom and find out who has put her up to this." Well you know, she got going with women talk a little bit, and finally tripped Margaret up into saying that Lester Johnson had called her and told her to call and swing us away from voting for Kennedy. We confronted him with this downstairs, and created a little scene which made us a little bit hot, and even shook my determination to vote as I had committed myself. I was then thinking of swinging to

vote for Kennedy first go around. Well, when I got into it, the chairman of the group--when we got down to voting finally, he got up and tried to make it unanimous from the whole state organization, and it got so difficult to do what I wanted to do, and what I had said that I would do, that I turned my back on the chairman in order not to be wavered or to change my position. Well, the vote went through, and Wisconsin, of course, wasn't enough to bring it across, but it did occur before it was over with. Well, then we turned around and made it unanimous. But of course I guess it was kind of a hollow victory as far as that was concerned. And I came back and lost the election in the district anyway. So it really didn't do me very much good, but I always felt that politically the fact that I had told them that I would do something, and then didn't get a chance to do it, I felt kind of as if I'd been cheated in a way, because I could have, in the second round. But of course, maybe they'd have been in a weaker position. I don't know.

MORRISSEY: Did they ever mention to you that on a second vote they were apprehensive that they might lose rather than gain?

PATTISON: Yes, but I think that this is part of the sort of thing that's used to sell. I think that there's also the possibility that they might gain instead of lose the second time around, too. I think that if you try to sell a first round, this is the way to sell it, but I think if you don't quite make it, that you'd better go to the second time, or you don't have another time to go. And there's always this about it--that if you are the strongest contender at the time, the tendency is that you'll gain more strength

the second time around, and I had made a commitment, so I know that they'd add one more under that circumstance anyway, because I had told them I would.

MORRISSEY: I would imagine that they were especially interested in persuading you to change your vote because Wisconsin comes so far down alphabetically in the role call. Did they emphasize this?

PATTISON: Oh yes. I'll tell you I had a lot of things emphasized to me night and day. The fact is I have been to a convention since then, and I don't think that there was any comparison. I don't know whether it was because it was the first one that I went to, but I wasn't stirred at all. The air was electric. There was almost the feeling that this was going to be historical. You felt that in all these people that were there. There was no question in my mind that we were going to win this election. I didn't know who we were going to nominate, but I knew we would win it finally. I was charmed by Stuart Symington. I thought he was one of the most delightful people I ever saw. But I thought that what we were doing at that time was--we were picking this man Kennedy because we had finally come of age; we had finally proven; and the thing that hurt me was the fact that I wasn't a part of doing that. And I felt kind of cheated and robbed by the fact that I had been made a Humphrey delegate, and I had to defend that side. But that's part of the queer, goofy things that happen in politics. You were simply trying to prove a point. I don't know whether I proved it to myself. I don't know whether the public was even aware of that. But you

know enough about it, the way they drag these things out a long time afterward. And they even got to the point where they afterwards had assumed that I was a Kennedy delegate. Pat Lucey knew it. He said, "If we don't have enough good Kennedy people for positions, we'll use Humphrey people." Well, this tended to eliminate and smooth out some of the difficulties that there were, and this was part of his case. And I was a close friend of his, and had felt that he was the ablest state chairman that we had ever had, of which I was sure. He brought in organization, aggressiveness, and a lot of things that we needed. And of course, we always said that Pat Lucey was the only guy that had a key to the back door of the White House, which I guess was true. He could call the President on a moment's notice. They were close friends and, since then, one of the interesting things that happened to me was that I was on this job here in town, and I don't know how it happened, but I happened to get in touch with Pat, and he said, "Do you know that there's going to be--out at the Governor's mansion, when John Reynolds was Governor--there's going to be a little reception for about sixty or seventy people out there for (Edward M.) Ted Kennedy and Sarge Shriver?" He said, "Why don't you come out?" I said, "Pat, I haven't been invited." He said, "You just have been." I said, "Who's going to be there?" He said, "A lot of people you won't know." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "These are mostly university professors and people who are interested in this memorial

to the pediatric contribution that the Kennedy family made out here at the university. They're having this little reception. We'll have a drink or two, and a chance to chat." Well, I went out there, and there were, he was right, there were a lot of people I didn't know. But the thing that impressed me that night was that Teddy Kennedy was the warmest, and I felt, very charming and personable. The fact is, he seemed to me to have more immediate contact than John Kennedy had, and you felt closer to him than you ever did to Bob Kennedy. And he seemed to carry the family name a little easier than anyone else I had known in the Kennedy group. And this was two days before the assassination. So all the time, after the assassination occurred--I was in the office, and I drove my car out next to the window, and I couldn't believe it at first. We opened the window, turned our car radios on and, of course, emotions were high--I kept seeing this little scene where Sarge Shriver and Ted Kennedy were in the Governor's mansion. Well, I guess that's about all that I can give you, unless there are some things that you'd like to pick my brains on a little bit.

MORRISSEY: Yes. Could you tell me about how the news of Lyndon Johnson's selection for the Vice Presidency was received by the Wisconsin delegation?

PATTISON: Oh, this was a wild affair. There had been rumors about this. Some of us thought, well, this looks like a good tactic, because it will pick off, will balance, the East with the West. But we

had some people that had seriously doubted it. And it had been published in the Capital Times (Madison) and Bill Proxmire, who was Senator in the state, had taken off at great length against the position that Lyndon Johnson had taken as far as off-shore wells and educational contributions, which is where this money apparently was to go. And so when he was selected, all of us went under the stands, and the labor people from Milwaukee were very indignant that this had happened. And Bill Proxmire was there. And one of the labor people got up. Now, this is where I could find out who it was, but I can't recall the name right now, and he said, "How in the hell can you turn around in mid-air the way you're doing right now?" Well, there was a lot of yelling and a lot of noise. It was a wild affair. In fact, there wasn't too much sense or reason to it. I mean everybody was milling around in there. The fact is that the President, or nominee, had accepted him, and we were going to have to go along or not. Well, there wasn't much you could do about it, but it was held under the stands in a very dark kind of place in a caucus room. And I can remember it was a terrible scene, and the lighting wasn't too good. Various people got up on soap boxes, and it was very emotional. It kind of reminded you of people kind of tearing their coats up a little bit, you know. I mean they just were trying to decide what had happened to him, because here was a man that they thought was a kind of moderate liberal who had won and who was going to be our fair-haired boy, a better looking candidate than we'd probably ever had. And

now you were going to try to associate him with a man who was very close to the Eisenhower Administration, who was not a moderate; he was almost a conservative Democrat. And these extreme liberals that were up in here were fighting this tooth and nail. Now these were people who were Stevenson people. They were the liberal guts of the party, more or less. They were making the most noise. Bill Proxmire, I'll say this, said, "If this is who John Kennedy wants to run with him, in spite of all that I've said, I'll do this." Now he wasn't making noise. It was the people who were trying to make it hot for him, because they still felt that if there were some way to back off from Lyndon Johnson, it ought to be done. But Bill Proxmire didn't waver. He took it and walked in, and he took the heat that he had to face. Our other man, who was Governor at the time, Senator Nelson, whom I admire greatly, had a terrific time deciding what position he would take. He was very reluctantly supporting Kennedy, because--not so much that he didn't like the man, but he was afraid that this thing would not work out right, and he was being advised by a lot of people that this is the wrong man. And we also had some people who walked out. I don't know if I should name names, but there were three or four who walked out, and said, "If you nominate this Catholic, you've lost the election." There were some others who hated me for taking the position I did of not voting the first time around. But I said I've made a commitment, and this is what I'm going to do. Is there any other thing I could....

MORRISSEY: Did the Humphrey people and the Kennedy people get back together to coordinate the campaign against Nixon up in your part of the state?

PATTISON: I'd say that there's some question in my mind. There were still some doubtful people even in our party. They didn't make any noise about it, but they didn't openly or very strongly support Kennedy. They supported (Lester) Johnson. I mean they supported Gaylord Nelson for Governor. They supported Johnson for Congressman. And the strange part of it is my vote for state senator as a Catholic, and John Kennedy's for President, was almost identical in the ninth congressional district. And I lost, John Kennedy lost, and Gaylord Nelson, a Protestant, won, and Lester Johnson, a Protestant won. So I guess we didn't fool anybody, did we? That's just the way it worked.

MORRISSEY: Back between the West Virginia primary and the Los Angeles convention, did you hear much talk about pushing Hubert Humphrey for the Vice-Presidential nomination?

PATTISON: No, I don't recall too much of that.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever talk to Humphrey about your commitment to vote for him on the first ballot?

PATTISON: No, I didn't. It wasn't a question with him. I mean it was just a question....I wasn't so concerned about Humphrey at that point. I was just concerned about my personal running for office. I felt that the responsibility lay with me. It wasn't a question....If I had run on that man's ticket, I felt that the public would expect something for it, and that was that they had only done one thing; they had said you vote for Hubert Humphrey. And I felt that this is what I had to do. When I had discharged that obligation, they I felt that I would have a choice. Now if I hadn't been

running for office, I would have made the decision on a personal basis. I felt that I had to exhibit something, and that was why I did it that way. I was sure that John Kennedy was the man that we ought to nominate before I went to the convention.

MORRISSEY: You mentioned a phone call from Mrs. Segerstrom about voting for Stevenson. Did you get many other contacts from Stevensonians about voting for him?

PATTISON: Not so many, no. I thought that was a pretty weak program out there. I thought this was pretty much done by people who just didn't want to support Kennedy, and they were trying to find some place to go, so they went back to the candidate that had lost twice. They would rather put themselves in that position, apparently the bigoted position was so strong that they had to go to some neutral spot, and this was going to be it.

MORRISSEY: The reason I ask these questions is because there were rumors after the West Virginia primary that there might be a stop-Kennedy gang-up by the other candidates, and I was wondering if you felt any intonations of this.

PATTISON: Yes, I think so. I don't know how to express it, but it was just in little things that occurred--oh, maybe newspaper stories that you'd get, or conversations, or political meetings. And I guess I'm quite a ways from it now to be able to relate to you just exactly what they were. There were a lot of them that thought that you were just a juggernaut headed for destruction. Because Catholics....and this is what delighted the public--they thought,

well, finally somebody's got guts enough to try it. And you kind of felt, well, now politics has finally kind of come of age, because somebody's finally going to stand up here and say, well, we're going to do it, we're going to try it. Even if we lost, we think it's worth it. And this is what delighted me, and this is what I thought was really worth while. And I was carrying on this personal conflict inside myself, and trying to say, "Well, what are you going to do about this thing? You've gotten yourself into such a cul de sac here that you can't even strike a blow?" But I did; I carried bumper stickers for Kennedy every day through my campaign. I put them on my car, and I supported him for President as loud as I could after the nomination. I said the choice had been made. I had some old ladies come up to me in various places and chew me out because they said we heard you did, and I said, "You weren't there." I said, "I voted the first time as I told you I would," and I said, "If there's any doubt in your mind, you go and find out." So, I don't know. I guess they decided that I had swung away on him, so I lost.

MORRISSEY: I've heard people say that the Kennedy campaign in Wisconsin was extremely well organized, but the opposite was true of the Humphrey campaign. Would you agree with that?

PATTISON: I think that they had some very able people. I think that they came in and covered the....I'll tell you where they picked up their strongest support was in areas in which the Democrats were not strong.

MORRISSEY: You mean this was the Kennedy...?

PATTISON: Yes, it appears to me that what happened was that the Democratic strongholds in the second district, of which Madison was one of them, Humphrey carried. The ninth district where you had an incumbent Democrat, Humphrey carried; and I guess the third, and the tenth was one in which you had a very liberal man who was (Alvin E.) O'Konski you see at that time. He's so liberal that he could be considered not a Republican, but a Democrat. Where did they win? Well, (Clement) Zablocki, that's a predominantly Polish-Catholic section of Milwaukee. Surely he carried that one. Zablocki supported him down there. And the city of Milwaukee is Democratic, and it sent for him. But it's quite a ways from Humphrey, and I guess there's quite a few German Catholics up there. Well, then we went up in Fox River Valley where no Democrats ever won anything, and that area they won up through there. There must have been quite a little cross-over and non-partisan Catholics to support a Catholic candidate in some of these outlying areas.

MORRISSEY: I'm surprised the Kennedys campaigned so much in the ninth congressional district, since religiously and geographically and agriculturally it's much more akin to Humphrey to begin with. I'm surprised they just didn't write it off.

PATTISON: Well, if they could have gone in and convinced Lester Johnson, Who's the congressman there, to support them...but they knew that there was a Democratic vote there, and I think that they

felt that maybe they could get through and pick up a lot of this vote, and they were a little doubtful about how many people would vote, but it really didn't make much difference. It was just a question of how many delegates you got, wasn't it? So, I question whether that was money well spent myself. Another part of it is that if Frank Nikolay hadn't gotten to me that night, I don't think I would have been a Humphrey delegate. I don't think I would have supported him. I think if they had been out here just a little bit earlier.... In the very first phases of it I wasn't sure that Kennedy was even well enough known. I'd known that he had been a possibility, but I thought that was kind of a fluke at that other convention at which he nearly became Vice Presidential candidate.

MORRISSEY: It's hard to recover the atmosphere just before a primary day almost six years ago, but did you think at that time that Kennedy might carry your ninth district?

PATTISON: I doubted it. Every Lutheran minister and every Protestant church pretty much was opposing us. And of course, I had been a recipient of an awful lot of anti-Kennedy literature that had come right into my mail box, because I was a Humphrey delegate. It wasn't a question of political issues, it was a religious deal.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever hear Humphrey comment on this?

PATTISON: I remember, yes. He was opposed to it, actually. He felt personally as a candidate that he had stature enough that this

sort of thing hadn't ought to be important. I remember I went to St. Thomas College one year in St. Paul. Why, when we went to a bean feed for Humphrey, over at Wausau, half the people that were there from St. Paul were from St. Thomas College--Catholics--and this is the kind of showing that they wanted to have. This woman who was from Red Wing, Minnesota, she was ambassador to....

MORRISSEY: Eugenie Anderson?

PATTISON: Yes, Eugenie Anderson came over. I took her to an Austrian German Catholic country church right in my home community, and we had all the kids from the schools and some adults there to try to have Eugenie Anderson speak for Hubert Humphrey. I don't think we convinced much of anybody, because they had made up their mind already. But at that time she was just terribly embarrassed by the fact that some religious hate literature had come out and had more or less assumed that all the people who were Humphrey supporters were anti-Catholic and were opposing Kennedy for no other reason. She did her very best there, and I know that this woman was quite emotional about the whole thing and terribly concerned, and we felt so too. She, of course, was looking to us because we were Catholics, and we were not doubting Humphrey's position. She didn't have to convince us. But they were doing a pretty good job.

MORRISSEY: What is your home town in the ninth district?

PATTISON: Durand, Wisconsin. I live on a farm about four miles east of Durand. And I was on the county board there, and was on the board of directors of the bank, and I was on the St. Paul Cen-

tral Livestock Cooperative, so I had gotten pretty well known throughout the whole territory. And then I got involved in politics, because my father was a Progressive, you see. He was Highway Commissioner under Phil LaFollette some years before. And even though there weren't any Democrats much up in our territory, there hadn't been anybody elected to the County office in our county since before the Civil War as a Democrat. And so it wasn't even considered smart to be a Democrat in our county. I mean you just needed to decide between the different Republican candidates. My wife had come from Minnesota, and her people were Democrats under Roosevelt. And my Dad always thought a lot of Roosevelt, and a few of our Irish people had kind of thought that the Democratic Party was our party naturally. So my wife and I-- she was a graduate of Minnesota and I was of Wisconsin--and I said, "You know, the time to make a move in politics is when your party's out of power." I said, "If you want to build something, now's the time to build it, because we can start from here." And I said, "Everybody will know what we believe." And I said, "We don't want to be just camp followers when the party gets in, and then jump on." I said, "Let's start in from now." Well, that's the way we started on the thing, and I'm real pleased to relate that we finally picked out a young fellow that had about ten or twelve kids and got him elected to the Circuit Court. And then we picked out a widow that had another ten kids, her husband died, and we got her elected, I think it was County Treasurer or something, so in our home community at least, a nucleus started to work. And that area now has quite a few Democrats. And we

kind of feel that we can take a little credit for the fact that we took a position when people looked at us as if they wondered why we would do such a thing? Later, they came to respect our position, after we elected Nelson for governor and Kennedy for president. And what used to be considered a liability became an asset.

MORRISSEY: Did the Kennedy women come into your city?

PATTISON: Oh, yes.

MORRISSEY: How effective were they?

PATTISON: Oh, they were wonderful. People were quite amazed that they came in, and we had a cousin of ours who was going to be a Kennedy supporter. His wife is a notoriously stingy woman, and so they were going to have a kind of coffee for Kennedy. Well, we had a coffee for Mrs. Humphrey at our home, and we had Republican women and everybody else out there. As I remember, we had about 65 or 70 women inside our home, and that's quite a crowd. Mrs. Humphrey was quite delighted, because that was one of the biggest ones that they had. But Mrs. Jordan and her husband, they had this coffee party, and they had Mrs. (Stephen) Smith and Mrs. (Sargent) Shriver, I guess. I've forgotten whom else. I didn't go to it, of course. It was for women anyway. But my wife came back and she was highly indignant. She said that this woman had passed a tray around to collect money for the coffee, and she thought the idea was to ask people to come in and serve them coffee, and she'd gone to it. Of course, we were Humphrey supporters, but because of our meager numbers, we were helping one another all

the time out there. That was this big front that we were telling you about to begin with. And we were just trying to make sure that our side of the street won a little bit, got a little notice. Well, we were getting plenty of notice all right. Everybody was watching every move we made. But the women were quite interesting. We thought that they were quite helpful. We don't know what effect they had. And people were quite charmed by Mrs. (John F.) Kennedy. They thought that she was not really interested in politics, though. And I guess she wasn't.

MORRISSEY: I'm intrigued by the fact that you were a Humphrey delegate to the 1960 Convention, but when the Kennedy Administration came into office you were appointed the head of the Farmers Home Administration here in Wisconsin. Is there a story behind that?

PATTISON: Well, as I told you, I was for Pat Lucey who was one of the strongest Kennedy supporters. Well, I was also a strong supporter of Pat Lucey's for various things, and I'm having a hell of a time with that now. I hate to admit this, but the same thing is still going on now. There is a standoff between what was at that time that group, and now you have Bill Proxmire and Pat Lucey, and he's running as a candidate for governor today. And Dave Carley is going to be the representative of the other group. This thing is still going on. This is the division that occurs inside our party. And I shouldn't even be opening my head about this now. Maybe you ought to bury this part of the tape, I don't know. But after this occurred, Pat had his executive committee, which

was Harvey Kitzman, Vel Phillips, the colored woman from Milwaukee, Marge Benson, Vice Chairman, Pat himself, and myself representing agriculture, and we met in the most ungodly places. We met in Pat's home. We met up on the north side of Milwaukee. And what's his name, the Jewish fellow from Wisconsin? who was....

MORRISSEY: A labor leader, Rabinowitz?

PATTISON: Yes, David Rabinowitz, whom I got to know and whom I liked and who was a terrific fund raiser. Dave was a very dedicated, positive fellow, and he was a Kennedy man. Well, I was a close friend of all these people at that time. So I remember that one of the first things that we did. We had the patronage that was to be handled, and they said, what are we going to do? Well, I remember the one speech that I made, it was right after this happened, it was in Pat's home. And I said, "Pat," I said, "the first thing that we ought to do is make damned sure that the people that we select are qualified and the kind of people that you can be proud of." Then I said, "secondly, we want to make sure that they're damned good Democrats." I said, "If we can use the criteria, and if we can assure ourselves of quality," I said, "this will be our first defense." And then I said, "We can go on and defend the political part." Well, we used this to some extent. And I mean when people would come in like, well, I can't even recall what the first appointments were, but I remember there was the one where Marge Benson was made in charge of the Port Authority. Well, there was no doubt in our mind but what Marge was honest, and would do a good job. I

remember some others that came up like U.S. Marshall, U.S. Attorney, and various things. One of the fellows we selected is now elected judge in the state here. Well, I guess this is kind of an endorsement of the fact that we picked a pretty fair man. The U.S. Marshall is still active. Various other people that we picked out, I think, are still in business. And I guess that they've been pretty fair and pretty honest, or they would have been kicked out. Well, this thing came up for this job. There was the A.S.C.S. (Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service) state committee. Well, (Wallace) Wally Mehlberg was the chairman of the Farmers for Kennedy Organization. Well, Bob Kennedy just picked him off and put him in this job. This didn't even go through the Administrative Committee, I mean through our executive party committee. Well, this didn't bother us. We felt this was fine. Then he put a couple of other fellows on the executive assembly. This other job, State Director of the Farmers Home Administration was one in which they had a fellow who was in it, and they couldn't seem to get him out.

MORRISSEY: Was he a Republican?

PATTISON: Yes. But they finally moved him into Washington, and I don't know what he did, but anyway he resigned, he quit, and this vacancy occurred. Well, then the executive committee endorsed me for this job, because there weren't too many of us who were in agriculture that had stuck our neck out very far, contributed very much money or run for office two or three times on the ticket. And this is, I think maybe why I was selected for it.

And I had, I guess I had, kind of convinced the people during the campaign that I admired Kennedy as much as anyone else. So I don't know. They pin license plates on people, but I don't know how long they last. I guess that is a misfortune that they have in politics, and that is, we tend to try to pigeon-hole people, and I don't think that you can do that. I don't think we always react the same way in every situation. And I guess that there are still a lot of things to be done in this country, probably new issues that we ought to be facing like improving the insurance regulations, and setting up some yardsticks for honesty, and maybe getting ourselves out of a situation where we have to collect money from people, from the same people year after year. Maybe it's a good thing the Kennedys did have some money, because they probably never would have gotten it if they had to collect it. I think that they had some highly competent people, and one thing they had is an organized, planned kind of attack. And I think that the fact that they had a fellow like Lucey was a great asset to them. And I still think that there are a lot of intellectuals who might be great idealists, but they're damn poor organizers. And I think that you've got to go back to an architect who can maybe dream up a good building, but like Frank Lloyd Wright, you don't want to build the kind that the water leaks through the first day you get it finished, you see. I mean, it's got to have some sensible sections in it too.

MORRISSEY: Well, I think I've run out of questions. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW