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Donovan, an assistant to Senator Muskie of Maine and member of the U.S. Department of Labor under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, discusses Maine politics, Secretaries of Labor Goldberg and Wirtz, and Kennedy administration labor policy, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

John C. Donovan

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John C. Donovan

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Oral History Interview

With

John C. Donovan

June 19, 1978
Brunswick, Maine

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Okay. Why don't we begin with your first contact with Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. I know that in your letter to me you said you first had a letter from him in early fifties.

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: Could you tell me what that was about and how you first met him?

DONOVAN: Okay. I think it was 1953 and, would he have been a senator by 1953?

STERN: Yeah. He was elected in '52.

DONOVAN: Yeah, okay, yeah. He was the, he was the new, young senator from New England. New England's new, young senator. And I was running a course at Bates [College] which was called the Citizenship Laboratory which had a small foundation supporting it. And this course featured bringing practitioners into the classroom to teach, and occasionally a journalist, but Kennedy was an obvious person to invite to this. The thing had been going for three or four semesters and was successful. And....

STERN: Had his senate victory over Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] generated a lot of interest here in Maine?

DONOVAN: Yeah. A lot of our kids come from the greater Boston area, probably, as at this institution, probably 40 or 50 percent of the students were in fact his constituents. So yeah there was a lot of interest. Or at least it seemed that way to me and I think there was. And, so we invited him to come and speak in this course at a certain date--I think it was in November or something like that; it was in the early fall--and, I got a letter back, which surprised me, in which he accepted. And this was for a

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date certain. And, either the night before--I think it was almost the night before, or the afternoon before--I got a call from his office in Boston, Francis X. Morrissey on the phone, "Doctor Donovan," you know, that accent and everything, saying that the Senator had had a flare-up of malaria and that he was taken to his bed and that he wouldn't be able to come. And I'm pretty sure this was the evening before and he was supposed to be here at eleven o'clock the next morning or whatever.

STERN: Yeah.

DONOVAN: And I said "Holy Christ," you know. And, because nobody had ever done this and I had had all kinds of people and if they said "yes," they showed up. And, I guess that I was.... I guess my irritation was pretty pronounced over the telephone. And so finally, Francis X. said "Well, actually he's in the next room here in bed and, you know, you could talk to him yourself if you wanted to about it." So I said, "I sure would." So, the Senator came on the phone and he was all charm and apologies but said that he really was under the weather and that he hated to do this and all this kind of stuff. And then he said "You know, could I come another time?" And I said, "Sure if we could work out a date." Well, as I recall, he was flying to Canada, to Montreal for some inter-parliamentary thing within a week and it would have been possible for him to stop back on a Friday afternoon but unfortunately I didn't have these kids on a Friday afternoon. And so I said, "No, I'm sorry, that wouldn't work." And he said, "Well, then, I guess we will just have to cancel out on this one and you can invite me again another year." And I said, "Yeah, sure, fine," and hung up. And, he made me feel a little better about it than the conversation with Francis X.

But then, within a day or two what made me feel very much better was from Hyannisport on Senate stationary, I still have it, a handwritten note from Senator Kennedy himself, his apologies to me and to the faculty and the students and he really would come some time, and so on. Which was, you know, on both sides of the little Senate stationary, a very nice thing. And I can't quite read the post date on that but I think it says November, what it was, whatever it was, 1953. I'm pretty sure it was in fifty-three. So that was my first meeting. And, do you want to go to the second one?

STERN: Did he ever come?

DONOVAN: No, but that's an interesting story, I think. In December of '56 I became the Democratic state chairman. When I wrote and invited him I was just a young assistant professor with no obvious political role. But by late '56 I was the chairman of this, of the state Democratic organization. Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] was governor and so on. And so, that next spring, for our big....

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first big fund-raising effort we put on a J.J. dinner [Thomas Jefferson-Andrew Jackson] in May up at the Samoset, big, old--it's gone now--resort hotel in Rockland and invited Senator Kennedy to come as a speaker. And, with Muskie as a.... involvement. And he agreed to come. And, of course, by this time, it was pretty clear, at least to the sophisticated, that his ambitions transcend New England. And...

STERN: You mean that this was after the vice presidential campaign in '56?

DONOVAN: Sure. Then there were some conversations between the State Chairman, me and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] on the phone as to what he would talk about which included Passamaquoddy. I guess you know what that is.

STERN: Right, right.

DONOVAN: And, then he flew up for the meeting in a little chartered plane and Bob Huse [Robert M. Huse], who was the executive secretary of the party, and I as state chairman, met him at the little, tiny airport in Rockland, Maine. And he got off the plane and it was Ted Sorensen and J.F.K.

STERN: This was your first actual meeting with him, when you had spoken with him. Right.

DONOVAN: This was my first actual meeting. Right. But this is.... The point is that is.... He came off the plane and I said, "I'm John Donovan and this is Bob Huse." We shook hands. Immediately he said, "Gee," he said, "I'm sorry I didn't make it to Bates when you invited me four years ago and I hope you'll invite me again."

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: So the card file system was working.

STERN: Amazing.

DONOVAN: Which we'll come back to later, again with Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]. But, so, you know, then he went to the J.J. dinner and, this will suggest a little bit of something about him too, I think. Ah, as state chairman actually I had, you know, the master of ceremonies role up at the big head table and by this time the Democrats were fairly prosperous and so there were a lot of people who wanted.... In fact, the National Committeeman and woman were mad at me because they didn't get, end up at the head table. But there just wasn't room, you know, because

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Frank Coffin [Frank M. Coffin] was in Congress and Muskie was senator, or was he, no, he was governor at this....

STERN: Governor. Right.

DONOVAN: Yeah, right. And, we just had too many celebrities, plus the star of the evening, the glamorous Senator. And, my wife, who would be sitting on one side and Jane Muskie [Jane Gray Muskie] on the other. He was between the two ladies, and he did a good job of keeping the conversation going with both of them. But, talking to my wife he was talking to a professor's wife, right? And, so he got talking about books, plus she reads a lot anyway, and she writes too. But, in any event, she got around to mentioning *Profiles in Courage* and he said to my wife, the young professor's wife, that he was prouder of winning the Pulitzer Prize for that than he was of any of his political accomplishments. And then they had a nice chat because it turned out that her father had gone to Boston Latin [Boston Latin School] at about the same time as his father, roughly the same generation. Her father was, majored in the classics, and I don't know whether Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] did or not. But anyway, there was this some.... And my wife was born and brought up in India and he had just been to India so they had a big conversation about that.

But, well, the part that interested me was his emphasis on the.... This great pride in his literary and academic accomplishments.

STERN: Senator Muskie, in his interview for the Library said that he didn't think that Kennedy was very effective in his address that day.

DONOVAN: He wasn't.

STERN: That it was a poor address.

DONOVAN: It was not one of Sorensen's great efforts. When I talked to Sorensen on the phone and he said, "We'll put in something about Passamaquoddy," which was not that live an issue actually at that point. I mean, it was sort of a traditional thing and you would expect any political hack to maybe emphasize that. But then I said, "What else are you going to talk about?" And I remember Sorensen's king of

lack of interest over the phone and cynicism was a little much for me because I was still a young, naive professor. He said, "Oh, I guess we'll say 'Hooray for the Democrats and to hell with the Republicans.'" Well, it wasn't a great literary effort and he read it in a sort of pedestrian fashion and it... You know, it wasn't a Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] effort or... The next year Sam Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn] came up because of his affection for Frank Coffin.

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STERN: Really!

DONOVAN: Because of his affection for Frank Coffin, not because of Muskie. And, Frank was one of his young fair-haired boys in the Congress and it was one of the rare times Rayburn would do this sort of thing. And I had a...

STERN: That's the first I've ever heard of Rayburn making that kind of thing up in New England...

DONOVAN: That's what May Craig [Elizabeth May Craig] said. She used to cover Washington for the Portland papers.... She was astonished that he came. And I rode with him after it was over the next day all the way from Rockland to the Portland airport alone in the governor's Cadillac because everybody else was having a political meeting and nobody else wanted to leave the meeting to ride back with the speaker. And I said, you know, "I'd be delighted to ride back with him." So I had about an hour and three-quarters conversation with Rayburn about everything. Just fascinating. But, what were we talking about?

STERN: About Kennedy's address in '57 at the J.J. dinner.

DONOVAN: Yeah, it was, it was not a spell binder.... But nevertheless he attracted a crowd and, you know, we sold our five hundred tickets and he was glamorous and well received but the address, but.... You know, many Democrats, I don't think, cared that much whether the address was that exciting or not.

STERN: Was it already apparent to Maine Democrats that he would seek the nomination in 1960?

DONOVAN: No, not, I don't think perhaps to the rank and file, even the party activists, but I think it was pretty clear to people who read the papers as closely as, let's say, Muskie would read them or as I would read them that, you know, I was aware that he was traveling around the country and taking all these J.J. dinners and so on. I don't think, it certainly wasn't, I don't think in retrospect it would have been clear to me that he was driving for 1960 especially.

STERN: Yes. Now in '58...

DONOVAN: But he was building his.... What.... His political fences and meeting people at the state level. That kind of thing that White [Theodore H. White] makes so much of in the first chapter or two of...

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STERN: *The Making of the President.*

DONOVAN: Yeah, the 1960 book, yeah.

STERN: Ah, now in '58, Muskie was elected to the Senate.

DONOVAN: Yeah.

STERN: And you had quite a campaign up here and you were the state.... You were the campaign chairman as I remember.

DONOVAN: I resigned as state chairman in late May or June thinking to spend a summer with my wife and young family at Harpswell where I would prefer

to have been, and, I had only been out of that job for about a week when I got a phone call from His Eminence, the Governor saying he'd like me to be his campaign manager. Campaigns ran effectively from the Fourth of July to Labor Day so it would have been feasible even though I was teaching. And I said, "Oh, gosh, you know," because I had put tremendous hours into this unpaying job for a year and a half and had been away a lot of nights and weekends and so forth. Plus, I was tired. And, so, you know, I guess I was flattered but on the other hand.... Because I didn't know Muskie that well on a personal basis. I'd seen him a lot politically but we weren't terribly close. So it was kind of nice that he asked me but I really did want to spend the time at Harpswell. Plus my wife was pregnant, and the baby was due in July, in late July. Our second daughter. So I used that as my big argument. I said, "Gee," you know, "I'm flattered and I'd like to, but my wife is pregnant and we are going to have a baby in late July. And it just wouldn't be a very good time for me to be away." And he said, "Oh, well, that's interesting," he said, "Jane is"--this was his first announcement that his wife was about to have another baby a little bit later in September or something, which wasn't generally known at the time. So he didn't accept this as being an overwhelmingly powerful argument.... And then when some of his other agents began to work on me, they said that.... In those days nobody who did anything in Maine politics got paid for it. You know, state chairmen didn't get paid or anything. I guess I got my travel in the car, eight cents a mile or something. Ah, but they said that one of his fund raisers, Dick McMahon [Richard McMahon] said that, if I'd do it, they would see that there was enough money to pay for a high school kid or somebody to stay with my wife and so she wouldn't be so burdened by kids and so forth. Anyway, they softened me up and I took the job and I was glad that I did, you know, I had a hell of a lot of fun from the Fourth of July until Labor Day. And...

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STERN: Did Kennedy campaign at all for Muskie in '58 Do you recall that at all?

DONOVAN: I remember him coming up even earlier than that in '54. When he was on crutches and in very bad pain. This was before the back operation. And it wasn't Muskie who got him here, it was Paul Fullam who died way before his time. Paul was a Harvard graduate and might have been a contemporary somehow of Kennedy's. I'm not clear on that but Paul was kind of elegant guy who was professor of history at Colby [Colby College, Waterville, Maine.] And took on this thankless task of running against Margaret Chase Smith when she was unbeatable. And Paul was a Stevensonian [Adlai E. Stevenson], very much caught up in the Stevensonian movement and would even be a classical Stevensonian. Very eloquent guy. And Fullam prevailed upon the young senator to come up and join in one of our TV programs.... In '54....

STERN: This was the race for governor.

DONOVAN: Muskie was running for governor and Paul Fullam was the candidate for the Senate, who ran quite well against Margaret. Held her down to some respectable percentage. It was the smallest margin that she had ever won by. I don't know whether she got 54 percent of the vote or whatever it was. And Fullam really scored quite heavily although he lost. And, so for one of the final, final telecasts--and there weren't that many; this was one of the first campaigns in Maine when television was used, it may have been the first and Maine Democrats didn't, nor did anyone else, didn't really know how to use it--they had a big finale and I don't know whether Kennedy came up for that one or whether it was the week before, but anyway, he was on with Fullam in a fifteen-minute talk about the New England economy and so on. And I can't remember why I was in the studio on this occasion because I was not state chairman, but I was active in helping Frank Coffin who was state chairman. And, as a kind of helpful egghead. In any event, I was in the studio in Portland. And I guess Muskie was coming on next, maybe they had back-to-back TV things, and I was in the outer part of the studio when Kennedy came out on crutches and you could see that the guy was in very great pain. He got on the phone and talked to Jean Gannett Williams (became Jean Gannett Hawley in 1970) who's the publisher of the big series of papers here in Maine. Apparently they were some sort of personal, social friends. He wanted to make this phone call and he sat on the edge of the thing, and then he got on the crutches and went down and got on the elevator and you could see that the guy was really suffering. So he came up even earlier than '58. And I didn't think he came up. I don't think he came up for a television thing. But I'm sure that he was, you know, lending sort of moral support.

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STERN: Right. Of course, in '58 he had his own race in Massachusetts and it wasn't, it wasn't one he expected to lose. It was very clear that he needed

a

big victory to push him for sixty.

DONOVAN: That's right. That's right. Right. And I'm not sure that Muskie at that point would have necessarily thought it would be good tactics to bring in somebody from Massachusetts to sort of endorse him. You know, he sort of had to be on his own, I think, in taking on Payne [Frederick G. Payne].

STERN: Right. Independent. Sure. Muskie.

DONOVAN: Muskie was in no real trouble. [Laughter] As I'm sure you know.

STERN: Muskie mentions that there was a dinner at the Calumet Club in Augusta in November of '59, at which Kennedy made a speech and at which he was a very big hit. Do you have any recollection of that?

DONOVAN: Yes. Yes. I was there. Yes, I do. Yeah. They.... I came up. I was working for Muskie in Washington and we all came up for that. And the place was jammed. And he was a very big hit on this occasion. John Bailey [John Moran Bailey] came with him and.... Who else? I don't remember. And then there was a big meeting, which I didn't attend.

STERN: Ah! I was going to ask you if you had attended that meeting.

DONOVAN: I heard about it but I didn't attend it. At the Blaine House. I sure heard about it from everybody.

STERN: He was trying to get an endorsement.

DONOVAN: Yes. Right, right, right. And there was a sequel to that in which I was invited to have lunch with Sorensen back in Washington. And, of course, by this time I knew Sorensen passably well. And, well, we'll tell this part of the story and then come back to when Sorensen finally gave the talk at Bates for Kennedy, which is what happened.

STERN: Now really.

DONOVAN: Yes. [Laughter] Sometime after, sometime subsequent to this famous meeting when they tried

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to get the endorsement, and there was a problem inside the Maine Democratic party which was for real. There was some Symington [(William) Stuart

Symington] strength there. And there isn't any question about that. And so Muskie had to handle it in his own way and, as it turned out, he handled it very damn well.

STERN: Was there any Humphrey strength?

DONOVAN: No, I don't think so. But there were some people who definitely were quite strongly favoring Symington. And it included some people in the trade unions. And there wasn't total enthusiasm even among people who later supported Kennedy, I would think, at this point. I don't think they were that sure of his candidacy or where he was going and so forth. But, in any event, some time after this Sorensen called up and said, "Let's have lunch." And, as usual, instead of going to a hotel or restaurant, to eat in some civilized fashion, we ate in the Senate cafeteria where I never ate otherwise, and, you know, we had a sandwich and a Coke in this spartan style of Ted's. Plus, you know, he didn't want to waste any time. And, he really came on very strong and said that they were very unhappy about this inability of Maine Democrats to convert this and so on and so on. And, if Muskie had any idea in his head that if Symington became the, or if someone like Symington became the candidate and that therefore Muskie might have the chance of being in the vice president's spot, that they would certainly have strength enough to see that that didn't happen, etc., etc. Really cold....

STERN: That's very interesting.

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah, really. No, nothing subtle about it or anything, you know. And, which left a bad taste in my mouth, to say the least. And I don't think I ever said anything to Muskie about it. I just thought it would irritate the hell out of him. What good would it do, you know? But anyway. But, I don't think, I don't think they necessarily understood the.... I think they thought that Muskie was playing games, and I'm absolutely certain he wasn't. And, as a matter of fact...

STERN: You mean in terms of the vice presidential nomination?

DONOVAN: Yes, and also playing games with Kennedy, trying to get something out of him or whatever, you know. I don't think.... Muskie's not like that. And, he probably should have been. But the truth of the matter was that the two people at the party who already wanted Kennedy to be the nominee more than anybody else were Muskie and Frank

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Coffin. Muskie had to have this position of inviting everybody in, you know, because of his own position in the party. But Frank Coffin and Muskie had already, I think, decided that Kennedy was by far the best candidate that could possibly come along that year. But, anyway, Ted didn't see it this way.

STERN: Now, how about 1960? I know the Maine Democrats lost everything in '60 including you lost your race for Congress that you had gained in '58. And Kennedy, of course, didn't carry the state either.

DONOVAN: That's right.

STERN: Do you have any insight as to exactly why that happened?

DONOVAN: Sure. Sure. No mystery at all. There was a Republican vote that year like nobody's ever seen before. And, Kennedy lost by a total of seven percentage points to Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon]. That's a very large margin in Maine, by the standards of the day.

STERN: You mean by about what, by about fifty-three and a half? Something like that?

DONOVAN: I think it was, fifty-four.

STERN: Fifty-four, forty-seven. Something like that.

DONOVAN: Yes. I think so. Yes. I think it was fifty-four. Yes. Exactly. And, Frank Coffin as governor got the best vote any Democrat had ever had. And picked up four percentage points. And still managed to lose. Everybody thought later in retrospect that the simplistic view was that he hadn't run a good campaign. He had run a sensational campaign! But he, you know, he got hurt by the Kennedy thing. Same thing happened in my district. I picked up four percentage points but you can't pick up seven. I got the best vote anybody had ever had, or ever heard of. And my opponent, Stan Tupper [Stanley R. Tupper] fell something like five thousand votes behind the head of his ticket. Five thousand people took the trouble not to vote for him and still he won. So.... And, the reason for it is that they came out from under the rocks. There was a big anti-Catholic vote against Kennedy...

STERN: Ah, so you agree. That was Senator Muskie's analysis also.

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The redneck, Bible belt crowd came out from.... Nobody even knows where they came from. People came to the polls they had never

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even seen before.

STERN: That's fascinating, considering that Muskie...

DONOVAN: But we didn't know it was happening.

STERN: It hadn't happened to Muskie, when he, when he had run in either in '54 or
'58 and he was...

DONOVAN: Well, when Muskie ran in '54 I don't think they knew he was Catholic. And, I don't know how much difference it would have made but it might have made a difference. And, by the time he ran in '56 he had scored so heavily image-wise, as they say these days.

STERN: Yes.

DONOVAN: The golden boy. Ah, and he had been a good governor and he was attractive and had an attractive family and nobody could touch him I don't think in '56. So he had kind of overcome, you know, he had broken the sound barrier sort of by accident, I think. I think it was quite a surprise to people when they discovered that we had elected a Roman Catholic governor. But the Kennedy thing was very well advertised and we heard later that there was quite a, you know, underground kind of campaign by fundamentalist types.

STERN: You see that generally, of course, one associates this sort of thing in a campaign with the South. Rather than....

DONOVAN: I know it. I know it. I know it. So I campaigned like the devil all over the place and so did Frank Coffin. And, people told us once in a while that this
was happening but we didn't really believe it. And, once he and I were in Farmington together, which is out where some of this would happen, and the Baptist minister in the church met us on the street and, you know, we were just shaking hands with everybody. And it was pretty clear that this guy was a bigot. He had identified, in fact, both Coffin and me as being Catholic and in fact neither one of us is. But.... And he might think I was with an Irish name, might very well think. But Coffin is about as Yankee a name as you can possibly get.

STERN: Yes.

DONOVAN: In fact, I said to him, I said, "Good heavens." He said, "I'm not going to vote for the Democrats because you're all Catholic." And I said, "What do you..."--I tend to be combative, you know and Frank's not. And I said, "What are you talking about? Come back here." And he said, "Well, Kennedy," and he said, "Obviously you're

Catholic.” And I said, “It turns out I’m not, but anyway.” And I said, “Why do you think Coffin’s Catholic?” And he said, “Well, you know, all Democrats are Catholic.” And I said, “He’s a deacon in the Baptist church, you idiot. You know, it’s the same church you’re in.”

STERN: [Laughter] What was his response?

DONOVAN: But we thought this was--I don’t remember--but we thought this was an isolated, idiotic example. But.... Now I’m not so sure.

STERN: Now that’s essentially what Muskie’s analysis of it was too.

DONOVAN: Well, Muskie might be more sensitive on the issue, but....

STERN: Now by this time you were already on Muskie’s staff? You had joined him as I say...

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. I resigned for the general election campaign. I stayed on the staff during the primary. There was a primary race. And when I won the primary, then I resigned. So I was without income for six months I guess. The better part of it.

STERN: And then you went back to Muskie’s staff?

DONOVAN: Yes. Right.

STERN: Right. Did you have a, had you had any contact at all with Kennedy as a senator in terms of his performance on, for example, the Labor Bill in ‘59 and things of that sort?

DONOVAN: I spent.... I didn’t have any real contact with him. I had a fair amount of contact with the staff, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] quite a bit. And, Sorensen occasionally, but not especially on issues, as I recall. But Feldman was on the floor a lot. He was sort of the legislative man and.... At least on some matters he was there. And, I was administrative assistant and Muskie was a freshman senator and wasn’t that involved because Lyndon [Lyndon Baines Johnson] had put him in the corner and given him lousy assignments and so on. So, and we were from a small state. And of course I was interested in the process. I was there to learn. So I spent a disproportionate amount of time on the floor because I was interested. Particularly the first year or two. I was interested in it and seeing what was going on and so on and so on. And so I saw Kennedy in the cloakroom and in action. I got to know people like Mike Feldman but I

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didn’t, no, I didn’t have any close contact with him.

STERN: Yes.

DONOVAN: There was one contact in, it must have been early '60 I think it was. It must have been early 1960. It was in the cloakroom. Lyndon, as you know,

was running the place at night at lot. And, I remember this was in the evening, maybe six, seven, eight o'clock. And, Kennedy was on the floor for some reason and Sorensen came into the cloakroom. And you didn't see Sorensen in the cloakroom a great deal. At least I never did. And, he came over and sat down next to me in the cloakroom and wanted to talk about the internal situation in the Democratic party because by this time Sorensen had it clear that there was Symington strength and who was it. And that was what the conversation was about. And I told him that one of the problems they had was Louis Jalbert [Louis C. Jalbert], who was the famous machine politician--he's still around, still in the legislature. Just got elected for the.... I guess this is his thirty-second year or something. Old time, machine type, Last hurrah politician from Lewiston. Pretty cynical. And, Louis, for whatever reasons, was for Symington. Could be because Louis would usually go where he thought there was money. Like he'd supported Harriman [William Averell Harriman] once. And showed up at the national convention and took some money from Harriman's people. I happen to know from Jim Sundquist [James L. Sundquist]. But it may have been that he'd heard that Symington had big bucks so maybe the Kennedys would buy him off. Who knows what Louis is up to. So I tried to explain this to Ted and he said, "Well, is there anything we can do about Jalbert?" And I said, "Well, you could try buying him off but then he doesn't stay bought, in my opinion. Somebody else might turn around and buy him out. So the only thing I could think of is throw him in the Androscoggin River, which flows through Lewiston. And Ted said, "I don't think we're ready for that yet." Then, he said, "Well, would you tell the boss what you've just told me?" I said, "Sure, why not" And so he said, "Well, he'll be through in a minute." And so, the Senator came off the floor and he said, "I've been talking with John Donovan here about the situation in Maine and he'll explain it, his view of it to you." So I went over essentially the same story with him. And they were thinking of putting a man into Maine as their own organizer. And they wondered if I thought this would be.... What did I think of this idea. I said I thought it was a lousy idea. Ah, that Maine people were not very anxious to have people from the outside organizing their politics or anything else for them. That they particularly have a sensitivity about Massachusetts and Massachusetts politicians and to put someone with an Irish name or whatever from Massachusetts up here to organize the Kennedy thing I didn't think would be very good tactics. And

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that, well, was there any way they could do it without it being very visible? I said I don't know how the hell you could do it without somebody knowing about it, if the guy is going to do anything. And, what astonished me was that Senator Kennedy--because I had been brought up in the legend that the boys knew nothing about the family business--said, "Well, let's see," he said. "There's an old movie house in downtown Augusta, which used to be part of my father's chain," he said. "We still own that, I believe." And he said, "And, as I recall,

there's an office upstairs in the back of that. And we could put a man up there and, you know, nobody.... We wouldn't have to have a sign on the door.

STERN: That's great.

DONOVAN: He didn't know the details of the business but he knew where the movie house was. And.... Incredible. They didn't do it. I don't think they ever did
put a man in. As far as I know.

STERN: Did you have.... I know that Muskie had, after Kennedy was elected, some problems in terms of maintaining his independence, because he felt that the voters in Maine wouldn't want him to simply endorse Kennedy's legislative program. For example...

DONOVAN: Yeah, Right. Exactly.

STERN: ...For example, on the Trade Expansion Act that he had. Did you work with him at all on these sorts of things?

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. By the time the Trade Expansion Act was very live I had moved over to the Labor Department so I wasn't.... You know, I can't, can't talk about that particular episode. But I think he did have that kind of general problem, which, you know, bothered him slightly, I think.

STERN: Okay, why don't we move on.

DONOVAN: Sure.

STERN: Let's just make sure I haven't forgotten anything. Why don't we move on then to the Labor Department, and, I guess the first thing I'd like to know is exactly how you became assistant to the undersecretary.

DONOVAN: Well, that's the easiest story in the world.

STERN: Okay.

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DONOVAN: I was now well into my, almost at the end of my third year as Muskie's administrative assistant. And, I was getting pretty bored with the job. I wasn't very stimulated. I was doing the same things over in a repetitious fashion and, you know, I had learned whatever I was going to learn about the Senate and so on. And, Muskie had sort of begun to arrive and, in fact, the last thing I did for him was to

work with people in the Housing and Home Finance Agency putting together the case for the Kennedy's Department of Urban Affairs Department.

STERN: Yes. I'd like to talk about that a bit. Yes.

DONOVAN: Okay. And then the day that that didn't get voted out on the floor of the Senate coincided with what was my last day with Muskie. I mean it just happened to be.

STERN: I see.

DONOVAN: And then the next morning I went to work for Willard Wirtz [William Willard Wirtz] in the Labor Department. But I was in the process of putting this together, although all the staff work really was done by the budget officer and his staff in HHFA. They prepared the whole case which was beautiful, documents. So my job was more tactical or whatever. And, Muskie was in Bethesda Naval Hospital with a leg which had been damaged in an auto accident, so he wasn't around on the scene during those last two or three weeks and so I was a little bit more in command of the details than perhaps if he'd been there. But anyway. I went to work for Willard Wirtz whom I had not met until the call came from Charlie Donahue [Charles Donahue] who was his solicitor. The top lawyer in the Labor Department, which is at the assistant secretary of labor level, is called solicitor. Odd that the most plebeian of departments would have such an elegant, Anglophile kind of title, I mean, why not call him, whatever.

Well anyway, Charlie Donahue was from Maine by way of background. His mother was an old Maine postmistress and big friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] and owned a hotel and fairly substantial family. Charlie had gone to Princeton, Harvard Law School. But he'd always been with the plumbers' union in Washington and.... So he was one of the construction trade types that was put in as.... He was part of the palace guard that went in and out of the Labor Department depending on whether there was a Democrat in the White House or not. And Charlie and his twin sister Elizabeth [Elizabeth Donahue], who was a very close associate of Frank Coffin's, and I had all become good friends and Charlie knew, or sensed, or Libby did, his sister, that I was getting a

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little bit bored up on the Hill. So, Wirtz was looking for, as undersecretary, was looking for a special assistant because his man, Tom Powers [N. Thompson Powers], was going up to become associate solicitor. And so he needed a person to fill this role and Charlie said, "Well, you know, think about John Donovan." And Wirtz said, "Who's he?" And Charlie gave him my background as a professor and Capitol Hill and so on and that seemed to fit some of Wirtz's needs. So, we all had lunch together at the Democratic National Club and Wirtz asked me several questions and I gave him what turned out to be more or less the wrong answers.

STERN: Do you remember what the questions were?

DONOVAN: Yes. One of them was about the Trade Expansion Act. And, I didn't realize, because I hadn't paid that much attention to it, so apparently it was

developing as I am leaving the Hill. It was still in the House though. And I knew that much from reading the paper. And, I had no idea that Wirtz was heavily into the Trade Expansion Act. It turned out that it had been one of his major projects. Then he went, he said, "What do you think of the prospects of the Trade Expansion Act?" I said, "I don't think they're very good." He said, "You don't?" And I said, "No." I said, "I think in the House you'll be lucky if you get a simple extension of reciprocal trade." And he said, "What do you base that on?" And I said, "I don't know. Just from reading the paper. But from what I sense about the House and the kind of place and this session I could think it would be remarkable if it came through." And he said, "Well, that's a pretty gloomy assessment." And I said, "Well, you know, that's the way it is." I don't remember what the other questions were but I remember, when the interview was over I--our little conversation at lunch really--I talked to my wife on the phone and she asked, "How did it go?" And I said, "Oh, lousy, I think I... And, I said, "You know me." And, anyway, he called my up at four o'clock and he said, "The job is yours if you want it." [Laughter] And, then he wanted me to come, like, you know, tomorrow. And I said, "Gee, the Senator's in the hospital with a bad leg, and he's got the urban affairs thing, the usual kind of problem." And he said, "Well, you know, I can't wait forever." So we compromised on a couple of weeks and then I finally broke the news to Muskie and he wasn't too pleased. But anyway. So I went over...

STERN: Can we just.... Before you go over to the Labor Department, let's take a minute on the Urban Affairs Bill.

DONOVAN: Sure.

STERN: The general view of the urban affairs bill which

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you see in books like Schlesinger's [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] is that Kennedy's open advocacy of the fact that he was going to appoint Weaver [Robert C. Weaver] to the department was probably what.... Well, probably a major factor in defeating the bill. But I've seen some evidence which suggests that the opponents of the bill were using the appointment of Weaver or claims that he was going to appoint Weaver, as a method of keeping it from getting through the Senate and that Kennedy essentially then openly said that he was going to appoint Weaver in order to expose the opponents. Do you have any recollection of exactly what was the internal development of this whole thing?

DONOVAN: I have no, I have no view of what the.... Of, you know, how this was working out in the White House. I don't have any insight into that at all. As

best I can recall, the Weaver possibility or distinct probability that he would become head of it, I don't think helped at all, in the Senate. And, you know, how much this was used as an excuse or whatever, but once the Bob Weaver was out in front as a, at the head of it I think that became a complicating factor.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: But what I think also happened in the Senate is that--I've forgotten the whole legislative processes at work at the time--but somehow this came out of Government Operations [Government Operations Committee] without--and I don't know how this could have happened--without the approval or whatever, of McClellan [John L. McClellan], who was chairman. And when it hit the floor of the Senate, McClellan raised a technical point that his prerogatives as chairman had been violated by this procedure.

STERN: Right. Kennedy was trying to do it by reorganization under his executive authority.

DONOVAN: Yes. And this surprised our side. I can't remember now why we wouldn't have thought that McClellan would raise this. But of course.... And then he

played it to all of the other senior chairmen. You know, "If this can happen to me, it can happen to any senator." And once that oratory started, I had the feeling that we weren't in very good shape. But also Bobby Baker [Robert G. Baker] I think, that little guy.... I think he gave us a bad count. You know, he was famous for being able to give you the nose count accurately. And he had given Mike Mansfield [Michael Joseph Mansfield] a nose count that was quite inaccurate. And, I was in the little room off to the back and when this was all over and Muskie, because of his bad leg was in a chair and, you know, he was kind of discouraged because he didn't even get

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the chance to read this seventy-five page document which had been prepared. This was his big moment. They had wheeled him in from Bethesda Naval Hospital and, you know, one of his great moments in the Senate never happened. Never got around to it. Mike Mansfield came in and he and Muskie always got along very well and he liked Muskie. And I think he sensed the disappointment that this would be to the young man. And Mike said, "Gee, you know, I'm sorry. Obviously the count was off." He didn't say, you know, "Bobby gave me a bad count." But Muskie always despised Baker anyway from way back. I think it was instantaneous, as soon as he saw him. Because he was a despicable little bastard anyway. And, from the point of view of anyone from New England I would think would have any kind of standard or whatever you might call it. The, so I think that Muskie always thought that Baker had not gone out of his way to give a terribly accurate count on this. But, I think the time wasn't right anyway.

STERN: Yes, well. I'm sure Kennedy found that out.

DONOVAN: Yes. A good effort!

STERN: Okay, why don't we move over into the Labor Department. There are numbers of things.... Now, of course, as assistant to the Undersecretary—you were there while Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] was secretary.

DONOVAN: Right at the end, yes.

STERN: And, I wonder if you could, for one thing, give me any sense that you have
of the differences between the way Goldberg ran the department and the way that Wirtz ran the department.

DONOVAN: I think the differences were very great from what other people tell me. And, I was only there from February to September under Goldberg. And, as a new special assistant working for the Undersecretary, you were just sort of learning your way around during that period so you were probably not perceiving everything all that accurately. And I did not see that much of Arthur Goldberg but Arthur.... One of the great differences was, for example--and I am sure of this--is that when there was testimony to be given on Capitol Hill, would take any boiler plate that was written by the solicitor's office and he'd go up there and ad-lib it and he couldn't have cared less. Wirtz, when he got the boiler plate from the solicitor's office on any piece of legislation would say, "This is terrible. It has to be rewritten. Who writes this?" and so on and so on. And then he'd fuss around with it. Then he'd take it home and then he'd stay up until three o'clock in the morning rewriting it and

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then he'd go up and every word was precious and so on and so on. He had this compulsive, perfectionist Methodist, German-American, middle America, Stevensonian commitment to words and the truth. And Arthur was a great improviser and ad-libber.

STERN: Did you help him with these congressional appearances? Preparing these things?

DONOVAN: I tried to. I was in the middle between the people who were preparing the documents and then taking them to him. All papers and all people went through me. You know, I was that revolving door.

STERN: I see.

DONOVAN: And I was responsible for what went in there. And I soon learned that he would never accept anything that the bureaucracy produced, particularly if

he were going to be identified with it, if his name was going to go on it. And so we had this constant problem and there was no way of solving it. And, in a sense, it was a kind of, not a game, but there was a role we were playing because what it came down to was this great inner need that he felt to take it home and do it himself late at night. After sixteen, eighteen hours he would go home and stay up to three o'clock in the morning. No wonder he looked tired when he came in. But this meant something to him, I mean words were important.

STERN: I see. Now, Goldberg, of course, spent so much of his time in terms of personal intervention in labor disputes. Wirtz...

DONOVAN: Wirtz didn't think that was an appropriate role for the secretary. He got involved in it a lot.

STERN: [Speaking simultaneously] Right. But he did it, yes. I mean, with the newspaper strike and all those...

DONOVAN: But he, but he, he realized that, once you do this, once you escalate it to that level then everybody wants you in, you see. And, he believed that the collective bargaining process should be made to work. He was an old mediator and arbitrator which Goldberg clearly wasn't.

STERN: Steve Shulman [Stephen N. Shulman] said that Goldberg acted as if William Simkin [William E. Simkin] worked for him.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. Steve would be right.

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STERN: That's quite true.

DONOVAN: The only thing I did for Goldberg was, and it grew out of this President's Advisory Committee thing we were talking about, was to put on the.... That is, a staff person in the Labor Department responsible for putting on the famous Kennedy National Economic Conference in '62 must have been because Goldberg was still secretary.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: The one that all the corporate leaders came to and the business leaders and everybody in the administration came and talked. It was an outgrowth of the labor-management process and it was felt that a great big conference at which everybody attended would somehow serve some useful purpose. And, Wirtz as undersecretary was put in charge of putting the conference together. This was to be a joint effort with Commerce and the Council of Economic Advisors. Wirtz was busy with

something and he called me in and he said “I can’t spend any time on this. You have to do it.” So I worked with Kermit Gordon [Kermit Gordon] from C.E.A. [Council of Economic Advisors], and I can’t remember.... Oh, Dave Burke [David W. Burke] Of course, Dave Burke from, later with Senator Edward Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy]. But Dave Burke was then a very young man and I, who were very good buddies. Dave from the Commerce Department, representing Luther Hodges [Luther H. Hodges]. And really, I think after the first session I think Gordon delegated one of the staff people at C.E.A. to work with us. But pretty much, as far as I recall, Dave and I put the conference together once they decided who was to be invited and so on. And it was one of those things that you never know whether it’s going to work or not until everybody shows up but it was a great success at least aesthetically, I don’t know about substantively, a great success. Everybody came and the place was packed and everybody was delighted and Arthur came up to me after it was over. I didn’t think he hardly knew who I was although he called my by my first name and he said, “John, Oh, Jesus, what a great job,” and really appreciated it and so forth. I thought he was, you know, a very skillful guy in his human relationships, the little I saw of him.

STERN: Can you, do you have any sense of how different they were administratively, in terms of how they related to the undersecretaries in the department, I mean, the whole dimension?

DONOVAN: Well, Wirtz was, Wirtz was Goldberg’s undersecretary...

STERN: Right.

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DONOVAN: And...

STERN: I meant the assistant secretaries.

DONOVAN: Ah, the assistant secretaries.

STERN: Reynolds [James J. Reynolds], Peterson [Esther E. Peterson].

DONOVAN: That I don’t have much insight into because I didn’t attend even Arthur Goldberg’s secretarial staff meetings; I didn’t attend. I attended Wirtz’s undersecretary staff meetings which were once a week so I have seen Wirtz with, as undersecretary, with his assistant secretaries. And I would have some idea about that.

STERN: I see.

DONOVAN: And then, of course, when Wirtz was secretary I attended the secretarial staff meetings when there was a different undersecretary and assistant

secretary. I don't have much insight into how Goldberg would have done it differently from Wirtz in terms of the assistant secretaries.

STERN: Did Wirtz give his assistant secretaries a great deal of independence, did he watch them closely, did they meet often? I mean....

DONOVAN: He gave them, he gave them a great deal of independence and, and he clearly had favorites. Jim Reynolds was assistant secretary long before he was undersecretary.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And he was a big Wirtz favorite from.... When that happened I'm not sure. But it happened.

STERN: Apparently Wirtz got, or rather the term is "stuck with" an undersecretary he didn't want, in Henning [John F. Henning].

DONOVAN: That's for sure. That's for sure.

STERN: All right. Do you have any insight into that whole thing? Why was this relationship just zero from the beginning?

DONOVAN: Ah, Wirtz is a very complex person. I love Wirtz. Yes, I think he's a great man and a great human

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being. I'm very close to him personally. But, I didn't know him when I went to work for him. And I think it's partly Wirtz's personality. And, it was partly that...

STERN: Excuse me.

DONOVAN: ...that Henning was sort of given to him as undersecretary by George Meany and the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations], and he wanted Reynolds by this time. And, he and Reynolds by this time were getting along very well on a personal basis, plus Reynolds was also doing labor management conciliation.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: ...and, an area that Wirtz had a lot of expertise in and he was glad to have a
a strong guy who could do a lot of this, back him up in this area and take

over, you know, a lot of the details. And he was a.... Wirtz was a close, old personal friend of William Simkin from the old days but I don't think he thought that Bill was too energetic in getting into these situations. I think Bill's slow, Quakerly pedestrian role didn't always delight Wirtz, who was a little more intellectual and aggressive about labor management, getting in there and getting into the tough issues. And Bill Simkin, I don't know, they spent a lot of time together, but I think, anyway.... It's pretty clear what happened is that Henning had been on the job a very short time when it was clear that Wirtz did not want him, so the result was that Wirtz and Henning had no kind of relationship from day one. And, I, among other people, but I know especially in my case, I became a kind of intermediary on a procedural basis between the secretary and the undersecretary. You know, I would be carrying messages to the Undersecretary usually through his special assistant Jack Howard, who became a close personal friend of mine. And, Jack and I had a very difficult time, bridging the gap.

STERN: I can imagine. It was a very awkward situation, to say the least.

DONOVAN: And, I would write notes to Wirtz because he often wouldn't get back in the office until eight o'clock at night or something so I'd write little notes to him, you know, little headlines notes, you know. "Should I suggest this to the undersecretary?" And there would be curt comments in the margin, you know, "I don't care," or "Yes," or "No," or "you tell 'em," and oh, boy!

STERN: Wow! Did, did you ever have any sense of Wirtz's

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relationship with JFK as, for example, as opposed to LBJ?

DONOVAN: Yes. I think he, I think he liked Kennedy a lot. And, you know, on a kind of a personal basis.

STERN: Let me just add one little thing to that question. Did you ever have any sense that Wirtz was in any way in an awkward position with Kennedy because he was essentially a Stevenson man?

DONOVAN: Oh, yes.

STERN: I'd like to get some of that.

DONOVAN: I think he felt that sharply in the case of Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy]. I don't think he.... I think he thought that Bobby never forgave him for being a Stevensonian, and particularly Wirtz was a Stevensonian in 1960.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And was one of the few people in the hotel room when it was all over. You know, there were a lot of other people who were Stevensonians for whatever reasons. But he was there to the bitter end with Stevenson. And I'm pretty sure that he felt that Bobby had never gotten over this.

STERN: There is evidence that Bobby did not forgive that episode, yes.

DONOVAN: Yes, he didn't... But I don't think he felt that, that JFK felt that way. Or if he did he certainly, JFK didn't major in it with him. And, you know, he didn't see that much of the President and often on a good many issues went through staff people on whatever was happening, Sorensen or Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] and so on. But I think he liked Kennedy, you know, very much on a personal basis.

STERN: Kennedy seemed, from evidence I've seen, to have had *extraordinary* confidence in Wirtz and in his judgment.

DONOVAN: I think, I think that--my impression is that the two ablest cabinet officers were McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and Wirtz. And, Wirtz has a superior mind, you know, we've all worked with bright people and so on, but this guy's beyond any norm. Enormous capacity for work, which I would think would communicate itself. And,

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has always done his homework, you know, and has his facts under control. So I would think he'd be bound to impress the President. And plus he's got excellent judgment. Unfortunately he could be very blunt and direct with people, as in the case of Henning or whatever. And, but, I think he was doing, my impression was that he was doing one hell of a job and that must have somehow.... Unless he was totally misperceived from the top.

STERN: Apparently Kennedy had accepted him for the, to the, for promotion...

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: ...strictly on Goldberg's recommendation. He really hardly knew him.

DONOVAN: I... Yes. I remember when this was happening, you know. Goldberg had gone to the Court and Pat Moynihan [Daniel Patrick Moynihan] was a Goldberg special assistant, along with Steve Shulman, and Pat had been helpful to Willard Wirtz as undersecretary in a couple of minor ways and Pat and I and Tom Powers were sitting around. Wirtz was out in Chicago, as I recall, when this happened, I've forgotten why. And, either Pat or Tom said, "I think we ought to call the Undersecretary and see if there's anything we can do." Meaning to advance his cause. You know, what we could do, I don't know, but, you know, we knew a few people. And, so Pat and Tom and I all thought that this was a good idea. So anyway, we picked up the phone and we called him in

Chicago, or wherever he was, and we said, "Mr. Undersecretary, is there anything we can do to be helpful?" And he said, "No, no. I appreciate it. It's nice of you to call, but just let the thing work and you know, if the President wants me, I'm sure he'll appoint me but I don't think that would be advisable at all. I appreciate your interest and your thoughts but please stay off the telephone." And, then shortly thereafter the news came that he was to be secretary, you know, it wasn't a very long wait. As I recall.

STERN: Right. Was there any administrative, structural kind of change that was very apparent in the department with Goldberg's departure and Wirtz's promotion? Did things change in any very overt way?

DONOVAN: I think they did. One change which I became aware of is that Steve Shulman who had had this role in that outer office. You see, this position we are talking about of executive assistant to the secretary in the Labor Department is physically part of the secretary's office. You can't get into the cabinet officer's office without going through his assistant's office. There's a corridor through his

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office.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And, so Steve moved out of that and went over to the Defense Department, and I moved in. And, Wirtz I think would be a quite different kind of operation than whatever the Goldberg one was. But then I think very....

STERN: Shul.... Excuse me. Shulman, for example, says that Goldberg was away so much that he saw him perhaps an hour a day if he was lucky. But that he would very often have to make decisions kind of on his instinct for what Goldberg would want. But I presume you would see Wirtz more than that.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. Wirtz would always come in early in the morning and sometimes would beat me in, because I don't recall that I arrived before eight. Not usually anyway. And, I would work as, I would stay as long as he wanted me to. But, he would often, if he was around, he would often say, "Well, go home." He was appreciative, I guess, of the fact that I had a wife and young kids, so, by seven or eight o'clock in the evening I might very well go home and he might be there God knows how much longer doing what, I don't know. And then when he was involved in labor management things and got tied up in those, sometimes I wouldn't see him really, to have any effective conversation, for days on end, and we would communicate by writing notes and so on. But, I wouldn't say it was only.... It wasn't typically one hour a day and it wasn't typically that I was making very many decisions for him.

STERN: As a matter of fact, I wonder if you could--this may be a difficult question to answer--if you could give me, at least briefly, a sense of exactly what you did as the assistant to the secretary of labor on a sort of average day, from the time you would come in at eight o'clock to the time you.... Exactly what sorts of things came up, what sorts of people you had to see, what sorts of issues....

DONOVAN: I wish I, I wish I had a form I filled out once for this book that John Corson [John J. Corson] and somebody did, on.... It was a book on the top executive, managerial types in the civil service and somehow in their lottery the executive assistant to the Secretary of Labor came in. So they were really looking at GS-17s and 18s who were career people, but they had a few political types mixed in there as it turned out. And, I was in there and so I had to fill out this forty-page thing in which

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I kept track of my life for a whole month, I think.

STERN: Oh, that's fascinating.

DONOVAN: I almost didn't do it.

STERN: And, my...But one of my two or three secretaries, Alice, said, "Oh, this is fascinating, you know, let's do it. And I'll keep track," you know, because I'd never paid that much attention to who I was talking to and so on.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: Then I had to comment on what I thought my role was and so on. I must surely have a copy of that,

STERN: I'd like to see that.

DONOVAN: If I can find it, I'll ship it down to you. But, roughly I would say, my view now is that my role was a sort of communication link between the secretary and indeed the assistant secretaries, many times. Not Jim Reynolds especially but a good many of the others. And, certainly between the Secretary's office and the whole bureaucratic structure of the Labor Department. Both people and papers. And, I often was in the position of trying to translate what I thought were the Secretary's wishes of policy aims to this complicated and resistant set of forces which is out there. And also mediating when their imperfect work came in with this perfectionist, demanding guy who you knew wasn't going to accept it and so to try to get back and say, "Look, fellas, you know, this is not going to fly. Please try to write it in literate English," or whatever, you know.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And after a while, because Wirtz is very elliptical, very elliptical man, I think I got to be a very good translator of what... You know, after you begin to have more confidence in yourself and more confidence in your relationship with your boss, I never tried to play an independent operational role because I knew that this wouldn't go with Wirtz plus it isn't my style or nature. But I tried to be a pretty faithful translator, whatever the hell I thought the Secretary would want. And after a while I got so I was pretty sure what he wanted on the important things the more I watched him, you know, and listened to him

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and so on. And, also I think, I guess the, the important connection back the other way is that--I think that it probably goes back to our original luncheon conversation--is that Wirtz is the kind of guy who likes you to tell him what you think. And, he doesn't care whether it's right or wrong. You know, he doesn't want you to give him the appropriate answer, he wants you to give him what you really think. So, you know, if you tell him what you honestly think, even though it's unfavorable or unfortunate, that's good. He'd rather have it that way than the other way.

The phone rings all the time and it's the assistant secretaries needing to see him right away because of this great, urgent problem they have. It's bureau chiefs with their bureaucratic problems which usually they're very happy to handle.

STERN: Things like the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Standards, things of that kind?

DONOVAN: Yes. The Bureau of Employment Security would be the biggest operating bureau in the department at that time. The whole Employment Office and also BES was operational for all the, for all the employment training programs which were coming along under the Manpower Development Training Act. And then we had the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training which was the thinking and research part of that. The Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, which is the one that...It's a little monastic order that doesn't do much of anything, made up of alumni from the building trades, but it was given the job of handling on-the-job training which was a smaller but very important part of this thing. So BAT had some responsibilities now. And then there was Wage and Hour Division which pretty much was self administering but formally reports up through the Secretary. Then Jim Reynold's whole Labor Management operation with whatever bureau was under that--I can't remember what it's called now, or was called then. A women's bureau, which reported up through Esther Peterson as assistant secretary. And later on an assistant secretary, quite later on, an assistant secretary which we didn't have originally, for policy planning which became Mr. Moynihan, who moved up from special assistant to fill that role.

STERN: Did you ever have...

DONOVAN: Oh, an international too. We had an International Labor, headed by George Weaver [George L-P. Weaver]. Sure, yes.

STERN: Did you ever have meetings of the assistant secretaries with the under secretary and the secretary?

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DONOVAN: Every Monday morning.

STERN: Every Monday.

DONOVAN: We started every Monday morning. First of the week. For an hour or an hour and a half. Sat around the table. "What's going on people?" Kick it around. Everybody report.

STERN: And Wirtz generally attended these things?

DONOVAN: Oh, he always attended. Very rarely did he miss one. Yes.

STERN: As a cabinet assistant, assistant to the Secretary of Labor, did you have anything to do with this group that Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] had set up in the White House, the Cabinet Assistants' Group, as it was called?

DONOVAN: No.

STERN: No.

DONOVAN: Don't remember ever meeting in it. In fact I never met Fred Dutton. Come to think of it. [Laughter]

STERN: Okay.

DONOVAN: But it's very possible that Pat would have. You see, we had two, two of these special assistant types. And Pat who was--before he was an assistant secretary--was a special assistant, but his office was down the hall, not part of this thing and Pat would dance in and out and, you know, work on speech drafts or whatever he was doing. He had all kinds of special projects. And Pat would have been the kind of elegant one that would have had the suit on and he would have known Dutton formally and Pat would have loved this. So I assume that if there was something at the White House, Pat went while I was back doing the work. [Laughter]

STERN: Goldberg's priorities were clearly unemployment, labor management relations, things like youth problems and the aged. What, in your opinion,

were Wirtz's? Do you think he made any major shifts in the Labor Department priorities?

DONOVAN: Yes. Wirtz's major priority, which soon came along after he became secretary, was to create a bureaucratic apparatus in the Labor Department

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which could administer the rapidly developing jobs training programs for the unemployed. And Wirtz was a passionate crusader against joblessness. And totally unprepared to accept even an interim goal of 4 percent unemployment, you know, when the rate was up at 5 1/2 or 6, which we thought was horrendous in those days. He had big battles with Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] on this all the time. And so he was determined to take this beaten up old bureaucratic structure that he had and make it work. And more and more this turned into moving away from BES and OMAT and BAT into a superstructure manpower administration which would be, be able to do this.

STERN: Right. He was largely behind, wasn't he, the amendments of the MDTA [Manpower Development Training Act] which came along? Yes. Right.

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. Right. Right. But he had a big hand in it, he had a big....

STERN: Sort of changed the whole focus of the department.

DONOVAN: But he had a big problem of reorganizing his bureaucracy and asserting policy leadership which all cabinet officers have.

[TAPE II, SIDE I]

DONOVAN: And, of course, he was secretary for a long time, through 1968 and I think you'll find that, with two, maybe a couple of exceptions, that one way or another, he managed to change all of the bureau chiefs, which is not easy to do. So it took, you know, it takes a lot of persistence to do that. I don't mean to say that he was a 100 percent effective in asserting policy leadership, because I'm sure he wasn't, but I think he saw this as a central task of reorganizing that damned department and trying to create some way in which the drive from the center would permeate a little bit further down through the resistant structures.

STERN: Right. What distinctions would you draw between the role of a special assistant and an executive assistant, exactly?

DONOVAN: I think there's no real difference necessarily in function and I don't know that Wirtz ever understood which title was which.

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: He asked.... He asked me....

STERN: Maybe he wanted to be more personal...

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DONOVAN: He asked me once, he said, "Which title is it that you have here?" you know. And for a while I was a special assistant and then--and Pat was executive assistant out there, whereas Steve Shulman had been executive assistant in here and Pat had been special assistant out there--and then, when Pat went over to be assistant secretary and what not, then I became executive assistant back here. We were paid the same amount of money and.... I said.... I think that in the, in some historic past that the term executive assistant had some meaning inside the Labor Department which it had long since operationally lost because, the reason I think that, is that once you become executive assistant, then you end up in the Green Book.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: In the Social Register. And it probably is what put me in *Who's Who In America*. [Laughter] Not my own accomplishments, or lack of them.

STERN: Apparently the distinction, at least allegedly the distinction was that a special assistant would handle particular items that break down while an executive assistant would sort of go across the board.

DONOVAN: Yes. Yes. Yes. I guess. But when Pat was an executive assistant during the first year or whatever of Wirtz's reign as secretary and I was a special assistant, Pat was working on special projects and I was the other part of things. But Wirtz was very, always very unclear about these things. Almost total lack of interest. He was very good in taking care of such details as what GS rank you were and, if he saw any opportunity to move you from a 17 [GS-17] to an 18 [GS-18] if that was called to his attention, he would do it. He was very, he was a very good boss in that sense. But he, you know....

STERN: Did he leave a lot of administrative detail to Leo Werts [Leo R. Werts], the administrator? That sort of thing.

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. One should comment on that relationship.

STERN: Ah, yes, well. I think that would be interesting.

DONOVAN: Because Leo was in a sense a civil servant. But he was assistant secretary for administration....

STERN: Administration. Right.

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DONOVAN: And Wirtz had been secretary only a very short time when he became more and more impressed with Werts, Leo Werts's tremendous capacity for work and his understanding of the administrative complexities of that strange thing that was the Labor Department. And, he spent more time with Leo Werts than almost anybody else and took Leo very seriously, very seriously, indeed. Too seriously, sometimes, I thought because I didn't always appreciate perhaps Leo's total preoccupation with administrative machinery. I once told him I thought his mother had been frightened by a moving van. [Laughter] Because he was always, he was always, he was always moving offices around, you know, tearing up offices and moving an assistant secretary from here to there.

Now, there may have been a point in that. Maybe he had learned that it's a good idea to move people around physically because that has some psychological effect. I don't know but.

STERN: So a lot of the.... Then the nitty gritty of administrative detail did fall to Werts. W-E-R-T-S, as his assistant secretary?

DONOVAN: That is for sure. That is for sure. Particularly all the paper stuff that goes into it. You know, all those administrative orders and all that stuff.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: But it was more than that because Leo Werts was a prime bureaucratic architect of the Manpower Administration. I mean, this was an idea that he had I'm sure for a long time. I would assume this is an idea that Leo had in the back of his mind long before Willard Wirtz came along. And like any good senior civil servant, in my opinion, you wait for that political leader who is very likely to go in the direction that you have always hoped things would go. And when you get that kind of a political leader you go very fast with him.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: I once said to Sir Denis Barnes [Denis C. Barnes] who was permanent secretary in the Ministry of Labor in England, then the Department of Employment and we became pretty good buddies and he was pretty candid with me--at lunch and things like that--I said, "How did you like Barbara Castle as a minister?" And he said, "Oh," he said, "We thought Barbara was great for a while." And he said, "We could see that she would be willing to go in directions that I had wanted to go for half a decade. So we decided to go

with her as long as she could carry the ball.” Which is, in effect, what you’re saying. We know that’s the case of the Mandarins in the English system but what we forget is that it’s probably also very true of the Leo Werts’s of the world.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: But they had a great personal relationship too. Wirtz respected Leo for the same reasons I’ve indicated: that Leo wouldn’t give him a lot of bullshit and would call it the way he saw it. And Leo is maybe almost as persistent as Willard Wirtz. So you would have two of the most persistent people I’ve ever encountered working together.

STERN: Now apparently despite his reluctance, Secretary Wirtz did get drawn into some pretty major labor disputes.

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. This is what happened to him all the time.

STERN: Railroads, the New York newspaper strike.... can you give me some.... You must have had some work on those.

DONOVAN: And when he got into them he couldn’t get away from them. I didn’t work on them at all.

STERN: Really!

DONOVAN: Ah, no. I knew nothing about that field and had plenty to do without getting involved, nor did he ever suggest that I get involved. And, his principal deputy on these was always Jim Reynolds and Jim Reynold’s staff.

STERN: Well, of course, logically it was Reynolds who took over as labor management and assistant secretary, sure.

DONOVAN: [Speaking simultaneously] And Jack.... And Jack Gentry [John N. Gentry] who was under.... Who is now Wirtz’s partner or associate anyway in that public interest law firm. Ah, no, I always observed this from a great distance but I do know that when he went into them, he went into them heavily. And, I talked to quite a few of the old arbitrators--there’s a group of arbitrator-mediators who came along in World War II. They almost all started out on the War Labor Board which is where Wirtz started. He had, he had never had any of this experience before. And I asked them about the difference and they said, “Well, Wirtz is the kind

of intellectual arbitrator who has to break down all the problems intellectually and find some almost rational answer. Whereas there are other people who will wheel and deal and money under the table and, you know, whatever. Tricksters.”

STERN: That’s clearly, that’s clearly what he did on the railroads.

DONOVAN: Yes. He couldn’t let that go.

STERN: Right, he just...

DONOVAN: Couldn’t let it go. And Johnson finally brought them over to the White House and locked them up in the room and wouldn’t let them go. Wirtz.... that’s when Wirtz first became super-impressed with Johnson, I remember. He came back and he said, “I’ve never seen anything like that in my life.” He said, “the problem was almost insoluble, if not insoluble.” He said, he just brought them all in, locked them in the room and said, “You can’t go until you solve this problem. I’m going to *keep* you here in the White House.” And then he said, Johnson would keep coming into the room, you know, every hour or so. “How’s it going? You figured it out? You worked it out? Okay. You can have lunch now. [Laughter] But you’re not leaving.” [Laughter] And, Johnson’s ability to somehow, you know, give people the treatment which I had seen on the edges of the Senate. Wirtz had never seen anything like this, I don’t think. [Laughter]

STERN: What was his relationship with Johnson generally?

DONOVAN: It was, during the period I was there, it got better and better and better. At first, you know, he handed in his letter of resignation...

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: ...as they all did and didn’t have the slightest idea what was going to happen to him. But then Adlai Stevenson talked to the new President Johnson and Adlai called him up and said, “The President says he’s going to keep all of you people on. It’s a good cabinet,” and so on. Wirtz had a conversation with the President or somebody over there and he said, “Keep working. It’s fine. He likes this cabinet,” and so on. But they didn’t know, I don’t think, well, maybe some of them did, but I don’t think that cabinet on the domestic side probably was sure for three or four months what was really happening to them. But Wirtz kept on doing his job.

And then, I forgot when the railroad strike came along, but then, in the summer of ‘64 as the Johnson presidential campaign heated up, somebody over there got the bright idea

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that Willard Wirtz was an experienced presidential campaigner and that he had been speechwriting and so on for Stevenson for, you.... People tend to forget, I’ve noticed this all

the time that, when a lot of people run a presidential campaign, they forget, they forget that somebody ran one four years ago. So everybody starts *de novo*. Well, somebody over there was smart enough to realize they had an old prop in Wirtz and so he moved over to the White House. We didn't see him for about three months and he was heavily into that and the legend came back that Johnson thought he was just great with this stuff, which I imagine was speechwriting and, you, I don't know what. He was eating out of the slot machines in the cafeteria, they said. And, and Wirtz loved presidential campaigns so I think this was like an old fire horse hears the bell. And, the legend was that he scored very heavily and that Johnson began to take him, you know, a lot more seriously.

And then their big problem came much later after I left. And it came in '68 when Humphrey was the candidate and Wirtz and Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman] and Stewart Udall [Stewart L. Udall] and I don't know who else tried to get Humphrey to give a speech in the Mormon Tabernacle, which would somewhat disassociate himself from the Johnson Vietnam policy. And evidently, I wasn't there, but I guess that what happened is that--or at least some people think this is what happened, probably got it from other people--that there was a pretty good speech draft which was written and they thought Hubert was going to give it. But then, at the eleventh hour, Johnson got on the phone and said, "Oh, Hubert, you can't do this to me." And so what we heard from the Mormon Tabernacle was a greatly modified version.

But anyway, Johnson was mad at Wirtz and these guys by this time. And I visited him in the fall of 1968 in Washington. I tend to think it was October. I can't remember why I was there. But I just dropped by the office and Arlene [Arlene Huff], his secretary, "Hi," you know, because we were old friends. And, I said "Is the boss around?" You know, "I'd just like to say hello. I don't want to take any time." And she said, "Oh, sure he's in there. You know, he'd be delighted to see you. Just walk right in." Uh, you know, not busy enough. So I walked in and here's Willard Wirtz at his desk. And it usually was piled up with papers, you know, *miles* high, the guy would pile the stuff up, with income tax forms and everything. The desk is clean and he's sitting there smoking his pipe and I walked in and he said, "Well, as you can see, I don't have much to do." [Laughter] And I said, "My God!" And he said, "He's not even talking to me." And he said, "Probably I should quit." I think he said something like that. "Probably I should quit. But that would, might be embarrassing and I don't want to embarrass him at all. And it's clear he's not going to fire me and so," he said, "I guess, you know, I just sit there in limbo and wait it out." Which is what he did.

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STERN: And this was, of course, largely over, over the escalation in Vietnam.

DONOVAN: I said, "What happened?" And he said, you know, "Vietnam, what else?" And Wirtz had, in the days I was there, '64 and through the first month of '65, I don't think, could have had any awareness of Vietnam at all. I don't know how he reacted during the, during the later sixties with.... Because he had young sons and so on. So I don't know what kind of....

STERN: Yes. Do you have any knowledge as to whether he might have had any

inkling as to, for example, what we now know about the Tonkin Gulf episode? Since he was in the White House in the summer of '64?

DONOVAN: I would assume that it's most unlikely and I never had the sense to ask him because I'd be fascinated.

STERN: I wonder if he knew, anything.

DONOVAN: Next time I see him I'm sure going to ask him that.

STERN: Probably didn't.

DONOVAN: Yes. Yes. I think he was so.... My guess is, knowing Wirtz, that he was so tied up in that next speech or, you know, what's going on out on that campaign trail that he wouldn't have the foggiest idea of what....

STERN: There is one thing that just occurred to me. It's a little bit of a tangent from all this but I found it an area of great interest. Did you ever talk to Wirtz about Adlai Stevenson, about Stevenson's relationship with Kennedy? About the whole question as to why Stevenson was never secretary of state, why he was unhappy at the UN [United Nations]. Did you ever get any sense of what Wirtz felt about all of that?

DONOVAN: Yes, I think so. Ah, I don't remember when or over what period of time, I guess I got more of an impression than anything else, that Wirtz felt that, you know, Kennedy would not put Stevenson into any very meaningful role because of the politics of the previous situation. And, I think he had the impression that Adlai Stevenson was, Wirtz knew that Adlai Stevenson wasn't very happy, to say the least, in his UN role. He didn't talk very frequently, as far as I know, to Stevenson. Their paths wouldn't cross very much and they didn't call one another up

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on the phone and say, "How's it going?" and so on. But, on the other hand, we have this episode I mentioned or incident, in which Stevenson.... He either encounters him or calls him up and said, "Bill, don't worry about being Secretary of Labor. Johnson says he likes the whole cabinet and so on." Wirtz had no relationship with George Ball [George W. Ball] at this point, which is funny. Once I said something to him about.... Something came up--I can't remember what it could have been--and I said, "Why not, why not call George Ball on it?" And he said, "Mr. Ball hasn't received a phone conversation from me in a year and a half or something like that." And so Wirtz wouldn't have had George Ball as a confidant in this strange pattern of relationships. So I guess, to sum up, that Wirtz was sensitive to the

Stevensonian problem around the White House, as it affected him and I think he would have been aware that Stevenson wasn't happy in this role.

STERN: Apparently he became more and more unhappy under Johnson, although there was a brief period there in late '63 when he seemed, at least, if John Bartlow Martin's second volume is accurate, and I think it is, that Johnson kind of led him on...

DONOVAN: Yes, probably.

STERN: ...to thinking that he was going to have a new and enhanced role. Perhaps he would even be the secretary of state.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes, yes. Johnson had a way of doing.... Oh, did he do that?

STERN: I don't know if he actually said it but he certainly rearoused Stevenson's hopes.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. Oh, dear!

STERN: And then dropped 'em.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. Johnson was a strange one, was he not?

STERN: Well, in personal relationships, as some have described him as a "people eater."

DONOVAN: [Laughter] Yes, I think that's right. That's my impression.

STERN: It's a good description. Did you have any role at all when you were with Wirtz in any of the other presidential committees, such as Equal Employment and things of that sort?

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DONOVAN: Yes. When Wirtz first became secretary he called me in and he said, "In this new position I'm in as secretary, this puts me as a, in a major way into the equal employment can of worms. He said, "I haven't done anything in this, I mean, bureaucratically." He said, "It's a minefield." He said, "You are to major in this."

STERN: Yes, so...

DONOVAN: "And be very careful. But stay on top of it twenty-four hours a day, if need be." Which I did and it was indeed a minefield. [Laughter]

STERN: Did.... Are you familiar.... Were you in close contact with the whole controversy over Troutman [Robert B. Troutman] and the Plans for Progress and that whole business?

DONOVAN: Yes, indeed yes.

STERN: Did you [Laughter] talk about that?

DONOVAN: Well, it was always at a distance. We weren't ever quite sure, I wasn't ever quite sure what the hell was flying. But I did know that Mr. Troutman had become enormously controversial. And, you've heard the name Hobart Taylor [Hobart Taylor, Jr.].

STERN: Sure, he was the successor .

DONOVAN: Have you interviewed Hobart?

STERN: He's been interviewed, although I didn't do it. Yes.

DONOVAN: Yes, right. Well, about this time I met Hobart. And, of course, John Feild [John G. Feild] was in the middle of all this. And, Hobart Taylor, I was led to believe was out to get rid of John Feild, because John was too much of a crusader or whatever. And Hobart was dancing around and running the Plans for Progress operation with or without Mr. Troutman. I never met Mr. Troutman, to tell you the truth. That was all second hand. But I saw Hobart very, very frequently and he was certainly working on us to find ways of getting John Feild out of there. John Feild was a somewhat friend of mine from Capitol Hill, that is, I had come to know him slightly and knew his background. Then George Reedy [George E. Reedy, Jr.] became very relevant to this operation. I began to see more and more of George Reedy as this thing went on. And at some point there was a story in *Newsweek*, which I think may have been leaked by Berl Bernhard [Berl I. Bernhard],

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I don't know, somebody leaked a story which was very unfavorable to Johnson and his role in all of this.

STERN: This is while Johnson was vice president?

DONOVAN: Vice president.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: But it was his thing, right?

STERN: Right. He had been.... Right. He had been put in charge of it.

DONOVAN: But also Robert Kennedy was involved.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: Everybody was involved. And, Wirtz and I were over giving a talk in West

Virginia, at Bethany College. You're not an alumnus of Bethany College, are you? Very unattractive place. But anyway. Well, we went over there because Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] had called and said that the White House would very much like to have the Secretary speak at some convocation at Bethany College in West Virginia. And I said, "Oh, my God." Because Wirtz hated to give speeches. He would work too hard on them, and the last place in the world he would want to go would be some little backwater college in wherever Bethany College is. And, so I cross examined him, insofar as a cabinet officer's staff assistant can question a staff guy from the White House. I questioned Reardon on how authentic this, this need was. And he said, "Well, this is one of the places the President had been during the primary, and that the President had a warm regard for it and that it really would be appreciated around there," I guess by Ted Reardon, since I doubt that the President could have cared less where the Secretary of Labor went. But anyway, I went and said to Wirtz, "This is what happened." And he said, "Who's Ted Reardon?" and I explained who I thought he was. And, he said, "How authentic do you think this is?" I said, "Who knows?" And, this was probably fairly early on in his secretarial role. And, you know, you don't want to unduly offend White House assistants for trivial reasons. So any way, we decided to go. And, went over to this dreary, horrible place. Spent a whole day there with some meetings, and lunch, and mine workers and, the president of the place who was one of the least attractive Elmer Gantry types you have ever met in your life. Just a horrible place!

STERN: [Laughter]

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DONOVAN: And, Wirtz was in a foul mood the whole day, you know, sort of looking at me. "Why did you get me into this?" I had diarrhea for whatever reasons. Anyway, while we were over there a phone call came saying that as soon as we got back, when would we be back? Well, we'd be back about seven o'clock, to come immediately to a meeting in the Vice President's office on equal employment opportunity matters. And, so here.... We were pretty beaten by the time we got to Washington but we go over to the Vice President's office. And I had met Lyndon Johnson on Capitol Hill a couple of times but there was no reason for him to remember that obviously. And, but I'd been working with Hobart and Reedy and so, as we came into the big room, Reedy was the major domo who was introducing people to the Vice President he didn't

know. And so he introduced me.... Wirtz came in and said, "Hi, Mr. Vice President" or something like that. And then George Reedy said, "This is Mr. Wirtz's right hand man, John Donovan." Lyndon took my hand and he said, "Mr. Donovan, Mr. Reedy tells me what a great job you've been doing on this. I want you to know I appreciate it." And I said, "Thank you very much, sir." And so I sat in the background at this meeting. *Everybody* was there. Everybody that was operative. There must have been twenty people. I think it was somebody.... I think Elmer Staats [Elmer B. Staats] was there! Well, the whole thing was pure Johnson, in a sense, trying to find out who had leaked this story. Telling everybody how they knew how untrue this was and unfair. And, "Goddamn it, don't let it happen again!" was, I guess, was the subtle message. But we spent, I don't know how much time around the table going over this thing. And, so it was a very sensitive area. And then, on the way out, at the door, the Vice President stood, at eight thirty or whatever, shook hands and, again as I went through, said, "Mr. Donovan, again I want to thank you for the great job you're doing in this area." And I said, "Aye, aye sir." But, the truth of the matter is that, you know, is that that sort of thing impresses you.

STERN: Sure, it does. [Laughter]

DONOVAN: You know what he's doing, you know.

STERN: You know and he knows that you know it, and still.

DONOVAN: And it's still true.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: The big meeting came later when I understand the chips were on the table as high as they can go; for some reason I didn't attend and Tom Powers went instead. Probably because Tom knew it was going to be a

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good meeting. [Laughter] Because he was sort of watching out for this area too. And, Wirtz relied very heavily on Tom Powers even when he was associate solicitor. There were certain people he relied on: Jim Reynolds, Tom Powers, John Donovan, and some others. Leo Werts obviously. Really about five people is what you have, I think, if the truth were known in this kind of operation. But anyway, Tom told us later.... I think the Secretary.... I think Secretary Wirtz also attended this meeting. But I know Tom did. And, apparently Bobby and--what was his right hand man, the lawyer who's now at Yale?--Burke Marshall...

STERN: Marshall, right.

DONOVAN: ...were at the meeting. And Johnson was vice president and evidently, and you would have this from other records, they sort of had it out that

Johnson was foot-dragging or worse on this thing and it was a real kind of nut-cutting verbal session. And I would think that the animosity between Lyndon and Bobby which was probably there before this...

STERN: Oh, no doubt about that!

DONOVAN: ...was certainly exacerbated by this episode because there were other people there, people like Tom Powers who might come back and tell me and, you know, pretty soon it's all over town.

There was one time when, and I don't know what this illustrates except that George Reedy came--it may have been subsequent to this--and I've totally forgotten the substance except that he came into the Secretary of Labor's office and I was there. The Secretary of Labor, George Reedy representing the Vice President in these matters, and me. And Hobart Taylor wasn't there on this occasion. I cannot remember what it was about but the Secretary asked him the question directly. And George gave the Secretary an absolute, total falsehood. Now, what's so astonishing about that is that George knew that I knew it was a falsehood. He must have known that the Secretary knew it was a falsehood and yet point blank. And then afterwards we went out and then I went back in. And the Secretary said, "How could a guy do that?" And I said, "I don't know. You know, he works for his boss and I guess that's what he gets paid to do." And he said, "But, he was lying. You knew he was lying. I knew he was lying. He knew that we both knew he was lying. How could somebody do that?" And I said, "Jesus, I don't know." You know, and it amazes the hell out of me but that's what he did. That's what the man did. Wish I could remember what it was. Incredible.

STERN: It is, yes. Although there are other incidents that suggest that it was not uncommon.

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DONOVAN: No, I'm sure it was not uncommon. Nor restricted to George Reedy.

STERN: Right. Shall we pass on to the Labor Management Committee?

DONOVAN: Yes, sir.

STERN: Okay, fine. We.... The evidence that we have, a lot of the papers from the committee, that apparently it was clearly Goldberg's idea.

DONOVAN: *Very* much so.

STERN: Yes. And that Kennedy had bought it very early. It was.... He issued the executive order in the end of January, in the very first month.

DONOVAN: Oh, no. This is an Arthur spectacular.

STERN: Right. And, it's very clear, it was clear to me in going through the material that right at the start you can see very significant tensions. For example, the Council of Economic Advisors, Heller, the Secretary of the Treasury, Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon], were very much opposed to even setting it up.

DONOVAN: Oh, Yes. I wasn't there but I'm sure.

STERN: No question. They saw it as an intrusion on their, on their fiefdom. And suggested in letters that they wrote to the President that...

DONOVAN: [Laughter]

STERN: ...certain areas be excluded. For example, the Secretary of the Treasury was supposed to be a member of the committee. And Dillon said, "I don't want to serve."

DONOVAN: No, he didn't.

STERN: "And I don't think I ought to be represented." He wanted to be completely separate. Likewise, the CEA wanted to be separate from it and try to limit its mandate, so that it would not deal with things like wages and....

DONOVAN: That figures.

STERN: They only wanted to deal with industrial peace

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and things of that sort which would not really intrude on their.... But, in making the appointments it's clear that, I think, that Kennedy was very much borrowing.... Oh, of course, obviously other people gave it to him.... But, the model is an old progressive, with a capital P, model notion that you balance these interest groups.

DONOVAN: Yes. Tripartite?

STERN: That's right, yes. The public--whatever that is--and you have management and you have labor. And somehow you, you get some sort of consensus. But it's clear even from the very beginning in going through these documents.... First of all, as soon as you see a committee with all these big names, instantly you know that they don't do the work.

DONOVAN: But the interesting thing about this is that they couldn't send a substitute.

STERN: Really?

DONOVAN: No staff person ever attended these meetings except one staff person from the Labor Department, me. One staff person from the Commerce Department, Dave Burke representing Luther Hodges and one staff person from CEA [Council of Economic Advisors] who was Jim Simler [Norman J. Simler] the year I was there, if I remember his name. He was an academic who was in for a year. And no, no recordings were made of these meetings. There were just headline notes that Dave Burke kept. And, if Henry Ford [Henry Ford, II] didn't come, you couldn't have a staff guy. But if Thomas Watson [Thomas John Watson, Jr.] didn't come, you couldn't have a staff guy.

STERN: Well, was there any particular reason for that?

DONOVAN: I don't know. I guess it was Arthur's idea that this was to be principals talking to principals.

STERN: And yet the staff work was clearly not done by the members of the committee. I mean, that's obvious.

DONOVAN: Oh, no, no, no, no.

STERN: I'd like to get into that in some detail. It's clear from the evidence that Wirtz had a clearly major role...

DONOVAN: Yes, he did.

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STERN: ...in running the committee along with the Assistant Secretary of Commerce Gudeman [Edward Gudeman] long before he became Secretary of Labor.

DONOVAN: Yes. That's right. Arthur.... I think Arthur had lost, lost interest in it.

STERN: Arthur simply.... And was busy with other things.

DONOVAN: Yes! Right. And he just said, "Bill, you...." And then Arthur would dance in and out of the meetings.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: I only saw him a few times at these. [Laughter]

STERN: As a matter of fact, I wonder if we could.... There were some, some things in the papers that I found very confusing. For example, you've got a

chairman, alternate chairmen, the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Commerce. Then you have an executive director, then I found there's a staff director, then there's an executive secretary. Can you recall what the differences were in function? You were executive director, right?

DONOVAN: I think so. I think that was my title. [Laughter]

STERN: That's right.

DONOVAN: Or maybe that was Wirtz's title.

STERN: It was his earlier.

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: It was his earlier. And then he was executive director in...

DONOVAN: When he was undersecretary?

STERN: April '61 when he was undersecretary.

DONOVAN: And then when he became secretary, did I become executive secretary?

STERN: That's correct. Executive director.

DONOVAN: Then, then I guess the next position would probably have been held by Dave Burke who was the Commerce Department person.

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STERN: That's right.

DONOVAN: And, in the years that Luther Hodges was.... Did, did.... Were they always co-chairmen? Anyway, there was one year when...

STERN: They alternated, that's right.

DONOVAN: Yes, and there was one year.... Then probably Dave would become the executive director and I'd become, you know.... I'm very unclear about that. I know I know what our operational roles were.

STERN: They alternated, that's right.

DONOVAN: Yes, and there was one year.... Then probably Dave would become the executive director and I'd become, you know.... I'm very unclear about

that. I know I know what our operational roles were.

STERN: That's what I'd like to know, the operational roles. The titles are quite confusing.

DONOVAN: The only staff work that was done that I'm aware of--you know, in writing the documents that came out of that thing--were, that was done by Dave and me.

STERN: Ah, that's what I wanted to know.

DONOVAN: And whoever it was from CEA.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And the staff person would have, the staff person from CEA would be as involved as we are if he wanted to be. And they often would be depending on what was going on. Particularly as you start setting, talking about wage and price issues, you know, that are going to get sent off to the.... And, one of the, one of the big papers that I can remember--I've forgotten now, it's so long ago--but one of them was on labor management relations and what you do. Collective bargaining and how to structure, restructure the whole thing, right?

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: Well, we, as I can recall, we put that together. We must have had some help from somebody in the bureaucracy in the Labor Department. I can't imagine we wrote every word ourselves. But it was based on the

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consensus as we heard. [Interruption]

STERN: Okay. All set.

DONOVAN: During one.... You know, I was involved in this work maybe a total of eighteen months or something like that at most. During one critical year out of that eighteen months or eight or nine months out of it, it was Luther Hodges' bureaucratic responsibility. And, Hodges clearly didn't have that much profound interest in this and so a lot of the day-by-day interests went to Gudeman, the undersecretary, who did, and Dave Burke worked for Hodges but he was really working for Gudeman at this point. And, once they got the responsibility, they decided over there to bring in an experienced academic type to head up the staff and probably, and probably two or three of the important papers that are extant came through that period and it was Jack Stieber who was an industrial relations professor at the University of Michigan or some such place...

STERN: Yes, I came across his name, right.

DONOVAN: ...and he's written in the field and this is not a field that I'm a specialist in academically. I'm a layman academically, but Stieber came on board and he was there for, I don't know, six months and was a very compulsive worker and so on and so on. And, so that I think that that's probably where you find the kind of detailed staff work that you see. But certainly the principals didn't bring this to it. I don't mean to say that Henry Ford didn't come prepared.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: Or that Thomas Watson didn't come prepared, but they didn't come prepared with documents which they presented to us. And so we picked it up by the headline notes and the consensus that evolved and then the staff staffed this out as best they could. And it was a very small staff, that's for sure.

STERN: Did.... Well, as a matter of fact, I neglected to ask exactly how you got into the committee. Did Wirtz ask you to serve?

DONOVAN: Yes, it was funny. I had been working for him a very short period of time. I almost think it was within the first week or so. And, and it's again part of this business of, of looking after your GS rating. I went over there as a GS-16, which was essentially the salary I was getting on Capitol Hill. And, he raised the position from

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a 15 to a 16 so that it would be almost competitive with my Capitol Hill.... It came within a couple of hundred dollars. But anyway, I'd been there a very short period of time and he said, "Oh, I've discovered that I've got a GS-17 slot here which you can occupy. It's only good until the end of the fiscal year which would be June and then you'll probably have to go back to 16 but you might as well have it while you're here." And it turned out that that slot was the assistant executive director or whatever of the Labor Management Committee.

STERN: I see.

DONOVAN: But he'd already asked me to do this. And he said, he said, I'm heavily responsible for this thing." And he said, "I need a staff person to go to these meetings and play the role." And, he said, "Besides," he said, "I think you'll find it fascinating." So he thought it would be a nice assignment for me. And I said, "Who else is there?" And he said, he said, "Just this young guy, Dave Burke. I don't know anything about him. You'll have to get to know him," and so on. And Dave was right out of graduate school, you know. So that's the way it happened.

STERN: I see. There were five subcommittees. Did the staff try to prepare papers for each of the subcommittees? Well, I'll give you the names of them. For example, there was one called Free and Responsible Collective Bargaining and Industrial Peace, Economic Growth and Unemployment, Automation and Technological Change, Policies to Make American Products Competitive in World Markets, and finally Sound Wage and Price Policies.

DONOVAN: I sure as hell don't remember it.

STERN: You don't remember?

DONOVAN: And I tend to doubt it during the period I was involved.

STERN: Why do you think that?

DONOVAN: I, I just don't have any visual recollection in my mind's eye--how's that for
a phrase?--ah...

STERN: Okay.

DONOVAN: ...of any subcommittees that were operationally relevant or of anybody preparing anything for subcommittees. I don't remember subcommittees ever meeting. We always met as a committee as a whole. Met in the morning. They usually went off to lunch in their various

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directions and then--I'll tell you a good story about Thomas Watson--and they, and then back in the afternoon. They'd love it if--which didn't happen too often--if then at the end of the day we said, "Well, we've got something good here, let's go over and talk to the President." And then Arthur would have arranged, or Wirtz, or whoever, that the President would see them in the Fish Room. And so rarely we would hop over to the Fish Room and they'd sit around.

STERN: I meant to ask you that. Did you meet in the White House now and then?

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. Not often during the period I was there but it happened, yes.

STERN: And Kennedy would meet you there.

DONOVAN: There's a picture.... That's one.... That's the committee.

STERN: I see. And there's the.... We have that in the Library, the Fish.

DONOVAN: That's in the Fish Room. And that's the whole committee sitting around the table. Yes.

STERN: Right. Did.... In preparing some of the really major reports, such as the Automation Report which I read the other day. Big thing.

DONOVAN: Yes, that was a big one.

STERN: What can you recall as being the most important internal conflicts between the labor-management sides on that report?

DONOVAN: Jesus, I can't....

STERN: The major divisions.

DONOVAN: I can't remember. I can't remember the major divisions and I haven't looked at that report in a long time. Does it look as if it were contentious and controversial?

STERN: No, the report itself doesn't.

DONOVAN: The labor-management one was.

STERN: What can you.... Well, then let's move on to that one then. I just.... I read that one, too. I....

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DONOVAN: Well, there I think you got into the classical kinds of struggles between Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] and management on the other side.

STERN: Definitely I found one thing by Meany in which Meany wrote a dissent, saying that he thought that Block [Joseph L. Block] of Inland Steel and Ford, and Henry Ford, were trying to weight the report, weight the report in such a way that it would make labor come out looking a little aggressive.

DONOVAN: I think Labor, as I recall, Labor was very sensitive that somehow they were going to sneak in national arbitration or whatever into the system.

STERN: Yes, right, that the...

DONOVAN: You know, more government intervention...

STERN: Yes, that did come up.

DONOVAN: ...in the free collective bargaining process.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And, I remember one meeting of the committee. I think it was a breakfast meeting somewhere. And I can't remember us having very many breakfast meetings. At some hotel, it might have been lunch. But, Reuther said something and Meany disagreed. Oh! I think Meany said that under some circumstances he would recommend people taking a wage cut. And Reuther... And, of course, the tension between them was very great but it was usually kept well under control. And Reuther said, "You would recommend a wage cut? Under certain circumstances?" And Meany said, "Yes, I would, you know, if the.... And I have." And Reuther said, "I cannot understand that at all." And Meany said, "That's because you don't understand anything about labor unions," or something like that.

STERN: Wow!

DONOVAN: Oh! It was.... And Reuther laughed. [Laughter]

STERN: Well, of course, the friction between the two was legendary.

DONOVAN: Oh, boy! You could taste it! I remember.... Henry Ford.... Reuther loved to bait him, you know, sort of tease him on the issues. And, you know, fairly....

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STERN: Ford doesn't strike me as being particularly bright, but I don't know how you would agree with that.

DONOVAN: That was my impression. That was my impression. That he was shrewd but certainly not terribly bright in the sense that a Reuther would be bright.

And I think Reuther knew that, you know. And that, when...that Henry had papers which were prepared by Ted Yntema [Theodore O. Yntema] or whatever and that.... But he, he really liked to rub him in a class warfare kind of way, you know. [Laughter] Still remembered getting hit over the head by those goons, I suppose.

STERN: Sure. Yes.

DONOVAN: Watson was always very suave and said very little. Chewed gum. I think he'd given up smoking or something and obviously got on very well with

the labor people in an industry, in a corporation which wasn't unionized.

[Laughter]

STERN: That's right. You said you had an anecdote about Watson.

DONOVAN: Oh. I might have told you socially when we were down there but in my mind it's worth getting in here. Illustrates a minor point. After one of these

meetings it turned out the President was going to be flying to New York City for what reasons I can't remember, in the late afternoon or early evening, for some reason, on Air Force One. And the question was that came over in the middle of the day while they were out. They all went to their separate places for lunch, wherever that was, to see their mistresses. I don't know what these guys did. And, then we all had to get them back, you know, to start the two o'clock. And so, it was while they were gone that the word came over. Wirtz came running in and said, "The President's going up to New York on Air Force One and he wants to know how many of these people would like to ride with him on Air Force One." So we had the problem during their noon hour of trying to get through to all these people and would you like to fly on Air Force One at four o'clock in the afternoon? And, of course, some of them weren't going to New York and what not. And, finally I got hold of Thomas Watson. Indeed, I don't think I got hold of him until he came back. Yes! It was a face-to-face conversation. And I said, "Mr. Watson, the President is going to be flying back to New York, or up to New York at four o'clock on Air Force One and all the members of the committee are invited to fly with him if they wish to." And he said, "Oh, yes. I would like that very much." And I said, "Fine."

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And he said, "Oh, young man." He said, "Would you do me a favor?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "Would you call whatever that little airline is that's"--this little air base that's south of the Washington National Airport. There used to be a north station or something, which you got on to fly northeast, and then there's a private.... Page Airways, where the little planes were. He said, "Would you call Page Airways and get a hold of my pilot and tell him that I won't need the plane tonight." So then I'm checking in with Wirtz just before two-fifteen or whatever and he says, "How did you make out and who's going?" And I said, you know, dump-de-dump's going and so on, and, I said, and Thomas Watson's going. And he said, "He is? Oh, that's nice." And I said, "Yes, and I'll give you a great one up." And, he said, "What's that?" And I said, "Would you like to fly in a president's plane? And he said, "Oh, yes, I'd love to." And I said, "Then guess what he says to me." And Wirtz says, "What?" And I said, "He said, 'Would you call and tell my pilot that I won't need my plane this evening.'" And Wirtz says, "Why is that one up?" And I said "Jesus...." [Laughter]

And then the next day he told me, Wirtz was on the plane. He went up. I wish I could remember what that could have been for. But anyway, probably the next day, surely thereafter, he said, I said, "How did Thomas Watson like the ride?" He said, "He loved the ride!" And, he said, "The President autographed a flight chart, or whatever they call it, for

Thomas Watson to take home to his son. And he said he was like a kid with a new toy. Couldn't have been more delighted.

STERN: That's fascinating. [Laughter] There were a number of other issues that— on which I don't think the committee came out with major reports and I think the reason is that there was too much division, too much contention.

DONOVAN: I think so.

STERN: Some of them are.... I wonder if you have any recollection of what some of the problems were. One was, for example, they got involved in the railroad dispute.

DONOVAN: I had forgotten that but it doesn't surprise me.

STERN: It did. But apparently, Wirtz was not able to get very much out of it and, of course, the unions were really adamant about any kind of forced arbitration. Then there was one on youth employment, and one particularly on...

DONOVAN: Youth employment didn't come up?

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STERN: It did. And not very much came out of it. It was in May '63. Then welfare and pension funds.

DONOVAN: May of '63. I should have known about that.

STERN: You have no recollection of that? Do you remember the problems over the welfare and pension funds? Funding of pensions, private pensions?

DONOVAN: No, they must have been theological but...[Laughter] I'm a big help to you!

STERN: Then the other one which apparently there were specific recommendations made, the president specifically asked the committee to work on the emergency provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act.

DONOVAN: Oh, God!

STERN: Do you have any recollection of that?

DONOVAN: No.

STERN: Oh, God!

DONOVAN: When did he do that?

STERN: That was, April '63. And he did get a very specific set of recommendations.

DONOVAN: Did he?

STERN: Yes. Which was, I can recall them to you. One was that the President would appoint an emergency dispute board in any dispute which involved the national safety or the national health. The board would then study, make recommendations and, if they were unsuccessful, negotiations would continue without a strike for eighty days and without a court injunction. And if *that* failed then the president would go to the Congress for the injunction under the Taft-Hartley Act. But apparently the problem was that he could never get this through Congress.

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: And nothing ever came of it.

DONOVAN: Now Wirtz was clearly the secretary by this time.

STERN: Oh, yes. This is May '63. April, May '63.

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DONOVAN: And the Secretary must have thought, because I don't think the initiative probably would have come from the White House. The Secretary must have thought that he could get some specific help out of this committee on this. That's interesting that he was trying to move it in that direction. Because usually they kept away from what you might call specifics. And, you know, have these philosophical statements on automation and so on and so on. But I mean to aim it at a particular kind of problem. I had forgotten that Wirtz was able to even think of moving it. I guess that would be consistent with his approach to life.

STERN: Well, of course, Wirtz had the responsibility of sell--of handling this type of feud and very shortly thereafter, when he made the recommendation maybe he was looking for help.

DONOVAN: [Speaking simultaneously with above] Yes. Right, right, And he thought this would.... Yes, right, right. I think that's it. I think that's it. And he

decided what the hell, we might as well get some good out of these guys, rather than just sit around shooting the breeze. And I don't know what Arthur Goldberg had in mind, I wish I knew, when he set this thing up.

STERN: It's very interesting. I found a letter from a very conservative businessman who was a member of the National Right to Work Committee opposing the setting up of the committee, although it was well into its tenure. It was a good two years after it had been set up. And he made a very interesting statement. I wanted to know your response to that. He said that the problem with this kind of committee he said, is that it represents on the labor side only perhaps fifteen million unionized workers. And many of those, of course, he said, are compulsory and into all the rest of that. And yet, he said, there were a good *fifty million* American workers who were not in an union, and are *they* represented on this committee? And, it's an interesting point, actually, when you go back to that whole progressive model, in terms of these blocs, representing these bloc interests.

DONOVAN: Right, it represents the organized interests.

STERN: That's right. It's the organized interests and in many ways.... Of course, a lot of new left people were very critical...

DONOVAN: And then the public in the form of Clark Kerr and David Cole [David L. Cole] and George Taylor [George W. Taylor] and other great arbitrators of that time. It also had the chairman of the board of McGraw-

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Hill, I can't remember his name now.

STERN: I have the list here somewhere.

DONOVAN: But Arthur Burns [Arthur F. Burns] was on it too.

STERN: Oh, yes, he was. That's right. Here it is. This is an early list when you were assistant to the undersecretary of labor. There was Block, of course, Bookbinder [Hyman H. Bookbinder] from the Commerce Department, David Burke, Burns, Cole, Dubinsky [David Dubinsky]

DONOVAN: Booky, that's right. Booky would have been the representative before Jack Stieber. I'd forgotten that.

STERN: That's right.

DONOVAN: And Dave was a deputy to him but actually Booky was the head of a

thousand things and Dave was the one that really...

STERN: Right. David Dubinsky....

DONOVAN: Gilbert Harrison [Gilbert M. Harrison] of the Brotherhood of Railroad Clerks, Keenan [Joseph Daniel Keenan] of the electrical workers...

DONOVAN: Yes, Joe Keenan.

STERN: Tom Kennedy [Thomas Kennedy] of the United Mine Workers, who died not long after.

DONOVAN: Yes, that was before I came, I think.

STERN: Ralph McGill [Ralph E. McGill].

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: Let's see. Oh, here's Stieber. He's listed too as staff director.

DONOVAN: Yes, okay.

STERN: Do you have any at all, any specific recollections of the differences between staff director, executive secretary, executive director? Or was it essentially not meaningful in terms of function?

DONOVAN: I think the staff director in the person of Stieber was mostly staff director, an academic

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with expertise in labor-management relations fields, who took these issues, whatever they are, very seriously and wanted the paper to be just right and so on. Bookbinder was a jack of all trades, bouncy, feisty guy, with five thousand irons in the fire, trying to translate Luther Hodges into something that made sense here. And Dave Burke was a young guy right out of Chicago Business School, and a protégé of George Schultz [George P. Schultz], who came to Washington to make his name, and to gain fame. And found himself in this implausible position where he proved to be very able because he was a good listener, and turned out to be very shrewd politically. And, then I was there doing whatever Willard Wirtz wanted me to do and I didn't see my role as essentially that of what Jack Stieber would see as the staff director's role.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: And, but I think what happened is that shortly after I moved into this is that the operational responsibility for a period of time anyway, moved over

to the Commerce Department and it was the Commerce Department that brought Stieber on board. Because they felt, I think, you know, that institutionally they were weak in this area. Hodges didn't know much about collective bargaining. The idea was that the Labor Department instinctively, or whatever, were great collective bargaining experts, or this relations between these guys. And this was a whole new world for Luther Hodges even though he had been an industrialist. I mean the theory of it. And, as this isn't Booky's field either. I don't know what the hell Booky's field is. Gudeman was good at it and had some experience at Sears Roebuck and so on. And so whenever the responsibility was, they wanted to show that they could do the job. And that intellectually and so on they were up to the Labor Department and so they brought this good academic type, who was a compulsive perfectionist, hard working guy. Very insensitive to the political nuances, I think and.... That help?

STERN: I think so. There was another question I wanted to ask though. I was thinking as you were speaking and now it slipped my mind. Oh, yes, how much of your, how much of your time, while you were assistant to Wirtz, did the committee take? Was it an extensive....

DONOVAN: It took quite a bit of time. And, I would guess on the average of.... Quite apart.... When, when, this committee, or the Dave Burkes and the John Donovans of the world had the responsibility of the conference which only lasted a couple of days. That was, you know, probably a couple of months operation in which, in which we didn't do much of any thing else. I've forgotten how much time we had to get ready but let's say six weeks. I think it

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probably wasn't more than that. That was almost a full time occupation, the Secretary said, or the Undersecretary, said, "Go all out on this. Arthur Goldberg wants this conference to be a success. I don't have time. This is your baby. This is your responsibility." So when you get that kind of directive, you spend all your time on it. I think the Labor-Management Advisory Committee probably took a day or two of each week. You know, if you added it up.

STERN: So, it was taking a good twenty-five hours a week.

DONOVAN: It was taking.... It was taking.... Yes. It was a pretty major responsibility.

STERN: How much time did Wirtz put into it?

DONOVAN: It's hard for the assistant to guess on that sort of thing. I looked at it this way that he regarded it as being an important thing and, you know, this

was something that you didn't neglect or put on the back burner. It had, you know, a pretty high priority in his life if he could arrange it that way. And, I don't suppose that he put in more than, I don't know.... I don't suppose that it was more than a few hours a week of even thinking about it. Except when it was in town.

STERN: What about Moynihan? He was executive secretary in '60 but that was before you were on it, though, so I guess you wouldn't have any specific recollections on that.

DONOVAN: I don't think that.... Was Pat ever attached to this committee?

STERN: Yes, he was. He was executive secretary of labor-management policy in June '61.

DONOVAN: I didn't realize that!

STERN: That's almost a year before you came.

DONOVAN: Yes. He must have attended the meetings under Arthur, then.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: I was never aware of that.

STERN: He does have...

DONOVAN: Pat and I.... Pat and I at one point.... Well, I guess shortly after Wirtz became

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secretary, and I became the special assistant sitting in there and Pat became the executive assistant down the hall. At one point, Pat and I began to overlap more and more and more operationally in various things and became very good friends. Spent a lot of time together. And, but I, if I ever knew that he had served in this, I had totally forgotten it. I don't think I was ever aware of it.

STERN: Yes. That's interesting.

DONOVAN: It'd be great if he talked about that early period.

STERN: Well....

DONOVAN: I certainly hope there's an oral interview with Dave Burke coming up.

STERN: I'll make a note of it. I believe there is. Yes, where's he now?

DONOVAN: He's vice president of ABC [American Broadcasting Company] news. Going to the newspapers. He's a very knowledgeable young man.

STERN: And of course he had a lot to do with this committee.

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And that was.... It was almost his.... I think it would be fair to say during this period, and he would know better than I, but I think it was almost his only responsibility. I mean, this was kind of a full-time job. I don't know that he had any other responsibilities with Luther Hodges and Gudeman other than this. And he was very good at it too.

STERN: As opposed to you having.... You had a lot of other things to do. Right. Okay. Do you have any other things about the committee that.... Any anecdotes, about meetings with the President, or anything of that sort. I can't....

DONOVAN: I guess the one meeting I can recall in the White House which is the one that we see the picture on the wall there, is that Arthur Burns was in attendance and who knows where we were at that time or what year it was or what the unemployment rate was but the president right off came in and said, "Well, Dr. Burns," you

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know, "what do you have to say about the state of the economy?" or whatever. "How we're doing?" And Arthur puffed his pipe and said [gives imitation of Burns' nasal voice], "Well, Mr. President," and, you know it was like he was the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors and, as I recall, if I'm not mistaken, Walter Heller was in that room....

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: Yes. [Has gotten up and crossed the room to look at the picture of the meeting] Indeed he was. Yes. Walter must have loved that. And Arthur went on and on. You know, give him a chance to talk and he's got something to say. [Laughter] Then he went around and talked to, you know, Henry Ford and all the others. But he led off with Arthur Burns.

STERN: Did.... I already asked you in terms of how many meetings you had with Kennedy. He certainly was interested, there's no doubt about that.

DONOVAN: Yes. I don't imagine it was a passionate interest but you've got to be interested in something that has Thomas Watson and Henry Ford etc., etc., on it plus George Meany, plus Walter Reuther and, you know, even Clark Kerr.

STERN: The whole thrust of the Manpower Defense and Training Act and then the amendments that came under Wirtz...

DONOVAN: You mean the Manpower Development and Training Act?

STERN: Isn't that what I said?

DONOVAN: Yes. I think you put national defense in.

STERN: I'm sorry. I made a mistake. I want to get it right.

DONOVAN: That's all right. We all make mistakes.

STERN: Right. Very clearly, by the time you get the amendments under Wirtz which were in terms of retraining and a very different...

DONOVAN: And getting more and more complicated all the time.

STERN: Right. A very different concept. Right. A very different concept. I think the concept in '61 was

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in some ways kind of naïve.

DONOVAN: Oh, it was.

STERN: In terms of conception.

DONOVAN: Do you want a comment on that?

STERN: All right, sure.

DONOVAN: When the Manpower Development and Training Act.... It must have been conceived in '61 and it passed fairly early in '62. Just about the time.... It was passing just about the time I arrived in the Labor Department and one of my first jobs, I guess Wirtz was trying to think of something for me to do and he said the Manpower Development and Training Act is about to finish its congressional course. I'd like to have you take a look at it and then tell me what you think are its administrative problems

overall nationally and, you know, give me an assessment of what you think this is. I wish I had a copy of this report but I don't. So, I looked at it. I frankly don't think I knew that much about it on Capitol Hill. I don't think it was a big thing in our office. And, and I know I wasn't knowledgeable about it and I had no idea what the Labor Department was or what the.... I had no idea of what the bureaucratic structures were at the state level. I didn't know how this should be administered. But I went around and I talked to people and I had plenty of time, you know, there was no big hurry about this. And, I talked to anybody I could find in the Labor Department I thought might know anything about this. And I wrote my little report and said that I didn't think the thing would work very well except in, you know, fifteen states. That most of them would not be administratively up to it. And, I did not think it was a pretty pessimistic assessment of it. And I think it was right.

STERN: Kennedy became disillusioned with it too, by as late as the summer, by late summer of '63 it was only reaching perhaps a hundred, a hundred and fifty thousand people.

DONOVAN: Didn't.... Didn't amount to a bag of beans at the beginning.

STERN: It was very small.

DONOVAN: It had a very small budget. It was something like twenty million dollars. But it was also a very limited instrument. But, I think what's important is first to remember, to keep in mind is that the congressional view which was embedded in the.... First MDTA

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was that unemployment was a problem of technological displacement...

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: ...of a fifty-year-old white, Anglo-Saxon, high school dropout from West Virginia with a wife and seven kids living in the hollow somewhere. And that they were somehow going to do something for that guy. And, the act had been in operation a very short time, even with the limited twenty million dollars, when the first returns began to come in to the Labor Department from all the employment security agencies all over the country and to and behold, who is enrolling in this program but young people, black people, women people...

STERN: Right, and thus the amendments.

DONOVAN: ...and that universe of need which was there begins to come up and so then you begin to develop a very different instrument. At that point Willard Wirtz, who was passionately into the unemployment problem of the nation, realized and I'm sure he wasn't alone in realizing...Not only.... I think he, I'm sure he

realized intellectually long before this that the problem was more complex than the limited instrument. He began to see that we had to seek much more technically complicated and sophisticated methods.

STERN: Right. In many ways this is the origins of what some historians have called the discovery of poverty which is really...

DONOVAN: That's right.

STERN: ...intellectually, at least, is the origins of the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity]. I mean, it's

DONOVAN: Oh, yes, oh, sure. No question about it. The OEO's an attempt to begin to meet what this thing was showing us was there.

STERN: Discovering.... Right. Do you have any recollection at all of *why* there was a major gap in terms of the passage of the MDTA? It had passed in the House in August of '61 but the Senate held it up. Excuse me, it passed in the Senate in August '61 and was held up in the House until just about the time that you.... It was March or April of '62.

DONOVAN: Yes.

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STERN: So obviously there was a lot more resistance in the House to the whole concept.

DONOVAN: The guy who would know the answer to this--I noticed, I just got the file of what you have in the Library, this latest document of materials...

STERN: The blue book.

DONOVAN: Yes, and you've got a hundred-and-seventy-two-page, whatever it is with Sam Merrick [Samuel Vaughan Merrick] and--who was special assistant for legislative liaison, old friend, with Goldberg--and Sam was the major technician operating in this. He would, he would know the answer to this.

STERN: [Speaking simultaneously] I was wondering if...

DONOVAN: My guess is--and I think this would be partially true--is that in the Senate you had a committee, a subcommittee chaired by Joe Clark [Joseph S. Clark], which had a strong substantive interest in this. And, the knowledge and expertise of that committee would help in carrying the day in the Senate. In the House, I

think you'll find that the committee, the subcommittee was headed by Congressman Holland [Elmer J. Holland] of Pennsylvania who was out to lunch, and whose wife ran the office. And, although Holland was a representative of the labor unions, in effect, in the Congress and had this little subcommittee, there may have been problems with him. And I know there were problems between Holland and Sam Merrick, which may have complicated this. So maybe, maybe just the simple thing that Holland and Merrick were warring for whatever reasons and Merrick was carrying the ball for the Labor Department.

STERN: I see. What I was wondering about is the sort of thing you dealt with in your book on the war on poverty, the fact that the House, in passing the War on Poverty Bill obviously did not really understand the major element of what this was going to be really....

DONOVAN: Right, right, right. Never took a look at it.

STERN: I wondered to what degree they did or didn't look at the MDTA and whether it had something to do with the delay or...

DONOVAN: I think, I think the House had already.... I don't think, I know that the House had already passed the Area Redevelopment Act.

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STERN: That's right. Sixty one. That's early sixty one.

DONOVAN: And, after all, that had passed the House twice under Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], all it needed was a president who wouldn't veto it.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: Kennedy as a co-sponsor, one of the many...

STERN: April....

DONOVAN: ...would obviously sign it. So it goes sailing through and, like that. So the, so the Congress had an early institutional and political interest in depressed areas like West Virginia or Washington County, Maine. And this white, unemployed, fifty-year-old guy. They had that interest. That starts with ARA [Area Redevelopment Administration]. And that carries in to MDTA. So I think there was a natural almost bipartisan thing going that would carry this through the House. And so I don't know why the reason would be for the delay especially because they weren't asking for much money anyway and they were already committed to this sort of thing. Unless it was that there was some screw-up in the structural processes of the House which I tend to think was the case. But I don't know that.

STERN: I'll have to look at that. I think the Merrick material may very well.... Well, I'd like to get on to your appointment as manpower administrator, how that happened...

DONOVAN: That's pretty simple from my point of view. The first year or so before this happened--this happened in the spring of 1964. For a year before that, or the better part of a year, Undersecretary Henning.... Wirtz finally decided, "I'm going to give the undersecretary something to do, and see if he can do it." And so he made him, he created this position of manpower administrator. But it was not a full time job. It was the Undersecretary operating as manpower administrator. And the Undersecretary met once a week with his staff and I don't mean by that all the assistant secretaries but with the people who were in the manpower field: the chief of BES [Bureau of Employment Security], the bureau chief of OMAT [Office Manpower, Automation and Training], the bureau chief of BAT [Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training], some special assistants and budget people and what not. The people who were putting together this program and making it administrative reality. And, BES and OMAT were engaged in a life and death struggle by this time.

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STERN: Yes.

DONOVAN: And so they sat around for a whole year and, at the end of the year succeeded in writing a mutual nonaggression pact on paper. That's about all. In effect, nothing happened. And it was pretty clear to the Secretary, or at least as he perceived it, that the Undersecretary really wasn't going to take this on in a very hard or substantial way. For whatever reasons, he didn't want to and the Undersecretary at this point, was constantly flying off to give speeches before AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] conventions all over the country. He was gone two or three days a week. Loved to be on airplanes. Loved to go talk to his old buddies and he saw that as part of his role, public relations and apparently George Meany liked this and all those people. And, it may have been also because by this time he had said, "What the hell, there's no role for me here and I have no relationship with the Secretary." You know, so I'm not blaming the guy. In fact, he's a kind of nice guy. But, the Secretary, at any rate, had reached the point where he felt that now the thing is getting very complicated and very big and it's not moving and we're going to, we're going to get responsibilities under OEO. We're going to get the whole, what turned out to be the whole Neighborhood Youth Corps, Title 2B, or whatever it was, which was a big thing. Nobody knew what it was but.... And who knew what else was going to come along. And, so, he called me in one day and he said, "I've decided to make the manpower administrator a full-time job and I'm appointing you to it." [Laughter] And I said, "Why me?" And he said, "You don't remember, do you, the first conversation we had at lunch that day?" And I said, "Yes, I remember it fairly well." And he said, "Do you remember that one of the things was that you said to me and I asked you what you would like in coming over to the Labor Department? What you would like to do and we talked about various things and you said to me in that conversation

you said, "Sometime I would like to have an operating program of my own to administer." And I said, "Yes, I guess I did say that." And he said, "Well, you know, this is it." And I said, "Gee, you know..."

STERN: Quite a memory.

DONOVAN: ...And I said, "Gee, you know, I'm not sure." And he said, "Nonsense." And he said, you know, "It has to be done and you're the guy to do it." And I said, "Okay." [Laughter] And so I started like the next day and then it took a week or two for the public announcement. And we now have a full-time manpower administrator. And they'd give me a big office down the hall, Pat Moynihan's former assistant secretary office. And then I

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had to create a staff and away we went. And it was new and it was a lot of fun.

STERN: How much cooperation did you get from the White House?

DONOVAN: In what?

STERN: As manpower administrator. Did you have any relationship with some of Johnson's staff people?

DONOVAN: No, not especially but I don't think that the job required a great deal of White House cooperation. Because a lot of the job was internal inside the Labor Department trying to shake this bureaucratic structure, you know, bang heads together and say, we're not going to have BES spending all its time warring with OMAT. We *are* going to make this goddamn program go. We *are* going to get organized for Title 2B. We put a task force, I created a task force immediately and took Jack Howard away from the Undersecretary. He became my principal deputy. Put him in charge of drawing up.... I discovered that no work had been done at all! Not one piece of paper on what this, what became the Neighborhood Youth Corps, what it would be or how it would be done. Nothing had been done. So I had to create an emergency task force to write the regulations, show how to create an apparatus out there which can.... This is going to be a big hundred-million-dollar program. So in six weeks they came through. No, nobody said it could be done in six weeks but, of course, it could. And, it was that kind of thing but then, what is perhaps kind of pertinent to your question is that I began to develop relations with the Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.] people...

STERN: I was just about to ask you that. The OEO people.

DONOVAN: And OEO. Because this was becoming extraordinarily contentious. Bad blood between Shriver and Wirtz at the top from day one. Now it was

becoming operationally and Adam [Adam Yarmolinsky] wasn't helping very much, God knows.

STERN: What was the source of the bad blood between Shriver and Wirtz?

DONOVAN: Struggle over bureaucratic turf. Wirtz wanted the program and it was Shriver's program. And, Wirtz, I think, was concerned that Shriver would use all of his money and glamor to build an independent employment service which would be apart from the U.S. Department of Labor Employment Service. That Shriver would get all the youth programs whereas the Youth Employment Bill had come out of the

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Labor Department and we were supposed to know how to handle youth. Plus Wirtz was passionately committed to unemployment and so on. And, it just didn't.... It just.... The Wirtz-Shriver relationship just never went well from the minute that Shriver was appointed head of the OEO. It was very difficult. But we had to work together and not at antagonistic purposes as this thing was coming on and so some way had to be found to do this. And, so I got together with Jack Conway [Jack Thomas Conway] and said, "Come on, let's get open, let's talk this out," and so forth.

STERN: So did you serve essentially as a mediator between the two? That's what it amounted to?

DONOVAN: Yes, but I said to Jack, I said, "Look, you know, you can probably spend a lot of time on this. I can't, I've got this other thing, you know, I've got this thing here. And so I can't personally, I cannot afford the time. So, who can I give you as my guy who's totally responsible to me and we must never have these obscene things, you know, we gotta work 'em out. Somehow. It's difficult." And he said, you know, "That's right. Christ, you know." And, you know, he couldn't have been better about it. And I said, as I recall, "What about Sam Merrick? Because I had taken Sam on. He was still a special assistant for legislative liaison but he was also the top deputy to me in charge of youth programs because he was very interested in them. And he said, "No, that wouldn't work at all because Sam had a reputation for being difficult. And I said, "I've got a new deputy, Sam Ganz [Samuel Ganz] who's a senior bureaucrat that I've picked up from OMAT, who used to be out of wage-hour and Sam is not a specialist in anything but he's a very experienced senior bureaucratic guy who can get along with anybody." And he said, "Well, let's try that." So Sam Ganz became deputy manpower administrator and I think he spent 50 percent of his time in diplomatic negotiations with the Office of Economic Opportunity. And then, this was a constant thing that was coming into my office and Sam and I talked about it all the time and Sam was great at this, you know, he smoothed over a whole lot of stuff. But we had BES in the background which was very nervous about anything that they were doing that would affect youth and youth unemployment. That was what it was really all about. But we had a little bit of an advantage, you see. The other side of

the issue is that they (OEO) were created as an operational entity long before they had any money. And, they didn't get their money until October and, and we had money. And so we were the only people in town that had any money. And, so there were things we could do; there were ways in which we could be helpful to them in getting started in these various communities that they were starting community action. We could build, you know, little building block kind of relationships and so on.

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STERN: Can you give me a--I asked you this sort of question earlier in terms of your working for Wirtz--a kind of blow-by-blow daily description of what a day was like in terms of manpower administration? What sorts of things came up? What sorts of people you had to handle?

DONOVAN: Well, bloody hell, I'll tell you that! [Laughter]

STERN: In what way?

DONOVAN: Well, you arrive at eight o'clock in the morning or, you know, some early hour and there would be on, from the night before, either five major problems unresolved or somebody would have already walked in with five more. And, the phone was going all the time because there were, you know, great, great problems that every, every everywhere you turn, you know, there was some kind of a major problem. Plus you are now head of a large bureaucratic.... You know, you've got three bureaus and three bureau chiefs, two of them warring with one another. I mean, two bureaus, not just the bureau chiefs, big bureaucratic war going on. Then this sleepy, monastic order, BAT, which you've got to try to build some expertise into. You've got relationships with OEO. You have to use the kind of congressional interests because these programs are going to go out into the congressional.... So why can't this program be funded tomorrow, and why isn't mine better than somebody else's? It's good that I had the sensitivity for that, I think. I mean, it was good that I had Capitol Hill...

STERN: Your congressional experience must have been very helpful.

DONOVAN: Yes, because the bureaucrats have a tendency to overreact, which is one thing I...Every bureaucrat thinks he's a great Capitol Hill expert. And they think a call from any Joe Jerk in a congressman's office means that they have to act immediately. And I would say, "Nonsense, you don't have to act just because a congressman's assistant calls. What congressman is this? You know, probably he's a freshman Republican. You don't have to respond to him. If it's Wilbur Mills [Wilbur D. Mills] or Senator Long [Russell B. Long] you'll let me know or Sam Merrick. But you know, don't, you don't have to go and leap just because they say frog." Well, anyway. Then I had a very sizeable staff that began to develop: deputy administrator and then Jack Howard and Sam Merrick. And then, you soon discovered that you had budget officers. And, they'd have

to see you a lot, and so you're seeing a lot of staff people. I tried to almost never attend a committee meeting if I could possibly avoid it. I tried to get out of all, you know, there

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were all kinds of interdepartmental committee meetings all over town that I could have gone to.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: But I knew from past experience these were a waste of time and so I would almost always, if I possibly could, send somebody else. I tried to stay in my own office as much as possible. I tried to keep on top of the paper which was an enormous amount of paper that came through, and you had to learn how to speed read and so on.

STERN: That's an interesting point. Speed reading.

DONOVAN: Yes. Yes. And in the meantime to complicate my life even further, Leo Werts and the Secretary decided to go for a version of PPBS [Program Planning Budget System]. Lyndon Johnson either had or was about to wave the wizard's wand and say, "We will have program planning budgeting all over the U.S. government." And Leo Werts, I guess, saw this coming, so he brought in Frank McGilvery who had learned it--he was a civil servant but was now in private practice, a consultant. And, McGilvery had done this for the army so he knew how to put program planning in. And they thought that the logical place to run the experiment once the Secretary bought it--he was skeptical but he finally bought it, to try it as an experiment--they decided the logical place to do this is in the manpower administration because it's new and because it's the big program and so on. And so, during my first year, along with all these other things, we go through the PPBS revolution. Well, of course, that generates even more paper because everybody had to write down every little person what it is and how to exactly.... And it all comes in at the end of the year in the report. Which was a good report. And I complimented it on them.

STERN: It reminds me of the present fuss over ZBB [Zero Base Budgeting].

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. The.... Because the beauty of this thing, when it got all through, was that it highlighted the problems which I knew were there, and which I think any normally intelligent senior executive administrator in this spot probably would have known were there. But it is reassuring to have a whole strange process gone through and then find that, by God, they have highlighted as the priority problems essentially what you had thought were the priority problems. I found that kind of reassuring, you know. On the other hand, it seems to me that one could have come to that set of priorities or whatever without going through all that. But, but, if that process reinforced

intuition or intuitive hunches I, you know, I felt better I think about it. So the day was mostly lots of phone calls from all over the place, a steady stream of bureaucratic visitors mostly from your own organization, not many from the outside world. Some interdepartmental committees which you couldn't avoid. There was one that involved, oddly enough, selective service because the selective service system had been found to be a great place for finding disadvantaged young people.

STERN: Yes, sure it was.

DONOVAN: Because so many people, so many people going through the draft were physically and intellectually and educationally unqualified, so they had the greatest set of names and numbers in town. And, this had started out as the selective service rejectees program in the Bureau of Employment Security. They had identified this, so now there was a group involving HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] and OEO and Labor and Social Security on how to put this together and make it fit into the War on Poverty. You know, how good were these names and that kind of thing. I did meet with them a lot, quite frequently. Weekly staff meeting, I think, was every Friday for about two or three hours with the manpower staff.

STERN: Did Reynolds have anything...have any major role in this as...

DONOVAN: No, as far as I know, none at all, none at all. I didn't even, I didn't even report through him especially. Well, during the first period I don't know how long thereafter, the undersecretary that I would have been reporting through was Henning. He was still around.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And there was.... It would have made no sense to.... I guess I probably went through some formal process of stopping by and chatting with them and so on but I didn't report formally through them at all. It was strictly to the Secretary's office. And I don't think that in the, I don't think that in the table chart that was drawn up I don't think I was supposed to report to the Undersecretary. I think that if I went in it was a matter of courtesy and so on.

STERN: I see.

DONOVAN: But it was a direct secretary to manpower administrator thing. And I would see the Secretary a lot just to make sure we were in agreement on the next move. This will interest and amuse you, I think. At

some fairly early point in the process, a person in our publicity, public information department came to me, Joe Judge [Joseph Judge], who's now a senior editor with *National Geographic*, and Joe said that OMAT, that's the, the fancy part of the department's manpower administration, the think tank part. But they had some E and D projects, experimental and demonstration, and at this point they had their own regional field offices, so they were out funding all kinds of creative things that the Bureau of Employment Security wouldn't get into, socially experimental and what not. The kind of thing that community action programs later on would have loved to have been involved in, and probably were. And, Joe had just found out that the OMAT was about to fund a project in Chicago and this was to retrain and reemploy some, let's say, three hundred black male, age fifty, former people who had worked in the stock yards who had been automated out of their jobs and would never work again in Chicago unless they were retrained. Now these were all men who were heads of black families and had earned half way decent money all their lives and now they were totally unemployed and unemployable because they weren't educated or anything like that, all they knew was working in the stock yards.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: And OMAT was funding something like a hundred and fifty thousand project to see what could be done with three hundred of these people through the Woodlawn Organization, if you've heard of it. It was created by Saul Alinsky, the radical organizer...

STERN: Doesn't ring a bell.

DONOVAN: Well, anyway, it'll all come out in the notes later on and Woodlawn was not an organization which would have been favored by Mayor Daley's [Richard J. Daley] organization and Saul Alinsky was a thorn in the side of the establishment and so on. And so, an organization which he had created at the neighborhood level was about to get a hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar grant to retrain black males. Joe Judge had checked this out and thought that the Manpower Administrator himself should go out and hand the contract to them. That we should get great publicity out of this and so on and so on. Since I did very little of this sort of thing, cross examined him very much on whether it was worth spending a day or two of time and what was this all about and was it a good project? Yes, it was. And Joe said, "I'll go with you personally."

So we went out and we certainly did get good local television coverage. They were all there and they interviewed me and so on. And there was a big ceremony in the neighborhood itself, which was attended by many, many black preachers. And

most of the Catholic hierarchy, I mean the church hierarchy, bishops and archbishops and what not were there. There were as many white Irish priests as there were black ministers in

attendance. But there was nobody from the mayor's office except a very frightened young alderman, I think. Young, probably Italian-American guy, who looked absolutely scared to death to be in this neighborhood or at this thing. But, he represented the mayor. And so I spoke and a black minister took the contract for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars and I think an archbishop spoke and the frightened young alderman. And, that was it. And then Joe and I went back and had dinner and then we flew back to Washington. About a month later I get a call from Hobart Taylor, my old friend from the old days at the White House saying that Mrs. So-and-so from Chicago was in town, an old friend of his and that she would like to talk with me, and that he would appreciate it very much if I would have a conversation with this lady. And she says that she's a *very* good friend of ours from Chicago. And he says I know the President especially would appreciate it if you would talk with her. Anyway. So the lady came over and, naturally, I saw her. And, she was a black lady. She didn't photograph terribly black but she was. And, she wasn't young. And, we had quite a long conversation around several corners before it began to get through to me why the lady was there. And, I think her husband was a black alderman in the Daley machine. But in any event, the message she delivered to me was that it would be very much appreciated when we came into Chicago and funded federal programs if we would go through the regular organization, that they had better contact at the local level and it was much less disturbing and so on and so on.

STERN: It sounds very much like your book on OEO.

DONOVAN: Yes, right, exactly. The.... She didn't overtly criticize the grant of a hundred and fifty thousand, didn't make any point of that but just said that they do have an established organization and in the future federal funding much better that it goes that way. And so I think both the White House and Mayor Daley are communicating fairly early on how they preferred to have these things done. And I probably should have sent a memo to everybody in the federal government, to let them know ahead of time.

STERN: That's a fascinating story.

DONOVAN: Yes, yes.

STERN: It reveals, I think, essentially the same point in terms of local, the whole....

DONOVAN: And this was just, you know, a little bit of

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money. But it was to an organization which I didn't know, I mean, I didn't do my homework on it. And, I probably would have gone anyway, as far as I know. But this was really an organization that city hall was very unhappy about, I mean, the history of it. Even if it was a good project.

STERN: Do you have any other anecdotes about, well, almost anything that would

be especially revealing of somebody like Wirtz or his relationship with Kennedy? You mentioned one when you were down in April. About getting a call, about, I believe it was agricultural workers' wages in Florida. Things of that kind.

DONOVAN: There was the agricultural, the workers for.... Migrant laborers hourly wage was before some administrative process and it was going to be raised

from, oh, I don't know, something like eighty-five cents an hour to ninety cents an hour. And Wirtz felt strongly about migrant workers. He felt that very strongly. He visited some of the camps. His Methodist conscience was outraged, and this was going through an administrative process and we had learned already that it was very sensitive politically because Spessard Holland [Spessard Lindsey Holland] and a senator from Florida was on the phone or writing letters and Sam Merrick was onto it and to some extent Smathers [George Armistead Smathers] was also involved. I was more aware of Holland's profound unhappiness with this thing, I think, than the other. And, the administrative hearing was about to come to an end and the guy would give his verdict. And, for reasons that I've never been clear on and I didn't inquire into, I learned through the Deputy Undersecretary, the most senior civil servant in the department, Millard Cass...

STERN: Cass. Right.

DONOVAN: You have a big interview with Millard Cass.

STERN: That's right.

DONOVAN: He could clarify this better than I could, because I really don't understand it and I didn't ask. But it turned out that apparently the verdict could go either way at the administrative level through this administrative process. And I would rather not have known about that. But anyway, I seem to recall that John Pomfret [John D. Pomfret] of the *New York Times* was birddogging this issue too. And he was a bird dog. Anyway, it was in the early evening and the Secretary was in his office and somehow, I have forgotten why, there was a call between the Secretary--oh, I don't know who initiated it but anyway--there was a call that involved the Secretary and the President himself. And

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Jack Howard was sitting there with me, and probably Charlie Donahue, who's dead now, and I were sitting around for whatever reasons, waiting. And, and we knew the Secretary was having this conversation and the Secretary came out and said, "Sorry, the decision goes the wrong way on the Florida case." And we were all mad, outraged, and I don't think he was very happy either. And, one of us had the nerve to say "Why?" or whatever. And he said, "Well," you know, "it's right from the man himself." And he said, "He's not very happy

about it either but he said blame it on that S.O.B., George Smathers.” It was, you know, interesting and intriguing. [Laughter]

STERN: Yes, it is. Well, their relationship clearly had soured significantly by the time he was president. It was Bobby who said...

DONOVAN: What Smathers had done to, what Smathers was working on him, I don't know.

STERN: Wasn't it Bobby who said that the last time George stood up for Jack was at his wedding?

DONOVAN: Yes, that's probably right. The one little story on LBJ--and I don't know what the meaning of this was. And I wish that I could pinpoint the date because I have often wondered if it didn't have something to do with the awarding of the TFX contract.

STERN: Then it would be early.

DONOVAN: Yes. I got a call at the Labor Department. I was in the other room and one of the lady secretaries that handled the Secretary's office and my office came running, and said, "The Vice President's on the phone and he wants to talk to you!" And I said, "You mean, somebody in the vice president's office wants to talk to me?" She said, "No, the Vice President!" I said, "You're kidding." She said, "No, you'd better get...." You know, "you'd better hustle." So I *ran* to my phone and, sure enough, it was LBJ. And he said, "Mr. Donovan." Now, you know, he obviously didn't know who I was. Somebody must have looked it up in the book or something...

STERN: Was this before you had that meeting in which he...

DONOVAN: I don't know, I can't remember.

STERN: Oh, you don't remember. I see.

DONOVAN: I know I was Wirtz's executive assistant but, even if he had met me at the meeting he still, you

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know.... Somebody had to say "Call Donovan" or he looked it up, or his secretary looked it up in the book and said, "He's the executive assistant, he must know." And he called me and said, "I'd like to get the latest up-to-the-minute unemployment rates for Los Angeles and Fort Worth." And he said, "Do you think you could get those for me. I need them right away." And I said, "Oh, yes, sir, I'll have them right back. Yes, sir" and you know. And he said, "Well, here's the number and don't go through a secretary, you know,

it'll be me." And I said, "Fine. Thank you, sir." And he said, "I appreciate this." So then I had.... I was way out on a limb because you could *never* get up to date unemployment rates out of BLS [Bureau of Labor Statistics]. They only do them once a month. They regard them as sacrosanct. They are very tendentious in dealing with the Secretary's office and treat us as if we were another principality or something and so I had absolutely no confidence that I could get anything that would be any damn good. But I called, I think, oh, I don't know who, Seymour Wolfbein [Seymour L. Wolfbein]. He wouldn't have been at BLS, I don't know. Maybe I did call Seymour at OMAT, I don't know. Because he's a smart guy. But I...

STERN: He probably would be the one to call.

DONOVAN: Yes, even though he wasn't at BLS. But, in any event, I called somebody and I said, "Boy, I'm really in a tough spot because the Vice President himself wants this and he wants the latest unemployment in L.A. and Fort Worth." And they said, "Wait a minute!" And they said, "Yeah, hey, we got one right here. It's right up to the minute. Very good" you know. "L.A. is 4.9 and Fort Worth is 5.2 or whatever." And I said, "Are you sure?" And they said, "Yes, this is.... You know, you're lucky, to get it." So, I was able to call him back even *faster* that I would have thought possible. And there he was on the phone, you know, whenever I dialed. And I said, "Mr. Vice President?" And he said, "Yes." "This is John Donovan at the Labor Department." And he said, "You got those figures?" And I said, "Yes." "What are they?" And I said, "L.A. pum-pum-pum and Fort Worth pum-pum." And he said, "Thank you" Pum. [Laughter] And I won.... You know, that was a close run thing as to where that would go. And, at the time I wondered why the hell does he care about what Los Angeles' unemployment is as well as Fort Worth's but those were the two places that were bidding for it and the one little thing that might have tipped it might have been if somebody's got a higher degree of unemployment. So that some of a gun was working on the thing, maybe legitimately, but...

STERN: Oh, I see. Did you have any contact with Johnson while you were manpower administrator? When he was president?

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DONOVAN: No, except to go to that ceremony and receive a pen. No, I'm sure not. Sure not.

STERN: And other anecdotes of that kind that you can think of?

DONOVAN: No, I don't think so.

STERN: Well, unless you have anything you...

DONOVAN: I think I've exhausted you and me.

STERN: I'm, I'm pretty much finished with my outline unless you have anything

else.

DONOVAN: I thank you.

STERN: Thank *you* very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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