

George S. McGovern Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 07/16/1970
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Biographical Note

George S. McGovern was director of Food for Peace (1961-1962) and a Senator from South Dakota (1963-1981). This interview focuses on communications with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] under Food for Peace, RFK as a Senator, and RFK's run for president in 1968, among other issues.

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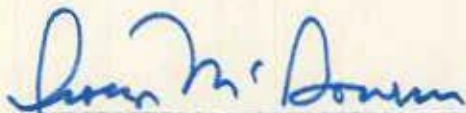
by George McGovern

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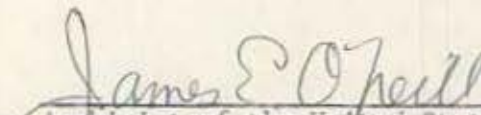
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George S. McGovern – RFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

GEORGE S. McGOVERN

July 16, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project
of the Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: I don't have any specific questions from that very early period, so I'll just ask you if there are specific things you remember from the '60 campaign or (Democratic National) Convention before we go to Food for Peace?

McGOVERN: Well, the first time I remember talking to Bob Kennedy was during the debate on the Kennedy-Ives labor reform bill. I had taken the lead, along with Stewart Udall and Frank Thompson and (James D.) Jimmy Roosevelt and others in the House, in trying to get a vote on the bill, up or down. There was an inclination on the part of the leadership in the House to pigeon-hole the bill once it had cleared the Senate. But, under some prodding from both Robert Kennedy and his brother, Senator John Kennedy, we were able to force a vote on the consent calendar in the House.

I was faced that fall with a very difficult race for reelection. I was coming up for the first time for reelection in the House and was being challenged by the governor of my state, (Joseph J.) Joe Foss. The charge that I was pro-labor and a stooge of the AF of L-CIO (American Federation of Labor, Congress of Industrial Organizations) was his principal battle cry. So, it was very important that I get on record as one of those advocating reform within the labor movement, facing up to the problems of corruption and dishonesty in the management of labor union funds and so on. This was a very crucial matter to me.

After we were successful in forcing such a roll call in the House, I asked Bob Kennedy if he would be willing to do a television film with me, which we did. He came over to the House of Representatives, and we filmed it. That was in the early fall of 1958, but it was the first time I'd ever really talked with him. I had seen him around parties and receptions and things many times. But I was very much impressed with Bob Kennedy the very first time I met him.

I came to know him better in the 1960 campaign when he did a very remarkable thing. I called him about a week before the end of the campaign to tell him that I was in deep trouble. I was then running for the Senate against Karl Mundt, and he understood that his brother's position on the ticket was hurting me in South Dakota. I asked him if there was some possibility that somebody could come out to give me a little help in the closing days of the campaign. It never occurred to me that he would offer to come himself, but he did. He flew all the way to South Dakota from Washington on the last Friday before the election--before the Tuesday election--which is an extremely generous thing to do because there was really nothing in it for him or for his brother. He was badly needed elsewhere in the closing days of the campaign as the campaign manager, and South Dakota just had a little handful of votes anyway. But he flew out there and spoke at Watertown, South Dakota to a capacity crowd, a very large crowd, and had something to do with the fact that I did very well in that part of the state. I mean, just the appearance of the president-to-be's brother was helpful. And then he spoke in such very warm terms about me that I never forgot it.

I remember he left that night on a charter flight which we had arranged to go on back into Chicago. He took off about midnight. It was a very cold, windy night, and the pilot we were able to get on short notice wasn't the most experienced pilot in the world. He happened to be an M.D. there in Watertown. I've often trembled at the thought that our arrangements people didn't take more seriously the danger of sending a person off on a night flight in a lightweight plane in bad weather conditions. But, nevertheless, he didn't complain about it.

He had with him on that trip John Hooker, who now is, I guess, running for governor.

HACKMAN: I just got back from Nashville yesterday, and he's very much running.

McGOVERN: Well, John Hooker was with him, and I remember that, as I say, that was one of the really generous things that I won't forget for a long time. Bob also called me

about 3 o'clock in the morning on election night. He knew that I had lost; I didn't yet know it, but he was looking at the thing more objectively than I was. I was still hoping for late returns that might turn it the other way. He actually called up to give me his consolation that I had lost, and I didn't take it that way. He said he was calling to see how I was doing, but he had seen more recent returns than I had and knew the thing was all over.

There's no question that it was through his influence, to a great extent, that I was given an attractive political appointment in the Kennedy administration. His brother, the president-elect, had called me two or three days after the elections. He said he wanted to talk with me. And I always felt that Bob Kennedy was the person that pressed my case most vigorously with the president. Those were the early contacts I had with him.

HACKMAN: What do you remember about his personality in those days? People have talked about him being--some people described him as very shy in that period. Does that strike you?

McGOVERN: Yes, I've always thought that he was a shy person, but he combined that with streaks of abrasiveness that were a little bit confusing. He could be quite kindly and retiring, and then, all of a sudden, there would be a kind of an abrasive toughness that would show that I think confused people about his nature.

HACKMAN: In dealing with you, or people around you?

McGOVERN: Well, he was very quick to pounce on a fuzzy statement, you know. I remember one time he asked me about (James W.) Jim Symington who was working with me in the Food for Peace office as my deputy. Bob said that he needed a topflight administrative assistant and he had heard that Jim Symington had done a good job for me in Food for Peace. He wondered if it would upset things too much if he took him away from me, whether it would hurt the Food for Peace program, and also, what I thought were his abilities. I said, "Well, Bob, I think you and Jim Symington would be happy with each other. I think that it would be an enjoyable relationship."

He said, "Well, what the hell. I'm not interested in whether we're happy with each other. That isn't what I asked you." He cut me down very sharply. And, somewhat impatient, "What the hell difference does it make whether we're happy or not. Is he good or isn't he? Is he a topflight guy? I'm not concerned about whether we're happy." He was very impatient with that kind of an analysis.

I saw that side of him on several occasions, which I later concluded was not so much abrasiveness or (a famous phrase) ruthlessness as it was tough-mindedness. I later described him when I introduced him in 1968 as "a guy with a tender heart and a tough mind." I've always thought that was an accurate description. But that tough-mindedness would come out from time to time in such a way as to make people think that he was kind of nasty and mean. I don't think he was.

Oh, well, I must say that I do hold to the view that Bob mellowed a great deal after the death of his brother. I think that he was somewhat harsher in the sense of being impatient with people and their weaknesses than he was after the death of President Kennedy. I think he then became a more mellow and kindly and compassionate person than he had been before.

HACKMAN: Did you ever get any feedback from him on how he did get along with Jimmy Symington and how he worked out, or from Jimmy Symington on how it worked?

McGOVERN: I think it was not entirely a satisfactory relationship. I think that their styles were quite different and that Bob wanted a little more faceless, selfless service than Jimmy was able to bring to the job.

HACKMAN: What about during the period you were with Food for Peace? Were there times when you'd go to him either for advice or for assistance or support?

McGOVERN: Yes, on two or three occasions when I thought there was a danger of the Food for Peace office being swallowed in the bureaucracy of either the Department of Agriculture or the Department of State, I went to Bob and explained to him that Food for Peace had great national and international appeal as a distinct program. I pointed out that one of the difficulties with the program in the past was that it had been run as a kind of surplus disposal operation over in the Department of Agriculture, and that the United States, therefore, had received little credit out of it abroad. Administrations here at home hadn't viewed it as a dynamic, attractive program that would give the country some satisfaction in our food production. We had all this talk about burdensome surpluses but no real attention to the positive asset involved with being able to produce food. And I thought that ought to have maximum visibility.

Now, very frankly, there was some self-interest in that. I didn't want to be buried either. And it wasn't necessary for me to say that to him; he understood that, as a politician, I didn't want to be put

in a closet under some bureaucratic arrangement where we did nothing but push papers around all day. And Bob was always one of those that picked up very fast on that.

Well, when I first talked about the job, he asked me to get in touch with (Richard E.) Dick Neustadt about the job description, and Dick came out with the concept of Coordinator of Food for Peace. Bob took a look at it, and he said, "I don't like that word 'coordinator'. Let's call it Director of Food for Peace. And I think it ought to be on virtually a cabinet level. You ought to have your own staff, and you ought to be in the White House and ought to report directly to the president." Well, it was largely his political instinct of how this could be helpful to the administration, yet, at the same time, keep me in a prominent political spot, that led to those decisions. And he was always there at a decisive time to say to the president, "Look, don't move that. Let it stay here. Don't move it to Agriculture. Keep George out in the open."

HACKMAN: Would he ever get involved in differences, personally involved in differences with Agriculture or State?

McGOVERN: If he did, I wasn't aware of it. I think he always worked through the White House staff. He'd just make a phone call and say, "George is worried about this thing being swallowed. Don't let that happen." That was my understanding of what happened when he called the White House.

HACKMAN: What about in terms of his relationship in that period with the White House staff? Were you in a position to observe much of that--(Theodore C.) Sorensen or (Kenneth P.) O'Donnell--and how he got along with those people?

McGOVERN: I think pretty well. I think the fact that they had gone through the campaign together built a relationship there that they did not find disruptive. Now there may have been some of them who did. But I would say that O'Donnell, (Lawrence F.) O'Brien, (Ralph A.) Dungan, (Myer) Feldman, Sorensen and (Arthur, Jr.) Schlesinger in the group that I was most familiar with, I think they fully expected Bob to be something other than just the attorney general. I heard reports about how some of the president's assistants were irritated with Bob's continuing role, but I never saw any evidence of that.

HACKMAN: I ask you this simply because it wasn't asked in the first interview: What about your own relationship with members of the White House staff in terms of access to the president or getting them to help you on occasion?

McGOVERN: I never had any problem there. Whenever I really wanted to see the president, I called Ken O'Donnell. Sometimes he'd be a little slow in returning the call, but I understood that. He was burdened with all kinds of things, and he was trying to protect the president. But frankly, there was never a time when I really wanted to see the president that I didn't get in. As I look back on it now, I'm a little embarrassed about a couple of the interviews that I asked for. I think they were unnecessary. I think sometimes people, just kind of to reassure themselves that they can get in to see the president, ask to see him when they shouldn't. I never took very much of President Kennedy's time. But if I were to do it again, I probably would have cancelled out a couple of the times that I did go in to see him.

HACKMAN: Had you made it clear when you went to Food for Peace that you would probably be leaving in '62 to go back to South Dakota?

McGOVERN: No, I didn't. As a matter of fact, I wasn't sure about that. I wasn't sure whether I would leave then. But there were several things. . . . Well, Bob was one of those that I consulted with first about doing that. I talked to him at some length one day at his office. I went down to the Department of Justice. His question to me was one that I understood he asked a number of prospective candidates: Can you win? You know, he didn't believe in making races just for the purpose of having a candidate in the race.

I think he was somewhat worried, too, about whether my health would hold up in a campaign. He quizzed me on that at some length. He said, "What I think you really ought to do is rest for about six or eight months." I had had a severe bout with hepatitis, and he seemed to take that seriously. I didn't bring up the subject, but he knew it had been a very debilitating experience, and it had knocked the hell out of me healthwise for a long period of time. And I think he was worried about me going into the Senate race. He was right. I had another flare-up in the middle of the campaign that almost cost me the race and could have cost me my life. I always felt that his advice was good, but it tended to be a little bit too strong on the side of whether you could win or not. He didn't believe in hopeless efforts. And I think he really felt I would have great difficulty defeating Francis Case.

HACKMAN: Were you ever able to tell that he did any checking on his own within the state with other people?

McGOVERN: No. Never. I never saw any evidence of that. He might have, but I wasn't aware of it. I wouldn't say that he didn't. I think he's the kind of person who might have made a call or two. But he knew that Case was an entrenched Senator. And neither he nor I knew that Case was going to die a month after I announced my candidacy.

HACKMAN: What about, then, during the campaign? Are there other conversations with him on the South Dakota race?

McGOVERN: Yes, there was. He watched it very closely. He was not popular in South Dakota at that point because of the rather strong-arm image he had as attorney general. And so I asked him if it were possible for Ethel to come out. I thought that she might be more helpful than he would, and that turned out to be a sound decision. She came out and worked very hard for me very early one morning until early the next morning, made a flying tour around the state.

I've always thought, in view of the fact that I won by just a handful of votes, that that push right at the end on her part was decisive. The publicity was fantastic. We had maximum coverage on television, radio, and the press, and she was gay and hopeful. I think it was a nice lift right at the end. I was very ill then. I could hardly hold my head up. I had just gotten out of the hospital with the second bout of hepatitis, but she added a note of strength and vitality to it and sort of played the Kennedy thing in a humorous, light way that blunted a lot of the attacks that were being made about me being out there as a stooge of the Kennedys. I never knew until later that she was 4 or 5 months pregnant at that time. She has held a special place in my heart ever since. Indeed, I probably would not have made it to the Senate without her.

HACKMAN: At the time that you decided then to go ahead with the Senate race, or as things developed, or later, did you ever talk with him about what would happen to Food for Peace, who would take over?

McGOVERN: Yes, this was a concern to him, too. And one of the things that came up in connection with the conversation about Jim Symington leaving was whether or not he ought to leave at a time I was thinking about leaving to run for the Senate. I told him I thought that if they put a good man in there the program wouldn't need to suffer. I recommended (Richard W.) Dick Reuter as my successor, and I think Reuter did a good job down there. But where the mistake was made was that Reuter was not a political figure. There was no reason to try to groom him for political office. He himself was somewhat content to see the office moved out of the limelight. And once President Kennedy had been killed, President Johnson seemed willing to let the program just go into oblivion. I have never understood why, unless he resented the fact that it had such a Kennedy stamp on it by then that he felt that. . . . I just don't know. I don't know why that happened, but he just let it die. And Reuter, recognizing that, that he was gradually being stripped of any real influence, resigned.

HACKMAN: In talking with Robert Kennedy about your problems with the State Department, did you ever get any feel for what

he felt about the State Department? A lot of people have thought that he was disenchanted with the Foreign Service.

McGOVERN: Yes. He didn't discuss that with me in detail, but there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that he had some serious questions about the whole State complex, about their capacity to handle new initiatives and to deal imaginatively with programs of this kind. He was cautious about direct criticism of anybody. I never heard him badmouth anybody. But he left no doubt in my mind that he thought Food for Peace would have been hurt had it been managed by State.

HACKMAN: What about then in the early months when you're in the Senate, or on through '63--are there things that you'd go to him for or he comes to you for?

McGOVERN: Well, what most impressed me about Bob after he came to the Senate was his hunger to learn, that is, to continue learning, because that had been going on all along while he was attorney general, too. He was trying to acquaint himself with more than the legal problems. Those seminars that he held out at Hickory Hill were designed to give Bob Kennedy an education in national and international affairs. But when he came to the Senate, he continued that in a somewhat different way. I was invited in to some of the sessions he held. For example, I remember one night he called me up at three or four o'clock in the afternoon. He said, "Look, I'm having a few guys out tonight to talk about China. Why don't you come on out?" I'd sat in on two or three sessions like that. I had the feeling he was always trying to bring people home who could fill in gaps in his knowledge, or that he could test ideas with, or that could stimulate new ideas for him.

Another time I went out there with Frank Church when Averell Harriman was present. Bob provoked a bitter debate between Church and me on one side and Harriman on the other. I was late getting to the dinner because I had to go to another function first. When I came in, it was just like walking into a battlefield. Obviously, Church and Harriman had just had the bitterest kind of argument. At that time Harriman was a great hawk on Vietnam and was defending the policy all the way. And Bob obviously knew that that's what would happen. He was sort of sitting there watching, like a ping-pong game, watching this argument develop.

After I came, I sided in with Church, and he continued to ask the kind of questions that would keep the debate going. But it was obvious that he wanted to hear both sides of the argument. He himself was then in a kind of transitional period when he was moving

towards the position that Frank Church and I had. And, yet, he had a great respect for Harriman and for others that had held to the administration point of view. And he also had a greater sense of the importance of working with the administration rather than confronting them. So he did a lot of that kind of thing, and I always thought it was a great tribute to him that he was willing to use his evenings in rather strenuous intellectual combat rather than going home just to relax. One of the greatest characteristics of the Kennedys is that they are so educable.

HACKMAN: My question really was, though, on the period when you were in the Senate and he was still the attorney general, those first two years. Can you remember anything else?

McGOVERN: I didn't have much contact with him in that period. I was invited out to his house a time or two, socially, but I didn't really have very much contact with him.

HACKMAN: I didn't check the dates on these, but the United States attorney in South Dakota, Harold Doyle, did you have anything to do with that?

McGOVERN: Yes, he was my guy.

HACKMAN: Any problems on that?

McGOVERN: No, that went--well, he was held up for a while. I called Bob on that. I called him from Georgetown Hospital and that broke it loose. He put it right through. That was cleared and also the Fred (J.) Nichol appointment as district judge out there. Bob was very helpful on that.

HACKMAN: Anything right after President Kennedy's assassination, in terms of what he might do in the future, the vice-presidency, Senate?

McGOVERN: Well, I started talking to Bob, I think, as early as anyone in the Senate about challenging (Lyndon B.) Johnson. I don't keep a diary, but I know the first conversations were held no later than the summer of '65.

HACKMAN: I'm talking about '64, right after the president was assassinated, and, you remember, the blowup over New Hampshire in the spring of '64? There was a little noise out in Wisconsin and maybe a squeak or two in South Dakota. I wondered if you had. . . .

McGOVERN: Yes. No, I didn't encourage him to do anything in '64. And I did, on the one occasion when he talked to me about New York, encourage him to make that race. But I was not actively involved in political conversations with him from the time of the president's death until he came to the Senate. Our relationship became active again after he was elected to the Senate.

HACKMAN: Did he come around to you, do you remember, and ask for advice on how much of a role he might play?

McGOVERN: No, he really didn't. I think the first time I talked to him about running for the presidency was in the summer of '65 at a party over at Rowland Evans' home and then out at Hickory Hill a couple of times after that and then over in the Senate cloakroom. I probably spoke to him a half a dozen times in '65 and '66 about running for the presidency.

I remember one time a syndicated columnist telling me that he had been at Bob Kennedy's and had said there was support in the Senate for him challenging Johnson. And Bob said, "You've been talking to George McGovern?" So, he knew that I was concerned and that I was pressing that, but he was always very noncommittal about it. I had the impression that he was thinking about it but that he was fearful of all the kind of press flak that came every time there was any speculation about his future. He was also worried about his influence on issues, because everything he said was interpreted as a ploy to get ready for a challenge to Johnson. I think that was something that worried him a great deal from the time he first came to the Senate until he finally announced for the presidency.

HACKMAN: What were your feelings then--and maybe you can speak for some other senators as well as yourself--just on the way he operated in the Senate, the way he ran his staff, the way he did his business, legislative contacts?

McGOVERN: Well, I think it was pretty good. I know he's been criticized for not being interested in the Senate and not being a Senate man, but, frankly, I always found him very sensitive and very thoughtful about calling senators ahead of a major speech on his part. He personally would get on the phone and call senators and ask them to come to the floor. He'd say, "I'm going to speak, you know, at one o'clock today." He was actually better on that kind of thing than I am. He was more careful about touching bases with senators and being courteous and doing little things. You'd get a handwritten note from him once in a while on something. I thought he was pretty good in terms of his relations with senators.

HACKMAN: Would he ever say, when you were discussing a particular issue with him, that his actions or lack of actions was due, in part, to what response he expected from the White House?

McGOVERN: Yes, he did. He would say. . . . He was always very aware of that. He was concerned about not appearing to confront the president or to take issue with policies too bluntly that he himself had had something to do with shaping when he was in the White House. I've heard him refer to that several times, and the special problem that he had as a former member of the administration and also as one who might be accused of undercutting Johnson. I think that it was not only on his mind, but he specifically mentioned those concerns to me on several occasions, and I'm sure he did to other senators.

HACKMAN: Maybe we can take that a little further on the Vietnam issue. Can you remember when your first discussions with him began on Vietnam after he gets to the Senate, and maybe any encouragement you gave him to speak out?

McGOVERN: Yes. I remember that he wasn't quite ready to join in direct criticism in the early part of '65. I'm a little hazy as to whether there was any specific request to him to join with us or not. I do know that he. . . . We asked him to sign letters a couple of times, urging the president to halt the bombing and he declined to do that.

HACKMAN: Did he give a reason? I think that was in early '66.

McGOVERN: Yes, that's correct. Yes, I tell you, his reasons, though, were evasive. He was not really responsive and direct at that time. I think perhaps he didn't want to just be a part of a kind of a group of people. He wanted to cut out a role that was more defined and that was more of a Kennedy role. Very frankly, I think there was the human factor of his own ego and the feeling that he was a national figure whose efforts should not be merged with a list of dissenters. I don't say that critically. I think that it was--well, there's a little bit of criticism in it. I do remember having kind of a mild disappointment that neither he nor Ted (Edward M. Kennedy) would sign the letter and a feeling that maybe the Kennedys felt that they sort of stood above and beyond joint efforts at that time.

HACKMAN: He wasn't willing to speak out in that period; did you ever get any response from the things you're saying? You were doing a lot of speaking on Vietnam in that period, '65 particularly.

McGOVERN: I had the feeling--both from what he said and also from just his close attention to what I was doing--that he welcomed the dissent. He was especially high, as I remember it, on Frank Church and on me. I think that he regarded us as two of the more thoughtful critics in the Senate, and he told me that on a couple of occasions.

HACKMAN: Did you ever have conversations with him about Vietnam policy during the Kennedy administration? I mean, concerning what had happened during that period? Did he ever say what his role had been, who he thought was responsible?

McGOVERN: No, he was rather reluctant to discuss that period, other than to say that he was one of those involved in supporting the policy. But I don't recall him ever saying anything to me privately that he didn't say publicly on that question.

HACKMAN: You mentioned the discussion with Harriman at Hickory Hill. Would he ever talk about the other people who were still around President Johnson, his relationship with (Robert S.) McNamara, (Maxwell D.) Taylor, and for a while, (McGeorge) Bundy?

McGOVERN: Well, it had always seemed to me that right until the end he had the highest regard for McNamara and Taylor and great personal affection for both of them. I think they were two of his most trusted and cherished friends and colleagues within the administration. I don't know why he continued to have such a high regard for their judgment, in view of how wrong they were on Vietnam, but, nevertheless, he did. To the best of my knowledge, he went to his death thinking that Taylor and McNamara were two of the ablest men ever to serve in government. I had a very high regard for their brilliance and their ability, but I was always somewhat puzzled as to why he continued to seek them out for advice. I think that when he made his first statement recommending a coalition government that he let McNamara and Taylor talk him into fuzzing it up and hedging on it and kind of backing away from it. And I thought that hurt him. I thought that hurt his national stature. But I always blamed primarily Taylor and, to a lesser extent, McNamara for getting Bob to back down on his coalition statement.

HACKMAN: Why do you make the distinction there? Could you see that operating that clearly?

McGOVERN: I think he told me that Taylor was greatly distressed by his statement and that Taylor had sought him out to

urge him to modify it. And there again, I'm speaking from something that happened four or five years ago, and I wouldn't want to trust my memory entirely. But I have a clear impression in my own mind that Taylor was the person who was most distressed about his statement and the one who made the strongest entreaty against it.

HACKMAN: Did you ever talk with President Johnson in these days about Robert Kennedy?

McGOVERN: No, but I did talk to him about Vietnam. I talked to him privately about it. Before I really became a strong public critic, I tried to talk with the president privately. It didn't have impact, but I did go down and talk with him. I don't recall ever discussing Bob Kennedy with him.

HACKMAN: Do you remember Robert Kennedy's observations on Lyndon Johnson during the Senate years, Lyndon Johnson's reactions to his actions, how he accounted for the way Johnson reacted?

McGOVERN: No, I don't recall that in sufficient clarity to really say much about it. I never found Bob Kennedy badmouthing Johnson. Maybe people who were closer to him as personal friends did, but I didn't. I don't recall him being very critical of administration people.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any specific instances when you thought of the possibility of a trip to Vietnam for him? I know he thought about this on and off a lot through the Senate years.

McGOVERN: No. I remember asking him once if he thought it would be a good idea if I went with Ted Kennedy when Ted was going over there. And he, very abruptly, said it would not be a good idea for me to go, that I was a figure in my own right and I ought to go alone if I was going to go. I think that there were probably two reasons for that: he wanted Ted to emerge as a strong figure on Vietnam; and he felt it would not be in his interest to go over there with an already-pronounced dove, a person with strong convictions already formed on it. I don't recall talking to him about his going.

HACKMAN: Can you remember issues during the Senate years when you worked closely with him on mapping out some sort of legislative strategy and tactics, or was there much of that?

McGOVERN: Well, he was awfully good on the welfare amendment, and he kind of took the lead--that is, his office did-- in getting me and other senators to pick up a particular part of that package. That was the one legislative initiative where I thought he did a professional, carefully orchestrated job. The whole range of social security amendments; he really was the leader on that. But, other than that, I don't recall anything of great significance in the way of legislative strategy where he led the way.

HACKMAN: Do you remember comments on the part of other senators about Robert Kennedy and the way he worked--he's been criticized for not being interested--in terms of the way he ran his office?

McGOVERN: No, I don't. I never ran into that criticism within the Senate of Bob Kennedy's operation. I always felt that he had good relations with other senators and that he ran a reasonably good office.

HACKMAN: How was he on things that you would take to him that you felt you needed support on, maybe particular things from your two committees, or things that were of interest to you back home? Was he reasonable?

McGOVERN: I never asked Bob Kennedy in my life for anything that I thought was very important where he failed to follow through. I can't ever recall a time. He was very conscientious when somebody that he regarded as a friend and colleague came to him and said, "This is important to me." Bob always picked up on it. I never recall anything just falling between the slats with him.

HACKMAN: Do you remember in '66, I believe--there were other cases--when you offered the two amendments, one to the Military Assistance Program on foreign aid to cut the budget and then one on the defense appropriation? He supported both of those. Did you have to have conversations that you recall to convince him to do that, or. . . .

McGOVERN: Well, I did ask him ahead of time if he could support it, and he agreed to do so. But I don't recall laboring the point at all.

HACKMAN: I believe he went to South Dakota in '66 during the campaign. Do you remember that at all?

McGOVERN: Yes, he did stop there. He was on the way to St. Louis, as I recall, and made a very brief appearance on behalf of the Democratic candidates. That was in Sioux Falls. He spoke there one morning. He actually spoke under the auspices of the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce in a sort of question-and-answer, public forum type meeting. But he used that occasion to endorse the Democratic slate.

HACKMAN: Any problem at all in getting him to go out? Is that through your efforts?

McGOVERN: Yes. He went through my efforts. There was a little problem getting him to go in. As I look back on it, I think his judgment was probably right that he shouldn't have gone in there in '66. He didn't know the candidates, and they didn't have much chance of winning. And I think that was probably one time when I gave him some bad advice. I did it under great pressure from the South Dakota Democrats. They wanted him to come on in. They wanted to try to raise some money on his appearance. He just wasn't able to work out an evening appearance. And as I recall, he didn't raise any money on his appearance. But the candidates thought it would be very helpful to have him come. And I really did it to protect my relations with the South Dakota Democrats. But I think from Bob's standpoint, it was not a useful trip.

HACKMAN: You talked a little earlier about discussions of a possible run for the presidency. When did these begin to focus on 1968?

McGOVERN: Well, that's what I had in mind from the very beginning. There then came a period when he convinced me that he wasn't going to go, or that at least he didn't want to be pressed on it. And I sort of eased off on the idea. He seemed to be wanting to be free of being pressed on the question.

It wasn't until the summer and fall again of 1967 that it looked like there might possibly be a move of somebody challenging Johnson. There were some people who had come to me and talked about the importance of somebody running, wanted to know if I would consider it. I immediately raised the question of Bob Kennedy. This was (Allard K.) Lowenstein and his group. They said, "Well, we've done everything we can to get Bob Kennedy to go and he's convinced us he's not going to run."

I never was fully convinced he wasn't going to run. But what I did decide was that he had made a judgment not to go in early, that he'd postpone it as long as possible to free himself of what would

have been a very bitter feud with Johnson. I thought at some point he might enter the race, and it was one of the principal reasons why I held back myself in making any kind of a challenge. It always seemed to me very presumptuous for a comparatively unknown senator from South Dakota to challenge Johnson when Bob Kennedy thought it was ill-advised.

I've always thought that he was the only guy that had a chance of really taking the nomination away from Johnson. And so I didn't start talking to him seriously about doing it until after (Eugene J.) McCarthy announced. And then I did again pick it up and urge him to go. That would have been in, I guess, November and December of '67.

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you: In the summer of '67, had you done much talking with other senators of like mind . . .

McGOVERN: No.

HACKMAN: . . . on what to do, whether to ask Robert Kennedy?

McGOVERN: No, I had not. In retrospect, I wish now that I had. I wish I had tried to organize a group of people--it wouldn't have taken very much. As I look back on it, it wouldn't have taken too many people talking to him to have persuaded him to go late in 1967 or early in 1968. I think his inclination was that way. Professional politicians from the John Kennedy administration, Sorensen and others, were telling him not to consider it, not to do it, that it was unrealistic, that it would ruin the Democratic party, that it would ruin him, and that even if he got the nomination, it wouldn't be worth anything, and that kind of thing. I wish now that some of us had gone to him in a body and urged him to run. I think we could have talked him into it.

HACKMAN: Do you think that there would have been enough people, in the Senate particularly, to put a body of people like that together who would urge him to run?

McGOVERN: I think there would have been a few. I think you could have gotten probably five or six senators that would have done this. (Interruption)

HACKMAN: Yes, because I was reading a magazine article the other day--I can't remember whether it was the (David) Halberstam article in Harper's last year or Jeremy Lerner on the McCarthy campaign. They were saying that you had had a conversation with (Joseph L., Jr.) Joe Rauh, that Rauh had said that he talked to you, and that you said, "I believe the doves wouldn't

support Robert,"--this was in the summer of '67--that no one really would support Robert Kennedy at that point.

McGOVERN: No, I never said that. That's a mistake.

HACKMAN: Maybe I'm not quoting it correctly. It's been a while since I looked at it.

McGOVERN: Joe Rauh came to me and asked if I would consider running, and so did (James A.) Jimmy Wechsler came to me. I said I didn't see how I could. They always put it to me in terms of, you know, "You might get 20 percent of the vote if you would run in New Hampshire, or 25 percent, and that's all that Johnson understands." It never occurred to anybody that you could actually get the nomination. They were looking for somebody to frighten Johnson into changing his policy. They never thought in terms of actually taking the nomination away from him. And that's why it seemed unreasonable to me to come to a senator who was up for election to the Senate. But I never had the slightest doubt about Bob Kennedy being the guy that would have made the strongest race. And I always told him that anytime that there was an opportunity to do so.

What finally cooled me off on really urging Bob to run was a call from Ted Sorensen at Bob Kennedy's request. He wanted to come down and see me. So, he came in, and said, in effect: "Now look, George, this is a very serious thing you're urging Bob to do. He's on the verge of going. And if you guys"--I don't know who the other people were--"if you guys talk him into this thing, you ought to be prepared for the consequences. What evidence do you have that there would be people that would support him if he announced?" I said, "Well, I don't really have much evidence." He said, "Well, then"--he was quite right--"you really have no business urging him to run. Why don't you find out?" So I said, "Well, who do you want me to talk to?" He said, "Well, begin with the people in your area. What would Governor (William L.) Guy do? What would Governor (Harold E.) Hughes do? What about Frank Morrison and (Quentin N.) Burdick?" So, I started checking around, and I just had to tell them in good conscience I couldn't find people who were willing to come out that early for him.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollection of about when that was, the fall of '67?

McGOVERN: No, that was in early '68, you know, like maybe in January. And so the only encouragement I got is that Harold Hughes said, "Well, Bob's going to come out here and speak in Iowa on March 10. See if you can talk him out of making a decision one way or another. Why does he have to say yes or no?"

So I called Bob directly, because I knew that he had triggered the Sorensen thing. Instead of calling Sorensen, I called Bob. I told him what I'd found, that people weren't willing to really come out and challenge Johnson openly, and that I was about the only guy that seemed willing to commit myself to him. I told him about. . . . I said, "I think Hughes has probably come up with a convenient thing, which is just don't do anything. Don't say you're not going to run." Well, within a few days, he went to a breakfast and said absolutely, under no conditions would he run. I had a sickening feeling when I saw that statement. It was directly the opposite of what we had urged him to do and I felt it would complicate matters for him later on.

HACKMAN: What kind of comments, if any, did he have in that period about Senator McCarthy's efforts? And, what could you see. . . .

McGOVERN: He was terribly distressed. I'll never forget how distressed he was when he learned that McCarthy was going to announce. Arthur Schlesinger called me on some other matter and in the course of the conversation, I said, "Arthur, Gene McCarthy is going to announce for President." Well, he immediately called Kennedy, and within minutes, Kennedy got hold of me. And he said, "Is that true?" And I said, "Yes, it is." And he was just terribly distressed about it because what became clear then is that he desperately wanted to keep that option open and that he. . . .

I've never seen him so disturbed as he was when he got this information that McCarthy was going to announce--because he could see the trouble that was going to present to him. He said, "He's going to get a lot of support. I can tell you right now, he'll run very strong in New Hampshire." And he said, "I'm worried about you and other people making early commitments to him because it may be hard for all of us later on." You know how he'd always kind of talk in vague terms like that when he didn't want to use his own name. He said, "It would make it hard for a lot of us later on if we wanted to make some other move." He was saying, in effect, "Don't get committed to McCarthy because I may come in." But I can't recall in the conversations I had with Bob anything that so much disturbed him as McCarthy's announcement. I think he thought, "My God, I should have done this. Why didn't I move earlier?"

HACKMAN: What could you see about their relationship earlier during the Senate years, things that stand out in your mind on the relationship? A lot of people have said it never was. . . .

McGOVERN: You mean about Bob's . . .

HACKMAN: . . . relationship with McCarthy, Senator McCarthy during the Senate years.

McGOVERN: I don't recall there being any significant relationship there at all. I think they ignored each other. I don't think Bob in his wildest imagination ever dreamed that McCarthy would announce as a candidate for the presidency. I think he always thought in terms. . . . Maybe there were anxieties there I didn't know about, but I think he always debated whether he was going to be the candidate or whether he wasn't. I don't think it occurred to him that somebody else might jump in and challenge Johnson.

HACKMAN: What kind of encouragement had Senator McCarthy received from other Senate doves before he announced?

McGOVERN: Well, I don't know whether anybody had talked to him, other than me, or not. I encouraged him to do it. I didn't talk to him directly, but I told Lowenstein--he can probably refresh you on the details better than I can. I told Lowenstein and (Richard J.) Dick Barnett and (Marcus G.) Marc Raskin and others that talked to me that they ought to go to a senator that didn't have a Senate race, and I mentioned both McCarthy and (Lee) Metcalf. Metcalf just dismissed it. He said, "It's ridiculous." But when I went over to the Senate floor a few hours later that day, I said to Gene, "I sent some people up to talk to you, Gene, about running against Johnson." He said, "Yeah, I talked to them. I think I may do it." And I just couldn't believe it. I was astounded. I really thought it was a way of getting these people off my back. They were taking a lot of time. They were triggering other people to come in and see me. But it was clear then that he was going to go. There must have been other people that had been talking to him before that that I didn't know about.

HACKMAN: Did you ever talk to Robert Kennedy then about how he should react to McCarthy's candidacy through the winter and into the spring? What he should say or whether there was any possibility of giving any support, even if it was behind the scenes?

McGOVERN: I didn't encourage him to do that. No, I didn't try to advise him. The only thing I did intervene on. . . . I heard a rumor that before the New Hampshire results were in Bob was thinking about going into the New Hampshire race, or maybe not. No, I guess what I heard is that he was thinking about announcing that he was going to be a candidate, and it was too late then to file in New Hampshire. But, I told him that I thought that if he did that he would be regarded as a spoiler, that there would be a kind of a

write-in vote for him in New Hampshire and it would blunt McCarthy's strong showing. And I said, "You're going to be accused of being a spoiler, just sort of a dog-in-the-manger-type thing, that you didn't enter New Hampshire but you're trying to blunt Gene McCarthy's hour of glory." And I said, "Let him have his big day and hold off a while before you make any judgment." And I still think he made a mistake announcing as quickly as he did after the New Hampshire primary. But whether he listened to me or somebody else, . . . I don't know whether I had any influence on him at all about not announcing prior to the New Hampshire results.

HACKMAN: Is there anyone through the winter and early spring that's close to Robert Kennedy that you talked to frequently that keeps you at least semi-informed on what's going on in his mind?

McGOVERN: I talked to Teddy on two or three occasions down in the Senate gym about it. Teddy gave me the same kind of a warning at one time that Ted Sorensen did. He just said very briefly, "Now, be careful what you tell him because he's thinking seriously about going in and he listens to people that he respects. You know, you might talk him into this. Be sure you know what you're doing, because," he said, "I think Bobby would go if he got a little encouragement." But I got the impression Ted didn't want him to run and was nervous about the fact that I and others were urging him to go.

HACKMAN: Once he makes that statement on January 31st that he won't run under any foreseeable circumstances, do you consider that a definite no, or what really happens after that? That's right at the time of Tet.

McGOVERN: Yes. I think at that time I thought it was, that he had really made a decision not to go. After the Tet offensive, I thought he would reconsider. I don't recall pressing that particular point with him, though. After that conversation urging him not to do anything until he'd gone on the Iowa trip, I don't recall discussing it again with him--other than maybe just some kind of passing reference over in the Senate.

HACKMAN: Any discussions at all of Robert McNamara's resignation?

McGOVERN: I just don't recall that.

HACKMAN: The next meeting, the next occasion that I know you were with him was just the Friday before he announces, in that dinner, I guess right here in the Senate.

McGOVERN: It was right here in this office.

HACKMAN: Are there other things before then that you can remember?

McGOVERN: No, I think that was a very long, tortured session here. It was a peculiar situation. We had arranged to have. . . . I used to get together maybe once or twice a year with Frank Thompson, Lee Metcalf, Stewart Udall, and Gene McCarthy. We were close friends in the House.

HACKMAN: Stewart Udall or (Morris K.) Mo Udall?

McGOVERN: Stewart. Stewart Udall. We all served in the House together. And it so happened we had set up a luncheon that day. Udall was here--Stewart--and Metcalf and Thompson and myself. And Gene didn't show, never called or anything. We called his office, and they said they didn't know where he was. He apparently just forgot about it. So, near the end of the luncheon, we got to talking about Bobby, I picked up the phone and asked if he was free to come down.

He came down with Ted Sorensen, and he stayed here most of that afternoon. He was here for a couple of hours, and he was obviously just in anguish as to whether he ought to announce or whether he shouldn't. He looked absolutely fatigued and run-out. We urged him to hold off on making the announcement. I didn't think he looked good, and I thought he was distressed and fatigued and was in a bad frame of mind. I just didn't think he ought to do anything right then, just let the thing cool for a week. And I still think that would have been better. But he went ahead and announced the next day--or announced that he was going to announce--I guess that was it.

HACKMAN: Did he give at that discussion any reasons why he thought he should announce?

McGOVERN: Yes, he just said, "Gene McCarthy's not competent to be president of the United States." And he said that if I had made the race in New Hampshire that he wouldn't have gone, that he wouldn't announce. I never knew whether he would have stuck with that or not. It's very hard for people to keep commitments like that. But he didn't think that McCarthy would make a good president.

HACKMAN: How did he answer the argument that he should wait until later, maybe on down the line, to work something out with McCarthy? Or was that argument made to him?

McGOVERN: Yes, it was. I didn't make this point, but everybody

else here urged him to campaign for McCarthy in Wisconsin and to establish himself as a guy that was interested in the war issue rather than the office. And, I just. . . . He made it clear that he just couldn't. . . . He did endorse McCarthy in Wisconsin, but he made it clear here that day that moving the White House from Johnson's hands to McCarthy's hands was not, in his judgment, a step forward.

HACKMAN: Did he talk at all about the Vietnam commission idea which was flying around?

McGOVERN: Yeah, just sort of briefly he mentioned that. I never thought he was too high on that idea. You never know, but I never thought he expected Johnson to accept that.

HACKMAN: Can you remember other topics discussed in that meeting? It was a long afternoon. Are there any other observations he had about what advice he was getting from other people, contacts with the political pros around the country and what they were saying?

McGOVERN: No, I don't recall that. I had the feeling that half the time he was talking to himself that day. He sat right over there at the end of the table, you know. We had a luncheon table set up. I remember just being shocked at the deep wrinkles. He looked so much older than I had ever seen him. I remember being more impressed with the anguish, self-examination that was going on, and the struggle. I think he was almost oblivious to what we were saying. And he, at various times, made a statement that sounded more like a speech than a conversation. He'd say, "I'm just concerned about the United States, concerned about the interest of the nation." It was kind of a speech, oratorical phrasing rather than conversation. And I had the feeling then he was preparing his public announcement.

HACKMAN: Did he ask you and Senator Metcalf and Congressman Thompson anything about what kind of response he was likely to get in your areas? Did he talk about South Dakota?

McGOVERN: No, no, he didn't.

HACKMAN: Was Sorensen carrying a strong position at that time or making a strong argument that day?

McGOVERN: No. Sorensen was kind of sitting back and listening to

the conversation. I had the feeling that Bob wanted to walk out of this office and have the story go to the press that Thompson and Metcalf and Udall and I had all urged him to run. We didn't do that, and I think he was a little disappointed in us. That was my view. I thought he should run, but I didn't push it very hard that day because everybody else had a different view. They all thought he ought to get behind McCarthy. I remember being somewhat startled at how strong Thompson and Metcalf and Udall were in urging him to back McCarthy.

HACKMAN: Did he talk at all at that meeting about the trip he did have to Iowa when he met with Hughes?

McGOVERN: No. No, he didn't. He never did. He never make reference to it. I think he was somewhat disappointed in his conversations out there. I never have known quite what happened.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

HACKMAN: When are your first conversations about South Dakota and whether you'll run as a favorite son or whether he'll go in or what's going to happen?

McGOVERN: Well, he didn't want to go into South Dakota. He felt that it would be difficult for him with that state being (Hubert H.) Humphrey's home state and McCarthy being right next door, and also the delegate vote was very small and he thought he was pressed for time. Anyway, he didn't want to enter there. He thought that he would not do particularly well in South Dakota. And I didn't press it on him, either. I wasn't sure how he would go in the state. I mildly urged him to do it, but I didn't really press it because I was uncertain myself as to how well he would do. Well, this fellow, (William J.) Bill Dougherty, our national committeeman, was very high on Bob Kennedy running. I sort of held him at bay at Bob's suggestion by urging him not to move too fast. Dougherty finally took matters into his own hands, and I got a report that he was going to file a slate. I told Ted Kennedy in the gym one afternoon that I thought Dougherty was going to go ahead, and he said, "Well, would you call him and ask him not to do it, because Bob doesn't want to go into South Dakota." So I called Dougherty, and he said, "The hell with it. He's going in anyway." And he just went ahead and filed the slate. He said, "I'll be out there at 8 o'clock the next morning and he's going to go in." He was friendly about it. He was laughing about it. He just said, "I think he'll

do well, and I can't take Johnson, so we're going to file him."

HACKMAN: What sort of efforts had you made in terms of the favorite son candidacy?

McGOVERN: Nothing at that point. Nothing at all at that point other than that what I did. . . . Well, that isn't quite correct. What I did was to tell Bob I would be willing to go in as a favorite son if he wanted me to, provided that McCarthy and Humphrey would agree. And as it turned out, both McCarthy and Humphrey did agree not to enter if I would go in as a favorite son. But then Dougherty upset the. . . .

HACKMAN: After Robert Kennedy did announce, did he make a strong appeal to you to head a slate on his behalf in South Dakota?

McGOVERN: No, no, he did not. He did not. In fact, he always told me, "Don't do anything out there that will hurt your own re-election. South Dakota is not all that important." He later came to see it as a much more significant test, once the Humphrey challenge was made. It was the one chance he had really to challenge the Humphrey forces directly and to do it in an agricultural state.

HACKMAN: What sort of efforts was Senator McCarthy making with you, let's say through the spring of '68, before and after Robert Kennedy announced?

McGOVERN: Very, very low. He came to me and he asked me at one point if I would introduce him out in the state if he came in. I said that I'd be happy to do that, which I did. But other than that, McCarthy didn't really seek very much from me. After Bob Kennedy died, then McCarthy--McCarthy's people, not he himself--came and made a strong pitch for me to endorse him. But I will say that Gene never put much pressure on me to do anything on his behalf.

HACKMAN: What about President Johnson after Robert Kennedy announced? Did he, or his people, ever talk to you?

McGOVERN: No. No, he never did.

HACKMAN: What about in terms, then of contacts within South Dakota on behalf of Robert Kennedy? Did you talk to Robert Chamberlin, (Melvin) Johnson, (Jim) Magness, Mary Wallner? I guess those are the names. I don't know South Dakota politics very

well. What kind of conversations did you have with them?

McGOVERN: Well, I told them all that I was going to be neutral in the primary, that I felt with Humphrey being there as a native son and McCarthy next door that I shouldn't make any public position, but that privately I favored Robert Kennedy. I did what I could in a discreet sort of a way to help him out there. I gave him an introduction in the state, which was widely interpreted as an endorsement rather than an introduction. But I preserved, technically, the posture of independence during the primary. I had really decided on that position at the time when it looked like McCarthy and Johnson were going to be the two opponents in the state. And it was really kind of difficult then to back away from that and say I was no longer going to be neutral, because I had said that I felt my role as an incumbent senator was not to become involved in the party primary, "Let the people of South Dakota make that judgment."

HACKMAN: Were Sorensen, then, or Edward Kennedy or other people in the Robert Kennedy camp coming to you for advice on South Dakota on through the spring?

McGOVERN: Yeah. Yeah, after that they sought out my advice very frequently, and I worked rather closely with them. I made my mailing list available to them and that kind of thing. I steered them to people that I thought would be helpful and gave them advice on issues and how to play certain things.

HACKMAN: How well did they handle it, or let's see, the people that they chose. (David) Dave Harrison, I guess is one of the fellows, and Don O'Brien.

McGOVERN: Well, I would say that the South Dakota primary was almost a model of how an election campaign ought to be run. I marvel even yet at how well-structured it was and how they used the people they had. It was extremely well done. The media was well used, and Harrison was just the right guy to send out there-- low-key, quiet guy, yet firm. O'Brien was awfully good. They ran a good operation, no question about it.

HACKMAN: Can you recall any problems, in working out the trips, that he brought in when he came into the state--what you would say and do?

McGOVERN: No. Everything was well handled, well advanced. I happen to know that sometimes the Kennedy reputation for organization doesn't hold up, that they run into some horrible snafus. But that did not happen in South Dakota. Everything was well

managed, and they had good people. They knew what they were doing. They developed a plan, and they stuck with it. Teddy was very effective, too. He put on a two-day swing near the end of the campaign that I think produced thousands of votes for Bob.

HACKMAN: On the occasions when you saw Robert Kennedy, like that trip on April 16th, can you remember his observations on how the campaign was going, what he should do?

McGOVERN: Yeah. He came into the state twice during the primary. I remember the last time he was there, he came over from Nebraska, as I recall it. I flew in with him from Nebraska. He wasn't very effective in his speech that night. He spoke at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, and very frankly, he was just exhausted, didn't do very well. That was the last time I ever saw him alive. But he went on then the next day to a tour that I was unable to join him with because Humphrey was coming into the state and I had agreed to kind of divide my time. I just thought as a courtesy to the vice president I had to be with him. But Bob did very well that next day in a fast-moving tour through the state where he spoke to large crowds and handled himself very well. I remember him being in a very philosophical and reflective mood on that trip.

HACKMAN: This is the second trip?

McGOVERN: Yeah, the second trip. I'm not so clear on. . . . The first one is when he went to . . .

HACKMAN: The Indian hearings.

McGOVERN: . . . part of the Indian hearings. He did well on that, but he always was strong with the Indians. He spoke in Rapid City that night to a very large crowd. That was a well-planned and executed trip. But I remember the second time that kind of sadness that sometimes showed with him was rather strong. He was in a philosophical mood. I made some reference in the introduction to "The Impossible Dream." I guess I quoted a few lines from it. And later that night he said, "What did you mean by that? Do you really think it is impossible?" And I said, "Well, Bob, I don't think it's impossible. I think it's going to be very tough. But the point is, you're willing to make the fight, and I think you're doing well. I'm awfully glad you're in it." And he said, "Well, I am, too. But," he said, "it is going to be hard." I don't recall an awful lot of conversation, though. He gave me fantastic praise that night in my hometown. He was very, very generous. He asked me about it later. He wanted to know if it was embarrassing to me that he was so flattering. Other than that, I don't recall anything.

HACKMAN: Nothing on Mayor (Richard J.) Daley or (James H. J.) Tate and (Joseph M.) Barr or any of these people?

McGOVERN: No. No.

HACKMAN: Anything on Lyndon Johnson's withdrawal? Did he ever have observations on that?

McGOVERN: No, he didn't say anything about that.

HACKMAN: Any resentment from the subcommittee you were on on Indians when he set up that special subcommittee on Indian education back in '67?

McGOVERN: Oh, not really. I knew what he was doing, and I felt that our committee was pretty well checkmated by the full committee. It would be very difficult for our subcommittee to move very far without running into barriers with the full committee.

HACKMAN: Do you remember any discussions on through the spring of trying to get other senators to come out openly and support Robert Kennedy? Was there much conversation going on with other senators?

McGOVERN: No. No, there wasn't any which I was involved in. I was, by then, pretty deeply immersed in my own campaign, too. I knew I'd have a tough race, so I probably wasn't as helpful to him as some people were who were free, free from the campaign pressures.

HACKMAN: Pat (Donovan) was telling me a while ago outside that there was a trip up when he came up on your behalf in the fall of '67 to talk to some of your people on registration and things. He brought (Matthew) Matt Reese along. What can you remember about that?

McGOVERN: That was very helpful. I told him I thought I was going to have a tough race, that I was the only incumbent in the state, and asked him what advice he had. He said, "Well, I think that one of the things that people overlook is registration and get-out-the-vote techniques." And he said, "There's a guy who's awfully good on that by the name of Matt Reese. I think you ought to get him involved." So, Reese came up here and made a couple trips out to the state. Bob gave me a thousand bucks, you know, to cover the initial cost of that, to get his advice. Then he also--Bob himself--came to a meeting here in my office,

where I had some of the South Dakota party officials, and talked to them about the importance of party registration, the importance of my being re-elected, and so on.

HACKMAN: Anything other than what you told me that you remember about the Hickory Hill meeting on China when Dick Barnet and John Fairbank and these people were there? Do you remember who else was there? I've heard (Frederick G.) Fred Dutton was there.

McGOVERN: I think Fred was there that night and also there was a fellow there from Harvard by the name of. . . .

HACKMAN: Benjamin Schwartz.

McGOVERN: Schwartz. Yeah. Fairbanks was not there. If my memory is right, he didn't get to the meeting. I think he was invited, but didn't come. Now, I may be mistaken on that, but I don't recall him being there. Barnet was there and Schwartz was there. I don't think Fairbanks was.

HACKMAN: Do you remember making strong arguments to Robert Kennedy that he should speak out on China during the Senate years?

McGOVERN: No. No, I didn't make such arguments.

HACKMAN: Are there any other issues that you can remember that you urged Robert Kennedy to speak on or act on during the Senate years that either prompted him to do so or that he resisted?

McGOVERN: I don't think so. I don't recall any other thing.

HACKMAN: Do you feel they used you wisely, I guess, in the sense of asking you to do things that you could have been helpful on?

McGOVERN: Yeah, I think so. I think they respected the problem I had in South Dakota. But yet I think they got all the mileage they possibly could out of my popularity in the state and my standing with the Democratic voters.

HACKMAN: That's all I've got.

McGOVERN: Okay.

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