

Donald A. Norberg Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 5/31/1967
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Biographical Note

Donald A. Norberg (1910-1986) was the Chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party and an official for congressional relations in the Department of Agriculture. This interview covers the 1960 Democratic primary and general election in Iowa, the workings of the Iowa Democratic Party, and the 1960 Democratic National Convention, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

with

DONALD A. NORBERG

May 31, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Norberg, do you recall when you first met John Kennedy?

NORBERG: Yes. It was after the campaign was underway. No, really I'd met him in 1958 or '59. President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was scheduled to speak at an agricultural exhibition of some kind at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Had about eighty thousand people there, and Mr. Kennedy was booked on the same program and spoke before Mr. Eisenhower's appearance. I spent probably two or three hours with him that day, both on the grounds of this agricultural exhibition and then at some appearances he made in schools in the area during the afternoon.

HACKMAN: Do you recall any of your discussion with him--what it centered on at that time, and what your attitude toward him was, or what your impressions were?

NORBERG: I don't remember what we talked about. I assume we talked about the Democratic Party organization, but not in terms of any relationship to him. I remember being particularly impressed by his charm and his graciousness and, in a degree, by his shyness. There were a lot of college and high school

girls there at this agricultural affair, and of course there were tents and exhibits all over. And walking through it, every time we'd turn a corner, there'd be a covey of girls there, and they would let out this bobby-soxer scream that they have. And each time it seemed to frighten him just a little bit. He would pull back and grin and say hello and go on.

HACKMAN: When did you become chairman of the Party in Iowa?

NORBERG: In 1958.

HACKMAN: Had this been a major change in Party leadership, or had the. . . .

NORBERG: It was the result of a revolution reform movement within the Party. And I became chairman quite by accident. We started the reform movement, got up to the day of the convention, and didn't have a candidate. So I said, "Look, we can't have gotten all these people involved and not have a candidate. And since we're going to lose anyhow, and I have no desire for a political future in the state, I'll be the candidate and take the licking, so we can be on record as having tried." And by one of those things that sometimes happens, I got elected.

HACKMAN: What was Governor [Herschel C.] Loveless' role in this?

NORBERG: Governor Loveless, behind the scene, was concerned with. . . . Pardon me. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: You were talking about Governor Loveless' role.

NORBERG: The Governor was not up front in it, but his people were deeply involved: his administrative assistant, Bob Johnson; his man on the state Board of Control, John Hansen, who later became a congressman; [Edward A.] Ed McDermott, who headed up the Citizens for Kennedy campaign in Iowa. [Lex] Hawkins, the

fellow who was on the state central committee, had been trying to generate reform for a number of years. The principal opponents, by and large, other than the people who were entrenched in the organization, were a number of the candidates who didn't want to change the chairman right in the middle of a campaign.

HACKMAN: Could you comment then on the development of the Party in Iowa after you took over, let's say up through 1959?

NORBERG: Well, we sought to do two things: First of all, we sought to broaden the base of Party support financially; secondly, we sought to broaden the base of leadership within the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party in Iowa had suffered for so long as a second-rate operation. Iowa was such a dominantly Republican state that--and I don't say this disparagingly--the people who wanted to succeed in politics, the young people, the young attorneys, the young businessmen, and the young housewives, naturally migrated toward the Republican Party because there was a future there. We were anxious to bring some of these people into the Democratic Party. We had a tremendous amount of help in this respect from the liberals in the universities at Grinnell, at Iowa State, at the State University [of Iowa], who identified openly with the Party, helped us in local organization across the state, and with some of the college people in the Young Democrats organization, and, of course COPE [Congress on Political Education], operating largely through the personnel of the United Auto Workers.

HACKMAN: How specifically did you go about trying to broaden the economic base, other than support from COPE, let's say?

NORBERG: We set up a sustaining fund with contributions of as little as a dollar a month that gave people direct communication with the party through newsletters, through periodic financial statements, and that sort of thing.

HACKMAN: When did it become apparent that people in favor of Kennedy as a candidate were making some moves in the state, either people within the state or coming in from outside the state?

NORBERG: I think that the initial movement came largely from outside the state through [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen and a chap named [Robert A.] Bob Wallace. They came in in the legislative session of '59 and worked with me in setting up a breakfast meeting for the Democratic leadership in the legislature at which time Wallace and Sorensen, but Wallace taking the lead, made a pitch for what Kennedy could do for the Democratic Party in Iowa and what the Party could do for Kennedy, of course.

HACKMAN: What was the reception generally of these people? Can you recall?

NORBERG: I thought the reception was fairly good. However, most of these people involved in this particular meeting, with few exceptions, were closely tied to Governor Loveless, and you could assume that they would go the direction that Loveless went.

HACKMAN: What were the main objections to Senator Kennedy at this point that came up on the part of the people in Iowa?

NORBERG: Well, there wasn't a great deal of objection to Kennedy that I could ever discover, except. . . . You see, the Democratic Party in Iowa has a pretty broad base of Catholic membership. This is an inevitable thing with a minority in a state like Iowa, dominantly Protestant, dominantly Republican. Catholics were in the Democratic Party not only idealistically, but because they had no place else to go. They didn't fit good into the Republican Party. They couldn't get nominations in the Republican Party; they could in the Democratic Party. But, because a large number of our candidates were Catholic, they wanted a Catholic at the head of the ticket like they wanted a hole in the head. We had more opposition from Catholics in that area to the Kennedy nomination than we ever had from Protestants.

The other thing that developed was that a big share of the liberals in the Democratic Party in that period were still pretty dedicated to Adlai Stevenson. Had Stevenson been an aggressive, active candidate, Kennedy could have had trouble. But because he wasn't the liberals tended-- where would they go? Hubert Humphrey had been pretty well pushed out of the picture by that time; [Stuart] Symington was not a guy who appealed to liberals and intellectuals; [Lyndon B.] Johnson certainly wasn't: so Kennedy was a natural in this situation.

And then another thing that happened was that the Kennedy workers within the state did a far better job and had a better understanding of the process of picking delegates in Iowa than any of the other candidates. They went to the grass roots.

HACKMAN: When did this movement begin, would you say?

NORBERG: I would say in the latter part of '59.

HACKMAN: Who were particularly involved at that point?

NORBERG: Well, Ed McDermott of Dubuque, who later came in with the Kennedy Administration in the Office of Emergency Planning; Hawkins, Lex Hawkins of Des Moines; Randy Dunbar, a member of the state central committee from Waterloo; [Edris] Soapy Owens, the number one man of the United Auto Workers. Those are the names that immediately come to mind.

HACKMAN: How did they go about making their presence felt, or how did they go about organizing things?

NORBERG: Well, they went into the precincts and found Kennedy supporters and told them how to get elected delegates to the Convention. It was just that simple.

HACKMAN: Was it apparent then at the district conventions that they'd been very successful?

NORBERG: Yes.

HACKMAN: As state chairman, could you take any part in this at this time, or what were your feelings?

NORBERG: I was not taking an active part in it for two reasons: One is that the state chairman, when you've got a governor, sits on second base and lets the governor play first; the other is that I was still in love with Adlai Stevenson. When it appeared to me that, first of all, the Governor was playing patty-cake with Lyndon Johnson and pretty near anybody else except Kennedy, and when it became apparent that Stevenson was going to go through this drafting again, without consulting the Governor, I made a public announcement of my support for Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Right. That was in June, I believe on June 26th, around that time. What were the immediate causes of your decision to announce at that time? Or who was most influential in. . . .

NORBERG: I don't think anybody made any effort to sell Kennedy to me. I don't recall that anyone did. The people with whom I worked closely in the Party that were pro-Kennedy and working for him worked parallel to me. They didn't try to get me involved. My decision, I think, was pretty much my own.

HACKMAN: Your statement just a minute ago about Governor Loveless and his relations to Senator Johnson and the other candidates--what did you mean by this?

NORBERG: Well, I got the feeling that--and I say this not unkindly because I think highly of Governor Loveless. I'm kind of probably a sort of an idealistic type of guy. I was thinking of a presidential candidate in terms of what he meant to the country and not what he meant to individual political fortunes in Iowa. This disturbed me a little bit.

HACKMAN: We talked about these early efforts of people within the state to organize for Kennedy. Were they in contact with the Kennedy organization

on the national level at this point, or was anyone in the Kennedy organization on the national level active in the state?

NORBERG: Oh, there's no doubt but what they were in communication with the Kennedy organization, with Mr. Sorensen, with Mr. [Lawrence F] O'Brien particularly. But the Kennedy people were not too conspicuous ever within the state campaign. They seemed to pick out some real bright, competent people and put the maximum amount of confidence in them.

HACKMAN: Could you discuss the state party convention in '60 and the selection of delegates? Was it obvious that Kennedy had strong support there?

NORBERG: Oh, yes.

HACKMAN: Were delegates elected because they backed Kennedy?

NORBERG: Right.

HACKMAN: Was there any deep split in the delegation over issues other than the candidates?

NORBERG: No.

HACKMAN: As the state chairman, what were you mostly involved in in the pre-Convention period, from '60, let's say, before the Convention?

NORBERG: I'm afraid largely in the mechanics.

HACKMAN: Would you want to talk about how they were set up?

NORBERG: Oh, just like any other convention. You've got to have places to hold caucuses, places for general sessions, a little bit of interest in who is delegates, not in terms of who they're for, but who they are and what they believe in. We've had difficulty in

Iowa, which is the same in any state that's moving from a dominantly rural to a dominantly urban society; it takes awhile to change the orientation of the party leadership. We couldn't go on. . . . The price of corn is important, but it isn't important to the majority of the people who live in Iowa in 1960, or who are in Iowa in 1967. These people are now concentrating in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, Sioux City, and while they don't particularly want the price of corn to rob the farmer, they're interested in education, in integration, in all of these things that are important in rising, congested areas.

HACKMAN: Do you recall having any conversations with Senator Kennedy in 1960? You've mentioned your conversation probably in the earlier time. What about in '60 before the Convention?

NORBERG: In '60, after the delegates had been chosen, he came in to Iowa to address the delegates. My endorsement of his candidacy had taken place the day before and got a good play in the Des Moines Register, which is the only general circulation Sunday paper in the state. Mr. [Sargent, Jr.] Shriver came into the room ahead of Mr. Kennedy and was very effusive in his gratitude. The same thing was true of other people, some in Iowa, some with the Kennedy entourage. However, President Kennedy didn't know me from a bale of hay. I saw him come into the room. I saw him ask where I was. He walked over to me and put out his hand, and he said, "I'd like to thank you very much." That's all he said. We stood there and had our picture taken together, and that was the only conversation we had that I recall.

HACKMAN: How well, at that point, did you think he understood Iowa? Did he have any problems in understanding the issues that would be important to people in Iowa?

NORBERG: I don't think that in relationship to the thing that always gets the most attention in Iowa--the farm people--I don't think Mr. Kennedy knew anything about it at all. I don't think he cared a great deal, really. His interests weren't that

far down the scale. I remember one of the delegates was with the Pioneer Seed Corn Company, which has been greatly concerned about the possibility that you put production quotas on bushels which Mr. Kennedy had advocated at one time. So when Mr. Kennedy started to talk, my wife and I were seated together and this guy, about a two hundred pounder about six feet tall, and I said, "Sometimes in the speech the Senator's going to say we ought to have bushel and pound quotas on production, and this guy's going to come up about three feet off his chair, and he's going to corral the Senator before the Senator can take three steps after the meeting's over." And it turned out just exactly that way.

HACKMAN: Did you hear much talk on the part of other people or other delegates concerning Kennedy's stance on agriculture? Were they skeptical as to his stances?

NORBERG: No, I don't think so. Of course, at this particular meeting Kennedy had them all in his pocket when he came in. He didn't act like he did, but he knew what he did.

HACKMAN: What was Governor Loveless' response to your announcement in favor of Kennedy?

NORBERG: He made no direct response to me, but some of the people on his staff made it plain that he was extremely unhappy about it.

HACKMAN: Did they give any reason why?

NORBERG: I think he felt that it destroyed flexibility to some degree because, after all, he was a favorite son. And he doubtless had a point.

HACKMAN: What about the other delegates or Party members, in response to your announcement?

NORBERG: I think it was generally well received, with the exception of the . . . I got a tremendous volume of mail, none of it from delegates. I had been a lay speaker in the Methodist Church and identified as such, and I got a tremendous amount of anti-Catholic mail, more mail than I ever had on anything all the time I was chairman.

HACKMAN: Did any religious organizations or the religious press respond to your announcement?

NORBERG: No, no.

HACKMAN: Did any of the religious organizations at this point publicly express their feelings toward Kennedy as a candidate before the delegates went to the Convention?

NORBERG: No. I think that, by and large, the churches across the state, with the exception of the Catholic Church. . . . A number of the Catholic clergy were outspoken in their support of Mr. Kennedy, naturally. There wasn't any concentrated opposition. I think a big share of them would have been more comfortable if he hadn't been nominated and created this situation. But all the religious opposition was in the fundamentalist groups, far right religious groups.

HACKMAN: Could you describe the efforts of other candidates in Iowa and in relation to yourself-- Symington and Johnson, I guess, would be the main ones.

NORBERG: I thought that the most aggressive effort was made by Mr. Johnson. However, it was entirely at the top. I saw no evidence at all of a real grass roots effort by Mr. Johnson's people. [Clifton C.] Cliff Carter of Mr. Johnson's staff, a real nice guy who just charmed the socks off of the people out in Iowa, did a lot of traveling around, but he seemed to communicate mostly with State Central Committee members and didn't get any farther down in the party organization than that. Of course, he was only one, and naturally his time was limited.

Symington came into the state and made a number of appearances. But it was almost entirely a farm pitch that he made. He didn't seem to make any effort to get involved with urban people.

And Mr. Humphrey came in. Of course, there was a lot of Humphrey support in Iowa. I mean, he's a neighbor. People think highly of him. He came in and made a number of fund-raising speeches for us, but he never pushed himself very vigorously. And the only person I can recall from Humphrey's organization coming into the state and making any contacts at all was Karl Rolvaag, who at that time was lieutenant governor in Minnesota.

HACKMAN: Do you recall anyone specifically working for Symington, other than Symington himself, in Iowa from outside the state?

NORBERG: I think there was a little organization set up, but it never amounted to a great deal.

HACKMAN: There was some talk at the time that some candidates for Senate, Governor Loveless being one, felt pressures from some candidates they might have trouble getting funds in their campaign for the Senate if they didn't support certain candidates. Was there ever any indication of that?

NORBERG: I heard that talk. I never had anybody tell me that this was actually true.

HACKMAN: As the Convention approached, were the delegates to the Convention under the control of Governor Loveless, or was there any disagreement over his leadership at that point?

NORBERG: It was pretty well under Loveless' control, in my estimation. The big problem was with Loveless as a favorite son candidate, supposed to get the first vote at the Convention. This posed a little knotty problem because the Kennedy people wanted all the votes that were available to him on that first ballot. This took some doing to get this straightened out. I'll be honest with

you--I was not involved in it. I think basically McDermott and Hawkins were involved. And they finally got the parliamentarian, Mr. [Clarence] Cannon, to remove that barrier. And Loveless apparently agreed.

HACKMAN: What do you know about the frequent rumors that he was a possibility as a vice presidential candidate? Did he actively seek this?

NORBERG: My feeling is that two things happened: I think the rumors were persistent enough to get the Governor enthused about it; the other thing was that we had a congressman named Merwin Coad. Coad was ambitious to be United States Senator. Had Loveless been nominated for vice president, this would have opened the Senate nomination at the Convention, and Coad probably would have been pretty much of a shoo-in because he was a real hot property at that particular time. Coad spent more time with Loveless in three days out in Los Angeles than I had seen Coad with Loveless in all the time that he had been in the Congress. I'm sure that Mr. Coad kept encouraging Mr. Loveless in this potential.

Loveless had a couple of Young Democrats working for him out there whom I know he got to get some posters and placards and things like that ready in the event of the need for a demonstration. How far that got off the ground, I don't know. We had a meeting one day in which Mr. Loveless discussed this possibility rather seriously. And he was called out of the room to the phone, and I said to the people gathered there, most of them members of the state central committee and candidates for Congress, that somebody has got to tell him that this isn't going to work. And the somebody turned out to be me. Whether the Governor paid any attention to my advice or ever appreciated it, I don't know. But nothing much happened after that on the vice-presidential bid overtly. And I don't think Governor Loveless was the only one. I think there was quite a few people out there, Orville Freeman, probably, and a few others, who felt that they were in like Flynn.

HACKMAN: Do you know if there was ever any indication on the part of anyone in the Kennedy camp that Governor Loveless was being considered as a possible candidate?

NORBERG: I never found any, no. This was a beautiful organization, and it didn't make many mistakes like that.

HACKMAN: No one from the Kennedy camp ever used the approach in talking to you that Governor Loveless might possibly be a candidate?

NORBERG: No.

HACKMAN: How important was this possibility in creating delegate strength for Senator Kennedy? Was it of any importance?

NORBERG: I think absolutely none.

HACKMAN: Had the Governor ever expressed his preference to you before the Convention as to what candidate was his real favorite?

NORBERG: No.

HACKMAN: After you had announced your backing for Kennedy as a candidate, did you make any efforts before the Convention to increase delegate strength on his behalf in the Iowa delegation, or was it unnecessary?

NORBERG: No. It was already there.

HACKMAN: Did you have contacts in this period with the important farm organizations in Iowa, the National Farmers Union or American Farm Bureau?

NORBERG: There's only one important farm organization in Iowa, and that's the American Farm Bureau, which is just as Republican as it can possibly be.

HACKMAN: There's really no communication there.

NORBERG: The National Farmers Union was real small, and you don't have to ask it to be Democratic: it is. The NFO [National Farmers Organization] was growing in membership at that time, but it had no real political moxie and thought that a bipartisan approach was being 50 per cent on one side and 50 per cent on the other. It had no concept of what real political action and power required.

HACKMAN: Now let's talk about the Convention a little bit. Governor Loveless was involved both in getting the agricultural plank in the platform and also with the rules committee. In his absence who ran the delegation at the Convention?

NORBERG: Well, he really wasn't absent very much. I would say, in his absence, [Donald J.] Don Mitchell, the national committeeman, kept the wheels moving.

HACKMAN: What were you particularly involved in in the Convention as the state chairman?

NORBERG: Mostly as an errand boy. I really didn't figure very prominently in the decision making.

HACKMAN: What, other than the nomination of the candidate, was the Iowa delegation particularly interested in accomplishing at the Convention?

NORBERG: In the case of that particular delegation, not very much.

HACKMAN: Can you describe its role in relation to getting the agricultural plank desired? I know Loveless had served on that Democratic advisory committee which supposedly wrote the plank.

NORBERG: The only real action involved a couple of state central committee members who were farmers and two or three delegates who were farmers, who got

together a farm rally and had all the candidates they could round up come in and talk. The platform was pretty much what they wanted.

HACKMAN: Would that have been that group including Leonard Hoffman and Ellsworth Hays?

NORBERG: Yes, that's right.

HACKMAN: What do you recall about the efforts of other candidates toward the Iowa delegation at the Convention?

NORBERG: I think the hardest pitch was made by the Stevenson people: Mr. [A. S. Mike] Monroney, Senator Monroney, who is the only one who talked to me; and [James G.] Jim Patton of the National Farmers Union, who was communicating with the farm people in the delegation. The only one that they got was a delegate named Steve Garst who was associated with the Pioneer Hybrid Seed Corn Company, who was elected entirely on his pledge to support Kennedy. And the Stevenson people got stars in his eyes, and he just set sail. They did a beautiful job on him. But he was the only one. There were some pro-Stevenson people on the delegation. I remember particularly Mrs. [F. O. W.] Voigt, who came out there for Stevenson, but she didn't do any evangelizing. She became very resentful of the Governor and some others who twisted her arm to be for Kennedy at the windup of it and went away from the Convention pretty disillusioned, unhappy because of it.

HACKMAN: Other than that lady, who was most opposed to Kennedy as the candidate?

NORBERG: There was a lawyer from Marshalltown. The name that comes to mind is [Richard W.] Kemler--that may not be right--Dick Kemler, who was violently opposed to Kennedy. I don't think he had any feeling particularly for anybody else, just so it wasn't Kennedy. I don't know his reason. I talked to him about it. I never did find out. But he was really almost belligerent, and he was a real charming, sweet guy otherwise. And then the other

one was a fellow named Ken Robinson, a newspaperman from Bayard, who was pro-Johnson and stayed that way all the way.

HACKMAN: Who of the Kennedy people from outside the state worked most closely with the Iowa delegation in Los Angeles?

NORBERG: I think Robert Kennedy?

HACKMAN: What, from your point of view, made Governor Loveless decide to speak out for Kennedy at the Convention and allow the ballots to be cast on the first go-round?

NORBERG: Governor Loveless was a very astute politician. I don't think he was interested enough in any other candidate to swim upstream and lose.
[Interruption]

HACKMAN: We were talking about the casting of the Iowa votes for Kennedy on the first ballot. Were people in the delegation pushing Governor Loveless to allow this to happen?

NORBERG: Oh, yes.

HACKMAN: You had talked about efforts to get the parliamentarian to allow this. Could you expand on that a little bit?

NORBERG: No, I can't. All I know is that it was accomplished.

HACKMAN: And who did you say were. . . .

NORBERG: Basically, McDermott and Hawkins who were both very skilled lawyers and very skilled politicians.

HACKMAN: What was the reaction of the Iowa delegation to the selection of Senator Johnson as Vice President?

NORBERG: I think that it was fairly good with the majority. The labor people on the delegation were vigorously opposed. But then this lasted as long as it took for it to happen. Once it happened, why, we were in business.

HACKMAN: Did Governor Loveless ever express any reaction to this selection?

NORBERG: No. I think probably, since he didn't get it himself, I think he was quite pleased that Mr. Johnson did.

HACKMAN: After the Convention, then, what were you mainly involved in during the campaign?

NORBERG: I was mainly involved in trying to get our candidates to campaign for Mr. Kennedy. I had the feeling that if Kennedy didn't get 48-49 per cent of the vote at least, that we were going to go down the drain everywhere. And we did. Man, we went way down. We had county officeholders who were fixtures in office that got swept out of office just like that. But our candidates didn't work for Mr. Kennedy's election--maybe it wouldn't have made any difference; who knows. But they didn't. The only ones, as I recall, that did anything at all, used any of the speeches that I wrote in support of Mr. Kennedy, were John Hansen, who was running for lieutenant governor, and Harold Hughes, the present governor.

HACKMAN: What in general were the problems in getting the rest of these people to do this?

NORBERG: They thought Kennedy was going to get clobbered, and they felt that individual campaigns would be more helpful to them. Our candidate for governor didn't even put "Democrat" on his billboards.

HACKMAN: What, to those people, seemed to be the main objections to Kennedy as far as his popularity in Iowa went?

NORBERG: They thought that the religious issue was going to beat him. I mean, there was no feeling, I don't think, among the majority of them, that Mr. Kennedy was not a high-type, able Democratic candidate, except that he belonged to the wrong church to be running at the head of the ticket in Iowa.

HACKMAN: And yet many of the candidates themselves were Catholics, six out of eight for the House and . . .

NORBERG: Yeah. This complicated it, you see. Had they all been Protestants, their problem would have been much simpler.

HACKMAN: During the campaign did you have any contacts with the Kennedy organization on the national level or . . .

NORBERG: Yes. Their field man for that area was [William R.] Bill Rivkin of Chicago, who died not long ago. And Bill spent quite a bit of time in Iowa, spent quite a bit of time on the telephone with me.

HACKMAN: What types of decisions would you two talk over?

NORBERG: How we could get more workers in the campaign, more big shot workers.

HACKMAN: Was getting volunteers much of a problem?

NORBERG: Oh, no problem at all. They were stacked up. And this was particularly true in young men and women; they'd go down to fifteen years old, for heavens sakes; they'd be lined up in front of my office. I'd come to work in the morning--"What can we do for Mr. Kennedy." He had them, boy.

HACKMAN: How did the "Kennedy for President" movement within the state tie in with the regular Democratic organization?

NORBERG: I think it tied in with my part of it. I think it died pretty much once you go away from the state headquarters.

HACKMAN: What type of problems would come up in this area? What particularly seemed to be the problem?

NORBERG: There was no particular problem. It was apathy, if apathy's a problem. It wasn't what they were doing, it's what they weren't doing that hurt us. I think that every Kennedy gain that was made, was made through the volunteer organizations rather than through the regular party organization.

HACKMAN: Of course, you hadn't been chairman in '56, but did this seem to be much more of a problem with Kennedy running than it would have been with other candidates, or why, specifically, was it difficult, do you think?

NORBERG: I think the religious thing entirely. An interesting thing is Mr. Kennedy's own analysis of it during the campaign: We were flying his plane from Sioux City over to, I believe, Fort Dodge, and Mr. Kennedy and Congressman Coad, who prior to his election had been a Disciples of Christ preacher, were seated at a little table. And Congressman Coad said to Mr. Kennedy, "You know, I had a religious issue in my first campaign. I was accused of being anti-Catholic." And Mr. Kennedy looked at him and said, "Congressman, if you've got a choice, stay on that side."

HACKMAN: In general, how effective was the volunteer Kennedy organization?

NORBERG: I thought it was an excellent organization. It did everything right and didn't get votes. But basically, all things being equal, it was a honey.

HACKMAN: What about funds in this campaign? What problems did you run up against here?

NORBERG: Well, the Party itself had a very difficult money problem. In the first place, when the Party has a governor in power, a big share of the money naturally gravitates to the governor, whether he wants it or not. That's where it goes. So we had a real problem financing the rest of the campaign. We just didn't have enough money to do it right.

HACKMAN: Were there funds that came in from the national level--were you at all involved in this--from the Democratic National Committee or the Senate Campaign Committee?

NORBERG: No. I think that we got no money at all from the Democratic National Committee. Now I know money came in to individual candidates for Congress, to Loveless from the Senatorial and House Campaign Committees, but it wasn't channeled through the Party.

HACKMAN: You named the gentleman who was working as coordinator in the state. Did he have any problem in working with people in Iowa?

NORBERG: I don't think so. It never came to my knowledge.

HACKMAN: Was there any set policy ever evolved on how to handle the religious issue or any directives or anything like that?

NORBERG: No. I tried. Here, for example, when our house-to-house workers were out doing canvassing, finding Democrats so they could visit them and get them on the roll and get them registered, ran into this situation constantly: "Well, I'm a Democrat, but I'm not going to vote for Kennedy because he's a Catholic." Well, our smarter workers would say, "Well, that's all right. That's your choice and your right. But on that same basis, you're going to vote for Governor Loveless for United States Senator because his opponent, Mr. [Jack R.] Miller, is a Catholic." "Can't be. His name's Miller."

HACKMAN: Yeah. I wanted to ask about that. How do you account for the Loveless defeat?

NORBERG: I think that Mr. Loveless, by being mentioned for vice president, by himself talking about the possibility of being Secretary of Agriculture, destroyed his own image as the little guy fighting the big guys. I think that was one factor. The other factor was he didn't run a very aggressive campaign. The early polls showed him so far ahead that it was pitiful. I don't think he realized the potential difficulties he had until it was too late to do much about it. This Jack Miller--there's just no end to this guy's stamina. He never quit; boy, he never quit. And he ran an awfully good campaign. And it would have taken a good campaign, even with Loveless' popularity, to beat him. I couldn't get Loveless to ever make a speech in response to this religious issue. I tried to get him to get into the Kennedy thing up to his ears and say, "Look, it's no more wrong to vote against Mr. Kennedy because he's a Catholic than it is to vote for me because my opponent's a Catholic." This would have brought the whole thing out into focus, you see. Maybe Loveless was right; maybe I was wrong; I don't know. But Loveless would not get into this religious issue at all.

HACKMAN: Were other people, other than yourself, making efforts to get him to do this, do you know?

NORBERG: I don't know.

HACKMAN: He did spend some time campaigning for Kennedy and being involved in this Farmers for Kennedy group and several other things. Did the amount of time, perhaps, he'd spent out of the state contribute anything to his defeat?

NORBERG: I don't think it contributed anything to his defeat at all.

HACKMAN: Was there a major registration drive undertaken during this campaign?

NORBERG: Yes.

HACKMAN: How successful was this?

NORBERG: I thought it was extremely successful.

HACKMAN: How did you go about setting this up?

NORBERG: We modeled it after what had been done in Polk County, beginning in about 1950, by Lex Hawkins and Bob Johnson of the Auto Workers. And then we set up schools. We started as soon as I became state chairman. We set up schools, two day schools, and trained people on how to go door-to-door. And we'd take them out after we went through the training process and send them door-to-door. And then we used those people in turn to teach others. It was not a new technique. It's the same technique that's always been used. But to get card files, to find out who was registered and who wasn't, and then follow up with the campaign, go through your cards, and the one's that are not registered, get them registered.

HACKMAN: Who was in charge of this in '60?

NORBERG: Edris Owens, the United Auto Workers man there. By that time Bob Johnson had become a vice president of the Auto Workers and was in Chicago.

HACKMAN: What do you recall about Senator Kennedy's personal appearances in the state in '60? How successful were they?

NORBERG: Just fantastic, almost frightening. In the first place, you got tremendous crowds, and everybody wanted to touch him. I was in a parade in the car behind his in Fort Dodge with Mrs. [Eunice K.] Shriver--one of the few times in my life that I've been physically frightened by masses of human beings. They just crushed up against those cars that you thought that they were going to just pile them up in the middle. He had tremendous personal appeal.

HACKMAN: Did you ever have any personal conversations with him in this period? Was there ever time for this?

NORBERG: No, there was never any time.

HACKMAN: Did you feel he concentrated on the correct issues during the campaign? How effective was he on agricultural, for instance?

NORBERG: I don't think he was effective at all on agriculture. He never seemed to me to speak with the knowledge and the conviction. . . . I think it bothered him. I know, when we were in Sioux City, he was going up to South Dakota to a plowing contest the next day, and I forget who it was, somebody in his group said that, as I recall it, they had asked him to read the revised draft of this farm speech, and he said he'd read fifty revised drafts already, and he was getting so cotton-picking tired of that speech he didn't want to see any more of it. I understood that he talked to Mr. Humphrey on the phone that night about what he should say, in addition to what was in the speech or how the speech should be changed. I think agriculture was kind of a pain in the neck to him, as it is to a lot of other people. After all, there are not very many electoral votes, you know, for the time and effort that's demanded of you in a campaign.

HACKMAN: Do you have any other recollections of the campaign or of the election?

NORBERG: I have some very vivid recollections of feeling awfully sick when the election returns came in from Iowa. Other than that, no. I mean, this was offset to a great degree by the fact that he was elected. I felt badly for a lot of our candidates. As for others, the society's better off because they were beaten.

HACKMAN: Anything other than religion that played, do you think, a particularly important part in the outcome?

NORBERG: Oh, Iowa is a pretty consistently Republican state. I don't think the fact that Mr. Kennedy didn't carry it was totally unexpected. It was the margin, because, you know, when you're for a guy, naturally you hear all the good things and get your hopes built up, probably too high, when your common sense tells you that they ought not to be that high. You believe what you want to believe.

HACKMAN: Let's move on then from the election. Did you have any conversations with anyone in the Kennedy camp or the President between the time of the election and the time you came to the Department of Agriculture?

NORBERG: Yes. After the election, there was a battle for control of the party organization that involved Mr. Loveless on one side, who at that time didn't know what his future was going to be but wanted to be firmly planted within the party organization, and [Edward J.] Nick McManus, who had been defeated for governor. There were fifteen votes on the state central committee. We tallied up. The lowest vote I had for retention as chairman was eight to seven in my favor; the highest, nine to six. I had no particular relish for trying to run a party organization with that kind of feeling. So I didn't talk to anybody except Lex Hawkins and Soapy Owens, who were the two best friends and associates I had on the committee. And I told them that I wanted to quit, but I didn't want to throw this up for grabs and get back in the situation we had been in before. So Hawkins, I think, primarily himself, worked out a deal where he could get the McManus votes, or most of them, and take the chairmanship himself. I don't think he ever intended to keep it as long as he did. But he did get it, and it made for a better transition.

And then I, of course, had to work for a living, and I decided if I'd picked up any points in this campaign at all, I'd spend them on a job. So I got in touch with McDermott, with Carl Hamilton in Iowa, who also was involved in the citizens campaign, and then got in touch with Larry O'Brien.

And I came in here to see Larry. And he said, "If you want a job, you can have one. Now it's just a question of. . . . Tell me what salary range you want in, and we'll just have to put you where we can." So I told him and went back to Iowa. One day I got a call from National Committee Headquarters to come in. They sent me down to the Department of Agriculture, and I went to work.

HACKMAN: When was this?

NORDBERG: I came in here in the latter part of January or the first part of February and talked to Larry and, oh, I can't remember the other fellow's name over there in the office next to Larry, and. . . .

HACKMAN: Harris Wofford?

NORDBERG: No. And then I came back here the first part of March.

HACKMAN: What was the organization of the Department at the time you went over there, as far as their congressional relations program went? Was anything organized at that early period?

NORBERG: Oh, yes. They had the best congressional relations man in town, I think, in a guy named [Kenneth M.] Ken Birkhead.

HACKMAN: What exactly did your position over there involve? What did you spend most of your time doing?

NORBERG: I spent a good share of my time writing explanations of the Administration point of view on legislation, both for speeches and for letters to congressmen, and spent quite a lot of time on the Hill, discussing it with congressmen, particularly Midwesterners.

HACKMAN: Was there any concentration on your part either on the House or the Senate?

NORBERG: House.

HACKMAN: On the House. Mostly with people on the Agriculture Committee or in general?

NORBERG: In general.

HACKMAN: Could you describe the method by which the Agriculture Department was organized as far as getting the legislation passed and things like that?

NORBERG: Well, basically, it was like any other lobbying organization. You had to know who the troops were in the commodity and farm organizations, find out where they stood, and if they were with you, get them in here to testify, to lobby, and that sort of thing. I don't think government lobbyists. . . . I think they perform a great service for members of Congress, but I don't think they influence them very much. But the people you bring in from the field, if they're prestige people, do have some influence.

HACKMAN: Who did Secretary Freeman rely most heavily on in congressional relations? Did he use mostly the liaison office, or did he use other people on . . .

NORBERG: I think mostly the liaison office, largely because of Birkhead. The Secretary had a tremendous amount of confidence in him and his knowledge. Frankly, Birkhead knew more about it than Freeman did. He should.

HACKMAN: How was the departmental effort coordinated with the White House, the Administration effort?

NORBERG: Quite well, I think. And then, again, this was Birkhead. After all, Birkhead lived right across the street from Henry Wilson, and they were very

good friends. So I think communication went on constantly. In fact, I kind of had the feeling that perhaps for some, you know, if a bill's not related to agriculture, that the Agriculture people did a lot better job on them than some of the other agencies did for agriculturally related bills.

HACKMAN: Did you keep a close enough tab on the situation in Iowa to get any idea of what the reaction was there to the Kennedy farm program?

NORBERG: Well, it was generally good because the best part of the Kennedy farm program was the feed grains program, and this is the big thing in Iowa.

HACKMAN: I was just thinking in light of your earlier comment on the strength of the American Farm Bureau and the fact that the American Farm Bureau usually opposed most of the Kennedy legislation. I was just wondering how that worked out.

NORBERG: Farm Bureau influence doesn't enter into that area too much. Most Farm Bureau members were cooperators in the program. After all, they had to eat, so they didn't carry their opposition to Government interference in agriculture to the point they were going to turn down an extra twenty-five cents a bushel on their corn.

HACKMAN: I think that's all the questions I have. Can you think of anything you'd want to say?

NORBERG: I don't think of anything else, Mr. Hackman.

HACKMAN: Okay. Fine. Thank you.