

John F. Cahill, Oral History Interview — 9/27/1967
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Biographical Note

Cahill, Chairman of the Massachusetts Democratic Committee (1945), and delegate (1940) and alternate delegate (1944, 1948) to the Democratic National Convention, discusses Democratic politics in Massachusetts and nationally from the 1910s to 1960s, touching in particular upon John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald’s political career, John F. Kennedy’s (JFK) 1946 congressional campaign, and the 1956 Democratic National Convention at which JFK was nominated for vice president, among other issues.

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Date: 7-9-02

John F. Cahill

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Oral History Interview

with

John F. Cahill

September 27, 1967
Wollaston, Massachusetts

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Why don't we just start out by you giving a little thumbnail sketch...

CAHILL: I started in politics in Everett [Massachusetts] away back in 1913, and was elected to the city government, and served in the city government in Everett in 1914 and '15. And I have been active in Democratic politics ever since. I was quite active when John F. [John F. Fitzgerald] was a candidate for the United States Senate against Senator Weeks [Sinclair Weeks], which goes back a long ways. I was very active, of course, in the Smith [Alfred E. Smith] campaign for president. I was a candidate then.

STEWART: For what?

CAHILL: For the House of Representatives. Well, I lost by about seventy-two votes, and Al Smith, of course, carried the state. But, at that time, Daisy Donohue was chairman of the Democratic State Committee.

STEWART: This is in the late 1920s or so?

CAHILL: '28, the campaign of '28. Then, of course, I was very much interested in Franklin D. Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] as a result of

Franklin D.'s participation in the election, or trying to elect Al Smith. And, of course, Al Smith, when he was defeated, said he would no longer be a candidate for public office. And I believe that those that were with Smith should be with Roosevelt, because he, at that time, was a cripple

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and came on here in a wheelchair and campaigned for Al Smith.

STEWART: In 1928 he did?

CAHILL: Oh, yes. Yes. Then, of course, I went to the convention in '32 when Franklin D. was nominated for president. And prior to his nomination, I sat down with Franklin D. at his office, when he was governor of the State of New York, and at the time, with Louis Howe [Louis McHenry Howe] present, who was his secretary, we discussed the old-age pension system. At that time the Townsend Plan was everything. And I explained to him how my father, who worked with GE [General Electric], for all those years and had been away for about three months, he was pensioned and he lost his pension because he was away for three months. So I explained it to him, and he listened intently, and Louis Howe took it down. And he concluded by saying, "John, if I discuss this at this time, they'll call me a socialist. But, as true as you live, if I get elected, we will have an old-age pension system."

STEWART: He was being very cautious

CAHILL: And sure enough, he went to work on it in '33, and we had a pension system by '37, which is your present Social Security. But however, I went to the conventions in '36 and '40 and '44 and '48 and '52 and '56.

STEWART: Was 1932 your first one?

CAHILL: Oh, no. I went to my first convention in 1912, in Baltimore, when Woodrow Wilson was nominated. At that time the convention went into the second week for Roosevelt but Woodrow Wilson was nominated on Wednesday of the second week. William Jennings Bryan handled the operations for Woodrow Wilson. And, of course, he was fighting Champ Clark [James Beauchamp Clark] and Tammany [Tammany Hall]. And he finally won out.

STEWART: What was the position of the Massachusetts delegation then, do you recall? Who was the big power in Massachusetts in the Democratic setup?

CAHILL: At that time a man by the name of McDonald was the chairman of the state committee. And, of course, well, it was see-saw back and forth.

Tammany tried to rule Massachusetts, but in the final analysis they swung to Wilson, and Wilson was the nominee. Well, then in the convention of '16, I didn't attend because I was in the service. I was then in the Massachusetts cavalry, and we were on the border, so I missed that one. But in '20, I went to the convention at San Francisco, where Cox [James M. Cox] of Ohio was

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the nominee for president on the Democratic ticket, with Roosevelt as the nominee for Vice President. And, of course, the Republicans won.

STEWART: Well, David I. Walsh had by this time been elected to the Senate [United States Senate], right?

CAHILL: David I., yes, was in the Senate. David I. won running against Weeks. But John F. [John F. Fitzgerald] Lord have mercy on him—he ran against Weeks and he was defeated.... I don't believe that he was ever defeated. I thought he was counted out. I will explain something to you—may I explain that now?—of the law.

STEWART: Yes, yes, go right ahead.

CAHILL: There's a law on the books in Massachusetts which prevents recounting unused ballots. As an example, if a thousand ballots was sent to a precinct and eight hundred ballots were cast, there'd be a surplus of two hundred ballots. Now, these ballots, in the event of a recount, cannot be recounted under the laws existing in Massachusetts. Now, this is where they would steal the election. They would know what number of votes they had to make up. They gave you a fast count on election day, and they corroborated it by using these unused ballots to make the switch, so that when you recounted they had made up the difference.

STEWART: Yes, whatever they needed.

CAHILL: And you couldn't recount it. Now I tried, year in and year out, to get rid of that law and could never do it. And it's still the law of the Commonwealth. I was also able to change another law, in relation to that, on a recount. The law was where you could not recount a vote where the difference exceeded 1 percent. I had the law changed so that it was reduced to a half of 1 percent, so that you could recount it a half of one percent or better. But again, when I got out of office, they changed this law and brought it back to 1 percent. Now I actually saw where this chicanery existed. And this is one of the real laws that was detrimental to the opportunities of the Democrats. And with this law, in 1928, it took three weeks to get the returns in on the state election when Al Smith was a candidate. So that this is where I saw the Republics [sic] were corrupt. And the Democrats did not have the opportunity or the chances that they should have had.

But, then, of course, I went to the convention in '24 where it was a battle, a real battle, where William Gibbs McAdoo and Smith

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were in a battle. And then, of course, the one in '28 where Smith was nominated at Houston.

STEWART: Did Massachusetts support Al Smith totally in 1924?

CAHILL: Yes.

STEWART: There was no problem?

CAHILL: Yes, yes. And '28 as well. And then, of course, the convention in '32 was.... They supported Al Smith in that one. At that time Joseph B. Ely was the governor of the Commonwealth. And this is a contest where it was a terrific battle over delegates. Curley [James Michael Curley] was on a plank running for Roosevelt, and he was defeated. And as a consequence he, through some manipulation, made arrangements where he was going to become the delegate from Puerto Rico. And he did. And the night that Roosevelt was nominated I happened to be aside of Curley at a telephone booth at the Congress Hotel, where he was talking with William Randolph Hearst and made arrangements whereby Hearst would get William Gibbs McAdoo out of the contest and that what's-his-name from Texas...

STEWART: Garner [John N. Garner].

CAHILL: Jack Garner would become the candidate for vice president. James Michael Curley made this arrangement and put it through with William Randolph Hearst. I'll never forget it, as though it was just yesterday. But anyway....

STEWART: Who else? Governor Ely was supporting Smith, you say.

CAHILL: Oh, yes, and Senator David I. Walsh—all of the Massachusetts Democrats did support Al Smith in that convention. And, of course, the things that they called Roosevelt were just out of this world—he was everything but what he was—to attain and accomplish the ends. But Roosevelt won the nomination.

STEWART: Do you recall anything about the role of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] at that convention?

CAHILL: At that particular convention? No, I don't, I don't, I do not.

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STEWART: Well, was Mayor Fitzgerald a supporter of Al Smith, too, I assume?

CAHILL: John F.? Yes, he supported Al Smith. Then we went on to the '36 convention, which was held in Philadelphia. And, of course—what is his name, the Republican nominee? They also convened...

STEWART: Alfred M. Landon. Alf Landon.

CAHILL: Alf Landon, yeah. And then we went into the '40 convention, which was held in Chicago. And the '44 convention was held in Chicago.

STEWART: There was a certain amount of opposition to Roosevelt's third term in 1940.

CAHILL: Yes. And what's-his-name from New York...

STEWART: Farley [James A. Farley], James Farley.

CAHILL: James Farley was a candidate for president. And he thought that he had the Massachusetts delegation. As a matter of fact, I think he had an understanding with Burke [William H. Burke, Jr.], who was then chairman of the state committee, that he would have the Massachusetts delegation.

STEWART: Is that William Burke, "Onions" Burke?

CAHILL: That's he. That is he. Yes. And, of course, it came down to a vote, and well, Farley was nowhere. He was counted out.

STEWART: Ambassador Kennedy's oldest son [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] Joseph, who was killed in the war, was a delegate in 1940 and was supporting Farley. And I believe Ambassador Kennedy probably was himself. Do you recall this...?

CAHILL: I don't recall, and I was so active in that. As a matter of fact, I personally grabbed the Massachusetts standard and started a parade in the convention hall, around the convention hall, for Roosevelt and what's-his-name from Kentucky, who was the chairman.

STEWART: Barkley [Alben W. Barkley]?

CAHILL: Barkley is right. I'll never forget it. He kissed my standard going around. And also I'm

just thinking of the candidate from Maryland, his wife [Eleanor Tydings Ditzen] slapped me in the face.

STEWART: Really?

CAHILL: I grabbed a Maryland standard and passed it to a fellow in the line, and she slapped my face.

STEWART: I don't know who.... He was a candidate for president?

CAHILL: Yes. Millard Tydings [Millard E. Tydings].

STEWART: Millard Tydings. His son [Joseph D. Tydings] is now a United States Senator.

CAHILL: That's right. Well, he was a candidate for president. And his missus was sitting in the first seat in that—well, it wasn't the gallery. What do you call it. The first balcony, where you could reach from the floor. My picture was in the Chicago papers. The whole front page of the Chicago papers covered that. And they were giving credit to a foreman of the sewer division for making these outbursts when it was me. And if you saw this picture in the Chicago paper, you would see that situation.

STEWART: Who was the mayor of Chicago—Kelly [Edward J. Kelly]—who...

CAHILL: No, no, gosh.

STEWART: ...who presumably.... As the story goes, he had his people arranged so that they started yelling, "We want Roosevelt" over the.... It came out over the...

CAHILL: That's right. That's right. But I'm the fellow that started that and grabbed the Massachusetts standard and broke it open. But the Chicago municipal employees were supposed to be under the platform and hollering, "We want Roosevelt." But I'm the fellow that broke that open. And, as I say, the pictures of it and all were in the papers.

But then we go on to the '44 convention, when I was quite active. And then Bob Hannegan [Robert E. Hannegan] was the chairman of the national committee. And I forget now the name now of the treasurer of the national committee. He was an oil man from California. And he was much involved in those offshore drilling rights. Well, it so happened, the Saturday night before the week

the convention opened, Roosevelt was crossing the country on a train and stopped in the yards in Chicago. Bob Hannegan and this fellow—I was there myself—he got consent to go through with Truman [Harry S. Truman] as the candidate for vice president, as against Wallace [Henry A. Wallace]. Now it developed in the convention that Wallace's friends, who to me were all commies, had all of the tickets for the convention. And to overcome this situation, the nominations for vice president were deferred one day. And that night all new tickets were printed for the convention, so that all of these Wallaceites were excluded, couldn't get in. And, as a consequence, Harry Truman was nominated as the candidate for Vice President. Also Byrnes [James F. Byrnes].

STEWART: From South Carolina.

CAHILL: ...Byrnes from South Carolina tried to get into it, but he was excluded very quickly. But Truman won that handily.

STEWART: What do you recall of the role of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy in Massachusetts politics during the late 1930's? Of course, he broke with Roosevelt.

CAHILL: He broke with Roosevelt. And, of course, he went to England as the ambassador. And I think that Joe was afraid that the Germans were going to lick England and the Allies and were going to take over. Well, I even heard him make a statement that the Germans were going to lick England. But in this situation, when he was the ambassador to England, he had acquired the rights of handling all of the Scotch liquor. And Jimmy Roosevelt [James Roosevelt] and a fellow by the name of John Sargent who was a partner with Jimmy Roosevelt in an insurance business, and Eddie Gallagher (I don't know whether you know him or not) he was also in it. His father was a former city councilor, and at the end of his career he wound up as president of the Wonderland Dog Track. But they had control of the liquor interests and went deeper into the liquor business in a big way, but they did have a break over the war, the different beliefs.

STEWART: In 1942 they ran John Fitzgerald against Henry Cabot Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.]. No, he ran in the primaries against Joseph Casey [Joseph E. Casey]. Do you recall that?

CAHILL: I do very, very well. Joe Casey is the congressman from Clinton. I remember this very well. And Joe Casey won the nomination. But John F. didn't put into it the world. Of course, John F. was no longer a young man. And, of course, Casey was a very active young man; he was a fine

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looking man; he was quite an orator. But he also lost in the election. And then we come on to the reelection of David I. Walsh, which was to take place in '46. And Lodge ran against David I. and, of course, defeated David I.

But now we come to a period here where John F. was very much concerned about young John being a candidate for public office. And this was late in '45. Now, I was chairman of the Democratic State Committee. I handled Maurice Tobin's [Maurice J. Tobin] campaign from the state committee, Lord have mercy on him, in '44.

That was his successful campaign when he ran against Horace Cahill [Horace T. Cahill] and defeated him. I inaugurated the system whereby we got the women interested in voting, and we ran tea parties all over the state, which was a great thing.

STEWART: For Tobin?

CAHILL: For Tobin, yes. I inaugurated this plan which was later adopted by John Kennedy. But John F., John Kennedy's grandfather, wanted me to do something about getting John into a position to run for public office. John F. lived at the Bellevue [Hotel Bellevue] with his wife [Mary H. Fitzgerald], and the Democratic State Committee, of which I was the chairman, we had offices there. And my secretary, a Miss Mary Cockrey, she was my secretary for seven years—used to be John F.'s secretary prior. And he'd come in every day, as sure as another morning would come, and want to know if I'd done anything for young John. So it had come into February of '46, and I was down in the dining room of the Bellevue when John F. came in with his missus. He sat her down and he came over to me and he said; "Have you done anything for John?"

STEWART: Well, what office was he thinking of? Was he thinking only in terms of Congress, or...

CAHILL: He wasn't thinking of Congress at all, or any particular office, just for some office that I would support him in. So I said to John F., "I've got him running for lieutenant governor." He said, "You have? Have you told him?" I said no. He said, "I'll have him in here in the morning." Sure enough, John Kennedy was in in the morning. He came in with Billy Sutton [William J. Sutton]. And I sat down with him for three mornings, and I've now got him as a candidate for lieutenant governor.

STEWART: Was that the first time you had met him?

CAHILL: Met John?

STEWART: Right.

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CAHILL: Met John? Oh, no, no. I'd met him many times previous. But this was the time when I asked him if he would run for lieutenant governor. And he said he would and would I support him. And I said, "Positively." But I said, "Remember, the state committee does not have any money." And he

said, "I won't need any money." He says, "I can take care of that." So with that, he's now a candidate for lieutenant governor.

STEWART: Why did you feel he should be a candidate? Or why did you think he should be a candidate?

CAHILL: I thought he had the qualifications, and I thought he had the ability and everything to make a good candidate. So, Paul Dever [Paul A. Dever] heard about it, and he called me up. And he said, "I understand you've got Kennedy running for lieutenant governor." I said, "Yes. He's got the qualifications. He's got everything needed to fill the job." Well, he said, "I want that." I said, "Well, if you do, you'll have to talk to John Kennedy." So he said he would. So he did talk to John, and he convinced John to run for Congress against Mike Neville [Michael J. Neville], who was closer than close to Paul Dever; and John Cotter [John F. Cotter], who was a secretary for John Higgins [John P. Higgins] when he was a congressman; and Mike LoPresti [Michael LoPresti], who was a secretary for Congressman Flaherty [Thomas A. Flaherty]. And then there was an Italian undertaker, also, who was one of the election commissioners in the city of Boston. They were in this contest.

So after John Kennedy's talk with Paul Dever, he came back to me and he asked me what I thought about it. Well, I said, "John, I think you would have greater success running for Congress than you would for lieutenant governor." "But," I said, "don't think for a minute that Dever will be with you, " because he was so close to Mike Neville, and he did not believe that Kennedy could defeat Mike Neville. As a matter of fact, in a conversation with Dever he told me this, that he could not beat Mike Neville. "But," I said to John, "to win this fight and win it big," I said, "if you'd go over and put on house parties in Cambridge, Somerville, Charlestown, the West End, and East Boston, and the South End, you'll win it going away." And this is what happened. He did win it and won it in a big way. And then, of course, he went on and he became a candidate for the Senate against Lodge in '52.

STEWART: There again was some question of whether he would run for governor or for the Senate in 1952, because Paul Dever was thinking of running for the Senate wasn't he?

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CAHILL: He was. But John decided to run for the Senate. I had talked with him previously, and at the conception of the whole thing, that his chances of advancement would be far greater running for the national office than it would be for state office, which only time proved was right. And, of course, Dever did run for governor. And Dever was defeated, and John won for the Senate.

I'm just a little ahead of myself. In '48—I might even go back to '46—Maurice Tobin, Lord have mercy on him, running for reelection for governor started to campaign. The first place that we held a rally, I held a rally in the Armory in Lynn, and it was on October 12, where I had all of these women, where I had set up a system where only women were invited to these rallies. And I talked nearly with every woman there about the situation and

the fact that nationally we had gone off on controls, and the butter and meats and bread and everything—there should have been plenty and more of it—were less.

That night I called Matt Connelly [Matthew J. Connelly], who was the secretary to President Truman, about the situation, and I told him that the Democrats were going to lose unless they could do something about the controls. And Matt said that it was too late. So I spoke to Maurice Tobin about it and suggested that Maurice, under his emergency powers as governor, could go out and buy all of the meat that he could lay his hands on, cattle, and bring it in here and slaughter it and have it on the counters, which would automatically divorce the Massachusetts Democrats from the overall picture. But he thought it was too radical, and as a consequence I concluded, because I found out that night, that day and from then on we weren't going to get anywhere. And we went down to defeat.

STEWART: Bradford [Robert F. Bradford] was elected governor, wasn't he?

CAHILL: What's that?

STEWART: Bob Bradford was.

CAHILL: Yes. He was the lieutenant governor with Tobin in '44, and he succeeded Tobin in '46. But that year fifty-three northern Democrats in Congress were defeated. And an incident that I recall—at that time bishops were elevated to cardinals. And the cardinal from St. Louis, who Truman knew, on his way back from Rome stopped in Ireland. And he died. And his death was not recognized by Truman, because he was listening to Bishop Oxnam [Garfield Bromley Oxnam]. And as a consequence, Cardinal Spellman [Francis Edward Spellman] was met at dockside by Dewey [Thomas E. Dewey]. And as a consequence, there was, underneath and in the grapevine, word they were out to defeat the Democrats.

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So now we come along to the campaign of '48. And this fellow that was the ambassador to the Vatican, who Oxnam was opposed to, Truman named as the ambassador to the Vatican against the wishes of Oxnam. And also another factor was the appointment of a relative of Spellman's to become the attorney general—not the attorney general, but the United States attorney—at Boston, who came from Cardinal Spellman's hometown. And he's related to him. I just can't lay my tongue on his name.

STEWART: From Taunton or some place down around there?

CAHILL: What?

STEWART: Cardinal Spellman is originally from Taunton or some place down around there?

CAHILL: No, not Taunton. It's right near Brockton. Gosh, I know it so well.

STEWART: Yeah, I can't think of it either.

CAHILL: But he came from there. But anyway, as a consequence, he was appointed as the U.S. attorney for the Boston district. And as a result, they all got in line to support Truman. But the leaders of the Democrat party, including Dever, McCormack [John William McCormack], and all the others, didn't think that Truman could win the election in '48. I did. Dever had a set of delegates made up of state legislators, headed by your present congressman Tip O'Neill [Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.]. Curley had a group of delegates in there lined up by Charlie McGlue [Charles McGlue], who I had stricken from the ballot because of erroneous signatures. And to bring about harmony, I called a meeting wherein Maurice Tobin sat in, Dever sat in, Sonny McDonough [Patrick J. McDonough] sat in; and Charlie McGlue sat in, and Bullard represented McCormack. Well what I wanted to do—I had made five positions available on my slate wherein these fellows could fit in. But Dever never had any intention of going on the slate because he didn't think Truman could win. So we argued all afternoon, and then come 5 o'clock, and he said, "Look, don't tell anybody about it, but," he said, "you and Maurice Tobin go up to the Speaker's office, Tip O'Neill, and he will take his slate of delegates out, and we will go in on your slate." But when he said, "Don't tell anybody about it," I didn't trust him, I didn't believe him. I had a lady on my slate who was a school committeewoman, Mary Ryan Dacy, that... Maurice Tobin was now in a position to run on stickers to fill that gap. And he ran on stickers and [Interruption]

So, of course, we went to the convention, and this convention was

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held in Philadelphia.

STEWART: Could you stop just a minute here? [Interruption] Okay. Go ahead.

CAHILL: This convention was held in Philadelphia. And at that convention this fellow from the Carolinas, Thurmond [Strom Thurmond], bolted the party and walked out. And, of course, Truman was nominated. And at the convention Truman's speech, in his acceptance stated that the Republican Party had convened in convention and had adopted a platform. And it was, as Truman said, a wonderful platform. But he said, "I don't think they intend to live up to it." He said, "I'm going to call Congress back in session, and if they adopt and put through their platform, I will not run against them. But if they don't," he said, "I'll cross the country and give them hell." And, of course

STEWART: That's what he did.

CAHILL: This is what he did, and of course, the convention went into bedlam over it. There is one other thing that I must further tell you about this

election in Massachusetts. At that time, John F. Fitzgerald, a former city councilor, ran for the United States Senate against Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall]. I was in a position to advance John F. Fitzgerald fifty thousand dollars for campaign purposes and would buy two inches across the bottom of the *Boston Post* if he would come out and endorse Truman, which he did not do and didn't want to. I chased him for two weeks, trying to catch up with him, but couldn't. And I understand, or did understand at the time, that the former commissioner of public safety, John Stokes, had control of John F. Fitzgerald. And as a consequence, he did nothing. He could have won that election so easily. He lost by around twelve hundred votes to Saltonstall. But if he had come out and endorsed Truman, he would have been the only prominent Democrat doing so. He could have won hands down.

STEWART: How was he nominated? He was a relative unknown as far as state office was concerned, wasn't he?

CAHILL: No, John F. Fitzgerald had been in the Boston City Council for years, and at one time was the acting mayor of the city of Boston. He was a very prominent member of the City Council. He was in the legislature. He was a protégé of Martin Lomasney's [Martin M. Lomasney]. And, of course, Martin

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Lomasney passed out of the picture, and he came on on his own. At the time of the... [BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1] ...new courthouse in Boston, he was acting mayor when—what's his name? He was sick. But he signed the legislation accepting the PWA [Public Works Administration] money to build the courthouse. I'm just trying to think of this mayor's name. He was very close to Governor Ely and, of course, hated Roosevelt and didn't want them to accept this money from Roosevelt. But John F. Fitzgerald, as acting mayor, did, and put through the building of that courthouse. I'm trying to think of the mayor's name. He was also the attorney for the archdiocese.

STEWART: It wasn't Cokely [Dan Cokely].

CAHILL: No, no.

STEWART: Or Dowd? Who was John F. Dowd?

CAHILL: John F. Dowd. He was a former city councilor, and became the sheriff of Suffolk County, and wound up in problems and he went to jail as the result of trying to get bribes from employees.

STEWART: Well, who was Cokely?

CAHILL: Mansfield [Frederick W. Mansfield]. Mayor Mansfield was the mayor. You asked who Cokely was. Cokely was an attorney, a very prominent

attorney, who was in the executive council and over certain transactions where the District Attorney for Suffolk County and the District Attorney of Middlesex County were all indicted over a scandal that Cokely manipulated, and as a consequence Cokely was disbarred, but after that, went on and became an executive councilor. And he was councilor when Curley was governor.

Curley was elected to governor in '34, and served as governor in '35 and '36. There was a great what-to-do about eliminating a man by the name of Haultman [Eugene Haultman], who was the police commissioner of Boston. Curley tried to get rid of him. And a man by the name of John P. Feeney was Curley's attorney representing him before the governor's council, but they couldn't eliminate Haultman.

Incidentally, I received the second appointment that Curley made when he became governor. I was named, four days after Curley

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became governor, commissioner of armories of the commonwealth. I was to be appointed the head of the Metropolitan Water Department, superintendent of the public water department; but Joe Ely, on his last day in office, appointed Joe Dever [Joseph P. Dever] to the position. And Curley wanted to put him out of it and give it to me. I said, no, because I knew Paul Dever back in those days very, very well.

STEWART: Was that Paul Dever's father or brother?

CAHILL: His brother. Joseph Dever, that was Paul's brother. And he became... [Interruption] But again getting back to John and when he was in the Senate, he was interested in the St. Lawrence Seaway. I was very much interested in the St. Lawrence Seaway, myself. I was constantly trying to bring about the development of the port of Boston and, as a matter of fact, filed legislation that brought about the present port authority, which is in legislation that became the law in '57. That's a matter of record. I fought them all, Chamber of Commerce and all of them that were against it, but they finally came around to establishing it. And I was very much concerned about establishing a free port in the city of Boston for a reciprocal work between Canada and the Midwest and the development of the St. Lawrence Seaway because the development of the St. Lawrence Seaway would add almost four thousand miles of coastline to the Atlantic seaboard, up through the lake of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. And, of course, I didn't know that the Kennedys had control of the Chicago Mart [Chicago Merchandise Mart] at the time.

But it would bring about a reciprocal business between the Midwest and Boston, because eighty percent of everything consumed in New England came by railroad into Boston. And knowing that you could ship fifteen miles on water to one mile on rail, and compete, I thought that the St. Lawrence Seaway would bring to Boston automobiles and meat and leather and dairy products. And, of course, all of your appliances were made around Detroit. I thought a reciprocal business could be developed between the port of Boston and all of these points in the Midwest.

John asked me what I thought about the development of the St. Lawrence Seaway. And I told him that I thought it was a great thing, it would be a wonderful thing. It so happened at the time, this fellow who was commissioner of labor and industries—he was formerly the head of Local 25 of the Teamsters' Union, he was an Italian-American—he was trying to talk John out of going through with it. And I told John that I thought it was one of the greatest moves that could possibly come about, that they'd been trying for over a hundred years to bring it about but the railroads of New England were against it.

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And, of course, it has become a reality. It's only in its infancy, but the port of Boston has not done the things that they were supposed to do to develop this reciprocal business—which can still be done. And, of course, the railroad rates into New England as against the railroad rates into Baltimore, worked to a disadvantage to the port of Boston. And, of course, John was very much interested in bringing about a reciprocal between these two different ports, which had since become a reality in a great way.

But the port of Boston is still working at a disadvantage because the shipment of grains into the port of New York are handled without any additional cost. To explain it, grains would be delivered into a freight elevator in the port of New York, no matter what railroad or canal they came from, with no additional charge to the cost of the grain; where here in Boston it was up to 8 cents and 10 cents a bushel to make this transfer, which is one of the things that should be eliminated that would help the port of Boston.

Then there was another period where I even advised John to run for president.

STEWART: Really? When was this?

CAHILL: In '56. Of course, you know when Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] was nominated for president, Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn], of course, was Speaker of the House [House of Representatives]. And there were ballots taken wherein John was a candidate for vice president. And there was a fellow by the name of Finnegan [James A. Finnegan], who was the chairman and national committeeman from the state of Pennsylvania, that was Stevenson's campaign manager, and also Governor Lausche [Frank J. Lausche] of Ohio, who was a very close personal friend of Stevenson's. In the first ballot, Pennsylvania cast twelve votes for John for vice president. Ohio cast ten votes for John. In the second ballot neither Pennsylvania or Ohio cast a vote for John. Rayburn had sent the word out that Kennedy was getting along too fast and sent word down to this fellow from Tennessee to get on the line for Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] or else.

STEWART: Albert Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.]?

CAHILL: No, it wasn't Gore. It wasn't Gore.

STEWART: Clement [Frank Clement] the Governor who was the keynote speaker?

CAHILL: That's the gentleman. That's the gentleman. Sent him and put him on

the line for Kefauver. And in talking to John, I said, “John, Rayburn controls

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these fellows in Congress, and these congressmen control the delegations that come to the convention. The only chance that you’ve got to defeat this system is, go out and run and get delegates pledged to yourself and take them to the convention,” which he did and as a consequence became the nominee. But this broke Rayburn’s heart. He cried over that.

STEWART: Really?

CAHILL: Yes. He cried over that. I could tell you more things, too, about McCormack.

STEWART: Go ahead.

CAHILL: McCormack was the fellow that was the instrument in getting Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] to run for Vice President. Rayburn was instrumental—not instrumental, but wanted Johnson as the nominee, which he failed to accomplish. And this deadlocked.... And it was finally brought about. McCormack is the fellow that really persuaded Rayburn to have Johnson run and accept the nomination for vice president. And, of course, there was dealings in there between the other Kennedys that night that really brought about the nomination for Johnson.

STEWART: What about the ‘52 convention? Do you recall when Adlai Stevenson was nominated? Paul Dever was...

CAHILL: Paul Dever made the speech for Stevenson and lost his voice. I’ll never forget that, I was within ten feet of him when this occurred. And immediately after Stevenson was nominated, there seemed to be a group of propagandists that were circulating stories that Stevenson was a divorced man. And I think that, before the delegates left the convention that Saturday night, that they had done such a job on Stevenson, he never had a chance, never had a chance. And of course, Ted [Edward Moore Kennedy] was a candidate for the Senate, and he won greatly.

And I think that Brewer [Basil Brewer] of the *New Bedford Standard Times* did so much to assist John in carrying New Bedford and the Cape area. Brewer, I know, was sore on Lodge because of having given the leg to Taft [Robert A. Taft] and, as a consequence, supported John for the Senate. And he carried the area overwhelmingly.

STEWART: To go back even further, there’s a story that Paul Dever got Harry Truman to appoint Maurice Tobin to the Cabinet to open the way for him to run for governor in 1948.

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CAHILL: Well, I must tell you that I am the man that did that.

STEWART: Really?

CAHILL: Yes. Paul Dever was a candidate for governor and so was Maurice Tobin. And we went to the convention, and, of course, our headquarters was in the Waldorf-Astoria in Philadelphia [sic]. And the man that is now vice president...

STEWART: Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey].

CAHILL: ...Humphrey came to the convention for the first time. He was then the mayor of Minneapolis, Minnesota. And Howard McGrath [J. Howard McGrath] was chairman of the national committee. And, of course, Howard and Maurice were very friendly. Well, there's quite a story that goes back into it. Dever would not be a candidate as a delegate to the convention. He didn't want to be because he wasn't with Truman. And, of course, I was concerned about a Democratic victory and unanimity among the Democrats, and as I told you earlier, how I tried to place these five on my slate. My delegates won. They went to the convention pledged to Harry Truman. And he won, of course. But the agreement was made there that Maurice Tobin would get out of the fight for governor and would become the nominee for secretary of labor, if Truman won. And this was how Maurice Tobin became the secretary of labor.

STEWART: Did he want to go? Was he reluctant?

CAHILL: Who?

STEWART: Tobin.

CAHILL: Well, Maurice thought that he could win the gubernatorial fight very easily, and I think he could myself. I did think that way. But he agreed to run—not run, but withdraw from the gubernatorial contest to become the secretary of labor in the event of Truman winning. And he thought that Truman could win, and he did, and, as a result, he became secretary of labor. But Dever had no more to do with it than Joe Blow.

STEWART: Really?

CAHILL: That's a fact—other than to clear the way that the Democratic Party would be united. And this was the situation. And, as a matter of fact, I was a

candidate for lieutenant governor in '50, running against a man by the name of Sullivan [Charles F. Sullivan], who was then the lieutenant governor, and he was from Worcester. And, of course, Dever won the gubernatorial contest in '48, and he was a candidate for reelection in '50. But there was a man from Northampton by the name of McCarthy [George W. McCarthy] running for governor, who Dever took out of the picture by...

STEWART: ...supporting him for lieutenant governor?

CAHILL: Hmmm? This McCarthy was running for governor. And Dever didn't want any opposition and, through certain tactics got him out of the picture.

STEWART: How?

CAHILL: I understand it was a fifteen-thousand-dollar payoff. It took McCarthy out of the picture. Now, Dever didn't have to campaign for governor. To run for lieutenant governor, without a campaign being carried on for governor, to run for lieutenant governor, you had to go on and make the fight as though you were a candidate for governor. And, of course, I tried as most I could, but didn't have the finances to make the fight. But I was instrumental in defeating Jeff Sullivan. And he was defeated. But Dever, of course, he had no opposition in the '50 fight and the primaries, and went on to win, but Herter [Christian A. Herter] had defeated him in '52 very easily.

STEWART: How big a factor was Senator Joseph McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy], say, in the 1952 election and later? Of course, the *Boston Post* later turned against Kennedy.

CAHILL: Joe McCarthy was well liked by what you might call the left-wing Democrats. He was idolized.

STEWART: The right-wing Democrats.

CAHILL: By the right-wing Democrats. He was idolized by the Irish. He really was. And he came on here and made several speeches. They had him speak before the Hibernians in Everett. He was well liked, and to the day he died he was well liked by the Democrats. They thought that they did a job on him, where he was trying to expose the commies and they did a job on him. But this is politics, and of course, trying to defeat those heavy interests was almost an impossibility.

STEWART: Well, do you want to stop here now, or is there

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more, do you think? You know, we could pick it up at another time if you want. It's up to you. Is there anything else you can think of?

CAHILL: Oh, there's so much that I could go on with, but I'll spend some more time with you on it. You know, I was with John F. Fitzgerald a presidential elector in the electors college [Electoral College] with John F.

STEWART: When was that?

CAHILL: For Truman, in '49, in the taking of office in '49. But I honestly believe that John was assassinated through the efforts of this Cuban. I'll never believe that this fellow did that on his own. I think that time will reveal the facts, where it was a premeditated arrangement to get rid of a Catholic and also for what John did in stopping the Russians in bringing the missiles into Cuba. But we'll let it go at that.

STEWART: Okay.

CAHILL: Well, there's so much more, but....

STEWART: Who was the national committeeman before Curley?

CAHILL: I was national committeeman when Curley went to the can.

STEWART: Oh, really? And then Curley came back in...

CAHILL: He came back. Gosh, I must tell you a story about that too, how Truman had a fight with Bob Hannegan. Truman told Bob Hannegan he was all done. And with that Truman asked a man by the name of James McGranery [James P. McGranery], who was a federal judge in Philadelphia and a former congressman, to take the job as chairman of the national committee. And Truman wanted the answer when he came back. He was going to take a trip on the presidential yacht. And he arrived back on a Friday, and McGranery told Truman that he would accept the chairman of the National Committee. Hannegan heard about it, and with Kelly of Chicago, Flynn [Edward J. Flynn] of New York and Hague [Frank Hague] of Jersey City, and Howard McGrath, who was then a senator, they sat down, and, as a consequence of this meet, Hannegan issued the statement that Howard McGrath would accept the chairmanship of the national committee and that it was acceptable to the President. The President was so incensed over this. He was. And, as a consequence—I'm now national committeeman.

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We were to convene at the Hotel Mayflower in Washington to elect the new chairman. And the night before the national committee had a banquet in the Mayflower. And it was in a hall that was.... There was a small lobby between the main lobby of the hotel and the ballroom, and I'm going into the ballroom. As I'm going in, Bob Hannegan is coming

out, and he has his assistant with him, a fellow by the name of Gael Sullivan. And Hannegan said, "Hello" to me. And I said hello. He said, "What the hell's the matter with you?" I said, "Nothin'." He said, "You're like all the goddamn Irish." "Well," I said, "I'm goddamn glad to think that you think I am like all the Irish, you mongrel." And with that he took a punch at me. And When he did I hit him an uppercut under the chin and dropped him like a thousand bricks. And Gael Sullivan started toward me. I said, "You want some of it, too?" And he ran like hell.

STEWART: And he was later fired, wasn't he, Gael Sullivan?

CAHILL: He was his assistant.

STEWART: Yeah, but he was later dropped.

CAHILL: Oh, he dropped him, yes. But fifteen minutes after this episode, Matt Connelly was over from the White House. And he said, "The boss has heard what has happened, and he wants you to go along with Howard McGrath." "Well," I said, "how about McGranery." "Jim is okay." So he had me talk to McGranery, and McGranery said, "Okay. He wants to go along. He don't want this squabble to get out."

Well, I said, "There's one other thing I'm concerned about. Curley is in jail, and it means fifty thousand votes to the Democrats in Massachusetts. I would like to have the President let him out of jail." Well, he said—this is Matt Connelly—he said, "Let's go in and sit down with Howard McGrath and see what we can do about it." So we went in and sat down with Howard McGrath, and, while we're sitting there, Hannegan comes over to the table and says, "What the hell are you talking to that man for?" Matt Connelly said, "Get out of here, you son of a bitch. You've caused enough trouble already." And Hannegan left. But Howard McGrath and Matt said they would do everything in the world to get Curley out. Well, I got word from Truman that he would let him out for Thanksgiving. I went along and voted for Howard McGrath the next day. And he became national committeeman. And I got the word on Monday that Curley would be out for Thanksgiving. And I came home and told his son that he would be out for Thanksgiving. And then, of course, he was out for Thanksgiving.

But Curley got out of jail and the first thing he did was to come out supporting MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur]. But Truman said

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that he never would be right, no matter what they did for him, that he'd never be right. Well, they called me on it, and I said, "No matter what he does; he'll never be able to change a vote against the President, because the President allowed him to come out and enjoy the fruits of the office of mayor." This was so.

But the other phase of it... Now, this story is an editorial, and it's in the *Herald* [*Boston Herald-Traveler*], written by Mullins [William Mullins]. I don't know whether you remember Mullins?

STEWART: Yes, yes. He passed away.

CAHILL: He was a political writer. Well, there was an editorial on this in that paper. And of course, Curley.... John Hynes [John B. Hynes] was acting mayor, and Hynes thought Curley needed some finances, and left garbage and rubbish contracts on the table, which he could have signed, but did not. Curley, as a matter of fact, he was in the position to sign them and made the contracts and, I guess, enjoyed the fruits of the office of mayor.

STEWART: But John Kennedy had been the only Massachusetts congressman that didn't want to sign, who wouldn't sign the petition.

CAHILL: He didn't want to sign. He wouldn't sign the petition. That's true. That's true.

STEWART: McCormack was getting the petition together, I guess, wasn't he?

CAHILL: Aha. No. McCormack would let him rot in jail if it was up to him.

STEWART: Really?

CAHILL: Oh, God. You don't know that down underneath.... The situation, as far as that's concerned: there was a rivalry there and a jealousy that McCormack.... McCormack, if a man was in trouble with the law, McCormack would do nothing to aid him in any way. But there were those that would operate and say that if he did this—the same as Curley, playing strength. He gave McCormack credit for taking him out of jail, when he had no more to do with it than you. That's a fact. I'm the fellow that did it.

STEWART: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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