

Robert E. Hedrick Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 07/29/1964
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Biographical Note

Hedrick was the manager of the John F. Kennedy [JFK] for President Campaign in Randolph County, West Virginia [WV], in 1960. In this interview Hedrick discusses how he first became interested in JFK as a presidential candidate and initial interactions with him; the 1960 WV presidential primary; the economics of Randolph County, WV; the issue of religion during JFK's 1960 campaign; the Douglas Committee and legislation; forestry and Randolph County's economy; Hubert H. Humphrey's campaign in Randolph County during the 1960 primary; mining communities in southern WV; which of JFK's domestic policies played well in WV; the students and faculty of Randolph County colleges and JFK's campaign; Republican hostility towards JFK versus religious hostility in the 1960 election; the impact of JFK's war record on the WV vote; how the JFK campaign helped WV's national image and reputation; and the 1960 Democratic National Convention, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT E. HEDRICK

July 29, 1964
Clarksburg, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Mr. Hedrick, among his close acquaintances is called Judge, and his title of judge has some relationship to the Kennedy campaign. Judge Hedrick, would you tell the story?

HEDRICK: A. James Manchin and myself had been at the convention in California, the Democratic National Convention in 1960. We were on our way back to Washington, and Senator Kennedy's plane with his staff were all riding in this plane. Ralph Dungan, who was assistant to President Kennedy, was probably partly responsible for my nickname of Judge. A. James Manchin was undoubtedly the one that got me off the legal end of judgeship into being a judge of cattle and good-looking women and other things.

YOUNG: Well, Mr. Hedrick, would you tell me how you first became interested in Senator Kennedy as a presidential possibility?

HEDRICK: In 1956, in Chicago, at the Democratic National Convention, when [Samuel T.] Sam Rayburn referred to him as "the sailor from Boston," that was my first contact with Senator Kennedy. I realized then that he had plenty of vision when I thought the nation needed to go forward. I was interested in him from that time on until he came in West Virginia getting in the primary.

YOUNG: What were your contacts with Senator Kennedy before he announced that he would file for the primary?

HEDRICK: Our congressman, Harley O. Staggers, was the first

man to tell me that Senator Kennedy was interested in me helping him out in West Virginia, and that he was coming in to win the primary. The first meeting we had was in Parkersburg, and with A. James Manchin, [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy, [Robert P.] Bob McDonough, and [Charles] Charlie Love. I think there were about six of us there at that first meeting that we had in the hotel in Parkersburg.

YOUNG: Well, what were your first contacts with the senator himself, first personal contacts?

HEDRICK: I think my first personal contact with him was in Charleston, West Virginia.

YOUNG: Well, what role did you play during the primary?

HEDRICK: During the primary I acted as sort of campaign manager in Randolph County, and in counties from there on back down here into the panhandle.

YOUNG: Would you, Mr. Hedrick, describe the particular economic interest of your section of West Virginia and how that section might differ from other sections of the state?

HEDRICK: Most of our section from Randolph County on back is mostly agriculture, and a big part of the Monongahela National Forest, and different utilities undoubtedly own over at least half of the land in that section.

YOUNG: So that your problem of tax structure is made unique by the fact that much of the land is national forest and not taxable, is that correct?

HEDRICK: That is correct.

YOUNG: So this throws the tax burden, then, on the citizens that are there.

HEDRICK: Yes, that's right.

YOUNG: Well, when you served as general campaign manager for your own county, Randolph County, and surrounding counties, did you set up a separate Kennedy organization or did you work through established courthouse organizations, or did you perhaps do both?

HEDRICK: None of the local politicians. . . . In other words, we were outcasts so far as all other political organizations were concerned. No other political organization had any association with us at all. We set up our own outfit

and worked completely separate from any other organization. We had a young lady named Pat Twohig from up in Massachusetts. She came in and worked with us. When President Kennedy was supposed to visit in Elkin, we wrote letters to every Democratic voter in Randolph County. And the day he was to be there, there came up a heavy fog and the planes couldn't take off or land. But he talked to the people there--we had a large group of people out, in fact, we had a packed house here at the hotel. He talked on the telephone to the people. But he never got to Elkins any time during the primary or after.

YOUNG: Well, you'd mentioned in our conversation before we started this interview, that religion in your section of West Virginia did become an issue, and that frequently people opposed the president, not because they opposed him as a Catholic, but simply because Protestants and Catholics might be fighting over other issues that were completely unrelated to the presidential election. Perhaps I've taken the words out of your mouth and done too much summarizing, but could you add a comment on that statement?

HEDRICK: We had one church--the Baptist minister spoke from his pulpit about President Kennedy and actually electioneered for him. Outside of the Baptist minister and possibly the Holy Roller church--we have several Holy Roller ministers that had tent meetings from town to town in small towns. . . . He finally went all-out for Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: What about the opposition to Senator Kennedy in terms of religion in your particular part of the state?

HEDRICK: In one adjoining county, Tucker County, some prominent Democrats made quite an issue out of religion. They were for Hubert Humphrey, trying to campaign for him on the hate proposition.

YOUNG: Did you feel that they were for Senator Humphrey because they wanted him, or was this perhaps indirect support for Senator [Lyndon B.] Johnson or some other candidate?

HEDRICK: No, they were just strictly against the religious issue, that's all.

YOUNG: They were supporting Humphrey simply on the grounds he wasn't Kennedy.

HEDRICK: That's right.

YOUNG: Well, since your part of West Virginia is a little bit different economically from much of the rest of the state, during the primary campaign did Senator Kennedy make any special appeal on the basis of timbering, national forests, and that sort of thing?

HEDRICK: I got a call one day to get somebody appointed to what we call the Douglas committee.

YOUNG: Was this after the election?

HEDRICK: Oh, this would be after the election; it would be after the primary.

YOUNG: Well, go right ahead with that, and then we can go back to the primary.

HEDRICK: I had a man appointed named Carl Channel that went along with things very good, and through him the whole committee consisted of the opposite party. The Democrats--the politicians--hadn't been too strong for us, so ordinarily we Republicans had been opposed to most anything that the Democrats did, but in this case they went along and approved all these different things, I think eighteen things the Douglas committee. . . . Seventeen of them are now working, I think, and most of them have become law.

YOUNG: Well, could you mention just a few of these to give some idea of the sort of thing that . . .

HEDRICK: The works bill that goes through that helps West Virginia (which they call the crash program now), one of the things that they put to pull the state out of the depression and the distressed condition it was in, would be one of the big things. And the appropriations in your forestry to enlarge your Monongahela National Forest and other forests, was part of the thing, and conserving water. About all the things in agriculture that are being worked now, was part of the reports from the Douglas committee meetings that we had.

YOUNG: Do you mean the national forest, then, was actually enlarged?

HEDRICK: Enlarged, yeah, being enlarged all the time from that.

YOUNG: Well, do the local people feel that this aids the local economy, that this helps them?

HEDRICK: Oh, yeah, we haven't got an unemployed man in Randolph

or surrounding counties. You can't hire a man to do anything now. Everybody's working. The greatest thing that ever happened to West Virginia was President Kennedy.

YOUNG: Working in forestry projects, tourists, that sort of thing?

HEDRICK: We have our highways all cleaned out, as you can see every place, the roads are in good shape. That's all part of it.

YOUNG: Well, let's go back then to this earlier matter of the primary. Was there any hint of this sort of thing from Senator Kennedy as a campaigner in the primary?

HEDRICK: It was all part of his original ideas there, to preserve our natural resources, he talked about natural resources in different places, even in city talks. It was part of the thing: we had to wake up and move forward and preserve our natural resources and our water. That was all part of his program.

YOUNG: Did Senator Humphrey campaign in your section of the state?

HEDRICK: Senator Humphrey's crew of people came into Randolph County. They were going on a tour back through the twenty counties that I worked. They got into Elkins, stopped a little bit, and handed a few badges out in one corner. And they got up to the next corner where I was located, and came in and met me. I praised Hubert Humphrey and told them what a fine man he was. If Senator [Matthew M.] Neely had been alive today, I would undoubtedly have had to split with one of the greatest friends I ever had. Because it could have been possible that through the friendship of him and Hubert Humphrey, he would have insisted I be for Hubert Humphrey, which would have split a lifelong friendship there. I praised Humphrey up, the man thanked me, and his group of people left. That was all I was bothered with all the way through.

YOUNG: Did you notice any difference in the West Virginia campaign between the two senators in the terms of programs, campaign techniques, campaign organization-- that sort of thing?

HEDRICK: In our particular section, we used no Kennedy money. We had no money. We even collected money in our section and sent in to the state headquarters. We used no money at all of the Kennedy family.

YOUNG: You mean into the state Kennedy headquarters?

HEDRICK: Yes. We took no money out, we put in from Randolph County. But, like I say, on the Humphrey campaign, I didn't see much in my section. Because I praised him up, they went up and pulled out and went someplace else. They didn't bother around. So I just don't know too much about their campaign; they didn't bother us too much, with the exception of the few groups of people that picked it up. Most all of that was the religious issue that they used. And I know that Humphrey hadn't encouraged anything like that. I feel certain he didn't.

YOUNG: Well, in the primary itself, what do you feel was the most effective aid that Senator Kennedy had going for him? What were his most respected methods and techniques of campaigning and winning votes in your part of the state?

HEDRICK: Well, he seemed to be well accepted by everybody. We went around from house to house with two people and got people's ideas, and sent in to where they could take and work that to what people actually wanted and what they needed. We talked to people and that really appealed. He'd get to people right on the things that they were interested in knowing, and what would help them. It came from the people themselves, this campaign did.

YOUNG: Before we started this interview, you mentioned going to a mining community that had a very mixed population. I wonder if you would say a word about the nature of some of these mining communities in southern West Virginia, their mixed population background.

HEDRICK: In Tucker County, we had a situation there. We had taken some literature and left it in some homes to be passed out, and by the time we got back twenty-two miles away, the people frightfully called to come and get the stuff out. The people threatened to burn their homes unless they got the Catholic stuff away from there. A. James Manchin and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. had an appointment to be in this town, Parsons, West Virginia (Tucker County), at a certain time--they got there about two hours later. Our Judge Stanley Bosworth, our circuit judge, had a daughter that had worked in politics from a baby almost up, a young girl about sixteen or seventeen. She went along with a fellow from Texas named Claude Hooton. This young lady, a beautiful young blonde-haired girl would pin a Kennedy badge on these people I'd get to talking to, and during the conversation I'd get them turned completely around different ways, and once they'd see that people saw them with

a Kennedy badge, they couldn't get out of it, and then people that had been peeking out of the courthouse windows and around the corners, they started coming. By the time that Manchin and Roosevelt got there, we had a big crowd. But different people would pick up every nationality of people out of the coal mining sections of Kempton Maryland Benbush, Thomas, Davis, and all the little burned-out mining towns up on the mountain, they were all hitchiking to get down into Parsons. The people would pick them up and ask them where they were going. Most of them stated they were going down to Parsons to see "mine good friend."

YOUNG: Who was . . . ?

HEDRICK: Franklin D. Roosevelt.

YOUNG: You also said something about the problem, of course, of the miners being paid on one time schedule, and then the difficulties with social security, and related this to some of the Kennedy program for West Virginia. Would you go over that again for me, please?

HEDRICK: Back during the time when a coal miner was employed, before the mines shut down, at one time we had twenty post offices in Tucker County. At this time there were ten; half of the post offices had gone, by the mines closing down. During the time of a coal miner's employment he got paid every week. Some of the old ones got on social security, and they got a small check each month. A lot of them actually died of starvation. They just couldn't manage their affairs. Before they had trouble managing it for a week, and when they got a check once a month, they were in bad circumstances. About all they had was social security, and now they felt they owed something to Franklin D. Roosevelt for passing the social security. It was the only earthly income some of the old ones had. They walked down the mountain to meet him.

YOUNG: Well, isn't an area like Tucker County very much changed now, four years later? In terms of economic . . .

HEDRICK: Yes. In Tucker County today, and thanks to President Kennedy, we now have a lot of tourists, and through his crash program the highways are cleaned out; people come through, and in Davis we have a lot of recreation area. We have skiing, a big lodge that's operated by the state, and different projects. Roads are being built, and the whole picture of the whole state seems to be changing. In fact, right below on Cheat River. . . . President Kennedy worked to harness up Cheat River at Rowlesburg. He met a lot of opposition there. Even the county court, the city council, and the board of education

went down on record being opposed to damming Cheat River, through encouragement of the power company and the power company's lawyer: when they first went out, it would destroy a lot of farm land. When they found out that this farm land was, most all of it, a burden on the tax payers in the Soil Bank. Then the power company came back and claimed, well, it would make a mud hole. But the last thing that happened, they claimed, well, they would go along with it, the power company, if they could put their turbines in. And I'm almost certain President Kennedy realized that Cheat River dropped more in Randolph County than it did from there in to the ocean, and the immense power and heat that could be produced from the waterfall of Cheat River when the power companies--when your whole nation was out of power.

YOUNG: Well, will it be used then for the production of power?

HEDRICK: Power, recreation, and flood control, which is very badly needed. Flood control is a big thing, and to store up water for the towns below.

YOUNG: Well, is this a TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] sort of operation?

HEDRICK: The same, about. TVA would be similar to that, yes.

YOUNG: Then the government will sell the power to private?

HEDRICK: That was President Kennedy's idea. Of course, when he was first elected, why, the power companies didn't seem to be interested going any place. He ran on the ticket that the nation was to go forward. He told the power companies about Russia transporting electricity a thousand miles. And through that we have power plants going up all over, and Stony River, the first power plant in this part of the nation that will carry electricity over a hundred miles. He told the power companies about Russia carrying electricity a thousand miles; they've been doing it for eighteen years. So that was part of the program if the nation was to go forward. That's what he was talking about. That's why he kept pushing those things. And that's why, I think, he used Cheat River, that the thing could be done and that the companies wouldn't go along. People could enjoy the better things in life, it could be made possible.

YOUNG: Could you mention any other domestic policies of President Kennedy that found particular favor in your section of West Virginia? I don't know that the Peace Corps would be tremendously important--whether you had any reaction to things like that?

HEDRICK: Yeah, the Peace Corps was a great thing. People were very happy about the Peace Corps. Of course, the poverty bill was one of the great things that happened, because we had a lot of our people living in poverty. In Randolph County we have "Birth of Rivers" back on top of the mountain there, a big sign, "Birth of Rivers." But then about 80 percent of our people live in poverty. And that's what he was talking about, this poverty bill: get people out of poverty. That's why we needed electricity, so the people could enjoy these things and have some of the better things in life. President Kennedy knew how many white men there were on earth; he knew about the Chinese, what they were building up and how this thing was going. And the ideas he had, there's no question in my mind but what it's a have-to thing that the people of this nation have better things, that they keep moving, if the white man is going to survive. I think all of these were over a long period of time; he stated in his inaugural address there, they probably wouldn't be done in one lifetime, but he had a beginning there to start on.

YOUNG: Mr. Hedrick, just for the record, I wanted to point out that your home is in Elkins, West Virginia; that Elkins is the county seat of Randolph County. This is correct, isn't it? Elkins is also the home of a privately operated college, Davis and Elkins College, which I believe has affiliations with the Presbyterian church. Is this correct?

HEDRICK: That's correct. Yes.

YOUNG: Did you involve any of the students or any of the members of the faculty in your campaign of the area?

HEDRICK: The Presbyterian college, D and E College, is Republican controlled. We did finally get a Democratic club organized in the college. We had trouble getting different sponsors and advisors and all those things; it seemed like it was almost an impossibility. But we did succeed under the Kennedy administration in getting a Democratic club, the first one ever organized in the college. And we did put Mr. [David K.] Allen, who was a Republican, on the Douglas committee.

YOUNG: Mr. Allen is the president of the college?

HEDRICK: President of the college.

YOUNG: Were there any faculty members that were active at all in the campaign?

HEDRICK: Mr. [Charles E.] Albert, a real old man, was a Democrat.

He had always been active in Democrat politics, but he didn't take much part in the Kennedy campaign. We had one other professor up there that pretended to be a Kennedy supporter from Massachusetts, but all he did was criticize things.

YOUNG: Well, did you take any of your speakers to the campus, any of the Kennedy family, the senator himself, or any of his entourage?

HEDRICK: No, I took nobody up there for the simple reason that four years before that, when Adlai Stevenson visited Elkins and rode in the parade during the Forest Festival in October 1956, the college had the college students out to boo him. And after all, Adlai Stevenson wasn't a stranger there. He'd visited with [Henry] Gassaway Davis who was the founder and built the railroad into Elkins years before. So, I felt it would be an embarrassment.

But I did take Bobby Kennedy. We made a speech on the streets, and from the streets we walked. We were accepted real well through the railroad shops. We walked across the railroad bridge to the Kelly Foundry, and he made a talk to all the people. And from there we went to the Allegheny mill and he made a talk there. And from there we went to the stockyards and made a talk to the stockyards; during the time we were there I bought two horses and the auctioneer said, "Sold to John F. Kennedy." From there we left and went to the shirt factory. We got there ahead of time. He saw the girls working and made a remark there that he'd been over in Russia prior to that time and that the people didn't work any harder in Russia than they did there. Bobby made that remark there at the shirt factory. From there we went to the Allegheny mill and from there over to the Preston? Hardwood & Lumber, and the main sawyer was very happy to meet Bobby as we went through the mill and went over and met the people on through. A week later a lady came in and told me that they had fired her man because he had associated with the Kennedy people. Her husband, the sawyer at the mill, got fired on account of it. That was at Preston Lumber. And she allowed that the reason he got fired was because he associated with the Kennedy people.

From there on we took him up to the airplane, and some prisoners were working at the Elkins airport. One of the prisoners claimed that his father was with [John F.] Jack Kennedy when the PT boat was wrecked. I never heard what happened after that. Bobby had taken his name, and I don't know what happened--whether it was correct or not--but one of the prisoners at the airport claimed his father had been on the PT boat with Jack Kennedy when it was wrecked.

YOUNG: Were these county prisoners--from the county jail?

HEDRICK: State prisoners. But Bobby met all the prisoners, shook hands with them like everybody else, never passed up anybody.

YOUNG: You didn't take the attorney general, however, to the campus of the college?

HEDRICK: No, I didn't take him there, because that was hostile territory; all they taught was Republicanism, and the whole thing was Republican. Like I say, they only had one Democrat that I knew was a Democrat, Dr. Albert, and he hadn't been too warm. . . . In fact they probably fired him, maybe. And one other fellow pretended to be a Democrat there, pretended to be from Massachusetts and supposedly knew the Kennedys. But all he did instead of doing anything productive, was to criticize the thing. So the only best we could do was to organize a Democratic club. I picked a Republican to be president of it and made a Democrat out of him. His father worked for Utility, which was all Republican, opposite politics. And we got him in and got the club organized that way. He got a lot of great laughs about pulling the wool over the Democrats' eyes and getting in. We got in and got a Democrat to take his place, see, and got in that way. That's why I happened to put a Republican in the organization, to get it started, to break in.

YOUNG: Do you think the hostility of the college students was due largely to the fact that they were Republicans and that it really wasn't related to the religion issue at all?

HEDRICK: It was all Republican, the whole thing, the college was. Religion had nothing to do with it. They were hostile against any Democrat--the leaders of the college. In fact, the whole Presbyterian church up there were very hostile all the way through, the Presbyterian minister and all the way down the line; that was one of our difficult propositions. The best we could do was to keep them quiet. You couldn't get them to be for you, so you just worked to keep them quiet, to keep them from fighting too much.

YOUNG: Well, could you evaluate the hostility in terms of how much of it was religion and how much of it was Republicanism?

HEDRICK: Well, most of that, I would say, would be Republicanism.

YOUNG: Religion wasn't the issue?

HEDRICK: Religion just wasn't the issue there in that church.

YOUNG: Had the senator himself been a Presbyterian, they would have been against him because they were Republicans anyhow?

HEDRICK: Yeah, that's right. That wasn't religion. Our Baptist minister had communion for all churches. I've been told that only one woman got up and walked out of his church when he would have communion. He mentioned Senator Kennedy's name in his church, in his pulpit.

YOUNG: Favorably?

HEDRICK: Favorably. I met him here today on the street; he's a very nice fellow.

YOUNG: Do you think, or were you aware of the fact, that Senator Kennedy's war record played any particular role in the primary victory?

HEDRICK: Yes, it did. It played quite a thing, and with rural people. One fellow, a farmer that still farmed with horses, had written Senator Kennedy a letter pledging himself to be for him. I have that letter in my possession that he wrote; it was sent back to me, and I put it in a file when I started on this, marked "President Kennedy"--all my stuff I filed that way. We had three fellows running for House of Delegates. One fellow was running, he had just strictly one reason he was running for. And the other two guys: one was running for the money was in it and what he could work out, I guess; and the other guy was running I don't know why. He came to me and I told him I had promised the Kennedy people that I would go all-out and go all the way, do everything I could. I'd close up my ice cream business, and do nothing else, only do everything I could to get Senator Kennedy elected president--which I did.

Everybody I knew all over earth, I wrote them a letter and had them working. Two of the biggest voting precincts, two of the biggest votes he got, were two precincts I sat up on the Ohio, and one in West Virginia, the biggest percentage of Democrats. So I told this boy, "Well, I know your mother and father, I've done business with them, and you know I couldn't go out and be against you. I just gotta be one way out for Senator Kennedy; that's the road I'm going to take." So finally this boy got out campaigning and went and visited this particular farmer and told him what he was doing. He said that Bob Hedrick and he were good friends--he usually went along with me. He said, "Well, Bob said he's for me, he's going to work for me,

he's going to be for me." The farmer said, "Well, then, I guess you're for Kennedy for president." "No," he said, "I'm not for him or any other Catholic; I want no part of them." So he just dropped his lines and his horses and came running into town, and rushed in and said, "What kind of double-shuffle game are you trying to pull here? That little so-and-so came out there yakitty-yak-yak." And I said "Old man, take it easy now, don't blow a head gasket. What's this all about?" So he told me, and finally that fellow, in order to get rid of him, I just had to deliberately expose him. And he just went all over cussing and using the Catholic issue all over, the religious issue, every place he could, until finally I just had to go out and open war against him. And he tailed the ticket, he was clear at the bottom, this one fellow running for the House of Delegates.

YOUNG: Well, did the president's war record seem to enter into this any?

HEDRICK: Yes, it did. That was one of the things that this farmer in particular, one of the two people that wrote him from Randolph County, a personal letter,--the war record was part of it that he considered. And in your rural sections, your rural people and the people that didn't go to any church, all the rural people, they were all for Kennedy, and it didn't make much difference what religion, what church he went to or anything else.

YOUNG: Well, you mentioned the importance and the influence of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. in the mining areas; Was FDR, Jr. in Elkins at all?

HEDRICK: He came to Elkins one day; him and John Bailey came in there in an airplane. They did a lot of good. They were supposed to have been there, first one was supposed to have been, then another, and several hours later, after they cancelled the meeting, why, John Bailey and Franklin D. Roosevelt came there. Dr. B. I. Golden, who's a Republican and runs a big hospital and employs a lot of people, his wife's mother was sick in Washington. And they rode her back to Washington. That was a tremendous big vote-getter. It got them a lot of votes in the whole hospital, and actually did more good than probably if they'd had a big meeting. They did a lot of good.

YOUNG: Well, you mentioned earlier that the Democrats in your area that supported Kennedy were considered outcasts, and that you worked with a separate independent Kennedy organization outside of the regular county Democratic committee, and so on. Did you have any difficulty then in closing ranks for the general election after the convention nominated Senator

Kennedy? How did you get along then with the regular Democratic organization after the national Democratic convention?

HEDRICK: We worked real good in Randolph County. I made our county chairman co-chairman--he was the only one that worked--co-chairman of the Kennedy organization during the primary. Then we worked it real good except for some left-handed Democrats that had been Republicans. Then switched over because we had a Democratic majority, and they worked the issue there pretty hard around: how many votes Kennedy would take off the state administration, how many votes he'd take off the governor and a lot of people used that pretty heavy, as much as they could, back in the general election. They worked it real hard. They threw a lot of votes to Nixon that way by working it real hard. In fact, I worked day and night, just went day and night to keep putting brush fires out all over, they would stir them up all over.

YOUNG: You mean they were trying to . . .

HEDRICK: They were single-shooting things just for the governor. And some of those fellows, after they got to eating real good, they died since. Some of them died, they killed themselves by eating too much.

YOUNG: Well, would this be a correct interpretation then of what you said: The religious issue was not buried in the primary, and there was some feeling in the general election--or at least some artificially stirred-up feeling in the general election--that Senator Kennedy's religion would work against the state ticket?

HEDRICK: In other words, it goes back to a theory that people stress, that one knocker could do you more harm than a thousand boosters could do you good. We just had enough of those fellows, that'd just keep a fire stirred up, you know. They were in with the state administration but wanted nothing to do with the national administration, and they had that awful fear that if you tied the two together, it would hurt the state ticket, so they fought that right on through there, right on down the line.

YOUNG: There was some reluctance then to be associated with Senator Kennedy on the part of the state ticket?

HEDRICK: All together, all over, yes. I found it all over, in different places.

YOUNG: Well, you've talked a little bit about the Douglas Committee and some of the reaction to Senator Kennedy's

program. Did you feel in general that the Kennedy campaign helped or hurt West Virginia in terms of national publicity, the national image of West Virginia, or national reputation? Would you comment on that in general?

HEDRICK: Oh, it brought West Virginia out of the lowest depths it could be, up to the highest. Today there is not a man in West Virginia out of work that can do anything at all. The only people that you can find that are unemployed are some young winos; their bodies are almost deteriorated, they couldn't do anything at all. There's no man that can do anything that's unemployed in any place in West Virginia that I know of today, due to the Kennedy administration, his crash program that put people out to work cleaning up the highways and the parks, that made things attractive to the tourists of the nation to come into West Virginia.

YOUNG: Well, do you think the national press treated West Virginia fairly in the campaign? The primary I have reference to, rather than the general election, because at the time of the general election we were just more or less lost with the other states. But so many outside reporters came in and followed President Kennedy, of course, in his campaign, and sent out both flattering and unflattering descriptions of West Virginia. I just wondered if you had any experience in that area, any contact with the press or with . . .

HEDRICK: Oh, I couldn't make too much comment on that. I do know they made a bad issue out of some things, and some they might have helped. So it could possibly have balanced up, I don't know. I didn't pay too much attention to them.

YOUNG: Do you feel if President Kennedy had lived to be the candidate this year that he would have carried West Virginia by an even greater number of votes?

HEDRICK: Oh, yes, he would have carried West Virginia. He would have got Republican and Democrat votes, both.

YOUNG: Well, if we omit the usual number of members of the opposite party, of course, that would have nothing good at all to say about a Democratic president, did you find among the Kennedy supporters any criticism of any Kennedy policies, any feeling that the president perhaps didn't go too far in some areas or perhaps went too far? I'm thinking of people that normally were still for him--but perhaps any disappointments with the administration?

HEDRICK: The only people that I've heard--of course, I haven't

heard too much of it criticized--were people that would criticize any administration, people that had been Republicans, that had been Democrats, that had been every place. But no solid people I ever heard criticizing him.

YOUNG: In other words, your section of the state was quite pleased?

HEDRICK: Everybody was real happy up there. I don't think we got anybody that's unhappy at all except those professional cranks that are always unhappy.

YOUNG: Mr. Hedrick, you mentioned in private conversation that you had a couple of stories relating to the Democratic convention in 1960, and your participation in it. Would you go ahead and give me some of that material?

HEDRICK: One of the things we were just talking about was Robert M. Bob Mollohan. When I got to Charleston, where we had a meeting before we went to California, I was informed they'd made a deal with Bob Mollohan. They put him and his friends on the platform committee, which means that you get your expenses paid, stay in the best hotels in town, the biggest automobile you have to ride. So I informed them I didn't think Mollohan would do anything at all that he said he would do, that you would still have only fifteen votes for Kennedy, not to give the newspapers that information that you'd have nineteen and a half.

So we got to California. We got out there and got ready to vote after all the kinds of hardship we went through there in the convention--the opposition kidnapping our chairman, Mr. Ward Wylie. And we finally got him at 4 o'clock one morning--A. James Manchin and myself--we got him away from the camel drivers the gypsies up in the hotel, and got him down and confiscated his whiskey. Then we found out that we had trouble keeping him alive over at the convention; we had to give him back some of his medicine that we'd taken away from him. So we got ready to vote at the convention after all the things there. One of the things was that at our hotel, a little cheap hotel we stayed at, they put Kentucky and West Virginia together. We look around and we see detectives all over, and policemen, and I asked a Captain Canfield and a Lieutenant Norris why all the policemen were there. "Why," he said, "the people on the platform committee from West Virginia said the West Virginia people and Kentucky people are liable to start killing each other just any time at all; every time they get together they want to kill each other." And I said, "Well, I'd expect that about some of those people

we sent out here on the platform committee."

So, we get ready to vote, get up to vote, Mollohan doesn't have any four and a half votes. He only has one vote, his own, and he wants to be the governor of the Virgin Islands, for that. Later when he voted, he voted some other way and claimed maybe John L. Lewis might have wanted him to vote that way. So we traded away the whole plums we had there at the beginning.

YOUNG: Well, what was the final West Virginia delegation vote, then?

HEDRICK: Fifteen for Kennedy.

YOUNG: You mentioned something about Senator [Robert C.] Byrd from West Virginia coming in with some placards and demonstration materials; would you go over that again?

HEDRICK: Senator Byrd brought people in off the street--paid people--and they got security passes and they smuggled them back out and kept filling, packing the hall with these people. All kinds of banners and stuff to put on a big parade for LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson]--"West Virginia Pledged to LBJ"--he had everything packed full of stuff there. So, while [William] Bruce Hoff was arguing with Senator Bob Byrd, myself, and A. James Manchin and some of the other workers confiscated all the material that Byrd had dragged in and we threw it back under the Puerto Rican and Virgin Island and every other delegation, Alabama, every place else but West Virginia. When it wound up, Byrd had one little banner--"LBJ, West Virginia Pledged to LBJ"--just one little banner he had, holding it up in his hand. He looked around and he didn't have a friend in the room.

YOUNG: You'd also mentioned then, I believe, that two West Virginians were chosen to inform Senator Kennedy that the convention had nominated him. Would you go over that, please?

HEDRICK: Myself and Bruce Hoff from Parkersburg.

YOUNG: Any particular incidents in connection with this? Did you go then to the senator's hotel after the convention adjourned, or what procedure did you follow?

HEDRICK: Well, everybody was so happy and worn out when the thing was over and we got the job done, that I don't guess we ever did get to notify him there that he was nominated. We went later to see him but we never got to notify him, to carry that out.

YOUNG: Do you have any other stories about the president himself, any anecdotes or personal experiences with him that might be interesting?

HEDRICK: I had one great experience when he came to West Virginia in the interest of [Cleveland] Cleve Bailey. One of the men that Cleve Bailey's people didn't want in his campaign was [Alfred E.] Al Chapman. The president came down off the platform. I was on the platform with him. He went out to A. James Manchin, picked his little boy up and talked to him. Then he left him and went out and took Al Chapman's hat off his head, and put his arm around his neck and stood there in the rain and talked to Al Chapman, a man that the Cleve Bailey workers didn't want in the Cleve Bailey camp. That's why Cleve Bailey wasn't elected to Congress.

YOUNG: This was in the congressional election in 1962 when President Kennedy came to Wheeling on behalf of Congressman Bailey?

HEDRICK: Yeah, that's right.

YOUNG: Well, looking back over the four years of the Kennedy administration, the four years that followed the primary, rather, do you have anything by way of summary, or general analysis of the general importance of the Kennedy-Humphrey primary, or the Kennedy years with respect to West Virginia, that you'd like to add?

HEDRICK: Well, there's no question about this big power plant being built down in West Virginia by President Kennedy. And Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.--that was his recommendation to President Kennedy; that's one of the things he wanted, the nation to go forward. And I think that all the progress we've made here and that will be made is part of the step forward, the step in the right direction that President Kennedy led the nation to. And West Virginia, I don't think, will ever be back in the dark ages it was four years ago.

YOUNG: This has been an interview with Mr. Robert E. Hedrick of Elkins, West Virginia.