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Biographical Note
James H. Rowe Jr. (1909-1984) was a lawyer and political figure in Washington D.C. and a supporter of Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert Humphrey in 1960. This interview focuses on Lyndon B. Johnson's and Hubert Humphrey's 1960 primary campaigns and John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

with

JAMES H. ROWE, JR.

May 10, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: I've read, Mr. Rowe, that you were originally a Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] supporter who moved to Hubert Humphrey's [Hubert H. Humphrey] camp and then back to Johnson's camp. Elsewhere I've read that you started as a Humphrey supporter and then moved to Johnson's camp. Could you set the record straight? Were you originally for Johnson or for Humphrey?

ROWE: I was originally for Johnson. The reason is that I've always been for many years of Johnson friend and supporter. I was with him in 1956 at the convention in Chicago when he was at least theoretically a candidate although he didn't try to get delegates. At that time Stevenson was nominated. Between 1956 and 1960 it seemed to me that if he were going to be a candidate in '60 he would have to take steps and become active in what I would call the Roosevelt technique of getting nominated. Of course today it would be called the Kennedy technique. What I urged on him for a number of years was to get out and run. I didn't think that, at least the way the party was composed, that anybody was going to get the nomination without running. So I urged him for a long time and, whatever his reasons, he always told me he wasn't running. He agreed he did not think he would be nominated unless he did make that kind of a run but he wasn't going to do it. And, eventually he convinced me of this. I wanted to be active politically and I thought the second best man was Humphrey. So I said farewell to Johnson and went over

to Humphrey. And as time went on, after Wisconsin and West Virginia, I said farewell to Humphrey and went back to Johnson.

MORRISSEY: Could you date the time that you said farewell to Johnson and moved over to the Humphrey camp?

ROWE: I started talking to Humphrey people, who came to me, including the Senator, in the summer of ‘58, I think. That was the first meeting I can remember. I told them then that Johnson was my first choice, Humphrey was my second, and that I would really have to explore more with Johnson and see what he was going to do. And I can’t remember but I think I asked for about six months. I did talk to Johnson from time to time in that six months. I have an idea it was January, 1959. I wrote a letter to Johnson. The reason I can’t tell you precisely is that I can’t remember the date of the letter. I have a copy of it and can check back. I wrote saying I thought he was making a mistake and I thought the country was getting to the stage on Civil Rights that somebody really had to put this together and I didn’t think anybody could do it as he could. I was convinced that if he didn’t run he was never going to get it. I wouldn’t urge him anymore and was going to support Humphrey.

I have a copy of that letter in my office, I’ll check the date and let you see the letter if you want it.

MORRISSEY: O.K. Swell. We can append it to the transcript of the interview. Had you known Johnson when he was a Congressman and you were working for President Roosevelt?

ROWE: Yes. I first knew him almost as soon as he came up. I can’t remember whether that was ‘37 or ‘38. It must have been ‘38. I think he won this bi-election in the fall of ‘37, was it? I’m not sure.

MORRISSEY: I think there was a special election in ‘37 and then he was reelected in ‘38.

ROWE: Yes, I didn't go to the White House until January, 1938, and I can’t remember meeting him before that. So it must have been in ‘38.

MORRISSEY: Why do you suppose he was reluctant to go out and seek delegates?

ROWE: This is a very difficult question. I just don’t know. That is a subjective question about a very complicated man. I’ve never been able to decide

why. In some ways he had a lack of self-confidence. He could get this feeling and he often expressed it. I can remember his talking about it during the campaign. He thought the country had come to the stage where they might possibly elect a Catholic president but that it would take another ten to twenty years before they'd take a Southerner. And it was interesting to me that he always equated these two as in effect the same form of prejudice.

Another reason may have been, in his own mind, that everybody else was getting knocked off. I don't think that he ever really believed that making a good record as a legislative leader was going to pay off very much.

I hate to use words like his subconscious, but I think one of the reasons he did was because he was a parliamentarian. And I suppose you could say that any good parliamentarian by tradition, custom, experience and knowledge is a waiter. He always waits. He has to wait until he sees the various pressures and he knows -- the parliamentarian again within the legislature -- that he cannot act until the issues get down to one, two or three. Then when he can see them, and they get simple enough and strong enough, then he can manipulate them and compromise. But before he can do this he was to wait. It seems to me that Rayburn always did this. Johnson did it superbly. Mansfield's got this technique. McCormack's is not as good as Johnson's and Rayburn's, but essentially when a man's spent twenty years being a parliamentarian he can't switch over and be a different kind of man. Kennedy could because in a very curious way he never was a parliamentarian, in my opinion, in spite of the time he spent up there.

MORRISSEY: At the 1956 convention, do you have any recollections of the Kennedy effort to get the Vice Presidential nomination?

ROWE: The only one I have, and I can remember at some stage having dinner with Kennedy and, I think, Jackie Kennedy, and Joe Alsop. The four of us were having dinner, and I can't remember where, but it was after Kennedy had made the nominating speech for Adlai. I remember his making a remark to me, and as I look back it's the first time I ever noticed this remark with what I can call a sense of detachment, and he said to me, "I don't really see how there is any possibility of my being considered for Vice President, do you, Jim? After all, I got paid off by being allowed to make the nominating speech." And I said, "Well, Senator, I think that is correct. I don't think you've got any bait." This was before Adlai got to that curious stage of throwing it open. It seemed to me Kennedy had written himself off as the newspapermen were writing him off at that time. That's about all I remember: a quiet, detached statement that

he wasn't going to be vice president. He wasn't going to be the candidate.

MORRISSEY: Going back to 1958-59, do you think a Southerner, or a Southwesterner might be more appropriate, such as Lyndon Johnson, could have persuaded many Northern Democrats to back him for the nomination?

ROWE: This is a hard argument, and it is one, I may say that Johnson used to make. "It just couldn't be done." I would restate it another way. I think that his chances for doing that were always remote, but they were a great deal better than if he did nothing. Also in a very curious way this fellow has a tremendous personality. It is as opposite from Kennedy's as it can be, but, as you've been seeing this last couple of months, this is a whirlwind and a dervish, and my thought was that if he started early enough and let the impact of that personality get going certainly in the West, in the kind of country I come from, he would go very well. He would get a lot of delegates. Whether this could have been done in the eastern part of the country, I'm not sure. I also think he needed time to get known.

I can remember, if I can tell a Kennedy story here, it seemed to be one of the best comments I ever heard. This was after 1956. It was after the dinner party for Adlai, and we happened to be sitting at the same tables. It was a fairly large party. He remarked to me, and as I now look back I'm sure he was already running for president but it didn't occur to me at the moment. As I say, this was a couple of months after 1956. It was the night before the Gridiron Club Dinner because Adlai had come down to address the Gridiron Club.

Kennedy remarked to me out of a clear sky that he was the second best known senator in the country. I said, "Who's first?" He said, "Kefauver." And he also said, this is not a quotation obviously, but he said it was ironic that after the number of years he had spent in the House and the time he had spent in the Senate the real reason he was so well known was the half hour of the voting at the convention, in '56. Estes was better known because he had won it and also because he'd had the race as vice president and also because of his television appearance. And I think it was quite clear, even then, that Kennedy was starting to talk to people as quietly as possible of the fact that he would be a good candidate.

MORRISSEY: Did you think that Humphrey's chances for the nomination were good?

ROWE: No. I thought they were better than Lyndon Johnson's, if he worked at it. If he could put together the Minnesota combination, which was

always doubtful, put the farmers and labor and the liberal intellectuals together. This is very hard work. But he was at least willing to try. And I was convinced that the only way he could get this thing was to get out beat your brains, travel around the country. Humphrey had the same problem at the first that Johnson had. His problem was a Southern problem, and a bad mental -- I don't like to use the word -- image. I don't know what I can use instead. This liberal shouting image that he had. But he was willing to make the run. It seemed to me clear that whoever did that was going to get the nomination.

MORRISSEY: Why did Humphrey decide to enter the West Virginia primary?

ROWE: Well, for a variety of reasons. I was very much in favor of it. I thought then, and I think now, it was the only political mistake I saw Kennedy

make. I thought it was a mistake when he did it and I still think [chuckles] it was. He retrieved it, brilliantly, but this was the one state that it seemed clear that we ought to be able to beat Kennedy in. First of all, our handicap all the time was money. You did not dare get spread too thin and you were always having to stop and go get money. Bum it and borrow it. We had to stay to the small states. This is a state with a lot of poverty. It is a state where the New Deal tradition is very strong, where being a liberal should have been helpful. And, being perfectly frank, I happen to be Catholic but the thing is they didn't like Catholics. We spent a lot of our time wondering how we could trick Kennedy into the state. And I gather his people were trying to do the same thing [laughter]; trying to trick us in. We should have won it. Of course, by this time we got there we were broke. We were all through running. I thought it was a mistake to go in that late. But at the time the decision was made it was the right decision for us and terribly wrong for Kennedy, which I gather he thought for a while after he got there.

MORRISSEY: Why do you think Kennedy won and Humphrey lost?

ROWE: In West Virginia? A variety of reasons and I don't state them in the order of importance. I think that the way he handled the bigotry thing was extremely important, particularly with a fellow like Humphrey who is a liberal and who is overly sensitive about being caught on the side of the bigots. He never knew how to handle it. There isn't any good answer. You can't tell people "vote for me just because Kennedy says you're a bigot if you don't vote for him. Don't pay any attention to that stuff." That's what he'd had to say. The other reason is saturation. Kennedy had saturated the state. He had all the

television and all the radio. We were so broke, it was just absurd to even be in there. I was against the decision of going in. The Minnesota organization, in a moment of euphoria, insisted on going in there. They were down and broke and so forth.

MORRISSEY: Could you elaborate a little more on the financing of the Humphrey campaign?

ROWE: You mean how it was done?

MORRISSEY: Yes.

ROWE: It was done I would say, and these are very rough figures, I'd guess about half of it came out of Minnesota. That isn't correct. Let's say almost half came out of Minnesota, almost half came out of New York and the rest was picked up here in Washington. It was almost completely a straight liberal financing. Part of it was the old Stevenson crowd. What their motives were we didn't pay any attention to. We just couldn't care less, as long as we got the money. Quite frankly, we made efforts to get

Symington money and Johnson money, particularly after Wisconsin, and pointed out to them what seemed to me perfectly obvious. If Humphrey went down, they'd had it. These were the professional politicians in both the Symington and Johnson camps and they were cute. They thought they could spend the money better than we could and so they fooled themselves. We begged and borrowed. ADA put in a lot of money. A fellow named Rosenberg raised a lot of money in New York. ADA did a good job. I raised some. Everybody raised what they could. But there was never enough.

I want to distinguish. As I look back at it, I think we spent as much as the Kennedy people in Wisconsin, not counting the airplanes, and the family and all that, which adds up to a great deal of money. But in terms of what I would call straight political expenditures, it has always been my guess that we've spent as much, or almost as much, as the Kennedy people. I've always wanted to sit down with Larry O'Brien, the keeper of the keys, and just see how much they did spend. They just out spent us completely in West Virginia. It wasn't even a contest. They spent a lot of money there. Not as much as people think. But they spent a lot.

MORRISSEY: There was some talk at the time about Stevenson people backing Humphrey in the hope that a deadlocked convention would give a third nomination to Stevenson.

ROWE: Yes. I don't know. This is never a conscious thing with a fellow like Adlia who could never

decide what he was going to do. There was no tough backroom group which would say, "Let's finance Humphrey --" Now there were people like this in the Johnson-Symington camps. Their problem was to make the decision. But politics is a funny thing. Everybody lives in hope you know. Hoping Humphrey would knock him off and it wouldn't cost them anything.

As I look back, the Symington people were more realistic about this than the Johnson people. The Johnson people, I am told, put some money in to get some delegates down there. They had activity there. They weren't going to trust us to do it there. They were trying to get rid of Kennedy and take care of Johnson at the same time. That was pretty silly.

MORRISSEY: Do you think after the West Virginia primary that Kennedy had a clear shot at the nomination?

ROWE: Practically a clear shot. As a matter of fact, I went through a very interesting period there with Johnson. He called me after that. He asked me what I thought could happen. I told him that I had thought that if Kennedy won Wisconsin, he'd probably get the nomination. The Wisconsin situation became such a muddled up picture. In other words, it was clear from the start what Humphrey was going to win in Wisconsin, and what Kennedy was going to win. And it wasn't clear enough, but I was sure after West Virginia that he'd have a free ride.

There was a moment after West Virginia. I told Johnson this. I said, "The only way to stop Kennedy now is for Adlai to run actively. He has to give some kind of signal. He doesn't have to get out there. Someone like Bill Blair, some one of his real chieftains has to start raising money. And you have to back Adlai." I said there's no other combination that will do this.

I said, "I don't know if that could be done at this late stage. This is the only combination, Stevenson as the candidate and Johnson throwing the South behind him, with which you could possibly stop Kennedy. You might stop him. Only you could. I doubt that."

And something I've learned through the years is putting a combination together to stop the front runner is almost impossible, because people are never willing to give up their own positions soon enough. I tried stopping Stevenson in '52 with Kefauver and Harriman. They spent hours together about which one was going to be first and which one second and got nowhere.

And at that point -- this was much more apparent by the time of

the convention at which I talked to the Stevenson people -- it was clear that most of the Stevenson followers preferred Kennedy to Johnson. It was clear that most of the Johnson followers preferred Kennedy to Stevenson, so putting a combination together then was impossible. It might have been done then but I doubt it. Kennedy had that middle of the road position which whether by instance, training, or complete understanding of how this party works he was in the middle with people on his right and left and he didn't get shoved out of that position.

This is my theory of the Democratic Party. The man in the middle always gets the nomination. If he can keep the other fellows to the left and the right, he is all right. Kennedy got there. I don't know how or why, or how conscious this was, but he was always there. Symington was there too, but not in the same sense.

MORRISSEY: Theodore White says in his book that Humphrey didn't limit himself to the primaries in South Dakota and here in the District because he wanted to enter other primaries where he could show more muscle at the polls.

ROWE: He entered those primaries. He won the District primary and the South Dakota primary. But we didn't think it would do any good to win these because it was clear we were going to win them and nobody else was going to come in.

The business of going into primaries is very complicated. I wrote a position paper somewhere, which I have often suspected Teddy White saw, in which we discussed what primaries we could go into. Again, money. I'd even let you see that if you want to, at this late date.

MORRISSEY: Yes.

ROWE: We were careful never to pick the big primary states. We couldn't afford it. And we quite early, long before the Kennedy people made their decision in my opinion, we made the decision, I drew up this position paper and said we should go into Wisconsin. We should probably, I was not too clear, but we should go into West Virginia and we should go into Oregon where we had to go anyway. We would go into South Dakota and the District of Columbia didn't mean anything. And other than that we probably should stay out. California scared us to death. We played a little game out there. We pretended to go in. But our strategy was made very early and we followed it as well as we could, all the way through. And I think it still was the

right strategy. It didn't win. It was the right strategy.

MORRISSEY: What's your opinion of Teddy White's book?

ROWE: Impressionistic. Good. I think the best thing I've seen on one of these things. Somewhat inaccurate in spots, as I remember. You've heard Kennedy's story about it, haven't you?

MORRISSEY: I don't think so. I can't recall it.

ROWE: Maybe you'll pick it up somewhere. It was just after the book was out. Kennedy and some of his staff were sitting around talking about the book, including Arthur Schlesinger, and saying how good it was and the President said, "Well, now wait a minute." He said, "The trouble with Teddy is that he makes all of us seven feet tall. Humphrey's seven feet tall, Johnson's seven feet tall. I'm seven feet tall and," he said, "That's the trouble, Arthur, with all you historians! That's what you did to Roosevelt and his crowd. You made all those New Dealers seven feet tall. They weren't that good," he said, "They were just a bunch of guys like us!" I always thought it was a good story. I think it is a good book.

MORRISSEY: Yes.

ROWE: The present President of the United States gets apoplectic when someone mentions it. He screams bloody murder about Teddy White -- which I've told Teddy. He's writing another one. He should write one every four years. I think it is a good book.

MORRISSEY: After the West Virginia primary did you move back to the Johnson camp?

ROWE: Yes. Not right away though. In a month or so. I'd had an awful belly full of politics. It takes a lot of time, time and money.

MORRISSEY: Were you still thinking of Johnson for the presidency or Johnson, now, for the vice presidency?

ROWE: Oh, for the presidency. Johnson for the presidency. It was clear to me by then that if he was going to make it he was going to have to run. I started on the basis of my own thinking that these were the two ablest men in the party, Johnson and Humphrey. I was interested primarily in getting an able man for president. It seemed to me that the problems and issues would make whoever

it was go the right way. It didn't matter whether his name was Johnson or Humphrey. I wanted a man of energy and I certainly wanted more than anything else a professional politician. The President of the United States has to be. I thought Johnson was the best. I thought Humphrey was the second best. And I had frankly seen nothing in Kennedy's record that was any good at all.

I didn't have any negative views, you understand. This man had been in Congress or what? Ten years? Six years?

MORRISSEY: Well, 1947 to 1960. Three terms in the House and then --

ROWE: Yes, including the Senate. That's right. And he had never made an impression on me. As a matter of fact, I didn't know him. I knew him casually, but I knew both of these other men very well. And again, looking back (it shows how wrong you can be about so many things,) I didn't know anybody in Washington who was for him except Bill Walton, the artist. He was the only friend I had who was for Kennedy. Everybody else in Washington was for some other candidate. So, frankly, I never really considered Kennedy as presidential timber. Which I think, if you could get back to that period, everybody in Washington agreed with. A curious phenomenon, when you look back.

MORRRISSEY: Teddy White mentions that you were at the Montana Democratic Convention about ten days before the National Convention in Los Angeles.

ROWE: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me about that?

ROWE: Well, it wasn't too important. It was the last convention of importance. I happened to be in Montana. It was the last convention before the big convention and therefore a victory for Kennedy would not have been good. I went out and tried to get a few delegates to slow down the Kennedy thing. I'd been out through that country with Humphrey. That is really Humphrey country. Kennedy would

have lost the delegation but all the Humphrey people, by the time I went back, had moved over to Kennedy. This is a fairly logical progression for Montana. It is a curious state. The western part is dominated by Irish Catholics about as much as Boston is. The copper mines were started by the Irish. The Irish, as distinguished from Boston, were always the ruling class. Where I grew up in Butte, if you look back, at one stage we had two Catholic senators and one Catholic governor. Butte is a mining town that has lost its voting power now so that stopped. That part

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of the state could have quite easily been for Kennedy and most of them were. Then the rest of the state is farming and farm country. If Humphrey had been in there, he would have gotten almost all of the delegates and Kennedy a handful from the Butte-Anaconda Irish places. But then its liberal; its mining, farming, labor country. So Kennedy was the logical progression in their point of view from Humphrey.

They had it all buttoned up by the time I got there, but some of the Symington people had come in and they had made some inroads among the farming people and ranching people. We fooled around, and by the time we got through we had a few delegates. Symington had quite a few, and Kennedy had most of them, but it came out as strictly not a clear cut victory for Kennedy. He was very bad tempered about it, I might add. I saw him at a party out there. I remarked on how well he looked and he said that, it was a curious Kennedy reaction, when he came up to me at this party and said, "Jim, I'm sorry that you had to hear that same speech all over again! You have heard it so many times." I had heard him speak that morning. I said, "Well, Senator, I haven't heard the speech for a month but I must stay you are getting better all the time."

This was always true about this man as I watched him around the country. Every time I saw him he was much better than the time before.

I said, "You look well." He said, "I'm so exhausted that I cannot stand another day. I am going right out of here and go to the Cape and take a week off because if I don't I'll never live to get to the convention."

He didn't look it. He might have been using the sun lap. But he was absolutely exhausted. Different ones told me several times at this party. And then, frankly, when he went back to the plane his driver happened to be one of my men. He didn't know this. The driver came back and said he just lost his temper because somebody kept him waiting. His nerves were pretty well gone. That is all his driver (my fellow) told me. He was just worn out.

I don't think there was anything unusual about that meeting. It was just another state convention. I went from there on up to the Governor's Conference. It was also in Montana right then. They were all politicing. Sarge Shriver and Bailey were up there. That is about all I can tell you.

MORRISSEY: As one who worked for Humphrey and Johnson, what were your overall impressions of the Kennedy organization in the drive for the nomination?

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ROWE: Very good. The more I went, the better I decided it was. I can't really think of any weak spots as I saw it. It was a very small, compact organization, which is what impressed me. You could see this from the outside. Every fellow had his job. And it was clear to me that this man could move, whether it was O'Donnell, or O'Brien, or Teddy Kennedy or Hy Raskin, he could move with assurance in his area and he didn't seem to be having to grab a telephone all the time. This was the one of the first things I noticed. First of all they were quiet. Second of all, they were wherever you looked. And third, they knew the makeup of every state they were in. There were certain states that I know I know better than they did. It was amazing to me how much they knew for odd reasons over the years. They knew where everybody was and they almost knew how to pry, like in an oyster bed, to get this fellow out. I thought it was very good.

The Humphrey thing was a typical liberal operation, like a debating committee. Too many people in the committee to debate, debate, debate. The Johnson campaign was completely disorganized. He relied on Texans and Texans don't know the United States. His political Texans were children once they got out of their own area. A few people were more sophisticated but they were also liberals with all their problems of liberals. Everything was a debate.

But the Kennedy tribe were just a quiet-moving machine of a very few people and hardly any of them had any real authority but the ones that did had a great deal of authority which I think has become apparent now that he has been President. O'Donnell and -- It is the same people. They were lieutenants. That is about what it was. John Bailey didn't seem to have much to say. He was a good front man with the older professionals. The Kennedys were just boys. They used Bailey where he was useful. I gather they used "Old Joe" where he could be useful. My impressions always was that the campaign manager was John Kennedy himself. I thought Bobby *carried out* orders. Bobby had the title but it seemed to me that the man who made all the decisions and pretty far down, was Kennedy. Pretty detailed. He got right down to details.

I think all good politicians do. They don't trust anybody. Roosevelt didn't trust anybody, Kennedy didn't, and Johnson, in this time, didn't, and Humphrey didn't. They wanted to make these decisions. None of them would delegate. Johnson less than any of them. Kennedy could delegate pretty well with the best of them.

O'Donnell told me he didn't delegate too much but it increased compared to the rest of them. My impression is that he did.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any specific recollections of the Convention in Los Angeles?

ROWE: Very little. It was apparent right from the beginning that Kennedy was going to win it. I remember that Johnson and I went over to see Humphrey as soon as Humphrey got in town that night. We talked because Humphrey still roused tremendous loyalty among his people, you know, even though he was out and acknowledged he was out. They were still consulting him. Humphrey said he didn't know

where he was going and what he wanted to do. He never did, I guess, [chuckles] all the way through!

I set up a very elaborate breakfast meeting with Stevenson and Johnson. This was through Phil Graham. Then Johnson cancelled this. He said Rayburn insisted it should be cancelled; Johnson should not go to Stevenson and Rayburn ought to go. I didn't think this made any sense. I thought Stevenson had come to Johnson in '56 and wanted his votes. And I thought this was what Johnson should have done. But it was apparent more and more as I have indicated earlier, that these two groups weren't going to get together. It was clear to Johnson too. I can remember sitting with Johnson having dinner with him and watching the keynote speech that Frank Church made. Johnson said at one point, "I don't see how we can stop this fellow, do you?" I said, "No, I guess not." It was just as casual as that and we went on listening.

MORRISSEY: Any recollections of the selection of Johnson for the vice presidency?

ROWE: Yes. I think Teddy's description is fairly accurate of the whole thing. There were some bad moments there when Bobby tried to change it, I think for good motives; no, not for good motives but for what Bobby thought were sincere motives. He was afraid of labor and the liberals. It seemed to me there was a breakdown between the candidate and the manager that they had. I never quite understood this. It seemed to me that either Jack Kennedy was doing it his way and wasn't telling his people what he was doing, which is always a possibility, or they failed in communication with each other. My feeling is that Phil Graham was the fellow that put this thing together. Maybe it would have happened anyway but he was the man always talking to Kennedy saying, "You call Johnson. This is his telephone number." And he's sitting there. "Johnson, Kennedy's going to call you." If it hadn't been done, I think it might have blown up. Bobby came down and said he did not think Johnson should run. Phil was the one that went and got Jack Kennedy on the phone and Jack told Bobby to relax.

And then I had a private conversation with Bobby. I remember

the whole room cleaned out, except Bobby and me. I don't know why. We were in one of Johnson's rooms. They had all gone out someplace. Bobby was tired.

He turned to me and said, "Jim, don't you think this is a mistake?" That seemed to be a curious question to ask me. I said, "No, I don't." "Well," he said, "don't you think Symington would have been better?" I said, "Bobby, you are absolutely wrong. There are two people that would help Jack Kennedy. One is Johnson, the other is Humphrey. Symington is exactly like your brother. He doesn't bring any strength to him. Humphrey would help him with the liberals and the farmers. Johnson would help with the Southerners."

I think that was all. But Bobby had this Symington idea in his head. I've never talked with him since as to why he thought this would bring strength to the ticket. It seemed to me clear that either one of the other two would and Symington wouldn't. And I was always a little fearful. I didn't think Symington should be president. I remember saying to Adlai…

One sign that Kennedy gave Phil Graham, I took up as a tip to tell Adlai this was coming to make sure that Adlai didn't say the wrong thing. Adlai started complaining a little bit about the Negroes wouldn't like it and I remember saying, "Governor, suppose Kennedy gets hit with an automobile. Do you realize who would be president? Symington." I knew that he didn't like it much. He said, "Well, maybe you're right." It was the end of the argument.

MORRISSEY: After the convention, I understand you went up to Hyannisport?

ROWE: Yes.

MORRISSEY: What was your function during the actual campaign?

ROWE: Not too many things. I had done the scheduling for Stevenson and Kefauver. This is a complicated thing when you are out of power. When you are in power you have the Secret Service but this is getting your man around the country, getting an advance man, doing the scheduling, making an estimate because campaigns freeze on you, making an estimate of where you have to be two months later, and you get yourself trapped in the first two weeks. So, as the campaign develops, if you think you have to be in California, the last two weeks and you have made commitments in New York that you can't break, or they don't think you can break, you have to sit down and say where are the pressures in this campaign? Where do we think we will be? How do you do this thing? How much time do you spend? That is what I really went over for was to do that with the Kennedy people.

As a matter of fact, to show you their thoroughness, they sent for me before the convention. A fellow they thought I was friendly to was in their camp. It was Dick Maguire. He is now the treasurer of the Committee. He did the active scheduling. He'd always been active in the Kennedy campaign. One of the lawyers in our office, Dick O'Hare, knew him. And I knew Maguire. Maguire came in and asked for my files, I'd say, three weeks before the convention. I said, "Well, we've got to win this, so I'll let you have them."

So I gave him my files and I saw Bobby at the convention and he wanted to know how long I'd be around California. This was several days before Kennedy was nominated. I said I was pulling out right after the nomination. This made it clear that Bobby thought Kennedy was going to be nominated and I thought so, too, and I wasn't going to hang around. He said he'd like to talk with me after this and I just said I wasn't going to be there so he came back here and I think, I've forgotten when but I think a day or two after the convention, when he got there Bobby called and asked if I'd come up. So I went up and we talked about the general problem which was a problem of area, really. They had already reached a decision in days they would spend and I thought Kennedy made a mistake and I said so. Now it was his group -- I talked with Kennedy but it was his group that reached this conclusion.

They decided to concentrate on the industrial East and suburban areas including the successful Catholics who had become successful enough to become Republicans. This was a very hardboiled, intelligent decision based on polls and analyses, etc. It was correct and I think in many ways it was what elected Kennedy. I argued somewhat the other way in terms of weight. I thought that Kennedy was spending too much time in the East and I thought it was essential that he go to the West and certainly to the South. His own feeling was that this was where Johnson should be and should stay pretty much in that area, mostly the South, somewhat in the West. He should not come up. I argued the other way. Johnson should come up and have some exposure up North, but particularly that Kennedy should show himself in the South; but his feeling, and the feeling of his people, was that he had spent so much time campaigning that everybody in every state knew him. My argument was, at least I thought I and I think I said it, was that the people he knew were politicians because in this early stage the only people really concerned were politicians and people as people, as voters, didn't pay much attention to all this business.

I always had trouble with Johnson on this. He thought if he'd been in the state talking to a bunch of Democrats that was enough.

I did not win this argument. I do think Kennedy spent too much time in the East. I know he said to his advance man at the end, "What am I doing in New York? I ought to be in California!"

But this is the tough problem on scheduling. He was frozen by that time so you, really in the first blush of the campaign, have to make your important judgements. You can pull a day from someplace, but you can't do much more than that. And I think if you look, Johnson didn't help him in the South. Kennedy won the Southern states but look at that western sweep. It was mostly a religious thing, I think, as I look at it. I know that western country pretty well. It just showed that the impact of this fellow didn't get over in that area. Now people say, in a sense he was too alien, he was New England, he was Catholic, he was Brahmin. These kinds of things don't fit in that country. I don't think this was true. I think if he got there enough, why it would have worked. But, with their analysis the other way, it worked; and we got only one test. It was a rough evening. And we're proving it out!

After that Dick Maguire and I took a day off right up there and drew up a over-simple schedule. What states? What cities? etc. We used that as a first working document. I can't remember doing one back of that and I can't remember if the President was in that second meeting or not. Bobby was there. We talked some more about it. At that time, Bobby asked me how much time I could give the Kennedy people and I said I just couldn't. I had to stay with Lyndon. So we decided I'd be the liaison between Johnson and Kennedy. This never came out because they never had any liaison or if they did, they talked on the telephone. The rest of the campaign I was in the headquarters trying to schedule Johnson, which is an impossibility.

I told him, after a week, that I was going to quit. I'd scheduled Stevenson and Kefauver and I'd done the preliminary scheduling for Kennedy, and he could be more trouble

than all three of them! So I got out of that. And went with the speech writing team so that it was what I did, mostly.

MORRISSEY: Speeches for Johnson?

ROWE: Speeches for Johnson. Yes. He had that. As a matter of fact, the old Truman team he had then: Charlie Murphy and Dave Loyd, and there is nobody better. We were writing. Sort of running it. Working with them. Both of them together.

MORRISSEY: In regard to this just let me ask you one question that just came into my mind. It seems to me I've

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read that Mr. Johnson gave a speech out in Lincoln, Nebraska, which was something of a predecessor of Mr. Kennedy's call for a Peace Corps.

ROWE: I haven't heard this.

MORRISSEY: I might be incorrect because I am pulling this out of the sky.

ROWE: Well, the fellow who really started extolling the Peace Corps along before Kennedy was Humphrey. I heard Humphrey all through the West make the Peace Corps speech, and Kennedy got it out there. Kennedy said he got it from Humphrey and he tried it rather casually out in California and it blew the lid off which is why he got doing it. Maybe Johnson did. I've always thought it was Humphrey.

MORRISSEY: Well, I'll have to check my own questions on that.

ROWE: Yes.

MORRISSEY: After Mr. Kennedy became president, I understand you had a rather long discussion with him one night in April, '61?

ROWE: I think it was April, '61. It was after Cuba. When was Cuba, do you remember? Bay of Pigs?

MORRISSEY: In April.

ROWE: Yes. I would guess, off hand, this was a few weeks to a month after Cuba. The reason I date it by Cuba, is that it came up somewhere and I was

saying to him, "My only fear, Mr. President, about it, is it will make you too cautious." He said, "That's right. That is the danger." The answer to your question is yes. I did spend the evening with him.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me what you talked about?

ROWE: Just talk, mostly. It was a social evening, as a matter of fact for that matter. Mac Bundy and his wife were there, Walter Sohier, the general counsel of NASA and Mr. Wrightsman and Mrs. Wrightsman of the Fine Arts Board. The president and I talked mostly about looking back over the campaign. Most of this was in response to something I'd said or asked. Looking back, I remember his saying he thought he was the only one who could have won the campaign; he thought Adlai would have been the weakest candidate; he didn't think either Hubert or Johnson could have

made it; there was a possibility, he thought, that Symington might have made it. On the whole, the strongest candidate in the party was himself. This was in a curious detached way, you know, as if he were lecturing about someone else. I've always admired it. Every time when I saw him during the campaign he would check the spots, you know, and say what do you hear out there? and so forth. He would talk about his status the way I'd talk about his status. Just detached. He would talk about Kennedy, he would talk about Humphrey, he would talk about Johnson as if he was a man out here looking at all three of them. Amazing accuracy about how he was doing! I can't remember what else we talked about. Mostly about the campaign. Hardly at all about Cuba.

We did talk, I do remember. I was arguing with him that his press conferences were wrong. This is one of my old hobbies. I can never convince anybody of it. It was probably too late, but I was arguing the Roosevelt press conference is the safest. The press conference exists to educate the people or to propagandize your viewpoint, you know. This is what a president gets out of it. I said I felt that television made a man too cautious, that he couldn't make a mistake with everybody looking at him, and therefore too cautious; and that the Roosevelt technique of no quotations -- through both the give and take, of the reporters and the follow through -- you could develop a theme much better than this business, and I hoped he wasn't going to use the television all the time as he started using it. Well he said that in general he agreed with me about the approach, but, he said, he was personally convinced that the press eventually would turn against any Democratic president and, therefore, he had to have this channel of television. This, again, is the way Roosevelt used to talk about radio. He couldn't antagonize radio people too much. He was going to keep that channel because, sooner or later, the press was going after him. Although I may say I don't think it ever did.

MORRISSEY: Yes. Did you have any other relationship with Mr. Kennedy when he was in the presidency?

ROWE: No, I can't think of any, as a matter of fact. No.

MORRISSEY: Let me go back a bit. Did you have any relationship with him between the election and the inauguration?

ROWE: No, except one -- let me see -- one thing I talked to him about at Hyannisport. I was on a Brookings Institution committee to study this transition. The Brookings people had written saying they wanted a liaison.

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The letter got lost somewhere. So I wrote him one and said, 'look you may win this, you probably will" -- this was in September -- "and you, clearly, are not going to have any time to think about this thing. If you win you'll be an awful mess the day after. This thing will help you. If someone you trust could get in and understand these problems you will be a way down the road." Well, this idea intrigued him and he said, "Well, who should it be?" I said, "I don't know your people that well to know who it should be. The fellow that would be perfect would be Sorensen but obviously this is ridiculous at this point in the campaign. He'd be the kind of man." "Well," he said, "what about Jim Landis?" Looking back at all those for troubles it seems strange, but I said, "Jim's an old friend of mine but his experience in government has all been with regulatory agencies and this is not the kind of problem!" "Oh," he said, "what about Clark Clifford?" "That's fine, Mr. Kennedy." And so he got Clark Clifford to do it. Clark Clifford had been his personal lawyer on a couple of matters which I hadn't known. Clifford did sit with the committee and worked on the transition and so forth. But on the transition, I think, like everyone else, I made lots of suggestions as to who was to get this job and that job. And I don't think any of them were listened to. Maybe a little bit on Freeman for Agriculture. I can't think of any other contributions that were used.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any final overall impressions of Kennedy or the drive for the nomination, and then the elections? Or Kennedy's conduct of the presidency?

ROWE: Yes, I have some. How can we help but have some of those? I thought the Kennedy drive for the nomination was exactly the same as the Roosevelt drive in 1932. They both went at it the same way which is "hell for leather," get out in front, and let other people try to catch you. You might become the front runner, you might get too far out and they will knock you down, but this is the way when there is a wide open nomination to go get it. It was clear that the boys would never give it to Kennedy. He was too young. He was a Catholic. And always the bosses are the most conservative, status quo people. Every Catholic boss in the country, at the start, was against Jack Kennedy for this reason. He understood this, but it was the same motivation Humphrey had. He never forgot it. It just seemed to me wise.

As I say, the only mistake I thought he made was West Virginia and that finally got him the presidency. So that mistake -- if it was a mistake -- he retrieved brilliantly and it made him president. So it was the typical politics. You can never tell.

I thought he ran a tough, ruthless, competent and capable campaign. Now when I say he, I speak of this group. He's responsible for the group. How much Bobby did, how much Kenny O'Donnell and O'Brien did, these are all very able men. My own outside impression is that there was clearly one boss. His name was Jack Kennedy. On all strategy, on all tactics, on all approaches he worked like a dog.

I remember, if I can go back a minute, I remember trying to get Hy Raskin lined up with Humphrey. For a variety of reasons, he should have been with Humphrey. And he told me he tried to see Humphrey three or four times. Humphrey was too busy being a senator. He got annoyed. I remember saying, this was in early '59, he said, "Jim, you won't believe this but Jack Kennedy today is a better politician than Hubert Humphrey." And I remember saying, "Don't be ridiculous!" He is a reserved fellow. And he was right, as I look at it.

I think he was an excellent president. I would have some questions on the way he ran his staff in the White House. I think it was too large. Someone phrased this and I think part of this was Dick Neustadt's fault although Dick would deny it -- there was a reaction by his staff -- by Kennedy, by all his people -- against the formality, the formal organization of the White House under Eisenhower. And they had too much organization, which was no way to run the White House, I quite agree. But they reacted so strongly against it that they agree. But they reacted so strongly against it that they became too informal. A channel was something you avoided at all costs! It made eight times as much work but it didn't go through channels. I think that, administratively, Kennedy was a little weak in this. In a sense, the White House was in entirely too many things which it should have stayed out of, but Kennedy people defend this on the grounds that they couldn't get anything done out of the departments. And this is often true. Roosevelt created new agencies so he avoided the problem. This is the kind of debate you are going to have all the time but, other than that, I think Kennedy was a very good president.

I think maybe the historians will find his great contribution will be that, first of all, he was tough at the right time on Cuba, or then with the Russians. The second Cuba thing. This scared me to death but he handled it just right and made the Russians and the world understand he was just this tough, and would have been tough if he'd had to. And from that basis of real Irish toughness, he was then in a position where he could negotiate and trade out on the atomic energy thing, the disarmament thing. Whether he could have done this without the Cuban thing first, I don't know. But at least the combination of being very tough when he had to be and then from this base of power saying that now I will be soft. And that probably is the reason why at lease, at the moment, the

Cold War has eased. This may be the rift, well, the moment of light. If so it will prove to be a tremendous contribution. If this happens it clearly means that he's the only man that could have done it. Or maybe not the only man, but he's the man that did do it. And so forth.

What kind of president he might have been if he lived? That is an idle speculation. It is a fascinating one but idle. I thought he was a very good president. DId his homework, he worked hard, he liked the job. I think he would have, like everything else I ever saw him do, been better and better and better. He had this quality about him. I never saw this man, for all the political campaigns and years, I never saw him be worse than the time before. He was always better. Never just the same. He was always better. As far as an outsider can judge, this was true of the president.

MORRISSEY: Yes. Any other comments?

ROWE: That's it!

MORRISSEY: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]