

Justin N. Feldman Oral History Interview – RFK#2, 11/26/1969
Administrative Information

Creator: Justin N. Feldman
Interviewer: Roberta W. Greene
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Biographical Note

(1919 - 2011) Consultant, Department of Commerce, (1961-1966); campaign aide and New York political adviser to Senator Robert F. Kennedy. discusses Feldman's role as a scheduler for RFK's 1964 run for Senate, and other people involved in the campaign, among other issues.

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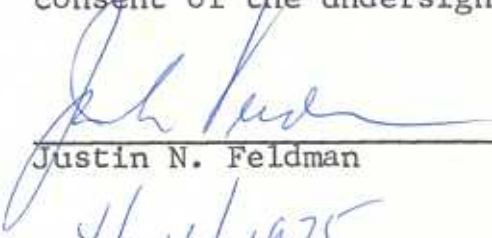
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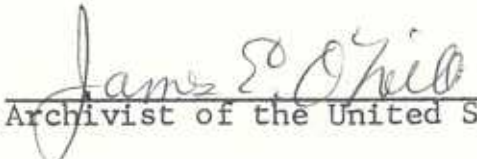
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Justin N. Feldman

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Second Oral History Interview

With

Justin N. Feldman

November 26, 1969
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program
of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Well, last time we were talking about '64 and your initial approaches to Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. Why don't you continue from there on what your own role was in getting him interested in running?

FELDMAN: After some initial, casual conversations, I had dinner one night with Stanley Steingut who told me he had some discussions with respect to Bob running in New York, both with English [John F. English] and with Bob Kennedy, and that it was his impression also that Bob had not completely ruled it out. That night somehow it was in the context of a discussion of Bob Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] and his ambitions and his future that Steingut had told me this. I'm not just certain what it was exactly that we were unhappy about with Wagner as of that moment, whether it was his push on Steingut—Steingut's leadership. I had had some unhappiness with Wagner over the years, anyway, on other grounds. I guess there was some conversation about the possibility of Wagner wanting to run for that seat and that was part of our concern.

We left dinner that night and went to the house of a third person who was with us at dinner, a fellow named George Daly. We proceeded to call Paul Corbin to find out what he knew and what Bob's temperature was like at that point on that score. Paul led us to believe that it was not out of the question and that it might be useful if I were to talk to Bob about this some more. So I went down to Washington again—I was there on business; this must

have been now early July, mid-July, somewhere in there—and I saw Bob at the Justice Department. I dropped by to see him.

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Excuse me, am I going over the same ground? Have I talked about the airplane ride back to New York with him?

GREENE: No.

FELDMAN: And the ride with Bill Barry [William Barry]?

GREENE: No, but you mentioned to me last time that that was one of the things you wanted to discuss.

FELDMAN: Okay, I just wanted to make sure I'm not going back over the same ground.

GREENE: No.

FELDMAN: I dropped by to see him and he was very busy; he didn't have much time. It was one of those mornings when he seemed a little irascible, troubled and weary. He asked me what I wanted to see him about. I told him I had been talking to some others and that I wanted to talk to him to pursue the question of his running for the Senate in New York. He said, "Oh, I just don't think that makes much sense," and more or less dismissed it that way. I said I'd been talking to Steingut, and he said, "Oh, I know, and he's been talking to me and he's been talking to English. All you guys up there do nothing but talk to each other about it. You're all trying to find some way to get me involved in something that makes no sense for me, because you all think it makes some sense for you." It was one of those mornings.

GREENE: You say this might have been mid-July. That sounds kind of late because mid-July was when Senator Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] had the plane accident. Do you think it could have been earlier than that?

FELDMAN: Yes, it could have been earlier, could have been earlier.

GREENE: Because he pretty much, I think, had decided to run before that and then withdrew partly because of the accident.

FELDMAN: Well, it could have been mid.... It could have been before the accident; it could have been after the accident, you know. I'm not sure, but I think I'm right.

GREENE: Yes?

FELDMAN: Yeah. I think it was either mid-July or towards the end of July. I can place it as the story goes on. It won't be too difficult to place. It was about a week or ten days before his meeting with Wagner at Gracie Mansion and about two weeks before his speech at the American Bar Association convention in New York.

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GREENE: Yeah, so it was late. Now, actually I just noticed Edward Kennedy's accident was June 19th so it must have been after that.

FELDMAN: It was after the accident. It was a switch between the last time I'd spoken about it. Now that you mention it, maybe it was Ted's accident or a combination of other things, but there was a very definite change of attitude on the issue. I also think a lot of it was the irascibility at the moment, as I'll explain. I was then ready to drop it; I mean it was obviously one of those conversations he didn't want to hold and as you undoubtedly know by now—and everybody who had any dealings with him does know—if there was a conversation he didn't want to hold, he didn't hold it very often. He made it very clear and he was just in a terrible hurry and that was it.

I went about my business in Washington and later that day I got on an Eastern Airline shuttle to come back to New York. Sitting, reading my paper, waiting for my plane to take off, Bob showed up on the plane. He was with Ronny Goldfarb [Ronald Goldfarb]. I don't think he was particularly happy to see me; at least he wasn't particularly happy. He didn't look like he relished the notion of continuing that conversation. As far as he was concerned, it was over, and the fact that I was on the plane, I guess, indicated that maybe I would try to revive it anyway. He very quickly said, "Forgive me if I don't sit and talk to you, but I'm going to try to catch a nap." Then he proceeded to take off his shoes and his coat and pull the arms out of two of the seats of the three-across seats and stretched out to go to sleep.

Shortly before the plane landed in New York, he got up, put his coat back on. I guess he felt that maybe he had been a little rude or he was a little better rested or whatever, but anyway, he said, "Do you have a car at the airport?" I said, "No." He said, "Where are you going?" and I told him. So he said, "Well, I have a car meeting me. I'll drive you into town and we'll talk."

Bill Barry, who was then an FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agent, met us at the airport and he, I guess, dropped Bob at the Carlyle Hotel, Bob and Ronny, and took me down to my office. But on the way in from La Guardia, Bob brought the topic up again, and said, "Do you really think it makes sense? Do you really believe this?" and so forth. "Do you think makes sense for me?" As I say, I don't know whether he was better rested or felt sorry that he had been as preemptory as he had been earlier in the day. When I came to know him a little better later on, I realized that you know, you never know which it was—or whether he was just thinking about it more while he was allegedly sleeping. Who knows?

But anyway, he started the conversation in the car; I wasn't about to start it again. We canvassed it some and discussed it. He was listening. He was asking good questions, you know, relevant, pertinent questions and incisive questions about the political situation and the

personalities involved, and what I thought Wagner was going to do, and why I thought it made sense for him, and so on and so forth. He said, "Let's stay in touch. I really am going to think about it seriously in the next couple of weeks because if nothing else I should let you and Jack English and Stanley and others, who are friends of mine in New York and who are sort of holding back, know more specifically what it is I'm thinking. I'll be in touch with you."

He then called me during the week and said that he was going to see Bob Wagner, that he felt that he could not come into the state over Wagner's opposition. He more or less wanted an invitation from Wagner or at least for Wagner to tell him that it was all right. He certainly didn't feel it was fair for him to come in and interfere with Wagner's ambitions and so forth.

I tried to argue with him on this question. I tried to tell him that I didn't think he'd get anything but equivocation from Wagner, and he said, "Well, I have to do this. I'm coming into New York on Friday and I've made a date to see Bob." I said fine, I wanted to see him afterward, if possible, to find out what happened and he said if he had a chance to, he'd call me. Otherwise, depending on how time schedules worked out, for me to call him at Hyannis over the weekend.

Well, the next thing I knew, I'd heard over the radio how he and Wagner had met after Wagner kept him waiting for a long time at Gracie Mansion. Wagner was never on time for anything and particularly something he didn't want to face. So, I phoned him at Hyannis that weekend, that was the weekend before the ABA [American Bar Association] conference because now everything started moving quickly. He said that he had had a good meeting with Wagner. I said, "Yes, and I'm sure that it started out by his saying, 'Bob, your father and my father were very good friends and they were very close. I'm sure that there's no reason that you and I can't be very close.' He said, "How'd you know?" I said, "Because that's the way he started his conversation with Frank Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] before he screwed him. It was the way he started his conversation with Gene Keogh [Eugene James Keogh] before he screwed him. It was the way he started his conversation with Stanley Steingut before he screwed him." I don't know if you want this....

GREENE: Sure.

FELDMAN: Okay. I said, "I know Bob Wagner." "Well," he said, "God damn it," he said, "You, you people in New York just don't understand it. I'm telling you we had a very nice conversation and that he was very open. He said he was not interested, that before he knew whether it would make sense for him he'd like to take some soundings, he'd like to talk to some people—all of which made sense. He didn't want to make any premature commitments. He had to find out—that he was out of it and that if I was interested, he would do everything he could to be helpful."

I said, "Okay Bob. And I tell you that sometime over this weekend, Moe Weinstein [Moses M. Weinstein] or Paul Screvane [Paul R. Screvane] or somebody who is connected with Bob Wagner, who has some relationship with him, is going to announce that 'We have a lot of talent in the state of New York and we don't need any outsiders coming in,' and that he's for Frank Hogan [Frank S. Hogan] or he's for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] or he's for somebody. While you are telling the press that he was very cordial and is very interested in your candidacy, I'm telling you that one of his county leaders, one of his stooges, one of his sycophants is going to announce for somebody else before this weekend is over."

He said, "I just don't understand it. You fellows are all paranoid about Wagner. I'm telling you it was a great conversation and, frankly, if this is what New York politics is like, I don't need this." And he started to say.... I said, "Well, what do you mean you don't need this?" He said, "I'm not that sure I want to go to the Senate and I'm not sure I want to run for it and I'm not sure I want to be a senator. I'm not that sure that I shouldn't take off a year or two and do some thinking and writing and teaching and maybe go abroad or go to the London School of Economics or something of that sort." I specifically remember his reference to the London School of Economics which just seemed kind of strange at the time. And, "I just don't know. I don't know what I'm going to do if this is the way this is, if New York politics is like that. If Bob Wagner can sit down with me and have the kind of conversation we had, and you can, in all honesty, tell me that he's going to do something like this, I don't think I want to get involved in this."

So anyway, you know, he said, "But stay in touch with Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith]. You know, call Steve; he'll know pretty much what I'm thinking on this." "Okay." Then he hung up obviously irritated with me and the situation.

That was Saturday, or Sunday; it was sometime over that weekend. Monday morning I was in the office and about 9:30, 9:45 the phone rang. It was Bob Kennedy. He said, "I'm at Steve Smith's apartment. Could you come up? I want to talk to you." I said, "Sure," and I went up there. He was in the room with Steve and Billy McKeon [William H. McKeon]. I don't recall whether there was anyone else there or not. I'm not sure, but I specifically remember Billy McKeon and Steve. He said, "I suppose you saw this morning's paper?" I said, "Sure." Weinstein had said, when queried by a reporter, that he wasn't sure about Bob Kennedy, that there was a lot of talent in New York. He would like to canvass the situation thoroughly before he thought we had to invite in an outsider. I said, "Yeah, I saw it." He had said this on Sunday afternoon on some interview show or something. So he said to me, "You really think Wagner doesn't want me in the state?"

"I don't know, Bob, but I just don't think that has to be part of

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your consideration or can tie part of your consideration. You have to make your decision independently of that. Those of us who know Wagner have seen him operate in the past. You say we're paranoid about Wagner; we're just going to have to handle our paranoia. We're going to have to handle the Moe Weinstains—you don't even know Moe Weinstein—and we're going to have to worry about that kind of problem." He said, "Well, I don't think I'd want to come in if Wagner really doesn't want me, but on the other hand, he did say he

wanted me and I did....” You know I kept pointing out, " Yes, you did all the right things, and he said that, you know, and he has to live with that."

We talked a little bit that way and then finally he turned to me and said, "What are you willing to in the campaign? Are you willing to help?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And he said, "Okay, I want you to do the scheduling." I started to explain that that was a full-time job, that I was just in the process of merging my law firm with another law firm, that life had been very difficult during the Landis [James M. Landis] period, and Jim had—Landis had—just been dead a short time. He listened to all of that and said, yes, he knew, and so on and so forth, then just you know looked at me with those baby blue eyes and that way he had and said, "Well, I don't understand. You mean Bob Wagner's not the only one who doesn't want me in the state?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, look. I mean you say you think I ought to run for the Senate. You think it's good for me; you think it's good for the party, you think it's good for the state; you think it's good for the United States Senate, and you're worried about having something about a merger with your law firm on October 15th! You tell me that being an outsider doesn't make that much difference. I don't know that many people in New York, certainly not that many people I can trust. If I can't rely for help on people whom I can trust in New York, well, then it makes no sense. You tell me I can't trust Bob Wagner and now, what's all this conversation we've been having over the months?"

I said, "Well, can I think about it?" He said, "Well, sure you can think about it. I mean I can't draft you for it, but I really would like for you to sit down and talk about scheduling." I said, "When?" and he said, "This afternoon." I said, "Well, I have a date down at the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] in Washington this afternoon. I have a conference down there. I can't put it off."

"Well, that's perfect because that's just where I wanted you to go to talk about it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I want you to sit down with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], get some of his notions on how the scheduling operation should be run. And I want you to sit down with John Nolan [John E. Nolan] and get some of his judgments, and I want you to sit down with"—what was his name?—Bill Evans [William J. Evans]?"

GREENE: Rowlie [Rowland Evans, Jr.]?

FELDMAN: No, no, no. Senator Ted Kennedy's office. Senator Ted's administrative assistant at that time.

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GREENE: Dave Burke [David W. Burke]? At that time I'm not sure.

FELDMAN: No, it wasn't Dave Burke. The name Bill Evans sticks in my mind.

GREENE: We can check it anyway.

FELDMAN: Yeah. "Because," he said, "Ted's just been through a statewide senate campaign. Excuse me. [Interruption]"

GREENE: Sure.

FELDMAN: "It's perfect because I want you to sit down with Kenny and John Nolan and Evans." And he said, "Call Kenny at the White House—he'll expect you by then—when you get to Washington." He was rushing off because he had to speak at the luncheon session of the American Bar Association. By the time I got down to Washington at about two o'clock and heard the radio, I heard that—oh, he was meeting Wagner; Wagner was going to accompany him, I think, to the ABA luncheon. When queried on his way into the luncheon, with Wagner at his side, he said that the mayor had been very kind and so forth and had invited him into the state. I forget the words he used exactly, but he sort of confronted Wagner with it and left Wagner no alternative but to either contradict him or impliedly agree. From that moment on, I was in the '64 campaign.

The campaign started to develop slowly because he didn't really, I guess.... I'm trying to remember when he did announce whether it was before he came to Atlantic City or at Atlantic City or after Atlantic City.

GREENE: I believe it was just before he went to Atlantic City.

FELDMAN: By the time I went to Atlantic City, anyway, I was deeply involved in the campaign planning and the scheduling, the schedule, planning. In Atlantic City, I guess, I helped to put together the reception for the New York delegates and put together the final schedule for the first week or two of the campaign following the convention—you know, in broad outline, not in detail. We recruited a couple of advance men whom we dispatched from Atlantic City to do the first surveys of the state. I guess we sent Phil Ryan [Philip J. Ryan, Jr.] up to Binghamton. We planned what we would be doing and were in a full-swing campaign. We were in a fight, of course, for the nomination with Stratton [Samuel S. Stratton]. That had been anticipated and no one was terribly concerned about that.

Before going to Atlantic City, you know, we'd spent some time working on endorsements. The Wagner thing was with us right up to the nominating convention; he was playing games. I pulled Eddie Costikyan [Edward N. Costikyan] out from under him by having Costikyan announce his endorsement of Bob Kennedy. Everybody knew that Costikyan was one of the county leaders who was close to Wagner. By that time he was not as happy with

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Wagner as he had been previously. He was planning on getting out, as he did shortly thereafter. He saw what was going on and we utilized that opportunity to have Costikyan come out, which kind of got a number of the other Kennedy leaders calmed down. Wagner was, right up through Atlantic City, playing with the notion of Stevenson or Frank Hogan, and there was much Frank Hogan talk in the New York delegation among the Wagner or anti-Kennedy forces. I don't necessarily equate the two; they weren't in each instance the same.

We planned a good bit of the campaign in Atlantic City. We came back, worked on the planning for the convention. I guess Jack English and I were the floor leaders at the convention. I don't remember how we divided it, but Jack had one half of the delegates and I had the other half who we were responsible for. We had some pretty good counts and knew where we were at. There was some unhappiness among some of the delegates. Some of the reformers were still for Stratton. I'm sure that they're a little embarrassed by it now, looking at Sam's position on the war in Vietnam.

Bob had said he wanted a vigorous and tough, hard-driving campaign, and I guess he really didn't know what that meant. He wanted to start out the morning after the convention bright and early. He told me that he wanted to absolutely lose no time; it was now September 7th approximately. He didn't know the state; he didn't know the people—he didn't know the party people—he didn't know the organizations; and he was at a terrible handicap. The polls had, in July, looked awfully good—the polls in June and July. The polls by the beginning of September didn't look quite as good. As a matter of fact, I can recall the afternoon after the convention his saying to me with a wry smile, but he meant it, "It's a strange state you fellows brought me into." He said, "I haven't made my first campaign speech and I'm already losing ground in the polls."

We started him out that first morning at the Fulton Fish Market at about 4:30, 5:00 in the morning—he said he wanted to start early—and from there he went to the Staten Island Ferry at about 7:30. We really kept him moving.

He took that first swing to Buffalo. There are, as I'd explained to him, sort of two ways you traditionally start a campaign in this state. One is you swing from west to east and the other is you swing from east to west. But you usually get as much of the upstate counties, small counties, out of the way as possible, make your initial appearances in the big cities, come back and spend a lot of time on planning your television and radio and media campaign in New York City and talking in and around New York City, and make a couple more swings of the state. Well, the reports we got on his first upstate tour were fabulous. I was talking to county leaders, staying in close touch with the advance man and with the party that was accompanying him.

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Buffalo was the best example of what happened. It ordinarily takes about thirty minutes to drive from the Buffalo airport to the Statler-Hilton Hotel where he was to speak—well, where he was to rest before he went to speak—at a labor rally. Oh, I forget the name of the hall, Yolian [?] Hall, or something else. We planned a motorcade from the airport so we figured it would take forty-five minutes, maybe almost an hour. I had scheduled this for Frank Roosevelt when he was seeking the nomination for governor, and then when he ran for attorney general, and I'd scheduled this for Bob Morgenthau [Robert M. Morgenthau] when he was a candidate for governor, and I'd scheduled it for Harry Truman [Harry S. Truman] during the presidential campaign, and I'd worked on the schedule for President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] in the state in '60. So I had some feel for this thing on how much time it would take—and when Hubert [Hubert H. Humphrey] was running. Except it took him, instead of an hour, it took him almost two hours to get from the airport to the center of town. The crowds lining the route were fabulous. The cars in the motorcade were just swamped. He

was doing things like getting out of the car to shake hands with a little group of kids on the sidewalk, or with a group of nuns on the sidewalk, and it took over two hours. The hall was absolutely jammed. The police had to barricade the area.

He came back from that first week's tour—I guess it was a seven-or eight-day's tour—and went out to Glen Cove for a couple of days of rest. He phoned me that morning and said, "I want to see you and John Nolan out here as soon as you can get out." We got in the car and drove out to Glen Cove. Sitting next to the swimming pool was the most dejected looking, tired, exhausted, beat-up looking human being I'd ever seen. I literally didn't recognize him. We approached to shake hands with him and he extended his left hand tentatively, showing his right hand, which was practically a piece of raw meat, and his left hand all bruised and swollen, not as swollen as the right. He just extended the fingers for a brief handshake and held his hands out to us and said, "This is why I wanted to talk to you." He said, "Are you guys trying to elect me or kill me?" We said, "What's the matter?" He said, "No man can live on that schedule. It's an impossible schedule." He said, "I didn't have time to breathe, I didn't have time to eat. I don't mind that; I don't mind working hard. We're all working hard and you're working hard, I know that, but that schedule is impossible. I show up every place an hour or two late. Everything gets all messed up and so on."

So we said, "Well, Bob, you know, we just never planned on the kinds of crowds you had on the crowd reaction, number one. Number two, we never planned on you, you know, getting out of a car in the middle of motorcades to talk to every batch of nuns and kids that were on the street. All of these things, you know, require a different kind of scheduling and a different sense of timing. You've never run before and we've never worked with you before as a candidate."

He said, "I don't care whom you've worked with. Not even Bob

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Morgenthau could have gotten from that Buffalo airport to the Statler-Hilton Hotel in the time you allowed. It's ridiculous." I said, "He did it in fifteen minutes." He was absolutely furious, and he said, "I have to have some time off. I now have to have some more time off than I'd anticipated before I go back on the trail. You're just going to have to give me more flexibility in the schedule," and so on.

Well, from that day really, until that campaign was over, he was so uptight. I rarely saw him display any humor except when he was on stage, you know, or any sensitivity to people around him. He hated himself, in my view, for being here; and he was doing very badly in the early stages. He was shaking hands, he was getting big crowds, he was getting encouragement, but he was saying nothing on the issues. He was being purely and simply President Kennedy's brother and he just wasn't coming through. He was making mistakes. He was doing things like riding on an airplane and telling a reporter in confidence that he's somehow or other having trouble with Jewish voters. He doesn't quite understand it but the Jews of the state don't seem to like him. The front page headline on the New York Times was "Kennedy Asserts Jews..." and so forth. He was making mistakes of that sort.

Those first few weeks of the campaign were just dreadful, just dreadful; and he knew it, and it was impossible to be around him. We were all trying to figure out how we, you know, could pull him out of it. It just had to be done with some substantive response, and it

just had to be done with bringing him out of himself somehow. We had one session in which I felt very strongly that he had to go after Ken Keating [Kenneth B. Keating], that he could no longer continue the business about "Keating's not such a bad fellow. He votes all right but he doesn't really contribute to leadership and he's not terribly creative and he's part of a Republican party, you know." This wouldn't work. I told him he had to go after Keating. He said he didn't think he should, that Keating did have a good record. Well, we had to mount a fantastic operation research that hadn't been done before to persuade him that Keating didn't have a good record. Keating made the mistake of attacking him on the A. G. Interhandel transaction which started to persuade him that Keating wasn't such a decent fellow. Until Keating attacked him on the Interhandel transaction, we had great difficulty persuading him that he had to go after Keating's record. At that point he was willing to take a real look at Keating's record.

GREENE: Did that hurt him or help him in the end?

FELDMAN: What?

GREENE: The Interhandel thing.

FELDMAN: It helped Bob Kennedy in the end because it made him an aggressive campaigner if nothing else. The Interhandel transaction itself, you know, nobody really believed that the Kennedy

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administration was soft on Nazis. That argument was dead. It had come up during the '60 campaign in terms of Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and nobody was going to buy that one. That was just Keating playing on the Jewish vote that was antagonistic to Bob Kennedy for a lot of other reasons, but he really didn't understand that; he thought he could do something with the Interhandel thing. Of course, Keating hadn't realized what his own record was on the Interhandel transaction so he was vulnerable there. The real contribution of the Interhandel issue, in my judgment was that it turned Bob Kennedy on to being willing to look at the Keating record on housing and the Keating technique of voting one way in committee and another way on the floor and voting one way on the bill and another on the motion to recommit and this whole business. That was the contribution.

GREENE: Were there people who thought he ought to go after Keating right from the start, who didn't like the strategy that was mapped out?

FELDMAN: There was no strategy mapped out, that I'm aware of, in the beginning. In the beginning it was Bob Kennedy—"I'm Bob Kennedy, and I'm here, and I've sat in the highest councils of government. I think I know what it is to be United States senator. Won't you please vote for me?" That was the strategy to the extent that it was a strategy, and it was just falling very flat. He was sliding and the polls were showing him to be sliding constantly and the complaints we were getting from more

sophisticated people in the party who were for him were tremendous. It wasn't until after he started going after Keating and started to sense that he was doing better that his sense of humor started to come back. But during that period.... The turning point was the Columbia University session.

GREENE: Yeah, that's what I'd heard.

FELDMAN: That was absolutely the turning point. His TV had been stiff. His speeches hadn't come through. Finally, we were talking to the television people about, you know, how we could work it out. Somebody had said that the best, the only thing that had come through in the campaign was an appearance he had had at the University of Rochester where he had met with a student group that had started to pepper him with questions and he started to come out of himself in response to the questions. So we, therefore, had the idea that we would schedule this marathon at Columbia. We would film it and clip from it segments for use on TV. We set it up virtually overnight. And it was really a fantastic evening. We set it up, as I said, almost overnight with the cooperation of the Young Democrats on the campus. We had the TV cameras there, our own. The crowd was tremendous, the kids were wanting to get in. We put him on with the notion that we were just going to let him go, as long as he could stand on his feet, and for an hour and fifty minutes—he having had a five-minute bland, opening presentation—those kids peppered him with every conceivable

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question, and he fielded them and answered them and treated them in an incredibly sensitive and responsive way. There was even one shot that was used as part of this that he didn't like, but it was Bob Kennedy: Having answered a lot of questions, one kid got up and asked him whether he agreed or disagreed with the conclusions of the Warren Commission report. He just paused for a moment, he dropped his head, and he looked up and he said, "I'm not going to discuss that question." You know. Rousing applause when he said it.

When he finished that session, he came by me—he was to be escorted upstairs where he had his coat and so forth; oh, and we had scheduled a staff meeting for upstairs by the way—came by me and said, "I want to talk to you." I came upstairs, matter of fact I came up with Dick Neustadt [Richard E. Neustadt] who was at Columbia University at the time. I don't know whether Dick went into the room with me or Dick stood outside and heard; I think he went into the room with me. As I came in the room, Bob was there alone and he said, "Come here." Then I think he said, "Come on in, Dick." And he said, "What the hell do you think you're doing? What was this all about now? How did you let me go for two hours? I'm absolutely exhausted," and so on and so forth." You said you were going to schedule me for a little television thing at Columbia and you leave me there for two hours. You didn't cut it off," and so forth.

We said "No, the whole point was to let it go so we could clip what we could from it." "Well, now, do you have any idea what it's like? Do you have any idea how exhausting this is? Do you know? Do you know I'm about to walk out of here and if a reporter asks me something I'll snap his head off and blow the whole campaign? And do you know how

enervating this is?" We said, "This was what we had decided to do." "Well, it didn't work," he said, "did it? You blew it. That was a lousy session. They were lousy questions. They were lousy answers."

He had absolutely no sense of appreciation of what he had done. It was really the most fantastic and moving performance you can imagine. Out of that hour and fifty minutes we got a half-hour television show, a fifteen-minute television show, five-minute segments, three-minute spots, one-minute spots, twenty-second spots, ten-second spots: we got the whole campaign.

GREENE: Did he appreciate it more later on?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes, when he started to see it on television. Up until then he had rejected all the spots. Every time he went to view the spots he accused the cameramen of sabotaging him; he accused the director of not knowing what he was doing; he accused the agency of being stupid.

GREENE: This was Papert [Frederic S. Papert]?

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FELDMAN: Yeah. Well, it was mostly Costigan. Tom Costigan was the television adviser whom he had hired. It was a superb performance. He had no sense of it. He was exhausted. He was as irascible as I'd seen him. I don't remember whether this was before.... Oh, this was after the Dutchess County incident when he bawled the hell out of John Nolan and me because we'd scheduled him into a terrible day. He was just impossible to work with during this whole period. It was the first time he'd been operating for himself under circumstances in which he realized that he was not performing initially, and he started striving in a way that he just lost objectivity about himself. He didn't realize even when he was doing well.

The Dutchess County incident was a funny one, only sad now because both participants are dead. We had scheduled a dinner in Dutchess County. It was a price I had paid in connection with getting the Dutchess County support at the convention. I had made the commitment to Al Hecht [Albert L. Hecht] that he would have him for a fundraising dinner in Dutchess County during the campaign, Dutchess having been wavering between Stratton and Kennedy. As it turned out, it was a tough day because Bob had been, I think, in the Columbus Day or the Steuben [Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben] Day parade or the San Gennaro Festival or one of those earlier in the day, and then he'd flown up to a dinner in Orange County.

Because it'd been a sellout they didn't hold it in Newburgh where they usually did but we had to drive an hour to someplace else in the other end of the county. Then we flew in the Caroline from there to Dutchess. It turned out that there was no single place at Dutchess large enough to accommodate the crowd that wanted to buy tickets for that dinner. The county chairman wasn't about to turn them away so he did something that we hadn't realized he had done. He had hired two places and he ran two dinners and they were about twenty minutes apart.

Bob shows up at the first dinner, exhausted. Hecht was very anxious to elect his congressional candidate Joe Resnick [Joseph Yale Resnick] who was running for the first time. We had had it arranged, we thought, that Resnick was to have spoken before Kennedy arrived so that Bob could be introduced and could leave. The chairman of the dinner was Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., because it was Dutchess County and so forth. We arrived and Bob sat on the dais. The advance man had fouled it up and Franklin Roosevelt proceeded to introduce Joe Resnick with a forty-minute speech. Joe proceeded to introduce Bob Kennedy with a half-hour speech which was about the most tasteless speech I've ever heard. It contained three sacrilegious stories, mostly anti-Catholic. This was the very first time Bob had encountered Joe Resnick and this was the beginning of that relationship, absolutely the beginning.

When he got off the dais that night and we told him that he had to go across town to the other end of town to the second dinner, he said, "Do I have to listen to that stupid candidate for Congress again?" We

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tried to calm Joe down and I talked to Franklin about how he couldn't possibly take more than four seconds or we couldn't get Bob to go. Anyway, he went; and they did it again.

We got on the Caroline that night in the Poughkeepsie airport, and it took off and the seatbelt sign went off, and he came out and said to Nolan and me—we were both with him—he said, "I want to see you." We came into the front of the cabin and it was again one of these "What the hell do you guys think you're doing?" speeches—just unbelievable. It was the start, as I say, in any case. Then he turns to me and said "And where did you get that idiot for congressman, the candidate for congressman?" I said, "What do you mean, where did I get that idiot? I never laid eyes on him before tonight either." He said, "You New Yorkers'."

All during this I was the "New Yorker," and anything that went wrong in New York it was all my fault because I had asked him to come in and I was "New Yorker," and I was his friend, and I'd double-crossed him, and I should have known better. I'm telling you we had a time during that campaign that was unbelievable!

As a matter of fact it was very funny—a funny exchange of letters with him—after he climbed Mount Kennedy and I read the story in Life. I dropped him a note in which I said—I still have the exchange of correspondence; it's a little odd under all the circumstances—"Dear Bob, I read the story of your climb of Mount Kennedy and," roughly this, "and I'd like to know what happened to the fellow who advanced it. When I think of what happened to Nolan and me when all we did was schedule two dinners in Dutchess County on the same night. ..." Then I went on, "Please be careful. You have at least an implied contract to stay alive for the next six years," which.... The response I had from him was, "Dear Justin, didn't you and Nolan schedule Mount Kennedy? How else did I get up 13,000 feet with a frayed rope and no parachute?"

GREENE: Was he as tough on other people in the campaign as he was on you two?
Was there a general feeling that he was irascible?

FELDMAN: Oh, yeah. I don't know that he was with Steve, although I suspect he was; there was some evidence of it I saw, the times I would see them. He did one of two things during that campaign. As a matter of fact, we almost considered it an honor to have him explode at you. I mean, this was a sign of real friendship and of a relationship when he exploded as he did with Nolan or with me or with Steve. With most people, he just withdrew, just silent, withdrawn, wouldn't talk to them. I rode with him in a motorcade in Brooklyn one day where he had all the candidates from Congress and so forth in the car and he just was glum, sullen. County leaders and everyone were complaining about that. Of course, he had the sense, unless people were really good friends, to shut-up. But, you know, he was impossible.

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GREENE: Was this mostly the way the campaign was going and his feelings about himself, or was it a hangover from the president's death?

FELDMAN: I couldn't attempt to really separate out the answers on that. I think it was all of that. I think it was a catharsis. I think it was a recognition that he couldn't indulge himself in his grief any longer, that his own neck was on the line and he was going to lose, or could lose. I think he was sorry he'd gotten involved. I think that he was sorry that he couldn't indulge himself and wallow in his own grief. I said this to him at one point during the campaign.

We had a terrible time during the campaign. I think we were better friends after the campaign as a result, in many ways, but he was a dreadful candidate those first few weeks, until after the Columbia thing. Then he started to see it. Then he started to see it. Then his sense of humor started to return. Then, for instance, you know, he would start to make cracks to me about, "Okay, so I got us into trouble by saying we're in trouble with the Jews. Now, what are you going to do about it?" I'd say, "Well, I scheduled you to talk to fourteen rabbis this afternoon." And he'd come out of there, out of the meeting and he'd call me and say, "Are you sure those guys were rabbis?" Or he'd say, "I didn't see a single beard in the crowd." It started to ease up. As he started to understand that he did better, it started to move, but he was uptight.

On election night it was fierce. I'd set up a little operation of sampling the state. I had actually fourteen election districts, key districts in the state I had used previously as a sample for determining quickly what I thought was going to happen. So, on election night, I had this operation going with fourteen people who were phoning in their results and I'd promised that if the polls closed at 9:00, I would have a prediction by 9:30. He was having dinner at Steve's, so he called at 9:15—we had a direct line between Steve's apartment and me—and said, "What does it look like?" I said, "I said I'd predict at 9:30 and I'll call you at 9:30." So at 9:25 he was there standing over my shoulder and said, "What does it look like?" I said—I'll never forget some of these conversations—I said, "I don't have all fourteen results yet. There are some delays on some of them. One of the machines jammed or something and closed late and there are people in line in Buffalo and so forth."

He said, "Well, what does it look like now? You said that you'd have a result at 9:30." I said, "Bob, I only have ten of the fourteen. It could be.... Anyway," I said, "It looks like

you've won. On this basis, I think you'll win by about a million two, if the total vote is as projected," and so forth. So he said, "You're sure?" I said, "No, I'm not sure." So five minutes later I had some more results. He said, "What does it look like now?" I said, "I was wrong on a million two, but it looks like about eight hundred or eight hundred and fifty thousand." Actually I was very close. He said, "Eight hundred thousand! For crying out loud! What did I do wrong now, Feldman? All during the campaign you were telling me I was doing something wrong. All I did now was stand here for

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five minutes and I've lost four hundred thousand votes!" [Laughter]. But, you know, at that point it was clear that he won and....

GREENE: After you got over that one hump was there ever any point where you felt that he was still on edge, might not win?

FELDMAN: No, I didn't think so. It then started moving and the trend was going the other way. The Columbia thing was significant, not only in terms of the nature and quality of the television that it give us, but what it did for him, in my judgment. It brought him to a realization that he could talk substantively, he could talk about the Kennedy period, he could talk about everything except the Warren Commission and the assassination, and do it in real terms. He could dream a little for the people; he wasn't just Jack Kennedy's brother.

GREENE: Did you work on him or anybody else getting him to refer to his brother less, or was that something he came to on his own?

FELDMAN: I think he came to that on his own. He started the campaign doing nothing but referring to President Kennedy and how, "I was in with President Kennedy on the Cuban missile crisis and I was in with President Kennedy on this," and so on and so forth. Then he came to that on his own, as far as I could see.

GREENE: Do you think that those statements, those speeches were things that were given to him or was this his own determination to take that line?

FELDMAN: In the first instance?

GREENE: Yes.

FELDMAN: I don't know how much thinking he did. My own feeling was that he did very little thinking at that stage of the game, that you know, he did a lot of feeling and that he was wallowing in his grief, still. I can't say he wasn't thinking; I mean that wouldn't be true; but it was just very hard to reach him, very hard to reach him. The incredible part of it was that he knew how badly he was doing in the beginning. He didn't lose that objectivity, and he knew when he was doing better after the

Columbia television thing. He started the attacks on Keating; he had him. Crowds weren't any bigger, crowds weren't any more enthusiastic; but he did incredible things, sensitive things then, that he couldn't have done earlier.

There was a district leader out in Brooklyn named Maxine Duberstein Cohen [Maxine K. Duberstein] who's now a judge of the family court and who was very close to Stein [Stanley Steingut?] and was, in addition to being a district leader, sort of placed in charge, along with another leader out there, Swetnick [George Swetnick], of the Brooklyn organization campaign in the '64 election. Maxine had been terrible about the Kennedy candidacy. She was an old friend of mine, but she kept calling

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and saying that the campaign was badly run and that "Every time he comes out to Brooklyn he insults somebody and every time some of his kids come out to Brooklyn—your damn Irish advance men—they insult somebody. You bring in these fellows from Massachusetts and they don't know anything about New York and they are always insulting somebody." She was just awful, but you know, she was for Kennedy. She wanted to see him win, but she was just beating our head in every day of the week about how everything was all fouled up and how he really wasn't worth the effort, but she was going through with it because that was her commitment, and that he was rude to her, and he was rude to this person, and he was rude to everyone.

About two weeks before the end of the campaign, we had a Brooklyn tour and a rally in Borough Hall. She called me after that and she was in tears. It's such a Bob Kennedy story that I almost go into tears every time I recall it. She said, "I saw today the guy you told me you had known before this campaign started, and it's unbelievable." I said, "What happened?" she said, "You know Kathy [Cathrine Troy]?" Kathy was her then twelve-year-old daughter, ten-year-old daughter. I said, "Yes." She said, "You know, we've had a terrible problem with Kathy and her freckles. Kathy has refused to go out and Kathy's refused to see people, and Kathy's refused to.... You know, she thinks she's ugly because of her freckles. Danny and I have had her in psycho—you know in therapy, as a matter of fact, because it's become a terrible problem. Today Kathy is prancing around this house like no one you've ever seen." And I said, "What happened, Maxine?" She said, "The nurse," or the what-have-you," brought Kathy to the rally."

I was going to be on the platform as I was with the Senator. It was the Borough Hall rally. There was a tremendous turnout. It was kind of a noontime thing. The nurse brought Kathy. They were behind the police barricades, way over on the other side. After his speech, he walked down shaking hands with people over the barricades on his way to his car. He stopped when he saw Kathy. He had no idea who she was, had no reason to know who she was, and reached out to her and took her face in his hands and he said, "You're beautiful. I hope you don't ever lose those freckles. I have a daughter with freckles. I used to have freckles. My sisters used to have freckles, and I think that girls with freckles are absolutely beautiful. I think you're beautiful," and he walked on.

Now, he was no more capable of doing that in the beginning of that campaign than he could fly. This was about a week or ten days before the end, maybe even less.

GREENE: Well, you've done most of my work, but I have a couple of things we should go over.

FELDMAN: Okay.

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GREENE: In the period when he had not yet made up his mind, were you doing much politicking on his behalf, anyway?

FELDMAN: Some. I was talking to, you know, leaders and county leaders and district leaders and potential delegates to the state convention—just more or less sounding it out because I wanted him to come in, of course. But I had a sense of responsibility about it, it wasn't just that I was politicking in terms of lining up support. I genuinely did want to know what kind of reaction there would be, and what sort of schism it would cause, and how that would reflect and so forth.

GREENE: Where was some of the resistance that you found?

FELDMAN: The resistance, essentially, was among the same kinds of people who were for McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy], who were against Jack Kennedy and were for Stevenson in 1960. Resistance was among the so-called upper-middle class, self-styled liberal, self-styled intellectual, mostly Jewish middle-class leadership in the city. The kind of people who, you know.... The New York Times kept it up. Some of them formed Democrats for Keating; it was the Freddy Richmond [Frederick W. Richmond] and the, tragically now, Lisa Howard and her operation. It was just people who felt that they were anti-Kennedy; they were essentially anti-Catholic, if you must know. I don't think they really thought so, I really don't, but, well, if you didn't grow up on the streets in New York.... I used to try to explain this to him from time to time. There was a certain confrontation in my generation in the streets of New York between the Irish kids and the Jewish kids. This was still latently there.

GREENE: Who was working on Wagner?

FELDMAN: I don't know. I guess Steve mostly, Steve Smith. Wagner did a very useful television commercial for us in the middle of the campaign—his speech that was useful. He came around toward the end. He reverted to type a number of times but he was helpful. I don't know whether he thought that Bob was going to lose and that he didn't want to take the blame or—I would make that kind of remark but Bob would probably be a little more generous than I am.

GREENE: I read an article in the Times about you, about the scheduling you and Nolan were doing in the campaign. Do you remember that article?

FELDMAN: Yes, the one that Dick Apple [R. W. Apple, Jr.] did.

GREENE: Yes, explaining how you had set things up and how you had developed the plan you did. Was that fairly accurate as far as taking the JFK vote of '60 and computing on that basis of that?

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FELDMAN: And budgeting the time by county and by area?

GREENE: Yes.

FELDMAN: Yes.

GREENE: Was that the normal way of doing it in New York? Working on...

FELDMAN: Well, no, we had.... No, as a matter of fact, I can't say that, it had been, to be specific. That was about the way I had budgeted the time in a couple of other campaigns. I don't know where I first determined on this kind of budget.

GREENE: Was this completely your own decision?

FELDMAN: No, no, I'm coming to this. In the past, in this process of talking about scheduling and scheduling philosophy with Nolan and O'Donnell, they had two roles. John Nolan had really two roles with respect to the scheduling. One was, he was second-guessing me which was perfectly, you know, legitimate in the sense that—well, in the way that John Kennedy, I guess, in a number of areas was always second-guessing or getting another opinion, another judgment. That was useful because John was terribly able. So, one, he was second-guessing me; and in the other, he was the guy that was going to say no where we had to say no, and it was tough to say no because he wasn't going to be in the state the day after election day. So he was there (a) to make certain that I wasn't saying yes because I owed somebody something from a long time ago—in that sense he was second-guessing me—and that I wasn't saying yes because I was going to have trouble living with these people later on. This was very useful. The fact that we were going to be together in that role was I think, Bob Kennedy's initially. I mean, the decision, I don't think it was Steve's or anybody else's. I think it was Bob who thought that we would work well together.

GREENE: With this kind of thing in mind, that it would be a good balance?

FELDMAN: Yeah, that I knew New York and John knew him. John had scheduled him in Poland and John had scheduled him in other parts of the world, particularly that famous Warsaw thing. And I think that essentially this was the notion, that it would be a good balance. I knew New York and John didn't, I knew the politicians, John didn't; I knew whom you could rely on, and John didn't. John would

soon know, you know, but the chart of budgeting it on a statistic basis evolved in the need for me to prove to John and Kenny that my budget of the time—my proposed budget of the time—was correct. I had done it empirically and they were questioning it, and in the course of the questioning I said, "I'll bet if you were to look at where the Democratic votes come from, you'd see that this is approximately right." They said, "All right. Let's try it. Let's take Jack Kennedy's 1960 results in New York." That's how it evolved. We made some adjustments on that basis but they were minor.

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GREENE: I have twenty-three days in the city and twenty-two upstate. Is it....?

FELDMAN: That's approximately it.

GREENE: Yes. Now I thought perhaps that he was scheduled very heavily in New York City because of the problems he expected to have among the liberals.

FELDMAN: No. You have a vote, a total vote, that would be cast of approximately 7 million, of which roughly 50 percent or better would be in New York and the rest of it in the rest of the state. The majority, if there was to be one, would come essentially out of New York. You could cover more territory in a day in New York than you could upstate. I mean, there were all balances. You might like.... As a matter of fact, I have, I think, the schedules, the actual schedules...

GREENE: Oh, that would be a big help. It really would.

FELDMAN: ...and the report that John and I prepared for him thereafter. You might like to have those.

GREENE: Oh, yes, I'd like that very much. We can Xerox them and send them back to you.

FELDMAN: I was just looking at them the other day and wondering did I really want to keep them. I hope I haven't thrown them out; I'm sure I haven't.

GREENE: No, that would be very useful. I can drop you a note and remind you of that. Would that help?

FELDMAN: I can give them to you if you want.

GREENE: Oh, you have them here? Very good. Okay. What about the policy of screening invitations? Were you and John doing that also?

FELDMAN: Yeah. John and I did all of that. We would screen them. We would set aside the possible ones and reject the impossible ones. We never gave any answers until the last minute. A lot of them we contrived our own invitations because, you know, we decided that he ought to make a speech on Israel and that he probably should do it outside New York City and he probably should do it at a temple. So, we called Abe Feinberg [Abraham Feinberg] and said, "Do you know a friendly rabbi in Westchester?" We tried, as much as possible, not to respond to the pressure of the requests, but to maintain control of our own philosophy of the schedule, flexibility and so forth. That's where John was essentially, you know, particularly useful because I was often in a position of being able to say to a county leader, "Look, Joe, I just can't do it. You know, you're going to have to talk to John Nolan." That meant, "No."

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GREENE: What about the other people working on the campaign? How well did they work together? A lot of them, I know the advance people, were largely new.

FELDMAN: The advance people that we put together in that campaign I'm really very proud of. They were not only largely new, but they were almost totally new. John and I trained them, developed them. They were the fellows who we recruited, except for one who really Ted recruited. And, except for one or two who dropped out because they didn't work out, they stayed right through California.

GREENE: What do you mean when you say you trained them? What was involved in that?

FELDMAN: Well, telling them what an advance man does, the kind of things we wanted to know and the kinds of reports we wanted before we let them go on a schedule. You know, the checklists we developed in terms of, "Have you talked to the local police? Have you actually run the schedule yourself with a stopwatch? Did you talk to the bellhop? Do you know how we get out of the hotel if there's a crowd in front?" You know, that sort of thing.

GREENE: This would be Tolan [James E. Tolan], Peter Smith...

FELDMAN: The two Hannans, Tim [Tim Hannan] and Tom [Tom Hannan], Tim being the one we got from Ted Kennedy. Phil Ryan, Jim Tolan, Peter Smith, Neil [Neil Mahon]... It'll come to me, Carmine Parisi, Vic Temkin for a while, and then he dropped out after the Grossinger bit.

GREENE: He had a problem there?

FELDMAN: Terrible problem. I have a list of everybody we used as part of that report we had.

GREENE: What about the coordinators? I know Sheridan [Walter J. Sheridan] was pulled from something foreign—pulled into something foreign, rather.

FELDMAN: Well, we had Sheridan up in Syracuse, but that wasn't so foreign for Walter.

GREENE: Well, but he said he'd never done coordinating.

FELDMAN: He'd never done coordinating, but he knew the territory.

GREENE: Yes, right. That's what I mean, more the job than experience.

FELDMAN: I'm trying to remember who the six coordinators were. There six of them.

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GREENE: Well, we can get that. How well did they work out?

FELDMAN: They worked very well. We had problems with New York City with coordinators. That was a terrible problem.

GREENE: Who was involved?

FELDMAN: Well, the county leaders were constantly sabotaging, didn't want coordinators, wouldn't work with the coordinators. We had some problems in Westchester over that. They were saying, "Well now, you know Jack English doesn't have a coordinator over in Nassau. Is that because you trust English and you don't trust us?"

GREENE: Was it that?

FELDMAN: Yes, in some measure. Factionalism in Queens, for instance, was driving us absolutely crazy. We couldn't get Jack Weinstein [Jack B. Weinstein?] to move, and some of the other factions there didn't want to move until we finally brought Matt Ryan [Matthew J. Ryan, Jr.] in from Springfield, Massachusetts. He had things straightened out pretty well thereafter. So we had to bring in coordinators. The philosophy generally was to bring in people who have no ties in the area and let them run. They're going to leave the day after election day and so if they ruffle some feathers we'll worry about it later. The only one we couldn't have showing was Paul Corbin.

GREENE: As usual.

FELDMAN: He was functioning in a hotel room somewhere during that entire period, calling us with code names and surreptitiously meeting with us and telling us that he'd heard this and that, occasionally our using him to check out this and that.

GREENE: Was he good at that kind of thing? Or was it make-work?

FELDMAN: No, he was good. He was good.

GREENE: How about the research operation?

FELDMAN: The research operation was a very good operation. I guess it was put together initially by Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] and Polly Feingold [Pauline Feingold]. Polly was very good, but they very quickly brought into it a couple of fellows named Adam Walinsky and Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] who were really running the research and speechwriting at the same time. They quickly took it over and, of course, they were sensational. Neither of them had had a relationship with Bob. I remember going up to the Carlyle for one of the meetings on why we ought to go after Keating, with Adam coming along. I don't think, as of that point, that Adam had met the Senator. I'm not sure whether he had, but certainly

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he was not the Adam Walinsky who we saw later. No, the speechwriting and research turned out to be a very good operation because of Walinsky and Edelman.

GREENE: What about Haddad [William F. Haddad]?

FELDMAN: Bill was running his own crazy Haddad-type show with a separate place and a separate operation. That turned out to be a useful operation because it gave us a lot of material that was useful in attacking Keating and persuading Bob that he had to go after Keating. Not all of it accurate, some of it a little distorted....

GREENE: The one on the nuclear test ban treaty was the one they got in trouble on, as I remember. Was that Haddad's?

FELDMAN: Right, right. That was Haddad's. A couple of things like that. Have you seen the so-called Haddad book that he and Bob Clampitt [Robert Clampitt] put together? I think I have that too.

GREENE: Oh, well, I'd like a copy just in case we don't have it. He's been interviewed, but I'm not sure if we have it. How was vanden Heuvel in this?

FELDMAN: In '64? He was amazingly subdued and amazingly unobtrusive in '64. He didn't seem very comfortable in the relationship. In the sense that he supervised a number of people on the substantive research, I think he did a better job in '64 than I've seen him do in subsequent situations. Why do you ask that question? Why do you ask it that way?

GREENE: Did I ask it a certain way?

FELDMAN: Yeah, as though you expected a certain answer.

GREENE: Did I ask it a certain way?

FELDMAN: Yeah, as though you expected a certain answer.

GREENE: No, not really. I mean, he's someone that I guess is somewhat controversial. You hear different things. I hadn't heard much about him in '64 at all.

FELDMAN: He was there. We had the two headquarters so to speak—the one at the Chatham and the one on 42nd Street. We had the research and speechwriting and press and scheduling at Chatham—our press relations, public relations—and so that was sort of the guts of it, of the staff work. Then Steve had literature distribution plus all the political stuff, the out-front stuff, over at 42nd Street.

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GREENE: Was there a specific meeting at which there was kind of a switch in strategy where you decided to get more aggressive, or was this something that just evolved?

FELDMAN: No, there was a specific meeting at the Carlyle. It was an interesting meeting. It was a meeting which Bob.... It's not a meeting in which we adopted the strategy of Bob getting more aggressive; we tried to persuade him it had to be done. We tried to persuade him that he had to do it. As a matter of fact, I was recalling this to John Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] during this last campaign, because I said that Lindsay had an initial reaction and he stayed with it most of the campaign. I told him that Bob Kennedy had an initial reaction when we said to him, "You have to go after Keating," or "What's wrong with Keating?" The second reaction was, "Well, okay, if there is something wrong with him, let other people attack him, but certainly not me. I'm going to stay on the high road." Then he realized he had to do it.

This specific meeting was one at the Carlyle in which he was urged to do it. He finally accepted the notion that maybe Keating wasn't a liberal, but then thought that maybe it was the Liberal party which should do it and maybe some of our ads should do it, but that the ads should be signed by the Liberal party and not by the Kennedy campaign. That was fought out, but once he'd agreed that we could now start going after Keating, the mechanics

of how we did it then got lost. I think the first ad was a Liberal party ad and then he started doing it and we started running the ads. Then it became effective and he started to sense that, you know.

GREENE: Was there anyone at that meeting who didn't think that this was the right way to handle it, that he ought to continue the way to handle it, that he ought to continue the way he had been?

FELDMAN: Oh, I think Lem Billings [K. LeMoyne Billings], when he heard Bob say, "Oh, no, the one thing I can't do is let them think I'm ruthless," agreed. Although, as I think about it, it may well have been Lem who had the notion of the marathon at Columbia from which we could clip TV—which came about—right at the same time that there was the same meeting, or a day or so later. I'm not certain any longer, but it was about that time.

GREENE: How were the personal friends, Bill Walton [William Walton], and Billings and people like that who were always anxious to help but didn't have that much political experience? Did they get in the way? Was it useful?

FELDMAN: Bill wasn't around much in '64. There were a lot of personal friends who were around, Natalie Cushing, Piedi Gimble, the girls, and Lem Billings, but not too many of them really; and they were helpful. They weren't getting in the way. They weren't getting in our way; they may have been getting in Steve's way. No, Piedi Gimble,

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as a matter of fact, did a useful job of organizing some of the people in the arts and theater. No, I don't think they got in the way.

GREENE: What about Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] visit to New York and coordinating with his people? Did you have to do that?

FELDMAN: Yes, we had some incidents on that. As a matter of fact, it was on the occasion of the Johnson visit to New York that the Borough Hall rally I was talking about earlier took place. So we can set that date.

GREENE: October 15th.

FELDMAN: Was that the only visit?

GREENE: To my knowledge.

FELDMAN: Well, was there a Humphrey visit later?

GREENE: Humphrey, I think, came in more than once. It might have been. You think it was later than that?

FELDMAN: Well, it could have been October 15th. Yeah, I'm blacking out a little on the Johnson visit. John Nolan was more involved in that than I was. We had some problems on the Johnson visit, and I'm trying to remember what the hell they were now, but they were problems that had us very upset and very uptight, with the Johnson people cancelling plans and rearranging plans. It's funny, I'm blacked out on that.

GREENE: Well, if you can come up with it, we'll put it on another tape; it's no problem. What about Robert Kennedy's feeling about having to merge his campaign with Johnson's, which he didn't do too much of in the beginning?

FELDMAN: We didn't do that at all. We didn't do it at all!

GREENE: But later on there was more of it, wasn't there?

FELDMAN: Was there? In the beginning there was lots of chatter about it, communications with Dick Ravitch [Richard Ravitch] and discussions and negotiations. It was merged in a sense that we sent some people over to work at the State [Democratic] Committee headquarters. But, I'd forgotten all about that, all the Ed Weisl [Edwin L. Weisl, Sr.] stuff and Peter Straus' [Peter R. Straus] role and title and relationship, all of that. We really didn't coordinate very much. They weren't too happy about it. We had our own fellow over there. Bill Barry?

GREENE: Bill Barry? He was with Senator...

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FELDMAN: No, not Bill Barry, but a lawyer from Philadelphia who ran the speakers' bureau over at the Johnson-Humphrey campaign headquarters over at the.... Let's see; they were at the Hotel Pennsylvania, but it's the Statler....

GREENE: Yes, I'm not sure of his name. We'll have to try and check it.

FELDMAN: Yeah, but anyway, we had some of our Kennedy people over there helping. There was not an awful lot of coordination. We minimized hostility, and that was only because Billy McKeon was around and he was a Kennedy person.

GREENE: Was that a personal decision do you think by the senator?

FELDMAN: I don't know. It was pretty clear from the beginning that it just wasn't going to work with Eddie Weisl, Jr. [Edwin L. Weisl, Jr.], and Jerry Kay [Jerome Kay] and Marvin Rosenberg and the various Johnson-Humphrey people who were not that interested in the Kennedy campaign. [Interruption] ...let them feel excluded because some of them were good people, friends of ours. Bob Low [Robert A. Low], drifting back and forth, Stanley Lowell [Stanley H. Lowell] drifting back and forth, and others; there wasn't a great deal of coordination. Peter Straus thought he was the link a good part of the time, but he really didn't know what was going on. That was really his function and we just kept blaming Peter if there was no coordination.

GREENE: What about Debs Myers?

FELDMAN: Debs was very good very useful. He was the bow in the Wagner direction, but he had good judgment, not always adhered to, not always listened to, and not always good. But no, Debs did a conscientious job, had good relationship with the press and kept those relationships.

GREENE: Anyone else from Wagner's group that was helping out?

FELDMAN: Bernie Ruggieri [Bernard J. Ruggieri] who traveled with the party all the time and became a good friend of the Kennedy operation, but always retaining his relationship with Wagner. Everybody recognizing why he was there, and the fact that this was a bow to Wagner and also a means of reassuring the upstate, you know, the leaders and so forth that.... And Bernie did know a lot of local politicians whose names he remembered. But Ruggieri, Lowell, Myers, Low, Deegan [Thomas J. Deegan] not really at that stage....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Justin N. Feldman Oral History Transcript – RFK #2
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