

Justin N. Feldman Oral History Interview – RFK#3, 02/04/1970
Administrative Information

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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 RFK's 1968 presidential campaign, those involved, and various other races going on in New York State leading up to the California Democratic Primary, among other issues.

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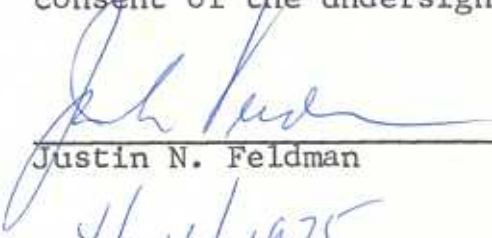
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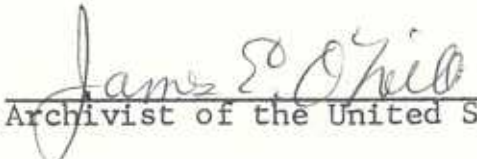
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Justin N. Feldman

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Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
51, 54	Discussing the possibility of Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] running for president in 1968
53	Discussing the seizure of the <u>Pueblo</u> with RFK and how President Lyndon B. Johnson would react to it
56	RFK's concerns about jeopardizing Senate seats by running against an incumbent president
56	Announcing the candidacy
57	Setting up campaign schedules in New York
57	Personal meetings with RFK during the campaign
58	Support of RFK's candidacy by friends and other New York politicians
59, 62	Public opinion of RFK as a candidate versus Eugene J. McCarthy
60	Working with Ronnie M. Eldridge on campaign
61	RFK campaign's view of women being heavily involved
61, 71	Supporting Samuel J. Silverman as a judge to the New York Supreme Court
62	Delegates who discussed switching allegiance from McCarthy to RFK following the California primary
64	Discussing getting a Congressional nomination for Allard K. Lowenstein
65	Relationship with various people working on the campaign
66	Contact with professional politicians in New York
66	New York legislative candidates in 1965 and RFK's involvement
68	RFK's participation in the 1965 mayoral race in New York City
74	Support and opposition to Silverman's run for Supreme Court judge
75	RFK's opinions of the 1966 governor race in New York
76, 81	Personal connections to 1966 governor race
77	Public opinion of RFK's participation in governor race
77, 79	Issues between RFK and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.
77	Relationship between John F. Kennedy and Roosevelt
81	RFK's opinions of Frank D. O'Connor
82	New York support of RFK versus Hubert H. Humphrey
83	Personal contact with RFK

Third Oral History Interview

With

Justin N. Feldman

February 4, 1970
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: Let's begin with you telling about your discussions with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] in '67 and '68 regarding the possibility of running for the nomination in '68.

FELDMAN: At various times in '67, and only one occasion stands out, I would mention the possibility of his running in '68. When I say "various times," I don't want to give the impression that I saw him every day. There were two or three occasions, I would say, toward the end of the year when the "Dump Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]" thing was beginning to take hold and before the McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] candidacy. I would say fall, late fall, and the end of '67.

He was very, very short. He just wouldn't discuss it with me really. I would make some reference that we had to do something in '68 and I'd get an answer like, "Who's we?" [Laughter] "Some alternative has to be developed. We have to take a look at the primary schedule and have to talk about what the schedule is for the primaries." And he said, "So, go look at it." It'd be that kind of curt Bob Kennedy response that always terminated discussion very easily.

I remember only one point when I thought... I really don't recall exactly when this was, but I think it was the end of '67 when I was in Washington. I stopped by his office and I had some sense that maybe he was looking at it again. It can be timed, dated easily, because

it was shortly after an appearance of his at Brooklyn College at which he had been picketed and booed. There had been a picket sign that said,

[-51-]

“Robert F. Kennedy: Hawk, Dove, or Chicken?” [Laughter] As I say, I date it that way because when I came out of his office after talking with him, I started talking with Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] and Jeff Greenfield about the fact that... Well, Peter inquired did I raise “the question.” As I say, I’m not sure whether this is December ’67 or January ’68. It had to be somewhere in that area.

GREENE: I think it was—if it’s the same speech and I’m fairly certain it is—a very disturbing thing to him, and I think it was already after....

FELDMAN: After McCarthy was in it?

GREENE: Oh, yes, and probably after the new year. I could be wrong, but anyway we can verify that easily enough.

FELDMAN: Okay, yea. It was before another conversation I had with him which was in much greater depth on the same subject, which I know occurred on the day that the Pueblo was seized. That I believe was early February so it has to be somewhere in that area.

Anyway, I know it was right after Brooklyn College because I came out and talked to Peter and Jeff and I said I sensed a little less ambivalence. Or, I shouldn’t say that; no, I sensed a willingness to look at it or talk about it. I wasn’t cut off in quite the same way that I had been before. There were questions asked and responses such as, “How do you think it’s possible?” or “Isn’t it totally ridiculous to think in these terms?” That was very different from, “You go look at it.” Peter and Jeff told me that yes, they thought he was shaken up at Brooklyn College. I laughingly accused Jeff of having prepared that picket sign; it was his style. He said no, but he sure would like to find the kid that did it. Peter told me that he had had a long conversation with Bob the week before in a hotel room in California.

GREENE: Oh, so that’s after the trip to California in support of Chavez [Cesar Chavez] and the meeting with Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh]? So I think it definitely is January.

FELDMAN: Okay. Well, that fits because of the next thing I’ll tell you. They encouraged me to keep talking to him. They said, “Everybody just has to keep talking to him.” We sort of had the feeling that maybe there was a chink somewhere.

After that, Ronnie Eldridge [Ronnie M. Eldridge] and Jack Newfield spent a day with him in Westchester County. Ronnie called me and told me that in the car this was the constant topic, and they kept harping on it. They

Were getting questions again. They weren't just getting short shrift and they were getting some questions. They thought that I ought to go talk to him, that specifically he asked them, "Who else?" and they had used my name. And he had seemed surprised by that because, quite honestly, when I had raised the question with him before I had been cut off so that I didn't have a chance to put forward a point of view. It was all done in this questioning way and, as I say, "have you looked at it?" or "Don't you think we should look at it?" "You go look at it." Even at that other session in his office it was, "Well, it looks to me like it's more viable than it was." "Well, why do you think so?" But it was not in terms of, "I think you should do this." He asked apparently, at least the report I had from Ronnie was, "What people are you talking about who think I should do this? Which of my friends in New York? Are they really my friends?" That sort of thing. Apparently, I'd been mentioned either by her or by Jack as one of the people who thought he should run. He seemed surprised by that, so she thought I ought to go see him. I agreed that I would.

I called him—I called somebody and left word that next time he's in New York—called Angie [Angela M. Novello], I guess. Then I had a call from Carter [Carter Burden] saying that Bob was in New York and understood I wanted to see him. Could I meet him at the Senate office? He had an appointment over at the apartment and we would have time on the way over to the apartment together and then at the apartment if we got there in enough time before his next appointment arrived. I went over.

As I say, I can date this easily because I know, when we came out of the Senate office, the New York Senate office on 45th Street, the [New York] Post headline was the Pueblo, about the seizure of the Pueblo. We had a little brief discussion about that. We had started the conversation in the office by his saying, "Okay, what do you want to see me about?" I said, "I want to discuss your future. I think you have to start thinking about your future. You are now reaching the stage and age in life where.."—you know, one of those. [Laughter] Anyway, as we got down the headline was there. He had known; somebody had told him about the seizure of the Pueblo before.

GREENE: Could you get any feeling about how he felt about that?

FELDMAN: Yes, he said, "Now, here's an example. You just don't know what's going to happen. The president's going to have to respond here very firmly, and he's going to have to find some way to get that damn boat back because the people are going to want him to. You can't be talking about Vietnam as an issue and so on and so forth when the Chinese communists, or the North Vietnamese, start seizing our boats. This is an example of how you just

can't figure on the mood, because it can change so rapidly. But he's going to have to respond very firmly. He's going to have to get the damn boat back somehow."

We got in the car and he said, "Why are you so concerned about my future?" I said, "Because it took you a lot of hard work to build your own political base since '64 and it will

take a lot of work on the part of a lot of us; and I think you're blowing it." He said, "What do you mean I'm blowing it?" I said, "You're blowing it. Your natural allies are moving toward McCarthy." He said, "Well, I understand McCarthy's doing very badly in New Hampshire. He's been up there a couple of times"—this was true at the time apparently—"and he can't get crowds. He's just not turning people on and there isn't a big response." I said, "Well, that may be now, but I think it's going to grow. Somehow or other, you have to exert some leadership here to retain your own political base." He said, "How can I do that?" I said, "You know how you can do that." He said, "Well, McCarthy's not going to pull these people." I said, "Look, I know Gene McCarthy, you know Gene McCarthy and it's hard for us to see how he's going to do it, but I think he's a kind of a symbol here and he's going to attract them." "Well," he said, "those people who go to him will come back." I said, "I'm not sure of that. A lot of them are people who would like to believe that you aren't as gutsy as you have been and that you haven't really believed in the things you said. You know who the hell your natural enemies are." He said, "Yeah, I know, the goddamn liberals again." I said, "yes." He said, "I can't worry about that. I do what I do and I do what I think is right; I just can't worry about them." I said, "You have to worry about them. If you end up losing the young people and losing the activists and losing the support of the student groups, you're going to be standing alone." I remember we got out of the car and we sort of got into the lobby of 870 [United Nations Plaza]. In the elevator there was a point at which he said, "All right, okay, so I've got to hold onto my base. How do I?" and so on and so forth. I've got to keep them from going to McCarthy. I've got to exert greater leadership on the issue. I've got to," and so on and so on. "That's all very well. What do I do? What do I do tomorrow? We know what we're talking about. What do I do?" I said, "You become a candidate for president of the United States." "Oh, for Christ's sake," he said, "I don't understand what you mean." I said, "You become a candidate for president of the United States. You know that's exactly what I'm talking about." He said, "That's the reason I asked you to fish or cut bait. I wanted to hear you say it in just those words, if that's what you meant, because as you say it...." He said, "Candidate for president of the United States against whom? The incumbent Democratic president of the United States?" I said "If he's running, yeah." He said, "Well, I forced you to say

[-54-]

it, Justin, only because I know how ridiculous it will sound in your ears as you say it. You know you can't do that with an incumbent president of the United States." I said, "I don't know anything." He said, "I've never lived through times like this before."

As we started to get out of the elevator—there were three of us in the elevator, Carter Burden, he and I—he said, "I don't understand you. I've always thought of you as being sort of a pro. And I will tell you that this makes you only the second person whom I regard as sort of a pro to take this position. Now, the first one is Jess Unruh and I know his angle. What the hell is yours?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He wants control of the California Democratic party and this is his medium. What's yours?" I said, "Electing Bob Kennedy president of the United States and helping us out of this position at this time." "Oh, Jesus Christ," he says, and we walk into the apartment .

At that point I take off my coat, the phone rings, Carter picks it up and comes to him and tells him that somebody or other is on the phone. He said, "I just have to take this. I'll

only be a minute." He goes into the bedroom to take a call and Carter said, "Oh, I don't know how you're going to work your way out of this one." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I know he's a friend and I know he has a lot of respect for you, but, believe me, he expects this kind of talk from some people and understands it, but I think he's really irritated with you." So I said, "I'm sure he is and I'm sorry, but I believe it."

At that point, or shortly thereafter, he came out of the bedroom and said, "Now, look, I can talk to you this way because you'll understand it. I've talked to a lot of people, and apart from people who are personal friends of mine and tell me it's bad for me, I've talked with some of the pros. As I tell you, Jess Unruh is the only one who's urging it, and I don't think he's thinking of me. I've talked to some of my colleagues and I can't find any support for that position. Up and down the line I'm, in effect, told by some of my colleagues in the Senate that if I were to do this and push them to a choice and push them to a corner, that they'd either have to abandon me or they'd lose their seat. I could be responsible here, because of some notion you guys up here have, for the loss of six Senate seats, or for six people losing primaries this year. I can't do that."

I said, "Well, look, I'm willing to listen to that kind of thing, sure. If you tell me that you can't get the support of any colleagues, that your colleagues have told you you'll endanger Democratic control of the Senate—for instance, if you were to tell me that Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] is concerned that we'd lose him as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—these are all considerations and things that you put into the hopper. I understand that, but I also understand

[-55-]

that you have to think of yourself and the country. You can't talk in terms of 1972." He said, "Why not?" I said, "I'll tell you why not"—and I remember this story specifically—"because there's a fellow sitting around tonight in Idaho or Montana or Arizona or New Mexico or Illinois; I don't know exactly where he's sitting. He's talking with some friends of his about whether he should take on the present incumbent Democratic Congressman in his district in a primary on the war issue; and he's going to do it; and he's going to win; and he's going to go to Congress. In 1970 he's going to take on his senator on the same basis and he's going to win. In 1972, this 42, 43 year old United States senator from someplace, who has mobilized the moral energy of the United States, is going to be a hot political prospect and you're going to be Estes Kefauver. [Laughter] You're going to be superannuated because you haven't given the leadership and retained that base."

Carter looked at me as though I had.... Carter was a little less sophisticated then than he became and is now, and he'd just been working for Bob for a short time. He said to me later, "I never heard anybody talk to him like that."

Bob said, "Well, that may be, but that's the chance I'm going to have to take. I just have to.... I just can't do anything as irresponsible as this where I'm going to jeopardize Senate seats, I'm going to jeopardize colleagues, I'm going to go into a New Hampshire race, which I probably would lose, and build Lyndon Johnson's prestige, and get sucked into this. I just don't see...." By that time, his next appointment arrived, was in the other room, and I was dismissed.

I didn't really see him again after that day, except for the day after the Indiana primary. Thereafter, I got involved when Steve [Stephen E. Smith] called me when he was going to do it, and we had some conversations. Then I talked to Bob on the phone after the New Hampshire primary just before his announcement.

GREENE: What did he say at that point?

FELDMAN: He just said that yes, he was going to do it, he realized it was late, it was a very hazardous thing, and he hoped I would help. It was the kind of thing that Steve had told him that I'd been unwilling to take on the coordination of New England because I didn't have the time for a full-time commitment. He understood that, but he hoped that I would give it some time. And we'd be in touch. This was I guess....

GREENE: The primary was the 12th and he announced on the 16th.

[-56-]

FELDMAN: Yes. It was the day or so before. He was in New York I know.

GREENE: Maybe at that meeting at the Smith's which was the day . . .

FELDMAN: He called either from there, or I called him at the apartment—I called him at the apartment, and returned the call. I just said, "It's obvious that you're going to do this now and I just want you to know...." And he said, "Yeah, but Steve tells me you're not prepared to help." In the ensuing couple of days they'd been more up on the timetable.

GREENE: Well, the thirteenth was the night that he sort of gave the whole thing away by talking to Cronkite [Walter Cronkite]. The next night, I don't remember too well. But the 15th it was definite.

FELDMAN: Friday I talked to Steve about New England.

GREENE: Friday was the day before he announced.

FELDMAN: Right. Friday I talked to Steve.

GREENE: He was in New York then, because that's when he went out to Long Island and practically announced the whole thing.

FELDMAN: Right, it was Friday. Anyway, then I did not see him again.... Then my role was to try to help around New York in setting up the New York thing. I would work with English [John F. English] and Burns [John J. Burns]. And I was sort of a liaison between Ronnie Eldrige, who wasn't getting along with English and Burns, and them. It was nothing very significant.

I did not see him or talk with him again until the day after the Indiana primary when he came back to New York for that luncheon with the New York people. As he was going through the luncheon crowd, he stopped at my table and said, "You happier now than you were the last time I saw you?" I said, "That's not the important question." He said, "What's the important question?" I said, "Are you happier now than you were the last time I saw you?" He smiled and he said, "Yes."

Oh, I say I didn't see him in between; I did. I saw him at the skating party at Rockefeller Center and teased him that night about—well, he teased me that night; that was it. I'm not a very good ice skater and I hadn't skated for years. We were going around the rink, and he came up to me and said to my wife on the rink, "Could you imagine,

[-57-]

after what he said to me the other day"—because it was a short time before—"I can see how much help he'd be in New Hampshire." [Laughter]

GREENE: Was his feeling accurate that there was really nobody, other than you, in the state that would be behind him at that point, from what you could tell?

FELDMAN: Oh, no. Oh, no. That there would be nobody behind him?

GREENE: Well, that nobody was really in favor of his running at that point, among the so-called pros.

FELDMAN: I don't know whether anybody was in favor or wasn't in favor because I don't know what anybody told him. My guess would be that had he—that there were a number of.... There was a sufficient number of loyalists who would grudgingly have come to it. There was a deep concern and deep fear. The Charlie Crangles [?] of this world, and others who were Kennedy people in most instances, just don't understand the notion of bucking your own president. I'm sure Burns was nervous about it and English was nervous. All the people who had some stake in federal patronage or pending federal appointments were extremely concerned and nervous. I think, in my own judgment, had he decided to do it some of them wouldn't have come along and some of them would have come in kicking and screaming, but....

GREENE: So what he was really talking about is people actually urging him to do it, rather than those that simply would have supported him had he come out?

FELDMAN: Yeah, I think he was also talking about something else. I think that, as to anybody whom he consulted specifically with regard to that question, which he wouldn't let anybody play around with....

I recall, as a matter of fact, in that elevator, when he said, "Now, what do you suggest I do?"—before I said, "Run for president of the United States," he said, "What do you suggest I do?" and I said, "Well, I know it's a very difficult kind of"—you know, I had sort of a preface, I said, "I know it's a very difficult kind of decision." And he said, "Don't. Look,

don't give me that. Don't tell me it's difficult, and don't tell me on the one hand, but on the other hand. You have a position here. What is it? You tell me what I should do. What is it you want me to do?" I said, "Run!"

GREENE: If he had come out earlier, prior to McCarthy, do you think there was lot of support for him in New York that

[-58-]

he lost in the interim?

FELDMAN: Yes, yes. There were people who perhaps never thought of themselves as his people and never really liked him particularly, who would have been required to go along and who would have gone along and would have come along enthusiastically. Interestingly enough, there are a lot of people, I think, who went for McCarthy who still would have gone for McCarthy if McCarthy came in after Bob. There's a kind of liberal Jewish, you know, Jewish liberal who....

GREENE: The reformers?

FELDMAN: Yeah, some of them. Some of them would have been—well, who empathized with McCarthy's vagueness and fuzziness, and who always found Bob a little too direct.

GREENE: Did you, in the course of the campaign, get involved in working out, trying to work out, coalitions?

FELDMAN: Yes.

GREENE: Yes? Which areas?

FELDMAN: Well, we tried to work them out in several places. We tried to work one out in the 19th Congressional District, which was my own home district, where we did work one out, in effect, although—yeah, I guess we did work one out by my agreeing not to run as a candidate, as a Kennedy delegate rather. We worked one with....

GREENE: There was one in the 27th, I know.

FELDMAN: Well, the 19th was the one that was worked out before lines hardened, so that it wasn't a case of a Kennedy delegation and a McCarthy delegation and then a working out an accommodation. We worked it right from the "go." Subsequently, an old line Tammany Hall-type delegation filed and declared itself to be the Kennedy slate, and we had some problems with that. The only two coalition slates that worked were in the 27th, which is the Rockland County area—I guess that's the only one that

worked. We tried to work them out in Rochester and never quite did it. We tried to work one out in the 25th and weren't able to. We tried to work it in a few places. That's the sort of thing I was trying to do.

GREENE: Who was standing in the way? Like in the 25th, was it Mrs. Kovner [Sarah S. Kovner]? Or was it just the whole group?

[-59-]

FELDMAN: She was standing in the way in some places; in some places the local people were standing in the way. They were people who were becoming candidates and they didn't like the notion of withdrawing. A lot of it was Sarah—and Harold Ickes [Harold M. Ickes].

GREENE: Were you working with Mrs. Eldridge at this point on the McCarthy thing?

FELDMAN: Yeah.

GREENE: Is she good dealing with people like that?

FELDMAN: Yeah, yeah. She's very good. See, she and I... She originally formed this whole coalition thing and had me on the executive committee, because we were going to try to hold it.

GREENE: You mean even before he announced?

FELDMAN: Oh, before McCarthy announced. Before McCarthy announced we were talking about—she was talking about this as a "Draft Kennedy" movement, as a "Dump Johnson" movement. I came into it at a very early stage to help her keep it away from anti-Kennedy people. But as Bob became firmer and firmer in his non-availability and made that statement I guess before McCarthy....

GREENE: The 31st. Well, the one where he said he would not run under any foreseeable circumstances? That was January 30th, or the—yeah I think it was the 30th.

FELDMAN: No, I think there was an earlier one, before McCarthy announced. In December.

GREENE: Well, he announced in November. Yeah, probably yeah. I'm thinking of the latest.

FELDMAN: There was a November statement.

GREENE: Right, right.

FELDMAN: It just became increasingly difficult to do that. When it became a McCarthy thing, we just backed away from it; we had no interest in it any longer, although we retained our relationships to some extent.

GREENE: Did she generally have a fair amount of influence with the Senator, Mrs. Eldridge?

[-60-]

FELDMAN: Oh, no, not really. No, he liked her and he gained increasing respect for her as time went on. But his first reactions to her were, "Why doesn't she stay home and take care of the kids" kind of thing. "She's a busybody, a pain in the neck, but she's useful and she's interesting. She knows a lot of people and she's got a lot of bright ideas. She certainly is loyal and you could"—you know, just coming on in these terms. And she was all of those things. Steve, right through the Silverman [Samuel J. Silverman] campaign, found her to be a pain in the neck, would talk in those terms behind her back. I showed up with her, at one point, in his office at the Pan Am Building to talk about the Silverman thing and he called me inside and said, "What the hell did you bring her along for?" Now Steve has great confidence in her.

GREENE: Do you think that might have been almost a knee-jerk reaction to the fact that she was a woman?

FELDMAN: Oh, I think it's part of it. I think it's part of it.

GREENE: They just didn't think women belonged in politics?

FELDMAN: They had knee-jerk reactions to women. They had knee-jerk reactions—they had a lot of knee-jerk reactions which they never quite overcame any more than the liberal Jews overcame their knee-jerk reactions to them.

GREENE: Right, right.

FELDMAN: You know, there's a great crack; it was very, very funny, sort of, in the Silverman campaign. When Bob came back from South Africa and went out the first night or two on the streets with Silverman and showed up back at the headquarters, there was a big crisis. There were fifteen West Side reformers in talking with Steve. There was Ronnie, and Al Blumenthal [Albert H. Blumenthal] and Jerry Kretchmer [Jerome Kretchmer] and me and so on and so forth. Bob poked his head in about 12:30—and hot and heavy discussion and argument and talk—Bob looked around the room and said, "Steve, what are you up to, spending all your time like this? You know what my old man always said about these people." You know, ha, ha, ha, very funny.

GREENE: There's a lot of truth in it.

FELDMAN: Right.

GREENE: Anyway, I don't know how constant your contacts were, but could you see much movement in the course of the campaign? Particularly after Indiana and Nebraska? Were you able

[-61-]

to get a lot of support?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had no question that after the California primary we would have—the McCarthy slates just wouldn't have done anything like what they did do eventually. Ten days back in the state after California and he would have mopped it up. People were starting to question McCarthy, were starting to talk in terms of “What we really need is a candidate who can win.” People were upset with McCarthy's performance in Oregon after he won in Oregon. People were beginning to understand what happened in Indiana and to see that maybe this is the way you hold the country together. It was resistance, but it was clear to me that it was disappearing and that the right moves, the right appearances, the right discussions with—seeking the advice of—certain people, it would have all folded up.

GREENE: Did you accumulate contacts, people you thought he ought to be in touch with, in the course of the time he was out of the state? Was he helpful in getting back to these people that you thought were important?

FELDMAN: Ronnie did more of that than I did.

GREENE: Did you actually have McCarthy people lined up who were planning to switch after California? You told me the story about Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] off the tape and I think it's certainly worth retelling. Were there others too?

FELDMAN: There were some others who said they would switch after California—nobody of the significance of Lowenstein. The Lowenstein story was very simply, as I think I told you off the tape.... I wasn't directly involved in the negotiations; I was getting the reports from Ronnie who was handling them and going out of her mind just because of the problems of dealing with Allard at 2 o'clock in the morning.

GREENE: She had an early appointment! [Laughter]

FELDMAN: But, it had been understood that.... Well, I had one conversation with him in which he confirmed to me that he had an understanding with Ronnie and the senator that he would switch the morning after the California

primary and start the New York movement going, if the senator won in California. Then, as I told you off the tape I think, that night, the night of the California primary when we were all gathered in a big victory celebration at the headquarters in New York, Steve called Ronnie—I was on the

[-62-]

other phone—and said, “What about it? I think it's important, and we've got to move it. Bob asked me to call and find out what's happening really.” Ronnie said she had just gotten off the phone with Al, which I knew she had, and that Al's notion was that he couldn't do it alone. And there was some indication that Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] was also considering something of the sort, or might under appropriate circumstances. And Al, after all, was just a vice-chairman of ADA [Americans for Democratic Action], and Galbraith was chairman of ADA, if they could arrange a joint press conference between Galbraith and Lowenstein, in which Galbraith would announce his switch, too, then Lowenstein would do it.

Steve was very upset. So was Ronnie. So was I. We talked about it a little bit and it was finally agreed that Steve would have the senator call Al and put him right on the spot, say, “This is something you told me; you never mentioned Galbraith.” As I understand it—other sources now—the senator, before he went down to the ballroom of the Ambassador [Hotel], had told somebody to get Lowenstein on the phone, after just talking with Smith. So, I think that it would have tied them together.

Interestingly enough, I talked with Ronnie about this story the other day. She remembers Lowenstein saying, “I'll switch if Galbraith and you can arrange a joint press conference.” She doesn't remember the three-way telephone conversation we had with Steve.

GREENE: You were on an extension?

FELDMAN: I was on an extension. I was on it not because I was involved in that caper but because Steve had wanted to talk to me about getting something set up for when they got back to New York. He had asked for me in the meantime; I had just gotten on the phone, and was just in a very passive role on that one. So, it's easy to understand why she didn't recall it as a three-way conversation. But she doesn't recall the conversation with Steve, although she does recall the incident.

GREENE: That's very interesting. Well, how did the senator feel about Lowenstein in general?

FELDMAN: I don't really know. I remember discussing Lowenstein with him only once, and that was before he'd ever met him. He'd heard about him and was asking me about him. That was early '67. I know that Lowenstein didn't meet him until April or May of '67.

GREENE: Well, he met him, actually, before he went to South Africa. That was their first conversation. He asked Lowenstein to

check over his speeches. That would have been about April or May of '67.

FELDMAN: South Africa was '66.

GREENE: '66, excuse me, of course. That's right.

FELDMAN: Oh, excuse me, you're right. I'm a year off. It was April or May of '66. My first conversation with him about Lowenstein was in December or January of '65, '66 when I was trying to get the Congressional designation, the Reform designation, to run against Farbstein [Leonard Farbstein]. Bob and I talked about that and he wanted to know who the other contenders were. I told him, R. Peter Straus, Al Lowenstein, and Teddy Weiss [Theodore S. Weiss]. He knew Teddy and expressed himself on that. He knew Peter and expressed himself on that. Then he said, "I don't know Lowenstein. What I've heard about him, I'm not sure I would like him." We talked about Al a little bit. So as I say, I know he didn't know him then, and I know that through that period which came down to April of '66, he didn't know him, because we had periodic discussions. I think Ronnie and/or Jack Newfield wanted to make sure that Al and he did know each other at or about that time.

GREENE: Did he ever discuss in '68 or did Steve on his behalf discuss, getting a Congressional nomination for Lowenstein?

FELDMAN: No.

GREENE: That never came up?

FELDMAN: No. No. There was some discussion in '68 right after the declaration. We were operating out of the Hilton Hotel, the New York Hilton. We being Steve, Ronnie and me, I guess, at that point—and John Burns and Jack English before we got to 38th Street headquarters. That was just prior to the State [Democratic] Committee meeting at which Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson] was designated as a candidate for the Senate. Ronnie was insisting to me that there was a chance that Al would be the candidate and that the senator thought it might be good to have Al as a candidate. I found some trouble believing that. Al was around sort of representing himself as having had conversations with the senator, with the senator having, in effect, told him yes, that he would like him to run for the Senate.

The prior week or so Ronnie had blocked Al on that at the meeting of the Democratic coalition in Albany. She was feeling guilty about it. I couldn't tell whether she was taking Al's word for it or the senator's

word for it. Steve was telling me, "It's a lot of nonsense," and English was saying, "It's a lot of nonsense." Yet, there was something going on about that that I'm not clear on and that I had no role in. But as to a congressional district, no.

GREENE: I could be confusing it. It may have been the Senate nomination that was under discussion.

FELDMAN: No, I don't think you're confusing it because Ronnie later on felt, when Al didn't run for the Senate, that he had some kind of a commitment for that district in Nassau for Tenzer's [Herbert Tenzer] seat and that Jack English was double-crossing him by not supporting him. Jack said that the senator. . . . Then Ronnie said that she knew the senator had spoken to English about it. English said that the senator never said anything about it to him, and as a matter of fact, insisted that the senator never even said any very nice things about Al. So there was that contretemps. It was all hearsay and third-hand.

GREENE: How much contact did you actually have with English and Burns?

FELDMAN: Oh, considerable. Daily, a few hours a day.

GREENE: No problem working with them?

FELDMAN: Oh, no. No. I had no problem with them; they were old relationships, old scores.

GREENE: But you mentioned that Mrs. Eldridge did have a certain amount of difficulty.

FELDMAN: Yeah, yeah. Well, Ronnie's ten years younger than I am and hadn't been through some of the wars I'd been through with Jack English, or with John Burns. So I had more developed relationships with them.

GREENE: How were they generally regarded in the reform groups?

FELDMAN: Burns is regarded as nice, trustworthy and ineffectual. English is variously regarded; I don't think there's a uniform view. Sarah Kovner is just mad for him; Jack English has been one of her hang-ups for a long time and he's managed to play that very well. Jack came out of it, being a. . . . Jack became the national committeeman by virtue of Sarah Kovner, and the McCarthy delegates support at the [Democratic National] Convention. We had more trouble getting him the support of some of the Kennedy people than the McCarthy people.

GREENE: Did you have contact with any of the professional politicians in the city, Wagner [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] or Steingut [Stanley Steingut] or Travia [Anthony J. Travia], any of the elected...?

FELDMAN: In connection with '68?

GREENE: Yes. Were you in touch with them?

FELDMAN: No. Steingut I talked to a few times, and he was playing a very cozy game of uncommitted slates. He was one of the new.... Well, Steingut was typical of the kind of politician I was talking about who was very unhappy about what was going on. He wasn't about to dump Johnson and wasn't about to dump Bob Kennedy, and would have ended up with Kennedy just on the theory that he was closer to home and could hurt him more over a longer period of time. That's it.

GREENE: Is there anything else on '68, do you think? Well, how are you on...?

FELDMAN: I blocked out on the rest of '68.

GREENE: Well, you know you can always skip down out of order. How are you on time? I know you've got an appointment.

FELDMAN: I've got a little.

GREENE: Okay, good. I don't know if you have anything on this: did you talk to him at all about the legislative fight in 1965, the leadership fight shortly after he was elected?

FELDMAN: Yeah, I talked to him about it only in the sense that I'd gotten into it. I'd gotten into it supporting Steingut, partly because of my feeling about Wagner, partly because I thought Steingut would make a better speaker, and partly because of the role that Steingut had had in Bob's coming into the state in '64 vis-a-vis the role the Wagner people had. I talked to him only about the fact that I was going to help Steingut. Nothing really was said about it. I spent those first 4, 5 or 6 weeks, whatever it was, in Albany working with Stanley and trying to help him, spending a certain amount of my time with the press denying that I was there as Bob Kennedy's agent.

GREENE: Which was true, I mean, you weren't.

FELDMAN: I was not his agent—absolutely not! And he was calling me from time to time and saying, “For crying out loud,

[-66-]

you'd better make it stronger than you did yesterday.”

GREENE: Did he seem very conscious of staying as far out of it as possible, or just publicly?

FELDMAN: No, I think he was genuinely removed from it.

GREENE: Did this cause some problem? Did Steingut want him to be more involved?

FELDMAN: No, I think Steingut understood that. There was nobody, at that point, short of Bob Wagner whom Bob Kennedy could have delivered for Steingut. There was nobody whose help Steingut could have expected Bob to be responsible for that he wasn't getting. I mean, he had English's help; he had my help; he had Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle]; he had McKeon [William H. McKeon]. He had everybody that he could have reasonably expected Kennedy to influence.

GREENE: How did that affect him do you think with the reformers?

FELDMAN: Who?

GREENE: This leadership fight. Kennedy. Did it....

FELDMAN: It didn't, because even the reformers supported Steingut in that fight.

GREENE: But, I mean, there was no regret that he hadn't come out stronger? They also felt that he couldn't have done too much?

FELDMAN: Oh, no. That's right. It was a fight really between the Wagner forces and the anti-Wagner forces. It was just that simple. The people who supported Bob Kennedy understood when they supported Bob Kennedy that that was part of the fight. So this was just a natural development. Bob Kennedy never understood that the support for his candidacy in large measure was anti-Wagner. He came to sort of understand that later on, I think. I think on one of the tapes I told you that there was one discussion in which he said, "Well, the trouble with you is you're just anti-Wagner. That's not my fight. You guys are paranoid on this Wagner thing." He never really realized that if we hadn't been, we might have not been so anxious, not have found it as necessary, to reach outside of the state for Bob Kennedy.

GREENE: But he did understand it a little bit better later on?

[-67-]

FELDMAN: Yeah, I think he did. I think he did, as he came to understand Bob Wagner better.

GREENE: What about '65 and the mayoral race? Did you have much of a discussion with him on candidates and who he'd like to see get the nomination?

FELDMAN: Not really. He had no real interest in getting involved in that, because that, again, was the Wagner-anti-Wagner fight. The anti-Wagner reformers had the Bill Ryan [William Fitts Ryan] candidacy, or O'Dwyer [Peter Paul O'Dwyer] to some extent. While he did not want.... He never saw Wagner as the enemy in quite the same terms that the rest of us did. As I say, he came to understand it a little bit better but he never.... He hadn't been scared by it as many times, or in quite the same way, as a lot of us had. He thought he probably could deal with Screvane [Paul R. Screvane]. He stayed out of it, although there are those who tell me he helped Ryan to some extent, I'm not aware that he did. I was involved in the Beame [Abraham D. Beame] campaign and toward the end of that—not really in the primary, but some in the primary—they were under the impression that he was helping them. Steingut certainly didn't feel that Bob was doing anything wrong by staying out of it and felt that he was getting some support and help from him. So that wasn't the problem. It was after the primary when he came in to try to elect Beame, because he had a real thing about John Lindsay [John V. Lindsay].

GREENE: Even at that point?

FELDMAN: It was starting to develop at that point. John Lindsay wasn't his kind of fellow. He'd refer to him as "an uptight WASP" every now and then. He saw him as a threat I think; I really do. He never.... The only real concern he ever expressed about Beame—and he tried genuinely to help with Beame and got Steve involved with helping, and almost took over some of the Beame campaign in the election which irritated Costikyan [Edward N. Costikyan], who had managed the Beame campaign—was that conversation that I had with him on election day. I think Newfield quotes it with some accuracy in his book.

I had a call election morning from Adam Walinsky saying, "Bob and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] are going over to vote and the press tells us that there's a crazy city councilman over at the polling place with television cameras and press and everything, saying that he's going to challenge their right to vote in the Carlyle [Hotel] because: (a) They're not residents of the state; (b) if they are residents, they're residents of Washington; and (c) if they are residents of the state,

[-68-]

they're residents of Glen Cove. And if they're residents they haven't lived in the city the requisite period of time, and so on and so forth. Bob asked me to call you. What does he do?" I said, "Well, there's a challenge for him if he executes it.... Adam said "Look, will you go over with him? He wants you to meet him up at the polling place and tell him what to do."

I said, "Sure," and dashed out of the office, found a cab and went up to [Public School] P.S. 6 with Teddy Kupferman [Theodore R. Kupferman] who had television guys and everything. Bob came in with Ethel and said, "What do I do?" I told him "You just very quietly say, 'If there's a challenge to my right to vote just let me say the challenge oath,' in

which you swear that you've been a resident a period of time, et cetera, et cetera, and that's the end of it." So he said, "Do you know this guy?" And I said, "Yeah. I know him very well; I went to grammar school with him." He said, "I don't imagine he can be talked out of this." I said "No." He said, "Yeah." No, I said something about, "I doubt that he can be talked out of it." He said, "Oh, no, don't even try. Let him go through with his thing, as long as I know what Ethel and I have to do so that there won't be any incident and so forth." So, we went up there and voted.

Ethel had Susie Markham [Susan Moore Markham] with her; they were going to go shopping afterward. She's just so great. That was the year in which we had all kinds of propositions and amendments on the ballot. She went into the machine ahead of Bob, and he was standing in line next to go in. She was in there for what seemed like a long period of time. He said something about "Ethel, you can't sit there all day, there are a lot of people out here waiting"—and there were a lot of people lined up. He said, "A lot of people are out here waiting to vote; you're only allowed three minutes." She said, "Well, Bob, there are so many little levers and dials it looks like an airplane cockpit. I'm afraid it's going to take off." You could hear her all over the school.

Anyway we got out and she and Susie went off shopping somewhere and he said, "Walk me back to the Carlyle." We started walking back to the Carlyle and he said, "What's going to happen today?" I said, "I think it's going to be very close. I think 100,000 votes will make the difference one way or the other, and that's too close to call because with a two million, three cast you don't know which way it's going to fall. He said, "Well, if you had to guess." I said, "Well, if I had to guess I would probably think that Beame could squeak through, but I just don't know. It's too close to call." So he said, "Well, what kind of a mayor do you think Beame will make?" I said, "Isn't this a little late for that question?" No, excuse me. He said, "What kind of a mayor do you think Beame will make?" I said, "I don't

[-69-]

know. If he listens to you and your friends and the people in the party who normally support you and not just to the regular politicians, and Stanley Steingut and so forth, I think he probably will do all right. If he's just going to make a lot of organization-hack appointments and doesn't show any real imagination or creativity, he'll be terrible." So he said, "Well, do you think he'll listen to me?" That's when I said, "That's a hell of a time for you to be asking a question like that. I would have thought you would have asked that question before you even started campaigning for him." And he just laughed. Oh, no, that's right. His response was, "You must think I'm ruthless."

GREENE: Do you think he was disappointed in Beame's loss?

FELDMAN: I don't think he was disappointed in Beame's loss. I think he was disappointed in Lindsay's victory. I don't think he had any too great illusions about Beame or the possibilities of Beame's victory. You know that great remark he had in Santiago de Chile a couple of weeks later?

GREENE: No, I don't remember that.

FELDMAN: Well, he had real concerns when he was campaigning for Beame because he was used to big crowds. He'd now been a senator for a year almost and was used to big crowds; and he wasn't getting them campaigning for Beame. He'd come back from these street trips and he'd say, "Boy, there's a real frost out there."

Well, a couple of weeks later he had this South American tour and he was in the plaza at Santiago de Chile and there was a tremendous group of cheering Chileans out in the plaza and he started his speech by saying, "Thank you so much for coming out to hear me tell you about my friend Abe Beame."

GREENE: That's like the remark he made when he came back from Africa about Silverman, "Everyone in Africa supports Sam Silverman."

FELDMAN: That's right. You running out of tape?

GREENE: Yes, I've got to turn it over if we're going to continue.

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

GREENE: You can start with your conversations with him regarding whether or not you should run a candidate against Klein [Arthur G. Klein]. I imagine that you would be in on that.

[-70-]

FELDMAN: Well, not really. I was not in those conversations. Somehow or other, I think those conversations were really Ronnie Eldridge and Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel]. Then I was in some conversations with vanden Heuvel. There were a lot of conversations with people in the reform movement. I had no conversations with him about this until the Saturday late in May when Ronnie was at my house in the country. She said she thought that Bob really was ready to do it—get involved and support a candidate against Klein. We laughed about the fact that I said I thought that was probably because he thought he could embarrass Lindsay, Lindsay having sat back while Albano [Vincent F. Albano, Jr.] supported Klein. The real difficulty was finding a candidate, and vanden Heuvel was sort of in charge of the candidate search. Then she told me whom they had in mind, the people they were considering at the time. They were down to Eddie Greenfield [Edward J. Greenfield] who was a judge of the civil court and Arnold Fein [Arnold L. Fein] who was a judge of the civil court, and a couple of other possibilities. I'd said that I thought it should be a supreme court judge, that it's difficult if you're running somebody against Klein to have somebody of lesser judicial status. She said they had talked to Arthur Markewich, and they had talked to a couple of other people, whom I had suggested to her during the week, whose names she'd relayed to Bill, or some people who Bill thought up on his own, or people others suggested to her, and that they hadn't gotten anywhere. Then I said, "Well, the problem with all those names really, is that they're really

not clearly superior in the minds of the bar.” What we needed was somebody who probably the bar would recognize and the newspapers would recognize as of clearly superior judicial calibre. She said, “Okay. So come up with somebody.” We sat and we chatted and I said, “Sam Silverman.” She said, “Why don't you call vanden Heuvel and suggest it?”

So I called Bill from the country that Saturday and made that same speech and I said I thought it ought to be Sam Silverman. He said, “Great idea. You're absolutely right. This is the one judge on the state supreme court that everybody would agree—that the bar would agree, at least—he's good, and for whom we could perhaps develop some non-partisan support.” Bob called later that day and said, “Bill tells me you suggested some fellow named Silverman. Do I know him? Have I ever met him?” I said, “Yes, I think you did. He wanted to go onto the Federal District Court in '61 and someone arranged for you to meet him at that time.” He said, “I don't remember him. Why would he be willing to do this?” I said, “I think he'd be willing to do this because it's the right thing to do. I think he might be willing to do it because you asked him to do it. I think he might be willing to do it because he would prefer to be on the federal bench and if he lost, or even if he won, the day might come when you could be helpful to him.”

[-71-]

Then Bill called back after that and said the senator had talked to Silverman and that Silverman seemed receptive, and that it was left. That was Saturday, and that evening and Sunday morning we set up that meeting at the Commodore Hotel for Sunday evening.

GREENE: The 22nd.

FELDMAN: The 22nd was it?

GREENE: Yeah.

FELDMAN: You probably know the story of that meeting and what happened with the reformers suggesting other people and he finally saying, “Oh, look, you don't...”

GREENE: What was their objection to Silverman? Why did they bother with other suggestions?

FELDMAN: It wasn't so much that they objected to Silverman. There was a faction there that wanted Fein. There was a faction there that wanted Greenfield. They were their own people. Silverman was not their guy, number one. Number two, Silverman, in their minds, was Eddie Costikyan's guy because he had been Costikyan's law partner and he had become a judge when Costikyan was county leader, by virtue of Costikyan's efforts in his behalf. They just—the notion of discipline was just absolutely ridiculous. Bob started the meeting by saying “A lot of people have been talking to me about how there ought to be a race for Surrogate, and how important it is to the future of the party, and I ought to involve myself in it,” and so on and so forth. “I've been checking

around and the problem is a candidate; and I wanted to talk to all of you about it.” So somebody immediately got up and said, “Well, who's your candidate?” And he said, “Well, talking to a lot of people I found that there was one candidate for whom there was considerable support on the basis of prestige and judicial competence and so forth. I don't even know the man, but it's Judge Sam Silverman.”

That's when the whole thing started. He finally said—he taught them a real lesson that night, a lesson that I would have hoped that they would have remembered, but haven't. But anyway, he listened for a while and then he recessed. He, Steve and I and vanden Heuvel and one or two others sort of caucused in a corner and he said, “Well, what do we do?” Steve said, “Ah, you tell them to go to hell. Who the hell needs this?” And I said, “Well, I think you tell them to go to hell unless, because I really do think it would be good for you and the party, and so on.” So we reconvened the meeting and he, in effect, said,

[-72-]

“Look, I don't really need this. I thought I could be helpful here on a project that we'd all be involved in together, but if you people aren't settled on a candidate, there isn't time. We have to go through a process, and so on. Just forget about it.” Whereupon George Osborne who was the district leader, said, “Senator, I get the message. I came here for Arnold Fein; I am for Sam Silverman.” And that was it.

GREENE: This couldn't have improved his opinion of this group.

FELDMAN: Oh, no. No. We then had to put something together. As I say, the next day we met and got the petitions going and the campaign went underway. His role in it was his name, his people, Steve's role, and then, of course, the last ten days or so when he came back from South Africa.

GREENE: How did he feel about Silverman once the campaign was underway? Was he satisfied with him?

FELDMAN: Oh, he was satisfied that everybody was telling him.... Well, I was with him as a matter of fact, on the Sunday of the weekend—Memorial Day, whenever that was, the following weekend—at Steve's apartment when he met Silverman for the first time. They had just talked over the phone before then. He liked Silverman; he didn't see Silverman as a great charismatic personality. He'd understood.... After my suggestion to vanden Heuvel, they'd checked around. He had talked with, I gather, people like Roswell Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] and some of the lawyers he knew, prominent lawyers, to check out Silverman's reputation, and he was satisfied with that. He recognized that this was a judicial campaign; it wasn't the usual kind of campaign. He liked him. He had all kinds of cracks about him. “Everybody in Africa,” as you said, “is talking about Silverman.” I came back with him one night and he said to me, “Boy, that tiger you found for me, he's fierce.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “I turned to him on the platform and I said, ‘Sam, how are we going to do?’ I turned to him tonight”—this was his

first night back from Africa—"I said, 'Sam, how're we going to do?' He looked me right in the eye and he said, 'We Silvermans never lose.'" [Laughter]

GREENE: He used that, I think, the night of the victory.

FELDMAN: He did, he did. As a matter of fact, when I told Sam Silverman, a couple of days later, that he'd said this to me and so forth, Sam said, "Well, he made it up. I never said it." But he treated the whole thing with—you know, he wasn't running; his brother wasn't running.

GREENE: Did he think there was a lot resting on it though? Did he see it as a fairly important thing in his own career?

[-73-]

FELDMAN: I think he saw it as an important thing in his own career only in that once in it he didn't like to lose. I think he also saw it as something in which he couldn't lose because he would have made the good fight. He had identified with the right forces. He was against Tammany Hall; he was against corruption in the courts; he had the New York Times with him for the first time since he had come to the state.

GREENE: Was he also a little bit anxious to redeem himself with the reformers, or he didn't care too much about that?

FELDMAN: I don't think he cared about that at all. No, I think he saw the importance. I think that he was willing to commit his energy and resources and people. He wanted to win it, but I don't think he saw it in the same way as he would have seen his own race. As a matter of fact, I was struck with the difference. Steve saw it as politically very important, because you don't start one of these fights if you can't win it. But I think Bob was reasonably satisfied that it was going to be won.

GREENE: It really wasn't that.... It didn't seem all that evident until he started campaigning himself, did it? The impression from the press is that it may even be pretty close.

FELDMAN: Well, everybody thought it was pretty close because of Harlem.

GREENE: Yes, well Jones [J. Raymond Jones]?

FELDMAN: Jones and the anti-Negro thing and so forth. And, of course, during the course of this Meredith [James H. Meredith] got shot. And we got Meredith involved in it.

GREENE: And Farmer [James Farmer].

FELDMAN: And Farmer. He was concerned about the fact that the Negroes might, the blacks might think it was in fact an anti-black fight.

GREENE: Did you get involved in trying to counteract what Jones was doing?

FELDMAN: Yes, in that I was finding him anti-Jones—I was finding anti-Jones blacks when we were setting up the operation. As a matter of fact, Hugh Marius, who had run my campaign for Congress earlier that year, took on organizing, the 74th, which is Jones' home district and Powell's [Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.] home district.

[-74-]

You know, we lost it by like fifteen hundred votes which nobody would have believed.

GREENE: He actually won in Jones' district, I think.

FELDMAN: That's right. We won in Jones' district, and lost in Powell's by fifteen hundred votes. Right. You're right. You've done your homework. But we were finding the people to work in Harlem. Of course, Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] was wandering around, and then they put out all those leaflets about Hatcher. He was upset about the reactions of blacks.

GREENE: Was his reputation at that point strong enough in the black community so that he could overcome that kind of thing?

FELDMAN: Yes, yes. He wasn't that sure it was, but with the rank and file—not with the black politicians. The black politicians have been preying on the black community and on the inactivity of the black community. The real threat here, and one of the things that he was interested in, was that he was stirring up the black community to take a much more active and meaningful role in their own political affairs.

GREENE: His conflict with Jones went back even further than that though didn't it? He never got along with him.

FELDMAN: His conflict with Jones really went back to 1960 when Jones and Powell were the two delegates from New York who voted for Lyndon B. Johnson on that first ballot in Los Angeles, which went back to some other stories about why Powell and Jones and so forth had been for Johnson. That was the start of the conflict with Jones; and Jones' relationship with Wagner was involved in it.

GREENE: Well, if there's nothing else on Silverman, do you have anything else?

FELDMAN: Not really.

GREENE: Okay, then we're up to 1966 and the governor's race. Can you remember conversations with him or with Smith about the senator's choice of a nominee and how much he intended to get involved?

FELDMAN: I had one or two conversations with the senator about it. He was prepared, I think, to get involved if there were some way he could affect the result. He became persuaded early

[-75-]

on that he probably couldn't affect the result. He recognized that Steingut and Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] did probably have the commitment to O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] that Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] charged they did.

Roosevelt's charge really was no great revelation to many of us; it was an open secret. He didn't have any great regard for O'Connor. He would have liked to see Nickerson, I think, as the candidate. I had one conversation with him in his office in which we canvassed this whole field. I asked him what he was going to do because I was under great personal pressure from various sources, partly my relationship with Frank Roosevelt which had been very close on a personal basis. And I was getting some heat from Steingut who really wanted me involved in the campaign because he thought I would make a very useful hatchet man against Roosevelt, which was a role I didn't want to play. The reformers were pressuring; people were going to Nickerson; and Nickerson is a law school friend and classmate and I have great respect and affection for him. I had managed the Morgenthau [Robert M. Morgenthau] campaign four years earlier and so for some reason I was—the various contending candidates were trying to get whatever help I might give. So I went to see him, in effect, to try to find out what his view was so that I would be sure I wasn't embarrassing him by doing something or not doing something.

GREENE: At what point was this?

FELDMAN: This would have been August? August. Clearly August. Roosevelt had made his charges in July. I was on the [Martha's] Vineyard at the time; I didn't get back till the beginning of August. This was August. Also, at that time, I had assumed I was going to be a delegate and I had agreed to sort of head up a "peace caucus" at the convention to try to get an anti-Vietnam resolution through. I wanted to sort of let him know where I was and where I was going and try to talk it through with him. As a matter of fact, it was right around that time that I think he made his second '66 Vietnam speech. He made one in February.

GREENE: February, right. The second one, I'm not sure.

FELDMAN: I think there was a second one right around that time; I'm not sure. Anyway, I went through it all and he expressed affection for Nickerson, no real conviction that Nickerson had the steam. As a matter of fact, when I

saw him later after that famous all night round at the apartment, he said that he just didn't know whether Nickerson had the steam. I said something about the fact that I thought he could deliver the nomination and perhaps take it away from O'Connor if he wanted to get into it; and he said he didn't

[-76-]

want to do that, that "You can lead and give directions, but you can't twist arms." He was not—if he had to twist arms in order to deliver the nomination to somebody, the guy wasn't going to be a very good candidate, might not even be a very good governor.

GREENE: Was this understood outside? Did the reformers, for instance, understand this position? Or did they feel he should be doing more?

FELDMAN: They felt he should be doing more. Which then led him to that all night session when he was calling people down from all over the state and found, as he told me afterwards, he would have not only had to twist them, he'd have had to break them. He just decided it wasn't there, unless he was prepared to say, "This is warfare, political warfare with me for all time unless..." He was just not ready to do that.

GREENE: Now, the memo that Roosevelt had about the deal, he apparently took it to Kennedy first and Kennedy suggested that he show it around and perhaps even leak it to the press; that's the way it's been written up. Is that your understanding of it? And that Roosevelt, of course, wanted to use it on his own behalf and Kennedy knew that it wouldn't help Roosevelt and, I guess, half-heartedly hoped it would help Nickerson?

FELDMAN: Well, it depends on whom you talk with. I talked with him about that specifically that day, and I had a lot of talks with Roosevelt about that. Roosevelt took it to Kennedy in the hope that Kennedy would use it to stop O'Connor saying, "This is a terrible scandal. We can't have O'Connor." Roosevelt says that he did not expect Kennedy to leak it to the press. Roosevelt also says that Kennedy leaked it to the press.

In this discussion in August that I'm talking about at his office in Washington, we canvassed the field. When we reached the name Roosevelt he said to me, "Your friend, Franklin; he's just destroyed himself. He's made it impossible for me to give him any help." He felt badly about that because he had told me previously that Jack [John F. Kennedy] had a commitment to Franklin for the gubernatorial nomination for '66.

GREENE: English?

FELDMAN: No, no. Jack Kennedy. Bob had told me in '64.... December of '64 he had a party at the Carlyle for the advance men and the scheduling team—around Christmastime. On that day, it was announced or rumored that

Secretary Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] had resigned as secretary of commerce and—this is disjointed but it does

[-77-]

flow. You need this to understand the later conversation.

GREENE: Right.

FELDMAN: Hodges had resigned and Johnson was appointing John Connor [John T. Connor], I think that was his name, as secretary of commerce—a fellow from Merck [and Company, Inc.] chemical or one of the pharmaceutical companies.

GREENE: Yes, that's right.

FELDMAN: At that party Bob said to me, "I gather Franklin's not going to be secretary of commerce. The president has just announced something—Connor's appointment." I said, "So I understand." (Franklin is now under secretary.) He said, "Well, it's too bad. It's another one of those things that never worked out. Had President Kennedy lived, he was supposed to—he was going to have obtained Hodges' resignation by December 31, '63"—this was now December 31, '64. "He was going to obtain Hodges' resignation by December 31, '63. He was going to appoint Franklin secretary of commerce so that Franklin would have had all of '64 and '65 to build himself for the governorship in '66. My guess is his not being secretary of commerce is also going to mean that he's going to have a much tougher time getting the gubernatorial nomination."

It was against the background of that that in this meeting of August of '66 he said to me, "And your friend Franklin; he's not only had bad luck, Justin, but he's really handled himself very badly on this memo." I said, "He claims that..." He said, "Letting this get into the hands of the press, he left himself no negotiating room." I said, "He blames you for leaking it to the press." No, I didn't say that. I didn't say that. He said, "Letting it get into the hands of the press and so forth." He said, "And if that's not bad enough... I've never been his enemy. I've always been his friend. Even when he and I have had disagreements, I've recognized that the obligation of the Kennedy family, for West Virginia and everything else. I think you know that. So why should he be running around saying I leaked it to the press?" That was it. I said, "Is he doing that?" I knew he was doing that. I said, "Is he doing that?" He said, "Of course." I said, "Well, he thinks that."

He said, "Well, it's just not true. He came down and talked to me about the memo and I told him it should not get into the hands of the press and that we would treat it very carefully and that I would investigate and check into it. But I didn't think there was anything new. I thought probably there was such a deal and maybe it would work

[-78-]

out right; by the threat of its leak or something we could get O'Connor out of the picture.” He said, “Franklin was not out of my office—and I was the first one to whom he had talked about the memo. I’ll tell you Franklin wasn’t out of my office an hour when Jimmy Wechsler [James A. Wechsler] called me to ask me what I was going to do about Franklin’s memo. He had talked to him off the record in confidence and told him he was coming down to show me the memo.”

GREENE: So Wechsler knew even before Kennedy?

FELDMAN: That’s right. He said, “The next day I had a call from somebody in Binghamton to whom he had shown the memo; and he showed it to Frank Sedita [Frank A. Sedita] in Buffalo.”

GREENE: It’s funny, I don’t know where Shannon [William V. Shannon] gets the story from, but the way he tells it, Roosevelt claims that Kennedy told him (Roosevelt) to leak it, and that he (RFK) himself was actually the one that let it go.

FELDMAN: Bob did not admit to me that he let it go and that he leaked it. My feeling from the conversation was that he did, but that he felt free to do it after he had the call from Jimmy Wechsler, after somebody in Binghamton told him that Franklin had talked to them about it and somebody in Buffalo had told him that Franklin had talked to them about it. He then felt, “Well, hell, if he’s going to be leaking it around, it’s going to hurt him, but maybe it can be used against O’Connor.”

So, I think both stories are true in a sense. I think Bob may have leaked it to the press generally, but Franklin had been talking about it and had been in dispute about it. I know that he had because I had to swallow when—he had told me that he had told Wechsler, off the record, and that he had told somebody in Buffalo—he showed it to Frank Sedita off the record. I said to him, “There’s no such thing in this business.” So both stories I think were true.

But anyway, the governorship at that point was just—he was saying that he felt an obligation to Franklin that he couldn’t fulfill because Franklin had blown it for himself. He thought Nickerson would probably make the best governor of the group, but he just doesn’t project. He didn’t like Howard Samuels [Howard J. Samuels] or trust Howard Samuels. O’Connor was a disaster and he just didn’t know what he could do. He didn’t think that he could do anything.

Then subsequently, as I say, he had the all-night session and told me afterwards—that was when he said, “Maybe even if you could twist them you can’t break them.” Then we talked about it in Buffalo

[-79-]

at the convention a couple of times and he just saw nothing to be done other than try to get a better ticket. He tried to get Jack Weinstein [Jack B. Weinstein] on the ticket and various things of that sort.

GREENE: Did he consider them all losers, no matter what the combination was?

FELDMAN: Yes, essentially. Essentially.

GREENE: What about the campaign for O'Connor? I know there were a lot of complaints at that time, too, that he wasn't doing enough and maybe he was even responsible for....

FELDMAN: Yes, well, I didn't participate in that campaign. I didn't participate in it because of my relationship with Roosevelt. I didn't want to help him, but I certainly didn't want to hurt him.

GREENE: Did this really damage his relationship with Roosevelt?

FELDMAN: Bob?

GREENE: Yes. Was it ever...?

FELDMAN: Bob's relationship with Franklin was never good, never good. Franklin claims that his gaff in West Virginia on Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was deliberately inspired by Bob, that Bob got him to do it. As you hear Franklin tell the story, however, and if you know Franklin as well as I do, it was exactly the same kind of thing as the memo. If Bob did have that in mind—I don't know. But in Franklin's story it sounds like Franklin's indiscretion and not Bob's. I don't know whether you've talked to Franklin.

GREENE: No, no, I haven't. It might be worth doing.

FELDMAN: But after West Virginia, Franklin's exercise in self-justification required that he blame Bob for that. He thereafter blamed—he had some tax problem during the period of the Kennedy administration that leaked to the press, and he blamed Bob for that. I don't think Bob had anything to do with any of it. Bob never understood why Franklin blamed him for these things.

Also, there was an incident that I know about that occurred.... Well, I know about it, but I don't know that I should know about it. It was an incident that occurred at the time of Jack Kennedy's death between Franklin and Bob. I'll tell you about it off the tape.

[-80-]

GREENE: You don't want to put it on here?

FELDMAN: No, I can't. Try it your own way after I give it to you off the tape.

GREENE: Anyway I interrupted you before; I didn't mean to. You were talking about the campaign itself.

FELDMAN: No, I don't think Bob.... The campaign itself I had nothing to do with. I know that some of Bob's people did. I know that the O'Connor people, particularly Mrs. O'Connor [Mary Kearney O'Connor] who was at my house one night with Gene McCarthy when Gene McCarthy was campaigning for O'Connor on a two-day swing.... And we had a group of reformers at my house for him to talk to. Mrs. O'Connor felt that the Kennedy people had hurt Frank in the campaign because they had interfered with his "own natural style" as she put it. His style was the glad-hand technique, and as she kind of described it, I guess in my own characterization, without substance. By their insistence on putting substance into all of his remarks, and on his acting in a particular way they made him absolutely schizophrenic and he did not come through well in the Kennedy style, and he no longer could come through well in his own style. He was just frozen all the time, which may have some validity.

GREENE: What was his personal feeling about O'Connor?

FELDMAN: I don't know. My impression—and I don't know whether I can quote him or that he said anything very specifically— was that he thought he was a politician from a mold with which he was familiar, but he didn't see it as any great kind of new style of leadership.

GREENE: I've heard it said that some people feel that Robert Kennedy really never wanted another Democrat in the state, he would have liked to be the kingpin himself and not have any competition.

FELDMAN: Well....

GREENE: Does that make any sense?

FELDMAN: It makes sense only in this way: O'Connor, when he got the feeling that Bob was holding back, tied in—I don't know where the chicken and egg is here, I'll give you that in a moment—tied in with the Humphrey people and the Humphrey-Johnson people. The Humphrey people, particularly Marvin Rosenberg,

[-81-]

from very early on, were raising money for O'Connor and trying to give him a liberal facade. And a lot of the anti-Kennedy liberals went toward O'Connor on the theory that—Alice Sachs, a whole group of them—there was going to be a Kennedy-Humphrey confrontation in '72 perhaps, if not in '68. Probably in '72. They couldn't let the state of New York be Kennedy's. I had a number of conversations with them about it in which I said, "If Bob Kennedy were to do this in Minnesota, you guys would be absolutely up in arms. But he understands politics well enough so that he's not going to try to take the governorship of

Minnesota away from Humphrey or to set up the governorship of Minnesota as his vehicle. By doing this in New York you're just making a dreadful mistake." Well, it was New York; it was important; and the Humphrey people were very uptight about Kennedy. So, having created the notion that there had to be a Humphrey-oriented or anti-Kennedy governor, they, yes, made it abundantly clear that Kennedy couldn't afford that governor.

Now, I don't know that Bob saw it in those terms because his notion was—and we had discussed this.... Again, this was one of those cases where he'd say to me that I was too uptight about it, because I talked to him about it and again in that August meeting. His answer was, "Look, if I'm going to be candidate for president of the United States in '72 and I can't get my own governor.... Or if we've got the kind of governor who is going to go for a fellow from Minnesota rather than his home senator, we've got other, worse problems than that."

GREENE: Bigger problems, yes.

FELDMAN: Yes. This is their view of it because they had set up a straw man, and as far as knocking it down.... They wanted O'Connor. O'Connor wanted to be pulled; he saw himself as a Johnson instrument, getting money and support and help and so forth by being anti-Kennedy. Then he turns around and says that Kennedy sabotaged him because he didn't want another strong Democrat in the state. It was just very circular.

GREENE: Their relationship was really bad after that, too, wasn't it? I mean in '68, O'Connor was strictly....

FELDMAN: Oh, sure. That's right. That's right. Of course, O'Connor had elected to play that game with Weisl [Edwin L. Weisl, Jr.] and Rosenberg. O'Connor elected to become the Johnson-Humphrey instrument of keeping Kennedy down on the farm, as his means of generating support. If you play that game, you have to be prepared to fall. But I don't think Bob saw it that way, I really don't.

[-82-]

GREENE: How was he generally to get access to? You seem to have had a fairly easy time of getting through to him. Were there complaints from other people, particularly those that weren't personally close, about getting through to him while he was a senator?

FELDMAN: I never heard. There were lots of people who would ask for help in getting through to him, but they were people who had no relationship, or if they did have, didn't think they had. I always found that when I wanted to get through to him that—I didn't do it very often because it wasn't my style. There were those who really made nuisances of themselves for sure. So, I found that if I wanted to talk to him or get through to him I called him at the apartment, if I knew he was at the apartment. He would either come to the phone or somebody would say, "He's tied up now. Where are you

going to be later this evening, or this afternoon, or tomorrow morning?" Or "It may not be 'til tomorrow 'til he gets back to you." Having said to him, "Justin's on the phone," he'll say, "Find out where I can reach him tomorrow," or "Find out where I can reach him this evening." Or, "Is it important? Tell him I'm in a meeting, but I'll come out if he says I should." I'd get this kind of . . . As long as I didn't pull him out of the meeting because it was important when it wasn't and said "Tomorrow's time enough," I always got the call back.
[Interruption]

Or I'd call Angie and say, "I want to see him," or "Can I talk to him on the phone?" And she'd say, "I'll tell him, but he may not get back to you tonight. It may not be 'til tomorrow." Or, "He's going out to Chicago tomorrow and he'll talk to you the day after," or whenever.

GREENE: Is there anything else in general, or on the campaign in '66?

FELDMAN: Not really. Nothing that I can think of, anyway.

GREENE: I think we're through then.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Justin N. Feldman Oral History Transcript – RFK #3
Name List

A

Albano, Vincent F., Jr., 71

B

Beame, Abraham D., 68, 69, 70
Blumenthal, Albert H., 61
Buckley, Charles A., 76
Burden, Carter, 53, 55, 56
Burns, John J., 57, 58, 64, 65

C

Chavez, Cesar, 52
Connor, John T., 78
Costikyan, Edward N., 68, 72
Crangle, Charlie, 58
Crangle, Joseph F., 67
Cronkite, Walter, 57

E

Edelman, Peter B., 52
Eldridge, Ronnie M., 52, 53, 57, 60-65, 71
English, John F., 57, 58, 64, 65, 67, 77

F

Farbstein, Leonard, 64
Farmer, James, 74
Fein, Arnold L., 71, 72, 73
Fulbright, J. William, 55

G

Galbraith, John Kenneth, 63
Gilpatric, Roswell L., 73
Greenfield, Edward J., 71, 72
Greenfield, Jeff, 52

H

Hatcher, Andrew T., 75
Hodges, Luther H., 77, 78
Humphrey, Hubert H., 80, 81, 82

I

Ickes, Harold M., 60

J

Johnson, Lyndon B., 51, 53, 54, 56, 60, 66, 75, 78,
81, 82
Jones, J. Raymond, 74, 75

K

Kefauver, Estes, 56
Kennedy, Ethel Skakel, 68, 69
Kennedy, John F., 77, 78, 80
Kennedy, Robert F., 51-83
Klein, Arthur G., 70, 71
Kovner, Sarah S., 59, 60, 65
Kretchmer, Jerome, 61
Kupferman, Theodore R., 69

L

Lindsay, John V., 68, 70, 71
Lowenstein, Allard K., 62-65

M

Marius, Hugh, 74
Markewich, Arthur, 71
Markham, Susan Moore, 69
McCarthy, Eugene J., 51, 52, 54, 58, 59, 60, 62, 65,
81
McKeon, William H., 67
Meredith, James H., 74
Morgenthau, Robert M., 76

N

Newfield, Jack, 52, 53, 68
Nickerson, Eugene H., 64, 76, 77, 79
Novello, Angela M., 53, 83

O

O'Connor, Frank D., 76, 77, 79-82
O'Connor, Mary Kearney, 81
O'Dwyer, Peter Paul, 68
Osborne, George, 73

P

Powell, Adam Clayton, Jr., 74, 75

R

Roosevelt, Franklin D., Jr., 76-80

Rosenberg, Marvin, 81, 82

Ryan, William Fitts, 68

S

Sachs, Alice, 82

Samuels, Howard J., 79

Screvane, Paul R., 68

Sedita, Frank A., 79

Shannon, William V., 79

Silverman, Samuel J., 61, 70-75

Smith, Stephen E., 56, 57, 61, 63, 64, 65, 68, 72,
73, 74

Steingut, Stanley, 66, 67, 68, 70, 76

Straus, R. Peter, 64

T

Tenzer, Herbert, 65

Travia, Anthony J., 66

U

Unruh, Jesse M., 52, 55

V

vanden Heuvel, William J., 71, 72, 73

W

Wagner, Robert Ferdinand, Jr., 66, 67, 68, 75

Walinsky, Adam, 68, 69

Wechsler, James A., 79

Weinstein, Jack B., 80

Weisl, Edwin L., Jr., 82

Weiss, Theodore S., 64