Peter B. Edelman Oral History Interview – RFK #1, 7/15/1969
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Edelman, legislative assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1964-1968), discusses why Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) decided to run for president in 1968, RFK's relationship with Lyndon B. Johnson, and his position on the Vietnam War, among other issues.

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Peter B. Edelman—RFK #1

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First of Eight Oral History Interviews

with

Peter B. Edelman

July 15, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Larry Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

Hackman: To build up to the decision to get into the ‘68 campaign, I’ll just ask you to recall what you can about conversations with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] from ‘64, when you come in, to say maybe October, ‘67, during that time period—his thoughts about his political future. Any comments during that whole period about the presidency or anything else about his plans for the future?

EDELMAN: Well, I don’t really recall having ever had a specific conversation with him about his political future. I think this was one of the interesting, and I think the admirable, characteristics about him was that certainly he was a politician, but he was that curious

kind of politician who kept the uglier sides of, if they are ugly sides, of his ambition to himself. I mean I’ve been around the Senate enough to see how much people like to see their names in the paper, not that he didn’t pick up the.... You know, if he delivered a major speech and his *New York Times* hadn’t arrived by seven in the morning, he’d be on the phone to one of us to find out what it had said. But there was never a discussion of, “I should do this because it will help me run for president,” or “I should not do this because it would hurt me if

I ran for president." There was never that kind of explicit statement. I think it was assumed around the office by all of us that at some point he would undoubtedly be running for higher office and the president was the only higher office from where he was. And I think at the beginning we all assumed that it would be '72, that Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] would be reelected in '68. And, you know, it's been many times recounted that Adam Walinsky wrote that set of memoranda to him after the '66

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elections saying Lyndon Johnson was a lame duck. And I think the rest of us in the office looked at Adam with a certain amusement and said, "Well, isn't that nice and maybe you're right and it's certainly an interesting thesis," and so on. But certainly from some point along in there the combination of Johnson obviously getting weaker and of Kennedy obviously having been built up into a, you know, an alternative now within the Democratic party—some point through '66 and '67—and with the war going worse and worse and with Kennedy himself becoming deeply concerned on the merits about the directions in which the county was going, both about the war and domestically, I think it just kind of naturally evolved and came closer and closer to the surface that in fact we weren't really talking about '72. And I couldn't pinpoint the day on which we woke up and said, "My gosh, this is really a matter of 1968 and not '72," but I suppose it was sometime in middle to fall of 1968 that that waking up place occurred. And I

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think, you know, you have that in mind because you ask in terms of up to October '67. But certainly after Watts, rather, I'm sorry, after Newark and after Detroit and with all of the problems about the war and the refusal to stop the bombing, through the summer of 1967, the thing came to have a different kind of dimension. And the stakes became different and so on. In term of the day to day kind of behavior the only political type conversations that I ever had with Robert Kennedy.... Obviously, we would say, "Should you take a trip to have a hearing in such and such in Mississippi?" or so on. And his general way or proceeding was, "That would be a good thing," "That would be a bad thing," in terms of, you know, was it right or wrong on the merits. And then either explicitly or perhaps through his own thought processes, as a secondary matter, he would kind of ask the political question, which after all he had to do 'cause he was a politician. And even it's just a question of getting reelected, every politician asks the political question. And to me

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the salient criterion is whether he asked the question first or second. And those that ask it first are the ones that I don't like much. So that sometimes he would say, "Well, you know, maybe it would be nice to do that, but I've been into too many of these kinds of issues in the last week, month, et cetera," or "Well, yes, I suppose that that would be right to do, but have you thought that for political reasons I might have a negative impact on that 'cause Lyndon

Johnson doesn't like me" or those people in Mississippi don't like me or those kind of things. So that that was the sort of general way of proceeding that he would ask either whether in fact his getting into it would be counter-productive for the merits of the issue because of who he was, or whether it was simply unwise for him to get into it—and would always ask those questions in a secondary way. But that was really the full context in which I had dealings with him about his future, and, as I say, therefore it was always implicit rather than explicit.

HACKMAN: When he tries to get at the political reaction to him doing something does he ask you this? Is there

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someone else in the office he usually goes to? How does he see you in terms of an advisor on political reaction?

EDELMAN: Well, I don't think that he thought a whole lot of me and Adam and his legislative people as a question of.... as advisors on political things. Somebody said that it was significant, and I think it was, that he made a statement to Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] when Schlesinger decided to advise him to run after being against his running, that something about, "The only people that are in favor of my running, Arthur, besides you is my wife [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and my sisters," I think he's supposed to have said. And the theory was advanced, I guess, in the Hodgson [Godfrey Hodgson] [Lewis Chester and Bruce Page book *An American Melodrama*] that that was really indicative that, in fact, he didn't trust the political way of all the so-called young turks on his staff. I think there's something to that. I mean I must say—it's self deprecatory, but I think right—that one of the reasons why Adam Walinsky and I and et cetera were not at some of these meetings in New York to discuss

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Robert Kennedy's political future was not because somebody wanted to exclude us that we were the young turks and so on. I think it was basically that we weren't regarded as political advisors. Now it may be that history proves that we were right, whether for the right or the wrong reasons, but that we were right, and whether coincidentally or because we were brilliant. But in fact, the fact is that Robert Kennedy was partly a traditional politician and that he tended to make political judgments in his role as a traditional politician. That the new political side of Robert Kennedy, if you will, was the issue-oriented side of him. The part that played new politics was the part that we represented because we were the issue oriented side. So if it was a question framed in political terms, he would not be likely to give our advice that much weight. Now that's not to say that he didn't ask because he did sometimes and particularly about smaller things where it wasn't, you know, really necessary to wheel out the big political

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advisors. Also it should be remembered that he was his own best political advisor about the day to day matters of politics. He didn't have to get advice because he was.... He had been that for his brother [John F. Kennedy]. So he could make his own calculation and do it really better than anybody else. And he would talk to Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan], I suppose, more than anybody else in the office about the political implications of things. And usually the way it went is that say I came in and said, "Senator, would you like to make a statement about cigarette smoking," as I did sometime in 1965. And it was very casual and off hand. He's on his way out of the office somewhere and I just have been talking to my friend that represents the cigarette company, who's morally appalled at what he's doing and so on and so forth. And I say this and he says, "That's fine." And I say, "Well, you know, don't you want to think about it a little because you're taking on this big—all these big companies and so on." "No, that's fine. I'm glad you

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mentioned that. We should do it"—as if he'd been thinking about it. You never knew whether he was or not. And we did it. And he didn't say, "Well, I'll talk to Joe Dolan," or "I'll think about the political effects of that." He just said, "Let's do it." So that was one way in which these things would operate. If it was something that, you know, he was.... He obviously had a moral view about cigarette smoking and it just didn't make any difference about the politics of it, he was going to get into it. If I wanted him to take a swipe at the federal programs, the way federal programs operate in Mississippi, where he had.... Let's say the poverty program where he had to think about, "What about Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] and what about, the people in Mississippi," and again that point, as I said before, about whether his getting into it would be counterproductive. Then he might say to me, "Okay, well now what do you think about the Shriver aspect, the Governor Johnson [Paul B. Johnson, Jr.] aspect, the fact

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that I'm Robert Kennedy aspect?" And I would say what I thought. So that was the second level. The third level was if the thing.... Maybe it was a question of taking a trip somewhere or, you know, and he'd have to.... Then he'd call in Joe Dolan and he say, "Well, how can I go to Chicago without talking to Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley]?" That would be one that was beyond my ability to advise him. So that was kind of the way it went. Sometimes I would get the political questions, but when they, you know, were too deep then he would call in Joe and essentially counsel with himself,

HACKMAN: Just using the cigarette thing as an example, this is something you brought to him, but he didn't know you were working on? Would you do this frequently? You'd go through the.... You'd put something together and then bring it to him without his knowing that you had spent time on it?

EDELMAN: I would never spend a substantial amount of time on anything without his okay because that would just not be productive. What I would do is I would get an idea, for example the cigarette thing. I would just, as I say, talking to my friend over dinner. And my friend was telling me how outrageous this legislation that was about to go through on the labeling was, that it was really a dodge to help the cigarette industry, and that the hearings were going on and so on. So I just went without having done any work and said, "Senator, this is going on, Would you like to make a statement about it?" And that would be the kind of way. I think one of the major functions of the staff was to do that. I was.... Sometimes I'd do some searching around, you know. Like he'd.... It would be this way. I would say, "Well, Senator, here are six areas. Which of these do you want me to put priority time in on developing legislation for you," let's say, And he might stay, "I'd like to do something on health." And then I would go out and talk to some doctors and health professionals and so on, and I'd

come back and I'd say, "Okay, now here are the kind of things, you can do on health. Which of these do you want me to pursue?" And then he would say, "Do this, this or this." So that the relationship was really very logical, as you'd expect. And sometimes, you know, to be fair to him, sometimes it went the other way. You know, he'd come in in the morning and he'd been talking to somebody or he'd been reading something or just thinking, and say, "I want to do so and so. Will you do it? I want to make a statement on it."

HACKMAN: Okay, you bring him in six things and say, "These are the things you can do." Does this happen annually, just periodically or...

EDELMAN: Well, it would vary. I probably wrote him one or two memos a year, long memos of the status of things that I was doing and proposals of things for the future. He wasn't a person who liked to read memos very much. He much preferred to have a kind of a short conversation about things and if you sent him a twenty page memo, he'd be... You know,

it was very unusual. You had to have damn good reason for doing it. You didn't just pop those things off. So one time he'd been in South Africa and I hadn't seen him for a month and plus the fact that I wanted to just sort of catalog for myself where I was, that was one time when I wrote him a long memo. And then usually at the beginning of the year we'd say, "Well now this is, you know, these are the choices of the things that we can do for this year." So that to offer him a broad range of choices, to really make choices about priorities was something that happened only once or twice a year. And then basically the agenda was laid out. And the way he sort of operated was like having a series of concentric circles, that there

would be three or four things that were on his mind that were the most important to him and that he would sort of bug the staff, one guy or another, about those regularly. And then there were some other things that he had maybe assigned and forgotten about that might or might not ever get

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done that he would bring up, say, periodically and say, "How's that every coming?" And you knew just as a matter of priorities you didn't devote that much effort to those. And so on on out. And all of us always had more things on our desk than we could possibly do and if we really expected to finish all of them, every one of us would have been dragged off to the loony bin long before it was finished with. So that that meant that you very seldom were really in a position to ask him any very fundamental questions about directions because the desk was always so laden with stuff to do. And I would only do that when I, you know, had finished a rather large project and wasn't quite sure what to spend a major part of my time on next. And usually just the day to day ebb and flow of the legislative process made it unnecessary to ask that. Or you could tell what his priorities were just by what he was asking for and what he was getting after. There were very few times when I really felt the need of presenting him with six alternatives.

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HACKMAN: Okay, going back to the political side then. You say by late '67, when the meetings start, those October and December meetings, one of the reasons you people might not have gotten involved is because he didn't look to you for that kind of advice. Another one that some people have suggested is that he knew where you stood by that time. Were there any points before those meetings where the staff just sat down with him and discussed this, going in '68. Are there any other memos after Walinsky's '66 memos where any of this is...

EDELMAN: Walinsky wrote a couple of more memos. I did not. I would add one more factor just because it is true, that some of his older political advisors, whether it's the JFK types or the Bill vanden Heuvels [William J. vanden Heuvel] or Steve [Stephen E. Smith] or his brother, Ted [Edward M. Kennedy] or whatever—Steve Smith, some of them, not all, bad the feeling that we were kind of pip-squeaks and upstarts. And to the extent that they could organize a meeting, they would exclude us from it not on the merits,

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even though perhaps we were also scrutable on the merits. So that that was operating as well. And it was just that the Senator obviously didn't protest, didn't say, "Where are my two most trusted young advisors?" when he showed up and found us not there. So he couldn't have been.... You know, if somebody'd organized a meeting on public service employment for him

to attend and we weren't there, he would have said, "Well, now wait a minute. Where are..." because we were the fellows that did the work on it. Other memos—would think that maybe Joe Dolan, but I doubt it. I think mostly each of us talked to him individually. We didn't have staff meetings. We never.... We didn't sit down every day or even once a week and say, "Where are we?" And every now and then he would feel sort of guilty about that and he would have us, particularly in the summer, all out to lunch at his house and we'd sit around the pool. And over the course of four years, we maybe had four or five fairly stimulating meetings like that. Again, after he came

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back from South Africa, after he came back from Latin America, when there'd been a real hiatus and we hadn't talked and so there was quite a bit pent up to discuss. But generally there weren't staff meetings so if you had a thought about his political future or anything else in general you just went to him. His door was always open or you called him on the phone or Sunday or whatever it was. And so I would think that each of us was pursuing our interest in his running sort of independently and we never formed a phalanx to go in and say, "All right, here we all are, Senator. This is what we think you should do." At least I don't recall our ever doing that in tandem. And I think he would have resented that. I don't think that he liked the idea of—even though he knew damn well we all talked to each other—that we all came in and presented him with any kind of an ultimatum. It's been recorded that Joe Dolan told him at some point, and I don't remember the actual date, but I think it was in '68 rather than '67, that if

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Johnson was the nominee and Robert Kennedy was going to go out and give speeches for him and so on that Joe would take a leave of absence, that he didn't want any part of that. And Adam, of course, told him he was going to quit, after that January 31st, '68 or 30th, '68 announcement of "no foreseeable circumstances." I, you know, figured I would when the time came I was sure I would do the same thing, but I never made a big deal out of it. In terms of my communicating with Robert Kennedy about my thinking that he would run, my recollection is that I did not say anything to him directly until about January first of '68. Now I'm sure he assumed I would think.... If I remember correctly that a couple of Adam's memos that he wrote on the bottom, "Peter concurs with this memo," because I would always read them and I would always criticize them and say, you know... [Interruption] So that I.... He undoubtedly knew my view because I had concurred with those memos of Adam's and maybe I'd said something, but my first distinct recollection

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of really talking about it with him was when we were in California. I had been on vacation, so I'd been out of it for two or three weeks, which means that I missed whatever happened in December, say from the fifteenth of December on, and I'd gone, to Antigua and then I met

him in California where we were having some Indian hearings and where he thought it would be useful for me to just help set up the hearings and so on and so forth. And we went from San Francisco to Los Angeles on about January third or fourth ’68 and he was going to have a meeting with Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh].

HACKMAN: Frank Burke. Was Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] there?

EDELMAN: No, Salinger wasn’t there. Who was Frank Burke?

HACKMAN: He was Unruh’s assistant.

EDELMAN: It isn’t Frank Burke. It’s something else, Larry, unless that...

HACKMAN: That’s the one I heard. Not Vacca [Francis J. Vacca]. He’s not with him.

EDELMAN: No. Vacca wasn’t with him yet. Maybe it is Frank Burke. Well, in any event, there were two of Unruh’s

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guys there and one of whose name I wouldn’t be able to recall on a bet and the other who’s the fellow that—maybe he is Frank Burns or something like that, and me and Kennedy. So there were five of us. And it was a very funny scene because we went to this—very clandestine—to this room in the airport motel there. And Kennedy obviously did not want to be in a private meeting with Jess Unruh. He did not want it to come out later so he insisted.... We sat around for a couple of hours jockeying and he finally insisted that we go up to the airport restaurant. He didn’t say, you know, “I don’t want to be in a private meeting with you, Jess.” He just said, “Well, Jess, I don’t like room service. We ought to really you know, go upstairs where we can get a good steak, and, you know, by the time the steak comes up on room service it’s always crummy.” So, of course, the first guy we ran into in the restaurant upstairs was the statewide political reporter for UPI [United Press International] and, you know, I could almost see the Senator thinking,

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“God, that was just perfect.” So we sat and we had dinner and then we went back and by this time I’d had a couple drinks and I was always more honest or open or whatever—unguarded—when I’d had a couple drinks. And we talked some more and finally left there at quite late, about 12:30, 12:00 or 12:30. And he said to me, “God,” he said, “I hate that.” He said, “I really don’t like to sit around and bull shit with those guys.” He said.... I said, “Well, didn’t you do that for your brother?” “No,” he said, “We used to send Larry O’Brien [Lawrence F. O’Brien] to do that.” He said, “He could talk the balls off a brass monkey.” He said, “You really got to stay up till 4:30 in the morning with those fellows and just trade it back and forth with them.” Well, anyway at that point I said, “Senator, you want my opinion,

you don't want my opinion. I just tell you, I think you ought to run. I think et cetera, et cetera, so on and so forth." And he said, "Well, I don't have...." He said a couple of things. One is he said, "I don't have anybody to do for me

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what I did for my brother." And then he said one of these things like he said to everybody else, "Well, you know, who...." He didn't say to me, "Who besides my wife and my sisters?" but he said, you know, "What major political figures are for me?" And I said, "Well, obviously Jess Unruh is," because that had been.... Jess had not explicitly said it, but it had been, I thought, probably what Jess was getting at. There had been a lot of fencing about taking a poll and stuff like that. In any event he said something about the fact that he didn't have any support and he didn't think he could win. So that's the first time I ever told him where I stood. And obviously people had been saying similar things to him before. What I had now in sort of comes back to me, people like Burke Marshall and John Douglas [John W. Douglas] had spoken to him before that: at least it's my recollection that it was before that. And I remember Adam and I sitting around trying to think who we could put up to telling him that he should run that he would listen to, because

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we obviously knew that he didn't listen to us particularly on questions like that.

HACKMAN: Was Burke Marshall then your suggestion? Did you talk to Burke Marshall and to Douglas?

EDELMAN: I'm not sure. I think we did. And I'm not, you know, sure which direction it went. I remember talking to John and John saying he was going to have lunch with the Senator and my saying, you know, what did he think about so and so, and John saying he thought he would run. And I said something like, "Would you.... Well, you ought to tell him that." And he said, "Well I plan to," or something. You know.

HACKMAN: That's mid-December, December 14 or 15 or something like that. Anybody else, then, that you can remember talking to to bring in?

EDELMAN: No. We talked to Fred [Frederick G. Dutton] about it. Fred Dutton. And to this day—I mean at that time—unto this day I don't know where Fred stood exactly, very ambiguous about it. And I had always thought that Fred was very sympathetic to his running and I remember in that conversation in the car

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that I referred to a couple minutes ago, that I said, "Well, Fred Dutton's for your running." And

he said, "No, he isn't." And, of course, I couldn't argue with him. Well, I think we probably talked to Al Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] some and to Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] some. I don't remember anybody else.

HACKMAN: Oh, while your mind's on the Unruh thing, can you tell me more about the conversation that night between Robert Kennedy and Jess Unruh and the polls, this back and forth?

EDELMAN: Yeah. The major thing I remember is that Jess kept saying that he thought it would be good if the Senator would run. And he didn't, you know as I say, explicitly say he'd support him. And then he, in effect he said, "I can't make a more for you unless you tell me to," 'cause he wanted the Senator to commit himself first before he was going to say to the Senator, "I'd be for you." He said, "I just wouldn't be able to move out here." And the Senator kept saying, "Well, I don't know if I

have any support out here." And Jess said, "Well, I have this poll that I've commissioned and I'll have the results in about three or four weeks." And it was.... I'm sure you've pulled it in time.

HACKMAN: It's March 10, I believe.

EDELMAN: No, no. March 10 is when we went to California. Jess came to see Kennedy in Washington.

HACKMAN: That's right. Maybe it's the third. Maybe it's the week before that.

EDELMAN: It may be.

HACKKAN: Yes. I've got it down somewhere.

EDELMAN: But in any event that was bringing in the results of the poll. So that Kennedy got out of that evening in January by saying, "Well let's see what the poll brings out and you be in touch with Peter here." Frank Burns is the fellow's name.

HACKMAN: Burns.

EDELMAN: And, you know, which he was for a while and then when it escalated to being something that was not really in my province, why, I got out of it. So

for a month or so through miscellaneous and relatively irrelevant phone calls, I was the political liaison. But, as I say, that lasted only as long as it was something that was within my province or not outside of my depth anyway. That's about all I remember about that evening, though, I was the fencing around about Alphonse and Gaston and then the poll question and then an awful lot of discussion of just irrelevant stuff where they were obviously both just sort of vamping and, you know, kind of making time.

HACKMAN: Okay, let me jump way back again. When do you feel, when did you feel that Robert Kennedy should be president? Was this obvious to you in '64 when you come on? How does this develop in your mind?

EDELMAN: No, it wasn't obvious to me in '64. My history is…. Well, I can't speak for the others, but I think is somewhat different than the others. I had not been in politics. I had gone to law school, clerked for two judges, worked in the Justice Department as a lawyer and always assumed I was

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going to be a lawyer, had grown up as a kind of a knee jerk liberal but just as a cocktail party, magazine reading matter and never any real ambition or motivation to become personally involved, and never marched in a civil rights demonstration and all that, I mean, really pretty square. And I remember, in fact, when I was in the Justice Department I went over and marched a couple of my friends had gotten a little bit more militant about that much—he said, indicating half an inch. And so I remember marching and my first demonstration against the Benjamin Franklin School over here on 16th and L and feeling very strange about it, very conspicuous, like I was the only one in the line, when in fact there were fifty people, and everybody walking by and staring at me. Well, then I was going to go practice law in New York. I'd taken a job with a Wall Street firm, Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen and Hamilton. And I thought I had three months in the fall and my wife and I had—my previous wife and I—had been talking about going to Europe.

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And I didn't like here that much. We were having some difficulties, so I thought it would he just as well not to go traveling with her, and I thought it would be interesting to be in a political campaign since it was an election year. And since I'm from Minnesota I tried to get involved in Hubert Humphrey's [Hubert H. Humphrey] campaign which shows you how non-ideological, although at the time Hubert Humphrey was a perfectly acceptable fellow. And all I could get there was being an advance man which I wasn't that interested in. Then and throughout August it became clearer that Kennedy was going to run which I hadn't known earlier. And that seemed very logical from a very practical point of view. I'm a Democrat. I'm a liberal, help this man get elected in New York, going to practice in New York, learn about New York politics, so on and so forth. So after some considerable effort on my part I

got to go up there and work, and considerable effort on John Douglas's part for whom I was working at the time. And he really went to bat and was the one who.... That

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was at, you know, at a very important period in my life because if I hadn't gotten that job in the campaign none of the rest of it would have happened. So, you know, I just was helping to elect this fellow, Senator from New York. And I was sufficiently convinced, but without thinking very deeply about it, that he would be a good Senator from New York. I didn't have the sort of West Side, New York reformist problem about the fact that he'd, you know, been against, been with McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] and been in favor of wire tapping or was convinced that he'd gone beyond that and so on. But, you know, when he got elected Senator and he offered me the job I just, you know, vaguely thought, well, he was a Kennedy and he was going to be more than the ordinary senator and that was one reason to do it, but also that it, was, a lot of it was in terms of that he would be more influential in the Senate and he wouldn't be the ordinary unknown freshman senator in the Senate. So my thinking about, thinking of him as a presidential candidate and whether that would be a good thing, I suppose began to evolve

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just as I got turned on to the issues and began to have some personal gut sense about them which occurred throughout '65 and '66. And as I saw the way he handled them, which I came to admire more and more, and as I saw the way Johnson handled them, which I came to detest more and more and as the war escalated, and so there were a number of things all working together. It really parallels the development that I spoke of earlier in terms of as he emerged as a candidate for '68: my thinking perhaps preceded that by a matter of months. But it was very much related to the events of the times. In '65 I think it would have been really presumptuous of any of us to say that one year from now our man is going to be measured as the alternative within the Democratic party and the papers will be printing polls saying, "It's Kennedy up and Johnson down this week and Johnson up and Kennedy down next week." We would have thought that that was just not going to happen. But, of course, the war changed all of that.

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HACKMAN: You said you didn't think your experience in this regard was typical. What do you mean by that in terms of other staff people?

EDELMAN: Well, I think, for example, Adam went to the campaign with the idea that he would get a job on Robert Kennedy's staff afterwards. I left out the fact that John Douglas had explicitly advised me not to go to work with him afterwards. And so that's one difference. Now I assume that Adam had in the back of

his mind that going to work for him afterwards meant staying with him through a long haul, and that that presumably meant and included the Presidency. I would think Joe Dolan, although again he has to speak for himself, would not have at, you know, the age of over forty, would not have rejected going back to practice law in Denver unless he thought that he was really—there was going to be something at the end of the road. Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] I don't think would have come from the Peace Corps to what was, after all, a relatively obscure job in an ordinary Senator's office if he hadn't had some

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idea. Now, you know, that's.... It may also be that Frank just felt, as he said, that this was where the action was, this was where some of the best stuff in town was going on and that was enough for him. So maybe I'm not that different.

HACKMAN: One of the people you mentioned earlier was Al Lowenstein. What can you remember about this relationship, his relationship with Robert Kennedy, '66, '67, and then particularly how he gets in there in '67?

EDELMAN: I don't know how Al knew Robert Kennedy originally but he was certainly a friend of Jack Newfield's and Jack had gotten to be friendly with the Senator in '66, I guess. I think the Senator had run into him one place an another before that. Al had advised him some before he went to South Africa which was June of '66. And they perhaps had come into contact even before that, and was just generally known around. You know, remember Al had tried to get the Democratic nomination, tried to beat out Farbstein [Leonard Farbstein] in the nineteenth,

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in the West Side in '66. The Senator I'm sure had come in contact with him at that time. And Ronnie Eldridge [Ronnie M. Eldridge] and Al Blumenthal [Albert H. Blumenthal] and Jerry Kretchmer [Jerome Kretchmer] were all very close to Kennedy all the way through these years. So one way or another he came to know him and then—I just don't know how much time they'd spent together, but in the fall of '67 Lowenstein came to Kennedy first. And then when he was forming his "dump Johnson" thing and wanted him to run and, you know of course, all the history of that. And there was that evening at Kennedy's house in the fall of '67 where Lowenstein.... It was quite late in the evening, we were working on the book. I would place it in September, I guess, or perhaps October. And I left at around 10:00, 10:30 or something like that. And so around 11 o'clock this debate took place, with sort of Kennedy sitting there as an amused observer, between Lowenstein and I guess Newfield or maybe Goodwin on the one side and Schlesinger and somebody else on the other side. So

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by that point Lowenstein was obviously quite friendly with Kennedy. I just wish I knew more about the evolution of it. And then Newfield recounts that scene in Kennedy's office in January '68 where Lowenstein came and they had that very tearful kind of exchange. But Al was always a rather, kind of shadowy figure to me and I really only came to know him, oh I would say, within the last year. He had known my wife [Marian Wright Edelman], my present wife, in Mississippi and really knew her better than he knew me.

HACKMAN: Did you ever get the feeling that Robert Kennedy was trying to sort of to hide that relationship or to keep it from getting out.

EDELMAN: No. No. There would be no reason to. I mean if you're talking about the fact that Robert Kennedy had a certain relationship with Tom Hayden [Thomas Hayden] that might have.... There might have been some reason to hide that, but then there would be as much reason on Tom Hayden's part to hide it as...

HACKMAN: I guess I'm thinking particularly of late '67 when

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people know that Lowenstein is looking for a candidate.

EDELMAN: Oh yeah, well there was that stuff abut the fact that he.... Lowenstein evidently saw him a number of times which were not in Kennedy's, put on Kennedy's schedule because there was that joke about it. And so I think at that point he probably was hiding the fact that he was talking to him.

HACKMAN: Were any of the outsiders, the old JFK people or others, talking with you at all or were you talking with them, other than Douglas and possibly Burke Marshall, about the possibility of a '68 race by late '67, before or after the meetings or in between?

EDELMAN: Not the JFK people. Adam and I talked to Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] one time pretty close to the.... It must have been the week before the New Hampshire primary, maybe two weeks before. And Kenny had obviously been urging him to run and the Senator had to go over and vote or something. And he called us in…

HACKMAN: Dutton's in on this meeting if it's the one I'm thinking of, isn't he?

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EDELMAN: I don't think so. I think it was just Kenny and Adam and I. And we sat for about two hours and Kenny took a line with us of all the problems that there

were in it, all the political problems, and the fact that it couldn't work and kept saying, "I'm in favor of his doing it, but I just don't see how it can work. Tell me how it can work." And at the time we weren't sure what the point was, whether they were, you know, whether Kennedy was in effect sending a message through O'Donnell to us that we weren't making any sense or whether he was asking us, you know, asking O'Donnell to test us out, since he didn't have the patience to, to see if we had anything that he didn't know about. I don't know which it was. But in any event, I think O'Donnell was paying a little game with us because I think he really wanted him to run and he was just sort of being the devil's advocate with us. So that was the only JFK guy that we talked to at any length, Adam may have talked to some that I didn't because

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Adam was much more active in his promotion of the whole thing. He may have talked to Schlesinger or something like that. I did not. And, of course, Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was against it and clearly against it. And then you get to the RFK Justice guys which was the ones that we were sort of closer to. And that would be Burke first and foremost, and then John [Douglas] and Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] and Byron White [Bryon R. White], whom I did not speak to and I don't know what their views were. And Lou Oberdorfer [Louis F. Oberdorfer], Jack Miller, people like that who were something more peripheral. So my only recollection is discussing it at some point or another with Marshall and Douglas....

HACKMAN: What do you remember about Marshall's feeling in that period?

EDELMAN: Well, he was for it. I can't tell you when he came to be for it, but he was for it. I think I'd.... Well, if the lunch with Douglas was December fourteenth, I'm pretty sure I had a phone conversation

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with Marshall somewhere around in there in which he said he was for it.

HACKMAN: I believe—maybe it's a little later—I believe he said it was the day before Robert Kennedy left for Sun Valley, maybe. That would push it back maybe another four or five days.

EDELMAN: Well, that's in that period. Yeah, I'm pretty sure that I talked to Burke on the phone and I mean I just can't vouch one way or the other for whether I took any initiative to urge him to make his feelings known or whether he already had.

HACKMAN: Do you ever recall a meeting with Dutton similar to the one with O'Donnell where he sort of giving you the message that "Look, you guys are going too

far. You don't know what you're talking about." Or something like that.

EDELMAN: No.

HACKMAN: I've read that somewhere. It's in an interview, I think it's in a book. I'll try and find out.

EDELMAN: I don't know it. During the campaign he used to tell us that, tried to cool use But....

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HACKMAN: Did Senator Kennedy ever discuss the October meeting with you—what feedback he got from the October meeting in Salinger's suite, the Regency Hotel thing?

EDELMAN: No. No, no. He never talked to us about, I mean to me about those things. And when I say us I'm including Adam and I think that's true of Adam as well.

HACKMAN: Was there some way you could get a feeling for what took place there other than what was.... I guess that story leaked in the press, but...

EDELMAN: Yeah, well some.... No, I didn't think.... The first time we found out what.... Well, I think Joe Dolan must have told us.

HACKMAN: Joe Dolan and Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston] went.

EDELMAN: Yeah, and I'm sure it.... Well, I don't think I talked to Tom about it. I think Joe told us that the basic feeling was against his going there, but that they had that Joe was going to keep on with whatever he was up to to try to gather the requisite information to have it in hand in

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case. Yeah, I'm sure that Joe had told us that it was negative.

HACKMAN: When does Dolan start working on all this? Can you recall that?

EDELMAN: Oh, along about December or the first of the year. I came back.... Well, I remember talking to him on the phone from California and he said to me—which would have been around the first of the year—saying, "Wouldn't you like to be the acting Administrative Assistant for a while?" And I said, "Well okay, why?" And he said, "Well, I'm going to take off and sort of work out of Fred's law office and try and do this thing." And so I said okay. So I guess he probably started with it after the first of

the year. Maybe did some, as I said, maybe he did some that I didn't know about in December too.

HACKMAN: Do you get the feeling this is clearly Robert Kennedy asking him to do this or is this him suggesting it to Robert Kennedy and getting permission to do this or do you know?

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EDELMAN: I think it's the latter, but I don't know. I think it's Joe saying to the Senator, "You really ought to, just in case." And Joe's theory at the time was that we would wait through the year and that Johnson would be in it and would get weaker and weaker and weaker and that we would take him in a confrontation at the Convention. So he wasn't really pushing for an early entry into the race, as I recall. But he felt that somebody had to start working over the lists and talking to people and making phone calls in any event.

HACKMAN: In your mind, and from what you know of Adam Walinsky and Mankiewicz, were you clearly in favor of going into an early primary and testing it or how did this....

EDELMAN: Yeah. Yeah, I was definitely, and Adam. I don't know about Frank. But Adam and I definitely felt that the only way you could succeed was by getting into it early and taking Johnson on in the primaries, that otherwise it was just going to be that one would look like a boss type, manipulative

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type usurper coming up to it at the last minute, and that in any event, it wouldn't work to do it that way. We felt that the only way that it would work was to take the case to the people because we felt that the people were very, very deeply against the war. And so I.... No, I was quite clear in my own mind that I wanted him to get into it right away.

HACKMAN: Can you ever remember talking with him about polls and what the polls showed about opposition to Vietnam and how he read them and whether you and Adam read them differently.

EDELMAN: Well, of course you would have a different conversation with him depending on what he wanted to prove in the conversation. I mean if he wanted to prove that the American people were really much more against the war than the polls showed, which he did sometimes, he would, point out, which was the case, that the polls were phony both because the questions were designed in a way as to elicit a certain kind of answer, which was true of both

Harris [Louis Harris] and Gallup [George Gallup] and because simply the sampling techniques are totally unreliable. Polling is one of the creepiest and phoniest occupations in the U.S. of A. And so he was, of course, tremendously aware of that. And if he wanted to tell you that the war was really going badly and Johnson was in deep trouble he would point all that out. Or if he wanted to tell you that Lou Harris was really in Lyndon Johnson's pocket, he would point all that out. On the other hand, if it was a day when I or somebody were trying to say, "Senator, you really ought to be giving a speech about Vietnam," he would be saying, "Well, you know, that's politically…. I got to be careful on those things because that's a political minus for me and if I go and do one of those things, my poll thing goes down and the American people are not really ready for it and I'm out ahead on this." That's particularly true after he got his fingers burned a little in '65 with that power and responsibility speech. Then throughout '65 he was quite—I mean '66. Excuse me. In early '66 he gave that power and responsibility speech. Then

he was quite reticent through the rest of '66 to really speak about Vietnam. And '67 the "stop the bombing" speech, in March of '67, was really much more of a watershed for him than that one earlier in February '66 because that was really in his own mind breaking the silence and I think, even breaking with the Administration. He had tried very hard through '66 to preserve the facade that he had not broken with the Administration I think primarily because he was convinced that it would not help end the war, that if he broke with the Administration on it, that Lyndon Johnson was so insane that he would literally prolong the war simply because Bobby Kennedy was against it. And I think more.... I'm really convinced more for that reason than because of the polls. Nonetheless, throughout '66 if one talked to him about the polls or about anything that could raise the subject of the polls he would say, "Well, that's bad for me to get into that." I think it was partly because that was the way of his putting off, I mean, or not having to discuss

the more fundamental psychological question of his relationship to the Democratic party, and more important, to Lyndon Johnson. So in sum, his feelings about polls and their importance varied with the day that they were discussed. Now those are issue polls. When it came to polls in a particular state with reference to a particular whether he could go or not, I think he obviously attached great importance to Jesse's poll that showed him so strong in California. I think that was very reassuring to him. So that those kind of polls which are a personal sort of thing, he was like any other politician, he carried them around in his inside pocket.

HACKMAN: Do you remember any polls that.... Do you remember discussing any polls with him in late '67 or early '68 other than the Unruh poll. For instance, that

poll like.... I guess out of that October meeting comes that poll of New Hampshire that somebody who worked for John Kraft [John F. Kraft] does in New Hampshire. Do you remember ever talking about that poll with him?

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EDELMAN: Yeah, he said that.... You know, when we would argue that he should get into New Hampshire, he'd cite that poll and say that it'd be suicidal to get in there, he couldn't possibly win. And then when McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] got into it and was running eight percent he would say that with some glee because it sort of proved—well, not glee, but self- justification perhaps. It sort of proved that he'd been right in not getting into it. And there was a little of the.... He was sure that he could be doing better in New Hampshire, but he thought that basically showed that people in New Hampshire just weren't ready to face up to all these issues. And, you know, it gradually dawned on him, say after March first, that McCarthy was making an impact there. So I think he had cited those early polls and maybe he'd placed some reliance on them. I think he probably had.

HACKMAN: Can you remember he's having—while we're talking about polls---opinions of different pollsters? Who

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was the most reliable, the least reliable? And what.... Any comments about John Kraft who he used, I guess, on occasion?

EDELMAN: Not particularly. I know he wasn't very high on Lou Harris, even though Lou Harris had worked for them in '60. And, you know, I think he had the same view that everybody else had that Field [Mervin Field] is better than Muchmore [Don M. Muchmore] in California. But I think basically he trusted John Kraft more than he did Lou Harris. And then, who's that other fellow that does things for NBC [National Broadcasting Company] or used to do things for NBC? Oliver Quayle. He thought he was in Lyndon Johnson's pocket.

HACKMAN: What about the December meetings then? Witcover [Jules Joseph Witcover] says that both you and Walinsky attended that one December meeting.

EDELMAN: That's wrong.

HACKMAN: That's what other people have said too. Do you remember getting any feedback at all on that meeting, what took place?

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EDELMAN: Was that the one where there were two meetings?

HACKMAN: There were two meetings. Robert Kennedy went to a brunch at vanden Heuvels. The second one was a general meeting. I think a lot of people were there.

EDELMAN: No, not particularly. I was very heavily involved in working on the conference report on the welfare amendments and I wasn't paying too much attention. And then I was so angry when that was all finished with, I just packed up arid left town on about the eighteenth or nineteenth of December. So, you know, I was just not devoting very much of my time and attention to Robert Kennedy's future at that point.

HACKMAN: Can you recall—we've talked a little bit about his feelings that McCarthy wasn't likely to do well in New Hampshire—can you recall discussing McCarthy as a personality at that early point in New Hampshire. Do you know anything about the relationship from '64 to '68 between the two of them?

EDELMAN: Yes. First about the relationship, there wasn't much of a relationship. McCarthy didn't like

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Kennedy. Kennedy didn't like McCarthy. That, in turn, I think went back to 1960 when McCarthy tried to shaft John Kennedy. And of course, how people had regarded John Kennedy and what they had done either for or against him was a tremendous touchstone in Robert Kennedy's life. And there were an awful lot of people who by any objective standard were complete "nogoodnicks" that Robert Kennedy would go to bat for and would help out if they got into trouble and so on, because they had helped John Kennedy in 1960. And there were some who were perfectly good human beings that he had no use for because they were against John Kennedy in 1960. So he had this general antipathy toward McCarthy. He felt, I think with some justification, that McCarthy was less than totally honest in his politics in the Senate Finance Committee, that he may not have taken bribes, but he had certainly represented the special interests on certain things and one supposed that that was how his campaign coffers got filled since he wasn't personally a wealthy man. Secondly, it was

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perfectly obvious that Eugene McCarthy was a lazy senator, that you could not count on him to show up for votes when you needed him and that sometimes he would even vote against you as he did on the poll tax thing. And that story has never accurately been told because McCarthy succeeded in obfuscating it by saying that Katzenbach had asked him to vote against the Kennedy amendment. The facts of that are somewhat more complicated and I think bear Kennedy out rather than McCarthy. But so there was some minor bitterness over

his voting the wrong way on that. And just this general feeling that you, you know, you never, you couldn't be associated with him on anything because he wasn't there. And he never came to the floor to stand up and fight about things. And so the Senator remarked from time to time that McCarthy was lazy and didn't do anything. And he would, he had a way of asking about people, just, you know, "Why do you think.... Why do you think he's like that?" That sort of thing. "Why do you think he never shows up?" "What do you think he

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does with himself?" That sort of thing. Or like Wayne Morse [Wayne L. Morse] talking for two hours to an empty Senate chamber and Kennedy would say, "God, he really must be stuck on himself," which was a favorite phrase of his. So he had that through the years about McCarthy that, he was just a lousy senator and plus the fact that Kennedy had a feeling that he was even somewhat, if not, as I say, if not crooked, at least willing to bend somewhat for purposes of making sure he was adequately financed. And I remember a conversation in the car which would have been in about.... It'd be interesting to pinpoint when it was. We were in the Bronx. It was Jack Newfield and I and the Senator. And we were, I guess, in the Bronx for some hearings on healthcare that George Smatters [George A. Smathers] and the Senate Committee on the Aging had, which we could find out when they were. But they would have been in the fall of '67 sometime. And I think it was before McCarthy announced. My recollection is that it was in September. In any event, Kennedy was telling Newfield

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in that conversation, about McCarthy's various depredations and so on. So he clearly had that feeling. Well, then after McCarthy announced, Kennedy told us at some point later that McCarthy had said to him that, you know, when Kennedy got into it, he'd get out. And I.... In fact, I think the Senator told me that two or three times that McCarthy had said that. I remember once at the time. So I must have had some conversations with him that I'm not remembering too well.

HACKMAN: Is this soon after McCarthy gets in or is it...

EDELMAN: Yeah.

HACKMAN: ... toward the New Hampshire primary?

EDELMAN: No, no.I think he had a conversation with him soon, when McCarthy got into it. McCarthy told him that—obviously not thinking of himself as a tremendously serious candidate at that point—said to Kennedy, and thinking Kennedy would be better, "If you get into it, I'll get out." And my recollection is that Kennedy told me that at some point close in time to when that conversation took place. That would be, therefore, November or December. And I

was spending a fair amount of time with him working on this welfare stuff and on the education conference and probably, you know, probably I asked him or he remarked to me or something. Then when Kennedy decided to get into it, he went to see McCarthy. He said to me before the New Hampshire primary—and I'm sure we'll come back to this—but he'd said to me that he was going to get into it, but he said he felt he had to get McCarthy out. So I guess it was probably March thirteenth or fourteenth, the day or two.... It must have been the fourteenth, on the Thursday after that New Hampshire primary, Kennedy went to see McCarthy and came back just outraged because McCarthy had said to him, "Well, Bob," he said, "Why don't you step aside for me this year and then I'll step aside for you in '72?" And, you know, Kennedy had thought that was just the height of the chutzpah is the Jewish word for it—unmitigated gall.

HACKMAN: Anyone that you can recall as the McCarthy campaign developed in New Hampshire who was telling Robert

Kennedy that he was likely to do a lot better.... When does he start to...

EDELMAN: Well, Goodwin was calling him up on the phone saying that things were going better than it was commonly supposed. Goodwin, I think, was his major source of information. And I think that it was.... You know, the last…. At least the last week and a half to two weeks, it was amply clear that McCarthy was doing better. Joe Dolan said that it was going to be over, that McCarthy would do forty percent. In fact, he may have even called the forty-two percent on the nose. That, of course, was just the day before. So we were getting some input to that effect. And he clearly had, as I say, decided.... I knew two days before the New Hampshire primary that he decided to go in. Other people say they knew a week or so before. So that he obviously knew that McCarthy was doing very well. Goodwin is the one person who I know was telling him.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about his feelings—talked about McCarthy—about President Johnson over,

going back to '64, both in terms of the issues, Vietnam and the other side, but particularly in terms of personality and just his ability to run the country—stability maybe is a better word.

EDELMAN: Well, the first few months that I worked for Kennedy I would suppose that he Didn't share very many personal opinions with him, with us, plus the fact that

he was feeling his way in the Senate, plus the fact that he was, you know, still a little bit in that post-November ‘63 funk. I think it had required a great deal of effort for him to make himself into a candidate in ‘64. I don’t think he was really emotionally ready for it. So that whole early ‘65 period we were doing things like working on some narcotics legislation. You know, Kennedy wasn’t talking about we had to have fundamental programs for the cities or for anything else. His ideas of first legislation, as I say, that was fine with him. You know, it was just sort of the Senate was what he was doing with himself while he figured out what to do with himself or,

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you know, to keep himself busy all day long. I don’t think he was really focusing on asking fundamental questions about the direction of the country. And then in May of ‘65 he made that little speech on the Senate floor where he criticized Johnson about the Dominican Republic, and then that nuclear proliferation speech. So he was obviously—to the extent he was starting out in some substantive direction it was foreign policy oriented. And I just.... I guess that by the fall of ‘65 there was clearly antipathy had developed. I mean, you know, I’m sure there was antipathy all along, but in terms of his staff knowing about it. We probably knew in some respects through ‘65, but I’m saying that not too much both because of our relationship with him, which was not that good yet, and the kind of substance which he wasn’t deeply into things that would bring him into conflict with Johnson. Well then, when he took that trip to Latin America, his fortieth birthday was during that trip. And Ethel gave him

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a plane, a little model plane, and said, who? “Somebody is in this,” you know, like Jack Valenti [Jack J. Valenti] or somebody, “is in this plane watching you.” Jack Valenti or I don’t remember who, but you know, Mervin Watson [William Mervin Watson] let’s say. So clearly there was a sense at that point of rivalry and a feeling back and forth. Significantly, she did not say Lyndon Johnson and when Andy Glass [Andrew J. Glass] wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post* that she had said Lyndon Johnson, the Kennedys were outraged that he had escalated it in that way. So clearly there was something. Then a major event is this February ‘66 thing, First of all, I know that Kennedy was outraged. Johnson set up that whole Honolulu business to take away coverage and attention, from the Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] hearings. And Kennedy had considered taking a trip to Vietnam with Burke Marshall, I believe, over Christmas in ’65, and Johnson had done something or other, I don’t remember just what, that somehow forestalled it. So by that time they were into a kind of a game where Johnson was

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deep enough into the war that he saw that Kennedy was, you know, a threat to him on that issue and in general and was playing things with Kennedy in mind. So it came to be vice

versa. Then the next significant event was that speech of February ’66, the share of power and responsibility speech, where they really just threw the whole, you know everything they had, at us after that speech—Hubert Humphrey, “fox in the chicken coop”, and Dean Rusk and, you know, everybody else that they could get to speak about it. And we got to feeling like we were sort of beleaguered, that we were the good, the white hats in the stockade with the whoever it is on the outside shooting at us. And I think that escalated the personalness of the feelings back and forth and by that time we were beginning to get little remarks from him. You know, “Do you know what Lyndon Johnson said yesterday?” And “Do you know what Lyndon Johnson’s saying about me?” And “Do you knew what Lyndon Johnson did about this?” And from there on I think it was a fairly steady

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stream that Kennedy had this sense—entirely correct—that Lyndon Johnson was, had begun including him in his calculations and was doing things because Robert Kennedy would or would not do such and such or to keep Robert Kennedy from doing such and such. And from there on it was a steady stream of that sort of thing.

HACKMAN: How did he account for that? I mean when he would talk about Lyndon Johnson doing these things, what did he see his motives as being or did he ever talk about that?

EDELMAN: No, the only thing is he once said to me, “If the full story....” We were looking at Schlesinger’s manuscript together, I guess, at one point. And I believe in the first chapter of Schlesinger’s manuscript was that Schlesinger’s version of the selection of Johnson as the running mate. Maybe... No, I guess we were on a plane and it was the published book. In any event, we were together and we had that material and we were both reading it or something. And he said, “Well, you know, that’s not

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quite right, and if the full story of that ever came out,” well, something. It would be better if the full story never came out. And…

HACKMAN: How did he say that? For his sake in his relationship with the President, for…

EDELMAN: No, I think...

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

HACKMAN: I... and I asked you how he meant that.

EDELMAN: I think he meant it more.... I don’t think he meant it would have been better, I just think it, you know, was a sort of a titillating remark. If you really knew

what had happened, you'd really be shocked or it'd be different from the—you know, that kind of thing. And the only reason I bring that up is I have the feeling that he probably, that those reports which talked about his having been opposed to Lyndon Johnson were probably closer to the truth, although I have no concrete evidence of that at all. And I think that Lyndon Johnson knew that, and therefore the next thing that had happened—of course, there was whatever happened in

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connection with the death of the President and I never discussed that with Robert Kennedy about how Johnson had behaved on *Air Force One* and all of that stuff— the next thing that I really know about was when Johnson screwed him out of being vice president in '64, which I'm sure Kennedy was very grateful for later on, but at the time was obviously very angry at.

HACKMAN: Do you think really.... Did he ever say that he really wanted the vice presidency or whether this was.... Well$_s$ some people have said that the fact that he didn't take himself out earlier was that he wanted Humphrey to be vice president. It was more a holding action to allow Humphrey to sort of consolidate his constituency so that Johnson couldn't move to a non-entity at the last minute. I mean does that make any kind of sense to you or do you knew anything about that?

EDELMAN: I would have to say I don't know. It makes sense, but I don't know. I know that Kennedy wanted McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] to be vice president and that

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I gather McNamara wouldn't do it because he wanted Kennedy to be vice president. So that maybe the coming to the Humphrey thing was a secondary position because Kennedy, obviously, had tremendous respect for McNamara and even though he respected Humphrey, far more respect for McNamara. He had.... You know, he did feel that Hubert Humphrey, while he liked him a lot, that he talked too much and that he was, you know, a little soft. In any event while it may be true that Kennedy wasn't that serious about it, when he went to see Johnson that time, he said to me more than once that Johnson had recorded the conversation and, you know, had done it quite visibly, had pressed the button. And that Johnson later denied having done it, and called a bunch of reporters in to listen to the tape. And Kennedy then confronted Johnson in, you know, quite frank terms a couple of weeks later, saying, you know, "It was one thing for you to make a tape out of it, but if you wanted the conversation confidential, which

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you told me, then you shouldn't have gone spilling the beans to these reporters. And Johnson got very outraged and said, "What reporters?" And Kennedy said, "Now, come on. I know

that it was Mr. A, B and C." I don't remember just who they were. "And, you know, I know that it was them." And Johnson's reaction was to say, "Well, I didn't talk to them on that day. I'll show you my calendar. They're not on it." And he told that story with some glee to show really what a sort of shallow kind of duplicity that Johnson would engage in, that he would use that kind of a device or trick to prove historically that kind of double thing, to prove historically he hadn't seen them—they weren't on his calendar. So obviously there were bad feelings that went back. And as I say, I think they date back to 1960, but there had been some acrimony and unpleasantness about that episode in '64. And I think in '65—I've basically said they stayed out of each other's way. But then in late '65 Kennedy was obviously aware that Johnson didn't like

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him taking that trip to Latin America. And, oh for instance, Jack Vaughn had led a briefing for Kennedy at AID [Agency for International Development] before that Latin America trip and had been very snotty, very snotty about the fact that Kennedy was messing in the diplomacy and as if he knew so much more than Kennedy about it, and Kennedy had gotten very, very angry and really taken him apart. And of course, that had gotten to the White House and the White House had gotten angry at Kennedy about that and I'm sure Johnson personally. So the reescalation of the feelings probably, although I couldn't point to the event, probably took place some place in late '65 Kennedy gave a speech…. It may go back to that Dominican Republic thing on the Senate floor and than he gave a speech in July ninth of '65 at the International Police Academy commencement exercises in which he had had a sentence that said, "Wars of liberation are won not by escalation but by de-escalation and then had taken that out rather unwisely because it

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got out to the press somehow. I guess it was in a release text and then he took it out, for delivery and they made a point that he had left, it out on delivery. And that must have angered Johnson. I would think Johnson must have been upset about the nuclear proliferation speech because, in effect, Kennedy was saying this was something my brother believed in, and this Administration is copping out on it although he was circumspect about saying it. But it wasn't the same as, you know, as it began to get in through '66 that, you know, Kennedy, for instance, in '67 introduced his tax incentive bills and Johnson put an entire task force of Treasury [Department of the Treasury] and HUD[Housing and Urban Development] officials on refuting those bills and discrediting those bills, just because they were Kennedy bills. Now that's clear, people have admitted that. And, you know, then you had the confrontation with Johnson in early '67 when Kennedy brought back the peace feeler. Kennedy came in and he was not being devious. Unfortunately, there'd been that misunderstanding about

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who had leaked it to *Newsweek*. And I think Johnson at that point simply didn't believe that Kennedy hadn't leaked it to *Newsweek* even though he hadn't. But in any event, Johnson was very, very crude and angry and swore at Kennedy. And in addition to that said, and this is a direct quote that I remember Kennedy coming back and saying, "All you dove politicians will be dead in six months," meaning that he was going to win the war within six months, but just in general being very abusive. And Kennedy came back.... I mean, he came back.... I seldom saw him shaken, but he came back shaken from that meeting. He came back to the office and just said, You knew that's—what I've been through is unbelievable. That's not a direct quote, but something to that effect. So by that time, it was just.... And as I say, he'd been telling us anecdotes and so on throughout '66 of what Johnson was up to and, you know, one thing and another. And I think that.... Remember I said earlier that I thought the March second '67 speech

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was more of a watershed in Kennedy's thinking, Kennedy's tactics about Vietnam than the February '66. And I think that meeting with Johnson was what did it because I think he just, after being treated that way, felt he didn't owe Johnson a thing. And so after March second '67 he just, even though we had gone through the text of the speech with great care, that's the time when Dick Schaap [Richard J. Schaap] reports that I'd had strep throat and I came into the office and I was reading the last draft of the speech and Kennedy came in and said, "Am I dove enough for you?" And I said, "No," because there was.... You know, the criticism had been muted and the stuff really about the fact that the whole war was foolish had been muted and so on and so forth. And Kennedy was sticking to his position of he was neither for escalation nor for unilateral withdrawal, but was for negotiation. And you know there was still that premise that we were, what we were fighting for made some sense, if it were done right. And by that time I was off that.

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But then, you know, later on he criticized the elections and he stayed on the question of the fact that Johnson had not responded to Kosygin's [Aleksi N. Kosygin] initiative and then later on there was the release of the telegram back from Ho Chi Minh which really proved, if you examined the text, that Johnson had hardened the line deliberately so that there couldn't be any negotiations. But in a sense, Kennedy's earlier perceptions—he was raising the issue that you didn't get to the merits—were correct, because nobody really would take the time to read the text of all those communications back and forth among Wilson [James Harold Wilson], Johnson, Kosygin and Ho Chi Minh and see what was plain as day, which was that Johnson had explicitly kept negotiations from getting started. Well, now I'm free associating a. little, but Kennedy told me a number of times about the fact that negotiations had almost gotten started in December of '65 and that we had bombed around the edges of Hanoi and Haiphong just when they were about

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to get negotiations started and Poland through—using the Polish government as an intermediary. And that's confirmed in the David Kraslow-Stuart Loory book, the *Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam*. But Kennedy had told me and others about that fact, of blown negotiations long before Loory and Kraslow's book ever came out and had a whole private case that he had developed which was tremendously persuasive about all of the times when Lyndon Johnson had deliberately blown up an opportunity for negotiations. You know there's another level of whether that was venal because he may have simply been convinced—I'm not sure he was simply convinced—that he could win the war by military means, rather than wanting to get American boys killed and so on. But even so that was a terrible set of misjudgments.

HACKMAN: Senator Kennedy had this in his own mind or had he put it on paper or need anyone else worked with him on setting up these cases?

EDELMAN: Well now, I don't know. He put an awful lot of stuff on paper that might be in these archives that

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none of us ever saw. But he made notes of conversations when he would come back from like a meeting at the White House that we were talking about a few minutes ago. I'm sure he wrote all that down or dictated it all to Angela Novello [Angela M. Novello] and put it in the safe. So somewhere there is, and I suppose that Arthur Schlesinger or whoever will bring it out. I think that will be very useful, historically because I think that there's an awful lot of handwritten stuff about those things. But in any event, the answer is, no, nobody helped him with it. I mean he—those things he just developed in his own mind and he.... I mean he was a very, very intelligent human being. I remember one time going with him to Chicago for some poverty hearings and so I also went with him to have lunch with the editors of the *Chicago Sun Times*. And this would have been in about May of '67. And he had developed a very, very sophisticated analysis, just all himself, from reading the casualty figures, reading the claims of the North Vietnamese—what we

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had done killing Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, and showing that the, you know, that the North Vietnamese would have had to replenish their army six or eight times if we were really killing people at that rate, so obviously we weren't. And this was tremendously convincing and he turned around more than, I would really say, more than one board of editors of newspapers around the country with these discussions because he just was so tremendously well informed, much more than they ever expected he would be and much more than anybody they'd ever talked to personally.

HACKMAN: While we're on this, did you ever give him things that he couldn't

understand? Did you ever have any problem getting him to, you know, to be able to digest what you were talking about or...

EDELMAN: Well, I think he could understand anything that he would put his mind too. We all have a problem about putting our minds to things that are…. But, for example, the housing tax incentive bill, which I never understood—I didn't develop it,

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Mike Curzan [Michael Curzan] did—he knew that he was going to get questions that were very complicated about that and he had Mike Curzan prepare a very thick briefing book for him and he learned it. He learned everything that was in there. And, you know, that's remarkable because Chuck Percy [Charles Harting Percy], who had a tremendous reputation for being great in the housing field didn't know anything about what was in that home ownership bill that he was tiding all through 1967. Whereas Kennedy again would go into these meetings with the board of editors of a newspaper, they would ask him a question about these things, and he would go into these long detailed explanations and sometimes lose them because he was, his technical competence, apparent technical competence I might say because in some sense he was repeating what he had learned and if you asked him some other kind of question about housing he obviously wouldn't know about it. But he just had a tremendous capacity. And there are some things that he just…. One time, for example, we had a group

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of economists at M.I.T. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], Harvard, Yale and one or two or Princeton, Columbia, Pennsylvania and so on. And they were to advise us on economic matters and help in program development generally. And Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] had set up the group and Ed Kuh [Edwin Kuh], K-U-H, from M.I.T. was sort of the operating head of it and a very nice chap and very energetic. Well, the first, through I suppose '66 we delayed at ever having a first meeting of the group, and finally Kennedy got a letter from either Galbraith or Kuh saying, "You know, Senator, you agreed to do this, when are we going to do something about it?" And he wrote me on the bottom of the letter, he said, "Peter, help. I got a D in Economics AA at Harvard." And, you know, so that if there was any area that he looked on as being Greek to him, it was economics and I think that was, you know, more a mental block than a question of competence. So that it was just a question of what his intellectual priorities are.

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He had a tremendous range of knowledge.

HACKMAN: Okay, you mentioned earlier the proposals then, I guess it was July 12 and 13

of '67, the incentive thing. And the Johnson Administration's reaction. Can you remember, in putting this thing together—you didn't put it together specifically—were there people in the Administration who the office staff had worked with in putting this together who then came back at it when it was submitted? You'd mentioned a task force.

EDELMAN: Mike Curzan, who did the work on it, had clearly talked to Bob Wood [Robert C. Wood] about it and had, yes, had talked to a number of people numbers of things like that—hot people—and had tried to talk to Senator Percy and some of his staff. I don't think.... I mean? I'm sure he had argued the merits of it with these people that he had gotten the figures from and so on. I think if Lyndon Johnson had known that Bob Wood was letting, was helping us even to that extent, he would have cut it off. I

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think further, though, that nobody ever was really helping on the premise that they agreed with it, so I don't think that we could accuse them of that. I think they were just doing the help that any senator was entitled to, which we by the way got much less of because very often people almost treated us like a member of the opposition party. But in that event I think Wood had been quite cooperative even though he never explicitly agreed with the proposals. Now it might have been that under other circumstances Wood is a sufficiently flexible fellow that he would have agreed with the proposals as well. I'd be reasonably certain of that, I might say that the idea for those tax incentive bills is kind of interesting. It came out of the Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] urban hearings of 1966. Kennedy had sat through those hearings quite diligently and Ed Logue [Edward J. Logue] had come in and talked about tax incentives as had a number or three or four other witnesses. And Kennedy said to me after the hearings, "You know I've really got

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to make some proposals based on these. I just can't have sat in those hearings all year and not have anything come out of it." And I think he was saying that partially because he didn't like to waste his time, and partially for political reasons, that just if somebody wanted to accuse him later on of being a do-nothing. So Curzan came to work for us about that time and I myself had kind of seized on the tax incentives and I had some preliminary work done by a couple of people on the outside although very, very slight. So I had Curzan go through the hearings and come up with what he thought were the best ideas and he came up with the tax incentives as well. And we went to Kennedy with that and he said, "That's fine. Do that." And so Curzan just went to work and that's all he did for about six months was work up those two bills.

HACKMAN: Newfield. Doesn't Newfield suggest that this grows out of the Bedford-Stuyvesant thing, that there's very much the origins of the tax incentive things

in the Bedford-Stuyvesant set up.

EDELMAN: Yes. That's partially right in the sense that it tied in philosophically. In Bedford-Stuyvesant we were trying to encourage…

HACKMAN: The practical work didn't carry over.

EDELMAN: Well, the legislative connection in Bedford-Stuyvesant was really its special impact, Title 1D of the Economic Opportunity Act which we put into the Economic Opportunity Act specifically for the purpose of funding Bedford-Stuyvesant. That was passed in 1966, in the summer. That was there to be ready when the Bedford-Stuyvesant project would get started which it did in December of '66, and that first grant came in '67. Philosophically, since we've been talking about getting private enterprise to come into Bedford-Stuyvesant, it was logical for the Senator to propose the tax incentive thing at least in so far as the job side of it was concerned. The housing half didn't you know, is a little bit less directly related. That's one of the reasons we decided to do it, sure.

You know, he said, "Well, that's good. That fits in."

HACKMAN: What kind of evidence came to the Senate office that the Administration was really organizing the task force to specifically block this legislation.

EDELMAN: We'd get leaks. You know, people that Curzan had met earlier who would tell him what they were up to, tell him that they had been directed to do this and they didn't like it much.

HACKMAN: You mentioned Robert Kennedy talking to you about a recording of that '64 conversation with Johnson. Newfield has something in his book about Robert Kennedy making a comment to someone—he didn't want to talk to them about this on the phone. He thought maybe the phone was tapped.

EDELMAN: Yeah, what the story is, which I didn't I know, but the story was that Kennedy wanted to talk to McNamara in person after McNamara was tossed out of the Defense Department because he didn't trust the phone. And Jack asked him why he didn't trust the phone and he said, "Well, because…." I

guess what he said is, "I think some of the phones are tapped." And then he said, "When you get to the last chapter of your book, come back to me and I'll tell you a story that'll make it a best seller." But he never told him the story, so….

HACKMAN: And no one else that you know of then heard anything about it?

EDELMAN: No.

HACKMAN: Do you know anything about a psychological study done of the President's personality. Did you ever hear anything about this in the office?

EDELMAN: Who? Johnson's personality?

HACKMAN: Right.

EDELMAN: No. You mean that some psychologist is supposed to have done for us?

[Interruption]

HACKMAN: Did you talk to Robert Kennedy about the McNamara resignation, his impression of how the whole thing came about?

EDELMAN: Yeah. He.... I wish I could recall. He had a specific conversation about that. Well, I mean

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I know that he thought that McNamara had been thrown out, rather than resigned. He never told us what he went over to see McNamara about. We think that he went over to see McNamara to urge him to make an issue out of it. That is one indication that he himself was considering running at that point because I think that he may even have been saying, "Run on a ticket with me," you know, something to that effect. But I have the feeling that McNamara's unwillingness to make an issue out of it set back Kennedy's political thoughts and plans considerably because he, you know, he lost that ammunition. [Interruption] A few days after the McNamara thing, maybe a two or three days, you remember that he put Teddy up to going to the floor and Teddy went to the floor to criticize the thing. Robert Kennedy had put Teddy up to that because he didn't want to do it himself because he thought that that would be taken as too personal between him and Johnson, and that again there's a sort of a credibility problem. But he

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also made—had Frank make a number of calls to so called friendly reporters to tell than what, in effect, his side of the story was and that was when Johnson made that remark about

the kids and boys going around. But sometime in there, as I say, maybe two, three days after the resignation, I remember we were sitting around one evening in the office, 6:30, quarter to seven just before everybody was going to go home. And he said…. First a day or two earlier he had said, "If anybody ever knew the full story of this, you know, it would be very bad for Lyndon Johnson," or something like that. Or "The full story of this hasn't been told yet"—one of those kinds of things like he had said in the office before the vice presidential thing. And that was all he had said in my presence. Then he came.... This particular evening he said, "I just was talking to Jimmy Reston [James B. Reston]," he said. Well now, Jimmy Reston wasn't a particular friend of his and he had said to me on other occasions that he never quite got along with Jimmy Reston

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and he thought that it was a generation gap, that Jimmy Reston was sort of jealous of these other fellows that had come up and that Reston had never liked John Kennedy for the same reason. So he said he'd just been talking to Jimmy Reston and that Reston told him that he had called Lyndon Johnson, or been in to see him, and spoken to him about the McNamara question and that Lyndon Johnson had said to him at that he never even knew that the World Bank vacancy was up that is to say, that this whole thing had happened at the World Bank before it…. Evidently, they had come to McNamara without his [LBJ's] knowledge and asked him if he wanted the job. And then in the same conversation, he had said to him that even though the World Bank had asked him for three nominees, that he'd only had one nominee all along and his number one, two and three choice was Robert McNamara. And, Kennedy, of course, told that with marvelous gusto to show the duplicity and so on of Lyndon Johnson. So that's the one specific thing that I remember about the McNamara thing. Interestingly, I believe it was

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the same evening, at least—you know how one's mental images are associative places—that we were sitting around the same place, somewhere around the same time, which was in the office next to Kennedy's, that was Angie Novello's office, and Jeff Greenfield, who had been with us at that point about three months remarked, and I think it was in this same conversation, remarked that he had gotten his draft notice and that he thought he'd better tell the Senator that he was not going to go. And he didn't know that the Senator would say. He thought maybe the Senator would say, "Well, you'll have to get off the staff," or something. Instead the Senator said, "Well, Jeff, you know if you go to jail, I'll see to it that you get treated right, because I used to have some influence over that prison system." And then he said, "And besides don't worry about it. A lot of the greatest men in history have begun their careers by spending time in jail," which was just marvelous. And it, well, it's irrelevant

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but I just happened to remember it because I think it happened on this same evening.

HACKMAN: What did you see.... You'd mentioned earlier that he obviously had a great deal of respect for McNamara. How does this come out over the years, particularly as he moves in another direction on the Vietnam thing?

EDELMAN: Well, just, basically a couple of things. One is that at an awful lot of things he would say, "Well now, Bob McNamara told me," or "I would certainly want to talk to Bob McNamara before I would say anything like that," or whatever. And then just along with that a reluctance to criticize Bob McNamara. But, you know, he said it on a number of occasions that Bob McNamara was one of the smartest men he had ever met, and tremendous respect and that kind of thing. And of course there's the theory around Washington that McNamara was coming on sort of dovish with Kennedy through this period and if nothing else was feeding him…. And I think this is true. I think that Kennedy must have been talking to him

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weekly or perhaps more often and was getting figures, classified material, or at least, you know, unreleased material, perhaps not classified, which he was then using at least in private conversation. I don't think he ever used any of it in any public statement. But it helped him to form his views. For example, the thing that I said earlier about the lunch with the editors of the *Chicago Sun Times*. The reason Kennedy was so up on the course of the war was that he was getting facts from McNamara. Now whatever else one thinks about McNamara and thinks of McNamara as being two-faced, let's say, because he was alleged to be complaining to Kennedy while serving Johnson, and maybe even taking initiatives under Johnson, he didn't have to be going that far. He could simply have been telling Kennedy the kinds of facts that Kennedy wanted to know, whether out of combination of friendship and guilt or whatever else. And I think, in fact, that's probably what the facts were, that he wasn't complaining or anything else to Kennedy or misleading

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as to where he stood, but simply because of their association was willing to talk and tell him the present status of things in a sort of factual way and let Kennedy do what he wanted with those facts. [Interruption] Yeah, I was just going to say that the general thing about Robert Kennedy—he had tremendous loyalty to people. As I said before, based sometimes on the 1960 Political Thing. But Robert McNamara was a person who he would have stood by for a lot longer and certainly stood by all through that period of time. And if he had any criticism of him or if he had any—if his respects were tarnished, he would never never show it.

HACKMAN: Would the staff ever come.... Would you or Walinsky ever come back at him on something like this and say, you know, "Look, here's what McNamara's doing. McNamara's...."

EDELMAN: Yes, and he'd be likely to say, "Oh, Adam," "Oh, Peter, I, you know, you don't have to go through all that." He just wouldn't listen. You know, it would either be an indication that he didn't want to

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listen or that, you know, you weren't telling him anything he didn't know.

HACKMAN: You'd mentioned earlier that he judged a lot of things in terms of, a lot of people in terms of where they'd stood in 1960 on John Kennedy. Who are some of the people that he doesn't respect simply because they were on the wrong side there and then vice versa?

EDELMAN: Oh, gosh. That's a hard question. Certainly, for example, there was a fellow whose name I don't even remember who had helped in the Viva Kennedy thing in 1960—very small example, Mexican-American guy who got indicted for something out in, I guess, California maybe New Mexico alone about '66 or '67. And Kennedy got him a lawyer. The guy wasn't anything in particular, but, you know, he just knew that that fellow had been very helpful and very loyal in 1960. And, you know, I don't know whether the fellow was framed or whether he'd actually made off with the money with some embezzlement kind of thing, fraud. There was that sort of

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thing. And then he would always drop handwritten notes to people that had been helpful in the past. I'm just trying.... Maybe [Interruption] Well, one example would be Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman], who had been very helpful in 1960 and through course, had been the Secretary of Agriculture. But Kennedy did not retain such a terrific personal relationship with some of the other Cabinet secretaries. Willard Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz], he thought was sort of a bullshit artist. And obviously, you know, I don't know what Wirtz's feelings were, but maybe there was day to day stuff but they just weren't that close. But Freeman is an example of like the McNamara case because long after it became clear that Freeman was really a very bad Secretary of Agriculture in the sense of not feeding hungry people in this country, Kennedy would always say, "Well, Orville's a decent guy and he'd trying to do the right thing." And to a really objective eye, it was rather clear that Orville was not such a decent guy and was not trying that hard to do the

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right thing, or if he was a decent guy, he was overly political and overly scared of Jamie Whitten and what Jamie Whitten [Jamie W. Whitten] could do to him, Jamie Whitten being the Chairman of the House Agriculture Appropriations Committee. So that was the thing where I think hides the thing he did in 1960 kept Kennedy from really being objective about what Freeman was in 1967 and 1968. Two examples the other way—one would be Joe Rauh

[Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.], who is after all has good liberal credentials and so on, but I don't even know the history of it, but I take it was probably a Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] type in 1960 and they probably hadn't been able to pin down. Well, Kennedy never, even though Joe Rauh, I don't think had anything particular against Bob Kennedy, and, in fact, you know around quite a bit on home rule in 1965 and on other liberal questions. Kennedy never really trusted Joe Rauh,

HACKMAN: And he wanted to get on the floor in the '60 Convention in opposition to Johnson, remember that. Rauh had wanted to speak against the nomination of

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Johnson.

EDELMAN: Oh, for vice president.

HACKMAN: Vice president.

EDELMAN: Oh, I didn't know that. I suspect that wouldn't have bothered Bob Kennedy particularly.

HACKMAN: No, the other way.

EDELMAN: Yeah. Although maybe again once the decision was made, he felt that the ranks should have closed or something. But in any event, there was something that had gone on back there. And I'm trying to pick a case where objectively Joe Rauh is someone who.... I mean I have.... He has his idiosyncrasies and I have certain reservations about him, but he's someone who basically you would work with, and Kennedy just.... You know, he would never, ever say, "Well, gee you could call up to see what Joe Rauh thinks about that," you know. If Joe Rauh came around he'd see him, and even then somewhat reluctantly, but that was only because Joe Rauh had especially good credentials.

I think another example would be Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford].

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Now again these things are never straight unambiguous, but Clifford was obviously…. Who was he for in 1960?

HACKMAN: Symington [Stuart Symington, II].

EDELMAN: Yeah. And then he'd had an association with Johnson over the years and so on. And, you know, Kennedy basically viewed the appointment of Clifford as Secretary of Defense as, you know, as appointing Marshal Ky [Nguyen Cao Ky] or something like that. He thought that was just, really very appointment of a very low

order of quality. And I'm sure that that also was because of the fact that Clark, you know, it went partially back in any event to the fact that Clark Clifford had been against John Kennedy in 1960. And I'd be willing to bet that if Clark Clifford had been for John Kennedy in 1960, that Robert Kennedy's attitude about him would have been quite different—maybe not wholly positive, but quite different. So these are the kinds of...

HACKMAN: What about Wayne Morse as an example? Does this….

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Do you think there's anything in that relationship going back to '60, when he'd run in Oregon against John Kennedy in the primary?

EDELMAN: No. No, he didn't have anything against.... Robert Kennedy didn't have anything against Wayne Morse. No, in fact, he rather liked him. He thought he was a windy and egotistical fellow, but he respected Morse's intelligence tremendously in the Senate and was always very polite, very deferential to him and I never heard him say anything critical other than that. "He must be stuck on himself" kind of thing—but never about political matinee because I don't think he really regarded Morse as the politician in that sense, you know, it's.... He was that special breed of man that only a United States Senator can be.

HACKMAN: Are there other people around Robert Kennedy that you and the staff have difficulty in understanding what attracts him to them?

EDELMAN: Yes. But let me say about Wayne Morse, that if, again this is my theory, if Wayne Morse had been very strongly

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pro-John Kennedy in 1960, I think that Robert Kennedy would have behaved differently in Oregon in '68 and would have gone out of his way to embrace Wayne Morse and see to it that he endorsed him and so on and so forth, which he didn't do because he didn't have any particular strong feeling for him. But even there, there was some by play that we can get to later on about the Indian hearings that we wanted to have in Oregon and Kennedy really, in effect, if it didn't cost him anything, wanted to be helpful to Morse. So he didn't have a strong feeling about it. Now, the other question.

HACKMAN: The other question is are there other people around Robert Kennedy that you have a hard time understanding—what attracts him them? I'm thinking of somebody, I don't know if you know even Paul Corbin well enough, but other people who go back to 1960.

EDELMAN: Yeah. Well, you'd have to give me specific examples, although I can give you

some. Paul Corbin would be

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one, except that he didn't like Paul Corbin. I don't quite understand that. Gertrude Corbin [Gertrude McGowan Corbin], as you know, works for Ethel Kennedy I guess, on a volunteer basis and I've always wondered whether if she, you know, whether Ethel's willingness to have somebody as a volunteer who was relatively competent was the basic motivation from Ethel's side in that relationship. I tend to think so. But in any event that means she's in the house every day. Now Paul, nobody knows where he gets his income from. And I remember once or twice his being out at the house early in the morning, he would come out to see the Senator about something, and the Senator seeing him there, coming downstairs and seeing him there and saying, "What the hell are you doing here?" You know, "Get the hell out of here." So I don't think Paul Corbin was a great favorite of his. It was just that Paul Corbin for whatever his reasons, had decided that Robert Kennedy was his fellow. So that's not so hard to understand. I mean, you know,

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what can you do. You know surely you just tell the fellow you don't want his help and he still goes out and is found around. And when Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] took the job in upstate New York, as he perhaps told you, the one thing that he wanted assurance of was that Paul Corbin wouldn't mess with him and Kennedy told Bruno in no uncertain terms, "If you ever hear of Paul Corbin around just let me know and I'll take care of it." So that was not really something that I, from Kennedy's side, didn't understand, I just didn't understand Paul Corbin. From Kennedy's side, the things that were harder to understand were things like, say, Bill vanden Heuvel because—except even that, I think I do. Bill vanden Heuvel is a very bright fellow, is very charming, is the kind of person who's pleasant to have around. He's not obnoxious. He is good for one's ego, a sycophant, but not, in other words, not obnoxiously so. And I'm sure Kennedy knew his political judgment was awful and simply didn't listen to that, tuned that part of it out. The place where

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it came to be a mistake is that Bill vanden Heuvel did go around in Robert Kennedy's name and did say things in New York which were damaging sometimes, did give him some bad advice that he followed sometimes. And that I never understood because I think Kennedy.... I'm giving Kennedy the benefit of the doubt when I say I think he knew that Bill vanden Heuvel's political judgment was bad. If he didn't, then I really don't understand that relationship. But that would be the kind of' person that I would tend to, you know, say and that we would sometimes say to each other, "Now what does he see in that fellow?" And, of course, personally I never saw what he saw in somebody like Andy Williams, who I think is really a dopey guy. But there was a side to Robert Kennedy which liked that, you know, the bright lights. There's no question about it. He'd got to New York and he'd go out to fancy

restaurants with his pals and so on, and sometimes looked bored, but he kept on doing it. And he'd go to Hollywood and, you know, he'd go and stay at

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Andy Williams' house and go out to that restaurant that Pierre Salinger had an interest in or go to The Factory or whatever it was. And I mean I don't think he would have done that if he didn't enjoy it in his own peculiar way. So that side of him I never quite understood although I must admit that probably in similar circumstances I would enjoy knowing some movie stars. And it's just that we were always sort of purist about—this was our Bobby and he was a Kennedy and what did he need? He was more famous and classier than any of them. But I think he derived some satisfaction from those things. It's just that the particular ones sometimes, like Andy Williams, who was really such a, as I say, I think such a dumby—can't remember anybody's name. And Kennedy told me once that Andy Williams can't remember the words to any songs, that he had to have a—always has to have a watchacallit—teleprompter—to tell him the words to the songs. And his wife I didn't like much either, Claudine [Claudine Longet Williams]. On the other hand he had some.... You know, Shirley

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MacLaine is kind of an interesting girl and a character. I never could see.... Well, his thing with Jim Whittaker [James W. Whittaker] was that Jim Whittaker was an outdoors companion and I suppose that's enough, but Jim Whittaker is not an intelligent person. On the other hand, John Glenn is a marvelous human being and I'm sure that he enjoyed John Glenn on a number of levels. So that you'd have to give me other examples and I could tell you whether I thought they were….

HACKMAN: Well, one person very similar to the McNamara case and that's Maxwell Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor].

EDELMAN: I just don't know enough about that. I've never had a conversation with Maxwell Taylor so I couldn't tell you whether he's dumb or smart. And that would go back to a different point really because I think we have to assume that Maxwell Taylor is smart, at least for purposes of the conversation and that would go back to the point about the fact that Kennedy was a great admirer of Herbert Hoover and always felt that Herbert Hoover was a remarkable.... In fact,

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you remember the David Frost interview recently where he talked about Herbert Hoover that that was really a.... That was not a phony thing. He really did admire him. And he was a great admirer of Douglas MacArthur. So that there was a certain breed of guy who had a kind of individualism that he admired even after his politics had changed and he wouldn't have agreed with anything that the guy thought politically. And that would be Maxwell Taylor.

HACKMAN: Yeah, but you don't get the feeling then through the Senate years that there's much contact in anything like there is with McNamara on policy things?

EDELMAN: With Max Taylor?

HACKMAN: With Maxwell Taylor.

EDELMAN: Oh, I think there was some, but not by me. No, I think there was some. I don't mean to down play that at all. I think he talked to him fairly regularly when he was around more. And when Taylor came back from wherever he was, he would come see Kennedy and tell him.... They were good friends. You

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know, when you asked me about.... Well, maybe—it's interesting—maybe I was answering the question in a way other than what you were getting at, the original question about people around Kennedy that I didn't understand, because I was never as much troubled by the fact that he had long-standing relationships with intelligent people with whom I disagreed on the merits because I knew that he would make up his mind, as I was troubled by the fact that he had these some social relationships with these rather stupid people, whose perhaps only basis for having a relationship with him was their glamorous name.

HACKMAN: How much of that do you think was through Mrs. Kennedy? Is that a factor?

EDELMAN: Maybe she liked them. I don't know. But he was, I mean, one time we went…. She wasn't with us and we were in California and we went and stayed at Andy Williams' house and he had a dinner party. He obviously saw them on his own. The relationship with Andy Williams wasn't a famous old friendship or anything. I was with Kennedy in Los Angeles in

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November of '65 and he said, "Why don't we...." And he taped a show at NBC at the Burbank studio and he said, "Why don't we go by and see if Andy Williams is working on his show? I met him recently and thought he was rather nice." And we went by and it grew from here.

HACKMAN: Maybe we can talk a bit more about the events when you went to California after Christmas in '67 other than the Unruh conversation. Did you get in on the meeting with the RAND [Research And Development Corporation] people?

EDELMAN: Yes. Yeah the breakfast meeting.

HACKMAN: Now how did that come about?

EDELMAN: Don't know. I don't know. It was just scheduled. It was at.... I guess Pierre must have arranged it. It was at Pierre's house, And it was basically about Vietnam, although we talked some about Indonesia. But basically.... I guess Dan Ellsberg [Daniel P. Ellsberg] was there. I think so. And he and another fellow had just had spent a lot of time in Vietnam and were just telling all the absurdities and it was a very, very good session. You know, things that are

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obvious once they are said, but that nobody usually talks about, which in the fact, for example, that since the war is Vietnamese against Vietnamese that very often people who fight for the ARVAN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] and people who fight for the VC [Viet Cong] cone from the same village and go home for, you know, whatever the Vietnamese equivalent of Sunday dinner is and see each other and then go back to fighting and that—you know, which is a rather curious way to run a civil war, although maybe there were some advantages to the war in this country as well. So that then you see that it makes it so clear that if the choice is between somebody that's, you know, your own people and somebody that's not, you'll chose the one that's your own people. And it has nothing to do with Communism or democracy and all of those kinds of words. Well, those are the kind of very simple things that they came back and said. And then there was a lot of much more complicated analysis of the troop strength of the North Vietnamese and just how much reserves they

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had and how far along they were in the training and so on and so forth. But it was a very good session.

HACKMAN: Is there anything that he takes away from this meeting that then comes out in a speech soon after or that really affects what he's saying?

EDELMAN: Some of it. Now Adam, of course, was not there at that meeting and Adam was the person who did most of the, well, who did all the drafting on Vietnam speeches with some help from Dick Goodwin. So that I would d only come into those speeches to criticize them once the draft had been written. And so the way in which it would have come out would have been Kennedy would have gone back to Adam and said, "Now we learned this, this and this." You know, "Follow it up." We'd really have to look again. I would think that some of it is in the February eighth '68 speech that he gave in Chicago, which was an excellent, excellent speech. And Adam in any event was developing a relationship with Dan Ellsberg at that point, so he would have gotten scene of that same

information independently.

HACKMAN: Can you remember at that meeting any talk about the possibility of an offensive then toward the end of the month? Were these people in any way forecasting what turned out to be the Tet offensive?

EDELMAN: I don't think so. I won't swear by it, but I don't think I remember anything like that except the question of how strong the North Vietnamese troops were, but that was really a reserve question of whether they were training, you know, whether we were destroying more than they could put in and how much reserves they had. No, I think that there was no inkling that I recall at that meeting at all.

HACKMAN: Do you remember the impression that he would have drawn from what they were saying about that question, the reserve thing?

EDELMAN: The impression he would have drawn was that basically the North Vietnamese probably had more by way of reserves than American intelligence was giving them credit for. That's true, because the strong basic tenor

of the breakfast was that things are going badly over there, worse than anybody thinks and, that anybody has publicly said, and that we just damn well better get out of there and get out of there soon. But of course that was what we'd been hearing for.... This was just a reinforcement of things that we had heard and felt for months. In fact, you know, more than a year.

HACKMAN: This is just before, I believe, Edward Kennedy takes his trip to Vietnam, isn't it? He goes in January.

EDELMAN: Yeah, it was either just before or.... I don't remember exactly then he left. I guess it was just before.

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything coming out of that trip?

EDELMAN: Well, again it's generally confirmation of things that we'd thought. But his people came back and said, you know, that just, "We thought it was corrupt. We didn't have the vaguest idea of how corrupt." And that they had seen how, you know, the corruption extended all the way down and that it was more than the usual, they said more than the usual Asian kind

of corruption, that it was the kind of thing that really preyed upon people's lives. It was more than just, you know, the casual idea of making a payoff to get something done to one man, that they had sort of deliberately constructed or the vestige from the French was the Civil Service system that had you going up and down, up and down to get a particular approval and that everybody along the way took something just so he would go like that [pounds table to indicate stamping] on the piece of paper. And, you know, this just really just made life impossible for people. So there was that kind of thing, plus there was the findings about the refugee thing which was that treatment of the refugees and so on was far worse than anybody had said. And there was a much clearer sense of how many elements were excluded from the government, much more clearly and much more firsthand than we had gotten. If you looked at the February eighth Robert Kennedy speech, probably you wouldn't find explicit stuff in it that came out

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of, you know, lifted from a finding that his brother, his brother's staff or lifted from what the RAND Corporation told him, but what you'd find is that he's saying all these things that he's been saying before but much more strongly and much more positively because he's more certain about them you know, with each new report that comes in.

HACKMAN: Do you recall if this is a trip that Edward Kennedy wanted to take, or is this in any way Robert Kennedy's proposal that he go?

EDELMAN: I don't knew, but I suspect it's probably both. You know, I'm sure they talked about it before he went. Now just who talked to who first is something that I don't know, but I'm sure Robert Kennedy encouraged him to do it. I'm sure that it's something he wanted to do.

HACKMAN: What kind of feeling do you get about Edward Kennedy's role through late '67 and early '68 on the whole question of going in and can you see what kind of attitude his staff has about Robert Kennedy going into the race—anything that just hasn't been written?

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You know what's been written is that he's opposed. So anything other than that?

EDELMAN: He was opposed. I don't know how his staff felt about it.

HACKMAN: Do you think Robert Kennedy looked to him with a great deal of confidence for political advice?

EDELMAN: No. I think he looked to him for political advice, but not with a great deal of

confidence. I think that remark that he made to me which I stated earlier was very indicative when he said, "I don't have anybody to do for me what I did for my brother." He would always talk to Teddy before he did anything that was major if for nothing else just to tell him that he was going to do it. But, you know, it just wasn't the same thing. He and John Kennedy had grown up together and been partners for a long period of time, and Teddy had never been a partner of his. He and Teddy, you know, had had separate political careers. Indeed I think there was some brotherly competition, not, you know, not hostile at all, but they were in a position of being kind of competitors

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in the Senate. It was clear which one was the older and which one had the best, had the claim on an issue. If it was an important issue, Bobby could tell Teddy to stay out of it. But significantly Teddy had a very lousy staff up until Robert came into the Senate, and saw Robert hire all these young fellows and then found himself Dave Burke [David W. Burke], then found himself Alan Novak [Alan R. Novak], and got rid of Win Turner [E. Winslow Turner],who was just some blob that had been around—very significant. And then his people who had told me from time to time that Teddy would say, "Well, now Bobby's doing this. Why aren't we doing something like that?" And we got some of that because they would try to really bullshit each other. Usually all in good humor, but every now and then one would get to the other and Bobby would come into the office one morning and say, "Well, now Teddy's doing so and so. Why aren't we? Why aren't we doing that? Why don't we have something in there? Why didn't we think of that?" I think less so in our case. I

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mean I think it was more the other way. But I remember once flying up on the plane with him to New York and Bobby saying, "Teddy what are you coming up here for?"And Teddy said, "Well, I'm going down to"—in his best low voice—"I'm going down to lower Manhattan to testify about the question of fish and fish meal in the harbor and the and the...."— you know, and really double talk—and Bobby sort of not quite getting that it was double talk until say three quarters of the way through it, but really you could see the look on his face that he's done me, he's one upped me in my own bailiwick here, and then, of course, getting a good laugh out of it.

HACKMAN: Whom do you think he looked to then by late '67 for solid political advice of the country's change and everything since Sorensen's time?

EDELMAN: That was the problem, That was his problem is he did not have anywhere to look. The closest he had was Steve. And it's very interesting that in all the stuff that threatened Steve's position, no one

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ever knows about it because that was.... You know Steve is a very cool operator as well. But I'm sure he was talking very regularly to Steve about it. He was talking to Teddy for whatever good that was. And then just, you know, whoever he could talk to. It was sad to watch in a way. And in the end, of course, all of us have the responsibility to trust our own decisions and. he made a mistake. He should have gotten into it much, much earlier and it was his problem. But he didn't have anybody. Ted Sorensen, well now, you know, he didn't regard Ted Sorensen as a political advisor. I remember once Ted Sorensen.... We used to call Ted Sorensen to get jokes sometimes for speeches. And Ted came back with one that was rather offensive. I can't remember whether it was offensive because of off color or, I think because it said something about some group or other. And he looked at that one and he said, "Where'd you get that?" And I said, "From Ted." And he said, "Well, that's why we used to cut those things out of President Kennedy's speeches." And, you know, with the sense that

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Sorensen was okay, but only up to a point. So who did he turn to? He liked Fred Dutton an awful lot. That was one person that he talked to. He always liked Fred Dutton a lot, always respected his advice. And Jesse Unruh.

HACKMAN: What about O'Donnell?

EDELMAN: Yes, I think O'Donnell, I think O'Donnell. But in the same category with.... He'd be the closest thing to a real advisor along with Steve and Fred Dutton just in that same.... Somebody that Kennedy respected.

HACKMAN: Did you ever find out where Smith, what Steve Smith's position was through this?

EDELMAN: No.

HACKMAN: On that California trip anything else that you remember—political contacts other than Unruh while you were in California? Is that the only person...

EDELMAN: Unruh was the only.... He called Alioto [Joseph L. Alioto] on the phone, but that was a courtesy call. Well, he talked to a number of people. He talked to.... There's an assemblyman named something

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like George N. Zenorich [George Zenovitch] or something. You'd have to check on the name.

HACKMAN: That sounds right.

EDELMAN: And that fellow came up to see him late at night one evening. Just, you know, that's the way he would have done a year earlier as well. You just check in with people. And there was a luncheon in San Francisco that he stopped in at. Let's see, no, he went there.... Yeah, he starred there.

HACKMAN: He made a speech in San Francisco somewhere.

EDELMAN: He gave a speech at the Commonwealth Club. So there was a luncheon that Bob Coate [Robert L. Coate], who was the Northern California chairman put together and there were a number of people there. And, you know, he sat there in the second floor of some restaurant in a private room and maybe forty people and talked very frankly about stuff. And that was a political thing. And I'm sure he made some other calls as well. But the only meeting that he had explicitly, and even as we've said that was not that explicit, but the only meeting we had to explicitly talk about

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the presidency was Unruh is.

HACKMAN: He also made a statement while he was in San Francisco that he intended to back Lyndon Johnson and the New York party would be clearly behind Lyndon Johnson. Can you remember?

EDELMAN: He got off the plane and said that.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

EDELMAN: Yuk! And Murray Kempton [Murray Kempton] wrote a devastating column after that about how Kennedy had gone off to the ski slopes and Ronnie Eldridge had said, "Well, leave him along out there 'cause he always thinks better when he's alone and on the ski slopes." And that he had come off the ski slopes to endorse Lyndon Johnson again and if this is what Robert Kennedy was, the hell with it. And that was really, I think, the first real break, the first time Murray Kempton really, you know, began to get seriously disenchanted, But he did, he came back from the ski slopes, went to Fort Hall Indian reservation in Idaho, which I did not go with him on, arrived in San Francisco that evening and had had

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three drinks on the plane, which was unusual for him and went into this press conference and said later that he was just trying to keep from saying anything significant about anything because he was, you know, knew that he'd had a couple of drinks and so just managed to bumble his way through it and, you know, literally trying to be as inarticulate as possible so they wouldn't use any of the film and just made this statement about how—which he thought

was very innocuous and that was, you know he had a way of miscalculating about these things—about how he intended to support Lyndon Johnson and whatever else was in it. And, of course, that was the big news. They had the headlines, "Kennedy reiterates support for Johnson."

HACKMAN: Do you get any feeling of Salinger's view point at that point?

EDELMAN: Well, I think Salinger was against his running at that point, but I have no proof. Salinger now claims that he was in favor of his running at that point. I think Salinger was against it up until

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the very last minute, but again I don't think that's either here or there. I mean, I don't think Kennedy.... He had one of these qualities and you know it relates back to my saying without any bitterness or rancor that he, that what my role and Adam's role was, in his mind, was to work on legislation and on speeches. And we weren't supposed to be political advisors. That isn't what we were hired to do. And I always had the feeling that Adam was somewhat overstepping his role in trying to keep on giving political advice. Now I think as a matter of history, Adam was very right to do that, but at the time it caused some abrasion and caused Kennedy to sometimes got mad at Adam became he thought Adam was pushing his point of view too hard. And I suppose all of that had it's effect. And I just didn't operate that way. So if Pierre is hired to be press guy, that's what he's supposed to be.

HACKMAN: If Walinsky was going too far in some cases, how does Robert Kennedy handle a personal relationship like that? Does he get angry about it frequently in

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the office or does he, you know, just gently say, "You're going too far." How does he get his point across?

EDELMAN: Well, first of all, he had a strong enough ego so that he didn't personally feel threatened by a guy. Now Adam is a very.... Adam's brilliant and he's, of course, a dear friend. But he's a very abrasive fellow and he's an arrogant fellow, at least he comes on as arrogant. Who knows what insecurities there are underneath? And it's very easy for one to be threatened. by him. So Kennedy, which I don't think Teddy has, by the way, Robert Kennedy had the strength to separate out the style from the substance. And he simply, if Adam orally pushed him too hard on something, he would say, essentially, "Oh, Adam." I mean it was just that way. "Oh Adam, don't go all the way through that." Or, you know, you...

[BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II]

HACKMAN: Well, we were talking about.... You were talking about how the Senator dealt with Walinsky.

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EDELMAN: Yeah. Not just Adam. I mean Adam happens he be a good example, but basically Kennedy had a way of hearing what he wanted to hear and if you were going on too long, he could find a way to just interrupt and make sure you didn't go on any longer. Some people found that impolite. I just found it efficient. So you would, you know, get to make a case and it was only if you kept on arguing beyond the point where he either wanted to listen or for whatever reason didn't want to listen any more, then his way of dealing with that either, I mean particularly of Adam would be sort of, as I say, it was, "Oh, Adam you don't have to keep on with that." And Adam was generally good natured about that.

HACKMAN: When you came back from the trip, from California, what are the things that you're involved in over, spending most of your time on over the next week, particularly when Dolan was working on the political side? Are there any things at all that you start doing in anticipation of the campaign in terms of position papers or mailing or whatever?

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EDELMAN: Well, I think not at that time. You're talking specifically about that trip to California now?

HACKMAN: Yes.

EDELMAN: No, what I immediately got dumped into since Joe had left the office, was personnel decisions in the office and making sure that the mail was being answered and essentially minding the store so that I was explicitly not working on putting together a campaign. But nobody really was at that point other than Joe. So I was, you know, pursuing my various legislative interests, working on whether we'd have some food hearings in South Carolina—hunger hearings and whether we would do it is eastern Kentucky and that kind of things, and working up some welfare reform legislation to put in to try and turn around the worst aspects of the 1967 Welfare Amendment. And the only indication of, you know, the political side of it would be the Senator would say to me as he always did, "I'd like to stay in touch with those people." That was the favorite phrase. So, you know, he had told Jesse Unruh to have Frank Burns with me. And, you

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know, he said to me, “Now you, stay in touch.... I’d like to stay in with those people.” There were certain follow-ups to what he saw in the Indian hearing aspects of the trip which was the main reason for the trip, and he wanted me to make sure that our staff, Indian committee staff man, got after the Bureau of Indian Affairs about one thing and another. And I’m just trying to think about.... There really wasn’t any other particular contact. I think along about that time he wrote me a note that I should be in touch with Cesar Chavez’s people saying I’d like to stay in touch with those people. But the only explicit thing politically really out of the trip for me was that short role that I had as contact to Jesse.

HACKMAN: How did you happen to go on that trip?

EDELMAN: I was there, as I say, I’d been on vacation through December. I was in Antigua and then visited some friends in New Orleans. And I just.... When I checked into the office, when I got back.... No, I was going to go out and visit my sister anyway,

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that’s what it was. And I just said, “I’m going to be out there. Is there anything I can do?” And they said, “Well, as long as you’re out there, why don’t you be the, you know, the guy who makes the arrangements, you know, traveling with him and so on.” And that’s particularly good because I had done work on the Indian stuff. So I sort of supervised, helped set up the hearings, the Indian hearings and so on and I checked in with.... He was promoting his book at that point, *To Seek a New World*, and checked in with the West Coast representative of Doubleday and, you know, just was the general arranger in the thing. And I happened to go on the trip then because, as I say, I was going to go out to visit my sister anyway.

HACKMAN: Okay. What about the contacts then with Cesar Chavez over the next month or so and his people? Are there many? How does that March tenth thing come about?

EDLEMAN: I don’t remember where I specifically checked in with.... I guess I probably did. “How are things going?” You know, “what can we do?” And we wanted to

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pursue the question of collective bargaining for the farm workers—the bill had been pending the previous year, S-S, of the ninetieth Congress—pursue that in the second session of the ninetieth Congress. I probably talked to Cesar’s people to make sure they still wanted that. And then sometime in February I got a call from, I suppose it was Jim Drake [James Drake] or Jerry Cohen [Jerry S. Cohen]—those were the two people that I usually dealt with—saying that Cesar had gone on this fast and it was then about the sixth or seventh day and no one... It

hadn't drawn any attention. And they just wanted the Senator to know that he had done that and also to know that they were worried about Cesar and they weren't sure just what his intentions were and wanted to alert us because they felt they might want to come back to us in a week or so after that, because they were worried that perhaps the only way they could get Cesar to go off the fast would be if the Senator would ask him, come out there personally and ask him. So I went to hire and he was deeply moved

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by it, really, you know, I think grasped immediately that Cesar was doing something that was just very meaningful. It was a, you know, a tremendous gesture on behalf of non-violence and one that was a physical risk to himself. And he asked me every day, you know, "Have you.... How is he today? Have you called out there? Do they want us to do something? What can I do?" And so I would call up and say, "You know I haven't heard from you," which I must say was not my style usually. I always figured that in general a wheel that wasn't squeaking was operating all right. But, so I called up there. Finally, they never.... You know, they kept saying, "Well, we might have to ask him to come out here." And I kept reporting that to the Senator. "Nothing new, they still might have to ask you to go out." And then one day they said, that the doctor had told him that he better start taking liquids or he'd be too dehydrated which he did do along about the, perhaps the twenty-first day or so. And then he said, "Okay," he would come off of the fast.

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And they wanted to know if the Senator would come out for that thing. And the Senator, without much hesitation.... You know, didn't say, "Is that a good thing?" or "Should I do that?" He said, "Well, does it make any.... You know, can I get out there?" And he was going to speak in Des Moines on the night before anyway. And we checked the flights and we said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I'll go." And there just wasn't ever any question about it. So he went and it was entirely non-political. He just went on a plane in Los Angeles, went up to Delano. John Seigenthaler came on out with us and Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] joined us in Los Angeles because he did want to talk to John about his political problems, and it was on that private plane flight from Los Angeles to Delano that I first knew for sure that he was going to run for president because he said explicitly, "I am going to run. Now I have to figure out how to get McCarthy out of it." The Delano thing was very beautiful—lot of people there and marvelous kind of pageantry about it and

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a joyous occasion and very moving and Cesar was helped in and of course they broke bread together. They sat next to each other and broke bread together and Kennedy delivered a very moving speech which was largely his, just his own extemporaneous thing based on some drafts that he'd been given and so on. And the only thing.... It was that night that we stopped

at Andy Williams' house and the only political thing he did was to call Jesse, talk to him on the phone for a few minutes and even that was just sort of checking in with him.

HACKMAN: What had his feeling been about Cesar before this over time? Had you played a role in getting them together originally or how had that come about?

EDELMAN: Yeah. You know, in here comes my education as well. I'd read in the *New Republic* and a couple of other places about the grape strike in the Christmas of '65 and early '66. Jack Conway [Jack T. Conway] called up one day and said, "You know we've been very involved in the strikers and Senator Williams [Harrison A. Williams, Jr.] of New Jersey's holding hearings out there

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and Bob's on the committee and we think it'd be good if he went, Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] and I." So I reported that to him and we went back and forth for about three days. Every day I'm asking him was he going to do it, and every day me's saying, "Yes, I think it's worthwhile," and then his saying, "Well, what do some of those people in California think about it?" And I checked I suppose with Fred Dutton and maybe he checked with some people. But anyway after about the third day of going around like that and his not giving me an answer, he finally said, "Okay, I'll do it." And so we met, both met, Cesar for the first time at the same time which was on that trip in March of '66. In fact, almost three years to the day earlier.... two years to the day earlier from Cesar's fast breaking. And he just, was very moved again by what he saw out there, the testimony of the workers very genuine about their conditions, versus the very flimsy justification offered by the law enforcement officials

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for their repressive treatment of the strikers plus the rather blustering and not very convincing position taken by the growers. And he just came back determined that here was something.... You know, something had touched a nerve in him and he was going to heap that. So for the next two years we were involved in many things: helping first to get the minimum wage for the farm workers, trying to get the collective bargaining legislation for the farm workers enacted, pushing the Justice Department immigration service and the Labor Department about the green card regulations, helping Cesar's people to raise money in the East during the summer of '87, going to south Texas, which Edward Kennedy did, which I went with him, to look into that aspect of the strike. Robert Kennedy then going to the follow up hearings in Washington on that. So there was a whole, kind of chain of things and, you know, Cesar's people kind of got the idea very early that we were responsive, that when they would call up and ask us to do something that we would try to do it. And so

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it came to be more and more the case. Well, then Kennedy went out there himself again in May of '67 for hearings of another subcommittee, the Poverty Subcommittee, and saw Cesar at that time as well. And then Cesar was back in Washington to testify before the Migratory Labor Subcommittee at some point in early '67 and came into the offices. So it was just one of those things. The relationship gradually developed and the trust gradually developed and Kennedy's respect for them continued and it was just the nature of it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any conversations between the two of them on a sort of a theoretical level of, you know, Chavez' theories of what he was about and what he was trying to do and non-violence? Did he ever talk in these terms?

EDELMAN: The.... It was a very.... The first time we were there, the second day was in Delano, the second day we were there, and in the morning there was a sort of a field trip out to see the strikers and we went out first to meet Cesar at the headquarters.

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And he and Cesar started talking and there were television cameras all around so it was very unnatural. And so he said something like, "How's it going?" And Chavez said, "Well, not bad, Senator." And Kennedy said, "Well, I mean how's it going?" You know, and it went like that very hesitantly, but then they began to get into it. Well, about this time that they began to get into it, I recall that there were about three or four other United States Senators wandering around there, and I started sort of seeing where they were and were they getting irritated and, you know, kind of going in and out of the crowd. So I just heard bits and snatches of the conversation. But I think it was, you know, they were talking about the nature of non-violence and they were talking about how difficult it is to make a strike when you have no assistance of, no protection under the law, and about the conditions of the farm workers and the things you'd expect. But curiously enough I think that was probably the longest discussion that they ever

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had, at least that I know about. I was not along in May of '67 so I don't know if they saw each other privately or what they discussed. And in March of '68 you know, Chavez was very weak... He was lying in bed. Kennedy came to see him just before the Mass. And, you know, it was another one of those things. And "Hello, Senator," "Hello, Cesar." "How's it going?" "Oh, not bad." And you know, "How are you feeling and are you going to be all right?" and that sort of thing.

HACKMAN: And we can talk specifically another time about what you did on the legislation side and other ways you helped them out. Did you go along to Des Moines on that trip?

EDELMAN: Yes.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about the meetings that he had with Hughes [Harold E. Hughes] and Hearnes [Warren E. Hearnes] and all these people?

EDELMAN: Yeah, that was most interesting. That night after the dinner—I don't remember anything in particular going on before the dinner. No. But after the dinner

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there was a meeting with Governor Hughes, Governor Hearnes, Governor Guy [William L. Guy] of North Dakota and Governor Docking [Robert B. Docking] of Kansas and Congressman Culver [John C. Culver] and a number of sort of local Democrats from Iowa so that there were probably forty people in the room. No press, and off the record, but clearly somebody was going to leak what happened. Well, those four governors particularly and then some of the local Iowa types just layed into Lyndon Johnson in a manner that was quite surprising for a group of men from Johnson's own party about a sitting President. And the Senator.... They kept saying things, like, "Somebody's got to take that fellow Lyndon on" or, "The way it's going. I doubt if I can support him." Nobody said, "Senator, you've got to do it." But there was an awful lot of that in the room and you know, a lot of stories were told about how this governor had tried to get something out of the White House and couldn't and that one had been treated badly and about how the war was estranging their

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constituencies and they didn't know if they could get reelected or whoever in their state was up for election could get reelected because of the war. And it just went on like that for a long time, probably two hours, which means from, say, 11 until 1 in the morning, which was again unusual. And clearly Kennedy, you know, read that as it should have been read, which was deep, deep hostility to Johnson in the rather conservative part of the also deep hostility to the war. And I think he found that very, very encouraging.

HACKMAN: You said, when you were in California, that was the first time you knew for sure that he was going in. What do you think hard brought him at that, you know, at that point in time—to that decision? Or is there anything that breaks it really?

EDELMAN: First thing that broke it was Ted, which was.... I'm sure he began to think he was losing his touch because he made that statement about "no foreseeable circumstances" as the news was beginning to pour off the wires about Tet. If he'd just had kept his mouth shut

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for one more day, he never would have had occasion to make the statement. So that was the first thing. He remarked more than once that, "Now it's all out there for everybody to see. Everybody in the country knows the war is a fraud." And that's far and away the most important thing." I mean it overshadows everything else in its importance. Second thing was that he was very pissed off about the Kerner Commission report, that Johnson just clearly wasn't doing anything about that and that rankled him a good deal. The third thing is McCarthy began to come up in New Hampshire and he saw that there was something out there, that it wouldn't be just quixotically tilting the windmills if you were to go into it. And that's basically it.

HACKMAN: Did you ever talk to him or do you know if he talked to anyone then about if he might seriously consider the possibility of announcing at that point, say, on March tenth or around that time?

EDELMAN: Well he did. Yes, he considered announcing before

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New Hampshire and just couldn't, I think basically wasn't psychicly sort of geared up. I mean he knew he was going to do it but worried about whether it would look opportunistic to jump in at the last minute just before the primary. Whether, in fact, it might hurt McCarthy's vote
drawing ability even if he, you know, jumped in endorsing McCarthy and just thinking that all the way around that things would be less complicated after the following Tuesday—which they weren't more—but basically thinking that he would be misunderstood.

HACKMAN: Why the statement then—I guess it's what the same day or the day after the primary. Why did he seriously reassess then which so many people have said is such poor timing, right on the eve of the...

EDELMAN: Well, because he had this pent up thing. Okay, now he's made this decision. He knows he's going to do it some time. He rather foolishly, as it turns out, has held his tongue through the previous week, not said what he was going to do. And he's

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sort of bursting with the news, knows he's made a mistake not saying something about it previously plus the fact that it's what's going through his head that morning is "I can't let that guy, can't let that guy stay in the limelight for one minute longer than necessary because I'm going to have an awful lot of ground to make up because he's turned out to be a hell of a lot more substantial than I thought." Well, that was the basic point because we came in. We said, "Senator, why did you have to do that? You know, why can't you.... Why couldn't you have held off for three days?" And he said, "Because it'll just be that much harder to make up the

ground three or four days from now." So I think that was the main reason and it was a mistake, but perhaps it was less impetuous than he.... You know, some people said, "He blurted it out." I don't believe it was impetuous in that sense. It was just a mistake.

HACKMAN: Had he ever talked earlier, as the McCarthy thing was developing about the kids going to McCarthy and this

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whole question of loss of constituency? Could you see that this was on his mind a lot?

EDELMAN: Yes, but he thought he could get them back. You know he just was making.... He was in the process of making the terrible mistake all the way through

from January, when he made that statement, January thirty-first. If he'd come into it and been in New Hampshire at that point or come into it and say, the day after the filing for New Hampshire closed, let's say, and just said, "Okay, I'm not in New Hampshire, but I'm in Wisconsin and I'm in it from then on and I wish everybody'd vote for Gene McCarthy in New Hampshire because he wouldn't have had any of this problem. I mean some of it.... They would have been some kids who were on McCarthy's, even at that point fixed to him. But he was very sure that he was the darling of the young people and that he'd be able to get them back. And he was among the most surprised when his reassessing announcement, was greeted with such tremendous bitterness among the brightest of the young

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people. He just.... That was part of the miscalculation. I'm sure all along he thought, "Well, okay, so I'll wait till after March, twelfth. It's a long time between now and November. I'll get it back.

HACKMAN: You'd said earlier that by the time you know he was running.... or that other people have said they knew earlier. During these days was he openly.... Was he telling people that he was going to run or were people just, from what he said, assuming that he was going to run? How did you come to it, and what do you know about these other people who've said they knew earlier? How did they know?

EDELMAN: Well, first, how did I come to it? I just, as I say, I was there on that plane trip on March tenth and he said, "Well, now I've got to decide what I'm going to because I'm going to get into it and I've got to try to figure out how to get McCarthy out of it." It was just as explicit as that. It was an off the record conversation. You know,

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it was me and Ed Guthman and John Seigenthaler, all close friends and associates. But earlier, I think that it'll come out in the rest of your interviews, my understanding is that he privately told some people that he was going to do it. I don't think _____. There is that thing about Haynes [Haynes Johnson].... You know, some of the people, Haynes Johnson and some of the others who gleaned it by inference—you know, who said, "just saw Kennedy, think he's going to run. What do you think?" What I'm saying is I'm quite sure, although I couldn't tell you which people it is, that if you queried, say, Burke Marshall or perhaps some other people in the Senate office, you'd find that he had told them earlier, or perhaps Schlesinger or Goodwin.

HACKMAN: Do you ever get the feeling then over the next couple days that he's about to come back off of this decision?

EDELMAN: I didn't. He acted for about.... Well, he went.... He used to divide it into time periods. The first

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time period is between the time that he made the announcement and the time when he went to see Gene McCarthy because he was still purporting to say, even though.... I mean he'd clearly said to me on Sunday before that he was going to do it and that he would try to get McCarthy out. And I said, "What if you can't?" And he said, "I'm going to do it anyway." But the general feeling around the office was, you know, "We'll sort of wait and see what McCarthy says and then we'll see." Okay, so that may have led, some people to the impression that he had to decide again when McCarthy told him to go fly a kite. So that'll be the next time period. And again I think some people, particularly those who were against his doing it, were given the impression that he was still weighing the matter. I'm convinced he wasn't.

HACKMAN: You said at the time he told that he was going in that he had to decide how to handle McCarthy. Can you remember discussions of how you do that and what, you know, what...

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EDELMAN: No, not how to handle him, how to get him out.

HACKMAN: How to get him out, right.

EDELMAN: And so, I mean, if you didn't get him out, you weren't handling him. No, what he said.... You know, he just.... I said, "Well, how will you do that?" And he

said, "I just guess I'll have to go ask him." And he didn't have any very bright ideas on that.

HACKMAN: Now in those last days—the same question I asked earlier about January—had you been putting together anything that could be used in the campaign, if it developed within the next few days.

EDELMAN: Not very much. I know some of the books say that we were set to work pulling together stuff. No. I mean, we were.... Adam and I and, I think really, the Senator felt basically that he had staked out a remarkable number of positions and that his campaign would not involve breaking new ground, but rather involve reiterating those positions and taking them to the people. And so there wasn't really very much to pull together on

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the substantive side. We started along in there somewhere. Now I don't remember whether it was before or after March sixteenth, but I think it was after. We.... Bruce Terris had been working for Humphrey and came over to us, which I think was after the sixteenth and so we started pulling together.... Bruce did a fact sheet on housing, you know, which was a combination of Johnson positions and Humphrey positions. And I guess at that point just Johnson positions and the Kennedy program. And so we, you know, we were starting to do position papers, but I don't really think we did much before the twelfth of March. I remember it was.... Well, it wasn't until we were into L Street, which must have been a week or so after the sixteenth, that we pulled together books and stuff and files out of the Senate and had them shipped over to L Street.

HACKMAN: We haven't talked at all about the Vietnam Commission idea. How do you read his involvement in this and Sorensen's involvement?

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EDELMAN: I think that Sorensen saw it as a way to keep Kennedy from running. I'm really pretty sure about that. I'm not sure how Kennedy saw it. I suppose he figured—and this is just sort of guessing—I suppose he figured it would fall through. And if Johnson had really taken it and put him on it, I don't know what he would have done. I think he just made a calculated risk about it.

HACKMAN: Did he ever talk about it at all?

EDELMAN: No, not to me.

HACKMAN: Did anybody... Who knew about it before the story broke? Did any of the staff people that you know of, or was it just Sorensen and....

EDELMAN: I don't know if Frank Mankiewicz knew about it. He might have. I don't think Adam did. I think....

HACKMAN: Looking at the whole thing in retrospect, what kept him out so long?

EDELMAN: Thought he couldn't win. That was basically it. All that…. You know there were other things that were related to that, which is—worried about splitting the party, but that really comes

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down to being blamed for splitting the party and therefore being discredited. So it's not just merely that the thought he couldn't win, but thought he couldn't win and thought the way in which he wouldn't win would make him.... would ruin him and figuring that there was no point in getting yourself ruined, if you couldn't.... if you weren't winning. The two were synonymous 'cause if you win, you're not ruined. Sometimes if you don't win, you're not ruined, in which case it would have been less trouble, but he was certain that if he didn't win, he would be ruined, because it would be a bitter fight and make a tremendous number of people mad that he'd taken on a sitting President. And further I think that he.... There was somewhat more an old part of it, which is that he didn't see. He thought that a) he might send a whole lot of liberal Democratic senators down to defeat in the process, having split the party and having one group not being willing to work for the other group. Secondly, that he might succeed in

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electing Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]—same reason, both of which are more altruistic than selfish part, but both of which did enter into the calculation. No question about it. So for all of those reasons he was thinking that the thing should not be tried. And, you know, to stand up against the perceived defeat of a number of very good senators, and the perceived possible victory of Richard Nixon and say, "Well you have to undertake the moral crusade. This was wrong and you must speak out against it by running for President. You cannot speak out.... It's not sufficient to speak out against it in any other way." That's an apples and oranges thing. That's, you know, tossing a Bible up against some very practical, political arguments. And it's just that, as it turned out, the politics were on the side of those of us who made the moral arguments. That's what wasn't perceived. That's where he was wrong. I mean he wasn't.... All of the things that he said I don't.... I'm not such a "new" politician that I think it's impermissible to go

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through all of these things. I mean I think a man is entitled to have self interest. I think a man is entitled to, particularly, to be sympathetic to the interests of other Senators and not just

throw those out. And so for all of those reasons I think that if he'd been right on his facts about the politics of the situation, I would have been disappointed, but would have felt in the end that he had turned out right. I mean that's a very hypothetical statement. What he was wrong about was the politics. He misread the mood of the country. And that was the things that was the mistake. In other words, I wasn't.... I don't think he was immoral. I don't think there was a bad Bobby keeping him out. It was just a bad judgment of *the* Bobby. And in a way, that's.... Jack Newfield, if there is some weakness to his effort, in a way that's what the weakness is is that he seems to be unable to sometimes, sometimes he does a remarkable job of just showing the complexity and contradictory nature of this

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man, but sometimes he makes it as though the man has half of his—you know, his brain is split in half and half of it is the old politician and half of it's the new or that kind of thing. And that's not true. I mean, it's just the politician making judgments about what's going on in the country and making a bad judgment.

HACKMAN: Does he ever talk earlier about any other ways to change the direction of the war other than running? Is there any way to get to the Administration, if he's not going to run and there's probably going to be another Johnson Administration or at least he's going to be running for another year?

EDELMAN: Before I answer that, let me say that even the decision to run can be viewed in old political terms—which many people brought to him—just that he would destroy himself politically by not running, that the country was such and that people would be so mad at him for not doing it. So, you know, he

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weighed that as well.

He tried changing the policy on the war in other ways, starting all the way back in May of 1965. He tried public speeches. He tried talking privately to the President, to members of the Cabinet, to members of the White House staff, talking, back grounding the press, not for attribution, talking on the record on television and in the press, talking to other senators to urge them to do things, working with people on the outside who were organizing things. He tried every way he knew how through 1966 and '67 and basically I have to say, even though it's a little inconsistent with perhaps something I said earlier, basically I think that whatever he did that was not, that was less than all out, was more—and this is a balancing—was more by reference to the fact that he thought it would be counter-productive ca the merits for him to do more, than it was by reference to saving his own political skin. Now obviously there was some of the other in there, as I said before. And obviously there's a difference between up to March

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‘67 and after March ‘67. But in general I think he tried every way he knew how short of naming and didn’t change it and that was one of the ways you can view the decision to run.

HACKMAN: Are there any points that he wants to talk personally to the President that he can’t get, can’t get through to him on? And what point does...

EDELMAN: No, I don’t think so. I think he could have gone to see Lyndon Johnson when he wanted to, and he didn’t want to. He didn’t.... If I remember right, there is some point at which, and it may be, well at some point in ‘67, after which he does not talk to the President either personally or by phone until the President calls him up in early ’68 and asks if he would look at the housing message, of all things. And I’m not sure what the earlier point in time is, but it’s approximately six months, where they just stop talking to each other.

HACKMAN: And how does he handle the housing message request?

EDELMAN: He says, “Fine. Send it up here.” Joe Califano [Joseph A. Califano, Jr.] comes up with it and Mike Curzan says

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it’s awful and goes into a big thing with Joe Califano and so on and so forth. And they fuss with Mike Curzan for a couple days. And then they go ahead. And there’s.... Mike Curzan says that their message was terrible and everybody says it was all right, so who knows?

HACKMAN: During the first days of the campaign then what, how did your role in the campaign develop? Did anyone definitely say, “You are going to do this,” or...

EDELMAN: Yeah, we had a meeting on the afternoon of March sixteen. Kennedy had gone up to New York to march in the Saint Patrick’s Day parade and we went to Teddy’s office and Teddy was there and I believe Steve, Helen Keyes [Helen M. Keyes] and Milt Gwirtzman [Milton S. Gwirtzman] and I think Gerry Cummins [Gerald Cummins] was there and me, not Adam interestingly, some others. And so we started talking about what was he going to do while he was in the campaign, you know. And they explained his assignments and assumed that there was a lot of questions as to who would travel with

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the Senator. The Senator I think had already asked Fred Dutton to travel with him. And there was a lot of feeling that only one speech writer should travel with him. And I always found it amusing because I thought that Kennedy could decide for himself, but it became increasingly clear that sometime.... You know in this kind of a context sometimes you just did the thing

because at one point after they'd been traveling for a few weeks the feeling was that the.... Some people felt that the speeches were too bomb throwing and wanted to pull Adam home. And I went to a meeting out at the house some weeks later where somebody said casually, "Well now, Senator, we thought we'd try next week to have Milt Gwirtzman travel with you and let Adam work on these major speeches for a little time ahead out of the office because he'll be able to do a better job. And the Senator just said, "Okay." And afterwards I went up to him and I said, "Well, now, you know, I know you said okay to that, but you know, Adam really knows

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what you want to say and how you talk and...." He said, "Well, yeah, I like Adam," you know, like he was waking up. He said, "Well I like Adam. I don't have anything against Adam. Sure. Well, Adam will come with me. That's fine." So, you know, it always kind of turned out when somebody tried to make a play against Adam that a number of us were able to protect him and so on. In any event, that March sixteenth, I think they, I think their first inclination was to have Adam travel and it was a question of whether there'd be a second guy traveling.

HACKMAN: Who was running that meeting?

EDELMAN: Teddy, I think, but maybe Steve. Maybe both alternating you know, alternating. You know how those meetings are. The phone rings and somebody gets up and goes out and the discussion just goes on a lot of the time. And they talked about having Milt travel along as well as Adam, but in.... And they said that.... Either they said that or a day or two after that, they said to me that I

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would sort of run the research part of it. And then it was decided that Milton and I would run that together because Milton had run research stuff in campaigns for a long period of time. And they, you know, they laid out sane of the other assignments. They decided that Dun Gifford [K. Dun Gifford] would run the Boiler room and that Dave Burke would service Teddy personally and I suppose there was some of it that went on after I left, after any particular role in it was decided. I just sort of drifted off to start doing whatever I was doing because they obviously didn't care about what I thought about what Kenny O'Donnell ought to do. So that was basically.... There was one interesting by play at that meeting that Adam was terribly concerned about something that had to be done a certain way and came over—had been in our office—came over to Teddy's office and told Teddy whatever it was. It was sort of a break in the meeting, after being specifically told by Dave Burke not to do it, And Teddy got very turned off because he didn't

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cotton to the style. I don't even remember what it was, but it was just, you know, I could see there was going to be trouble. So, well, anyway that's what happened that day. They had, I think by then, rented the top floor of the Dodge House. Dunny.... That was one thing I had worked on in the course of that week although Dunny ended up doing it, but I had spent same time looking for space.

HACKMAN: Did the assignments seem to be given out.... were you basically agreeable with the way it was handled? And who got to do what, or did the whole thing not make much sense to you?

EDELMAN: No, I thought it was fine. I mean, I didn't.... I thought that Adam should write speeches and that, as between me and Jeff Greenfield, that Jeff was better as a second speech writer and that I.... I thought that it would be.... I could make my best contribution in running a research operation. That made sense to me.

HACKMAN: How did you and Gwirtzman spilt the responsibility then

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on that?

EDELMAN: Oh, we didn't really. We just worked together and made decisions together and if only one of us was around, then that person sort of did it. Then we both ended up out, you know, sort of traveling and, in fact, Bill Smith [William Smith], who's never gotten any credit because he was there for such a short time, came in. Bill was the Counsel to the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty working for Joe Clark [Joseph S. Clark] was then the chairman of it, and [Bill] is a tremendously able guy. Bill came on about the middle of May and was basically running that research store because Milton and I were running around on the West Coast. So he would have been, you know, had things continued, we would have had sort of a troika.

HACKMAN: How did you pick up the people in that operation? I mean just how did you organize a research operation? What had to be done?

EDELMAN: Well, Lew Kaden, who had worked for us the previous summer, just showed up. He'd been out of law school

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since June '67 and he'd been clerking in New York and he just showed up and so we said okay. And Bruce Terris also, in effect, showed up, wrote me notes under my door and so on and so forth. And of course Bruce is very competent, very able so.... And Kennedy knew him and liked him as a fine lad. And then there was Mike Schwartz [Michael Schwartz], who already was working for us in the Senate office, who was just.... It made

sense to assign him to that. So that was what we started out with was Milton and I and Lew and Mike and Bruce and then we picked up this fellow P.J. Mode, who was at Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering and came highly recommended by somebody or other. And then as Milton and I got to traveling we picked up a couple of other fellows. But it was just, you know, going to be a small operation. We didn't have to go out and recruit. And you always get an enormous number of people that want to come in and help, and it's very hard to make judgments about whether somebody's going to be able to operate under

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these circumstances or not. Generally people are specialists and at that point it was too early to have a foreign policy specialist and of course nobody.... You couldn't get anybody to understand that the Kennedys were running a campaign on a—trying to save money, that they absolutely would not let us put any more money into the research operation. And they were right; it didn't need it at that point, it was fine the way it was. But people couldn't understand why we didn't have a resident foreign policy expert. Well, what the hell, we had Adam Walinsky and Adam Walinsky could either himself pick up the phone or ask me to pick up the phone and we could talk to Roger Hilsman [Roger Hilsman, Jr.], Jim Thomson [James C. Thomason, Jr.], Carl Kaysen, Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner], whatever, at any time we wanted. Well, okay, that brings me to the next item, organizing the research operation which is that one of the first things we did was to make up a list of all the possible topics on which we would want files, position papers, anti-Johnson, ultimately anti-Nixon, so on and so forth.

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Then we organized…. We had a meeting up at Cambridge which Abe Chayes [Abram Chayes] and.... Abe Chayes and somebody else I don't remember pulled together. And we talked.... We split up the twenty-five or thirty topics that we had and assigned one or two of them to each person and they were in turn supposed to organize committees at Harvard and in Cambridge and really wherever else that they had reached to and then the committees were supposed to start working on, essentially, position papers, but also to feed day to day stuff as well and to be ready to answer, you know, quick type questions that would come up. Then we asked Peter Fishbein, who was a lawyer in New York had been helpful in a lot of stuff, former Brennan [William Joseph Brennan, Jr.] law clerk on the Supreme Court and also had worked in the White House under President Kennedy with Dick Goodwin. Very.... No, he'd worked with Dick Goodwin in the International Peace Corps Agency and then worked in the White House

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briefly under Johnson. He went around the country and organized groups on every campus. Then we had special California groups for the primary in that state who were working on local issues. So by the time that he was done we had, you know, a thing that was maybe thirty pages thick of names, addresses and numbers of academics specialists on one thing and

another who were going to help us out. And that all turns out to be kind of a.... I must say, I mean, you have to do it, but it all turns out to be rather unproductive. There were a couple guys in California who were helpful, and that's all. And the academics in Cambridge produced very little by June. Now it would have picked up because the Senator was beginning to get tired of the old material even though we had decided at the beginning that he was basically going to campaign with the old material. And he was very ambivalent. He would say one day, "Why don't I ever have anything new to say?" And we'd say, "Well, Senator, you know, we've given you the following six proposals that if you want us to

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flesh them out you can make a speech out of them on a position paper." And he'd say, "Well, I don't want to have to read anything new,"—you know, literally in the course of a two minute conversation because he was just that harried and so on. So it ended up being that we would sort of do a combination of rehashes and we finally had evolved a system of doing a major position paper a week of which we had done four by the time he died, one on welfare, one on the economy, one on the cities and I don't remember what the other one was. And maybe it was only three. And there would have been more of those. We would have had one on returning Vietnam veterans. That was in the works. There was one on balance of payments in the works, And we would have had one on tax reform. And we would have had one specifically on job creation, government as employer as last resort and so on. And those things got press attention, 'cause if you put them out on the Wednesday before the following Sunday and gave reporters a chance to digest them, you would get good coverage and you'd get

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it in some places around the country as well as in the East. Significantly the economic white paper was the first from page story we had gotten in the *New York Times* on a substantive issue in the whole campaign, and the first time we had made the front page, I think, since, apart from the results on primary day, since the first couple weeks when there was all the excitement. So we clearly had, you know were on to a way of doing things which we had been groping for for a while. But that was basically the way we organized it, then. We had in the office the five or six of us who had specific sort of brain trusts on issues. When Adam, for instance, wrote the Bloomington, Indiana speech the "No More Vietnams" speech he had a draft sent back to me somehow by Xerox telecopy or perhaps by phone and I, in turn, got that out immediately to Thomson, Katzenbach, Hilsman and Kaysen and Goodwin and maybe one other. I don't remember. But at least those five. And then they, in turn, phoned their comments back into me and

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I got then out to Adam so that, you know, you didn't have to have a resident foreign policy man because you didn't.... You could do that, and people were willing to go out of their way,

you know, go to the airport in the middle of the night and pick up a draft speech and read it and call in and criticize. So that we had task forces tike that which we wound check things out with, bounce things off.

HACKMAN: How much traveling did you do yourself during the campaign? Maybe it would be good just to sort of sketch a schedule so I can come back at you on some of the things.

EDELMAN: I left.... I was in Washington, except for like the trip to Cambridge and for trips on my own, in other words. But I went to Indiana about May first, which.... No. Well, about April thirtieth, April twenty-ninth. It was the Monday before the Indiana primary. I did that because they said they wanted help out there on local issue press releases and on just getting everything out

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faster and so on. And the Senator saw me there and so on and so forth. And along about Thursday that week he said, "What are you doing here? Why are you here?" I said, "Well, because they told me to come out." So.... Well, I had had responsibility for the D.C. primary. We haven't talked about that and we should because I don't think that's gotten ample discussion in any of this. He said, "Well, you.... What's happening in the District?" I said, "Well, it's all right." He said, "Well, you better get back there. I, you know, you better get back there." So I turned around and went back after having been in Indiana about three days and spent that whole weekend before May seventh in the District headquarters and working on that. Then May eighth, Jeff Greenfield got married along about May eleventh and so he dropped off the day after the Indiana primary. May ninth we went out again. I guess on Thursday there was a day off in there. And so I went to Nebraska and then I just stayed with it. I was out continuously

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until the day before the California primary. I was out from May ninth until June fourth, June third.

HACKMAN: Okay, well that gives me something to go on next time. Maybe the.... If you want to quit at the end of this side, probably the best other thing we can talk about just in terms of future interviews is just to have you go through the split subject matter-wise, within the senate office so that I can get a better idea of the kinds of things.... What were your areas?

EDELMAN: Well, that changed a lot. That evolved. And, to some extent, we both, Adam and I, worked on same things. But, for instance, I started out having responsibility for foreign affairs, but then when it turned out that that was basically a speech writing matter, it came to be his responsibility. You could say that

generally speaking he tended to write more and I tended to do more straight legislative work. Even that would not be true because I wrote perhaps a third of the speeches and I only

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started doing less writing when Greenfield came on in ’67. But up until then I really wrote about a third of the speeches and some of them.... You know, they varied in their importance, but some were pretty significant. And at the same time Adam did some legislative work. So that you couldn’t.... The generalization only holds so far. By the end the break down was the I had health. Well, now Adam had had health at the beginning and he had worked on the original Medicare bill, but I had health from just about then on. At the end I had poverty, but Adam had worked on the poverty legislation in ‘65 and ‘66 and Adam worked on the poverty conference in ‘67 as we1l because I was all involved with the welfare amendment. But I was basically the poverty man and particularly when there was anything that had to do with hearings, any field hearings or any other kind of hearings, I was sort of counseled for the hearings and I would get the questions together for the witnesses and go and sit there and whisper in the Senator’s ear and that stuff. So I

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sat through most of the Ribicoff urban hearings and was.... They were my responsibility and, you know, worked with Ribicoff’s staff to decide what witnesses to invite and all that. And migratory labor hearings, poverty hearings and so on. So that urban matters, generally, as a general matter, were my responsibility, but when you came down to technical stuff like housing, Mike Curzan worked on that specifically. Welfare was my responsibility. Education, I did some; Adam did some. Reapportionment, civil rights, transportation, agriculture, these were all my responsibility. Narcotics, electoral college, campaign financing, the Presidential inability these were all the things that I worked on. There was a tremendous, tremendous range. And Adam’s stuff was foreign affairs plus domestic pet interests from time to time in education, poverty and urban stuff. And those were, as I say, from time to time. And then Wendell Pigman did air and water pollution and sort of military matters and

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science.

HACKMAN: Cigarettes?

EDELMAN: I worked on cigarettes.

HACKMAN: That’s yours more than his. What about automobile safety?

EDELMAN: He did that. No, the cigarettes was mine. You couldn’t break it down by who was the consumer man, although he tended to it more. I wrote, for instance,

the Senator once testified advocating the Department of Consumers and I wrote that testimony. I wrote, except for the testimony.... I mean, Adam seldom wrote testimony for him or floor speeches. Adam's stuff was more rhetoric-type stuff. So just about every instance where there was testimony, except on air and water pollution, something that I wrote. Very few exceptions.

HACKMAN: What are some of the major speeches that you regard as being primarily yours?

EDELMAN: The first one of that trilogy of speeches that he gave in early 1966 on the urban crisis. Adam and I worked on all three together, but I basically

drafted the first and he drafted the second and third. There's a speech in May of '67 which I felt was quite important called, "The Child and the City" in which he, you know, gave an over view of the inadequacy of social services which I drafted. There was a speech in April, May of '66 in Ellenville, New York where he attacked Johnson's budget, which, got front page coverage. There were all of his testimony on narcotics, all the testimony that, you knew, anything that got some coverage or you know that had some significance as to the path of the legislation. Those would be the main ones that coarse to mind.

HACKMAN: I think that's all maybe we should do today.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

Peter B. Edelman Oral History Transcript – RFK #1
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