

J. William Fulbright Oral History Interview—JFK#1, 4/11/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Fulbright was a senator from Arkansas (1945-1975), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (1959-1975), and namesake of the Fulbright Program. In this interview, he discusses informally advising John F. Kennedy (JFK) during the 1960 campaign; international crises including the Bay of Pigs invasion, Laos, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Berlin; and compares JFK's ability as a communicator and negotiator to Lyndon B. Johnson's abilities in those areas, among other issues.

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J. William Fulbright—JFK#1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Senator J. William Fulbright

April 11, 1964

By Pat Holt

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLT: Do you remember the first time you ever met Senator Kennedy—
Representative Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

FULBRIGHT: I don't remember a specific time, because I may have met him along
with a great many people. But the first time that I became acquainted
with him was after he came into the Senate. One of the first occasions
when I had a debate, or discussion, with him and in connection with his activities, was over
the question of the Kennedy Foundation sponsoring a number of African students as I recall
it. Do you recall that attack was made upon him by Senator Scott [Hugh Doggett Scott, Jr.],
and...

HOLT: Well, that was in.... As I recall, that was in the campaign of 1960.

[-1-]

FULBRIGHT: That was the first time I'd had an active participation with him in a
debate. I had met him before that, but when one meets people casually
around here it doesn't make a great impression. I'm afraid I can't say
that the first time I met him made such an impression that it stands out in my memory.

HOLT: Well, frequently this is the case. I was wondering if you.... Really, what

I was getting at was the first association you had with him which did stand out in your memory. And I suppose it is the African students.

FULBRIGHT: I didn't know President Kennedy socially before he came into the Senate. I am considerably older than he is, and belong to a different generation. I had never been thrown with him socially as some of our colleagues were, such as Senator Smathers [George A. Smathers] and others.

[-2-]

HOLT: When did you first begin to take him seriously as a candidate for the presidency?

FULBRIGHT: During the hearings when he had considerable exposure on television in connection with the Hoffa [Jimmy Hoffa] (I believe it was Hoffa) hearings conducted by Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan], and his brother Robert [Robert F. Kennedy]. He had a great deal of exposure then. Of course, I wasn't on that committee but I saw him on television often and then the talk began about being presidential timber and having ambitions to be president. But being a Southerner, and very close to Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]—then Majority Leader—my delegation and most of us from the South had committed ourselves, if not formally at least in our minds, to support Senator—President—Johnson, and we did that at the Convention in Los Angeles. While we took him

[-3-]

seriously, for obvious reasons, I think, we did not support him. After he was nominated, of course, we supported him, and my state supported him. And I worked for him with a committee, an informal committee, of Senator Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.], Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford], Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton], and one or two others. They asked us to do this as a sort of strategy advisory group, and then I made some speeches in his behalf, by invitation, in Texas and California. We did all we could to elect him and, of course, I remember meeting him and conversing with him, when he visited Arkansas at Texarkana during the election.

HOLT: Do you remember any of the specifics of this meeting, or the conversation, that took place in Texarkana?

[-4-]

FULBRIGHT: That was a regular campaign meeting. Yes, we met him at the airport; rode in a long parade; he spoke in front of the Courthouse there to a very large crowd—the largest crowd, I think, that has ever been gathered together in Texarkana. He did a very good job (he spoke very well, as you know—not too long), and he made a very favorable impression upon the audience. And it was an audience

that came from Southwest Arkansas and Texas, some from Louisiana—it's right in the corner between Texas and Arkansas and not far from both Oklahoma and Louisiana.

HOLT: Did Senator Kennedy, at any time before the Democratic Convention in 1960, talk to you about the campaign, or ask you to support him, or ask you to do anything to help him?

FULBRIGHT: No...

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HOLT: Or did he just take it for granted that you were supporting Senator Johnson?

FULBRIGHT: I think so. Prior to that time, and in the discussions that took place, as they do with press and so on, I, along with some of my colleagues, had stated that we were supporting Senator Johnson. And he did not personally solicit my assistance. Now after the nomination, I was asked to participate in this group that met once or twice a week. We met sometimes at my house, and sometimes at Senator Gore's apartment, and we would take the various issues that came up, or try to think of some new ones. I remember one in particular that appealed to me and to the group, and which we recommended quite strongly that he play up—the idea of the Peace Corps. Whatever appeared to be an issue

[-6-]

at the time, we tried to deal with it. The matter of the prestige of America abroad—you will recall there was quite a controversy over the release by the USIA [United States Information Agency] of some reports that they had based upon polls they were taking abroad about our standing abroad. We advised him on how to deal with this, and the liaison with the campaign headquarters of the Kennedy group was Mr. Fred Dutton of California. He would come to these meetings, we would discuss it, and then he would relay whatever our recommendations were. We often reduced these to memoranda and he would take them to the Kennedy headquarters and they would use them or not as they saw fit. They were simply ideas. That was what we did at several meetings. And then, as I say, I made a few speeches. But President Kennedy

[-7-]

was always most gracious. When I did meet him on occasions such as Texarkana, he was extremely appreciative. He was a very cordial man to work with, and he never showed the slightest resentment—and I'm sure he had none—at the fact that I, along with our delegation from Arkansas, supported Johnson in Los Angeles. He recognized the political facts of life and he was not inclined to be personal in those things. It was my experience, he didn't look upon a political matter wholly from a personal point of view. He recognized what was a

political consideration and was always very gracious. He never showed the slightest resentment, or feelings, that we had not supported him in Los Angeles.

HOLT: Do you remember any other instances besides the Peace Corps and the question of the USIA prestige

[-8-]

polls that this committee took up?

FULBRIGHT: I don't recall them offhand. There were the daily matters during the course of a week. Quemoy and Matsu; how to deal with them. I'm sure we discussed it in considerable length—made recommendations, and so on. And we would follow developments as some attack was leveled at him, or some issue arose that appeared to have some significance in the campaign we'd deal with it. I'd have to go back and refresh my memory as to what they were. Many of them were of a rather transient nature and they would vary from week to week.

HOLT: I've made a short checklist here which includes what you mentioned. Also, at one point during that campaign you demanded that Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] resign from his UN [United Nations] position; that Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] be appointed.

[-9-]

Was that your idea, or was that something that had been discussed with Kennedy?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I think that was discussed in these meetings. I think, didn't Lodge make some rather strong statement about Kennedy? I've forgotten what the occasion for it was, but I'm sure it was in response to some statement Lodge made. I don't remember what it was at the moment. Do you have something there to refresh my memory on what his part was?

HOLT: Lodge had denied a suggestion that his UN post could be used as a political forum. The rest of this story is just about what you said. Well, coming now to the period after the election, there was a great deal of speculation, at that time, as you recall, about the Cabinet, and specifically about you becoming Secretary of State. I think it would be well if you filled in the record on those events.

[-10-]

FULBRIGHT: He never spoke to me about it at all, either directly or indirectly, or made any inquiry as to whether I was interested in it. This speculation arose,

as you know, some time after the election—in November, late November or December. I was, at the time (at the height of the speculation), traveling in Arkansas. I remember when I was in Magnolia, Arkansas making a speech one night—I think it was approximately the 20th or 25th of November or perhaps the first of December—there was a broadcast in which one of the commentators made very direct statements about this matter, indicating that he knew that the President was going to appoint me, or something along this line, and, of course, there were a good many inquiries about it, and I got some telephone calls.

[-11-]

I stated on each occasion that I knew nothing about it, no one had ever said anything about it, and I wasn't interested in being Secretary of State. I was interested in being Senator. And, in fact, I was getting ready for my own election, which came in 1962, as you know. And that's why I was speaking Arkansas at this particular time, after the national election. Then I came up here and one of the editors—the foreign editor, I believe—of *Life Magazine*, called me—he's a man from Arkansas named Farmer—called me and asked to come see me here in Washington. And he did come to see me and he told me that he thought he had it on very good authority that this was what the President was going to do. I said, "Well, I have no knowledge of it, and I had not spoken to the President, nor had he spoken to me about it."

[-12-]

Mr. Clark Clifford spoke to me about it and asked what my attitude was. I told him I was not interested in it, and I didn't know what I would do if he were to ask me to do it, but I certainly didn't wish to promote it, because I didn't think I was temperamentally suited for this kind of a position, having been in the Senate as long as I have. I also went so far as to call Senator Russell. I saw in the paper one day that he was going to see the President for a conference. I called Senator Russell [Richard B. Russell, Jr.] and told him I—having known Senator Russell intimately for over a number of years—if he was asked about this matter that I hoped he would say he thought that I was better suited to be a senator, and that I could be of assistance, possibly as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, more

[-13-]

than as Secretary of State, and that I hoped he would discourage the idea. Senator Russell was very reluctant to undertake any such function, but he said if I was positive that that's the way I felt about it, that he would do so. I don't know what he said to the President, but all of this was talk and I never, during that whole period, had any communication from the President. Of course, it was much in the press and it became evident from the press that some of the labor leaders were strongly opposed to my appointment, and also, some of the Negro leaders were strongly opposed because of my being a Southerner and the position I had taken consistently with regard to the civil rights legislation. Whether or not this had any effect, of course, is not for me to say. I would guess,

[-14-]

purely a guess, that it did. But, in any case, we know what happened. The history stands.... After this was done, after he appointed Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk], he did ask me to come to Palm Beach just to talk. So I went to Palm Beach; stayed all night with him. He was very gracious, he and his father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]—his father was there. And he met me at the airport, and we went to his home (his father's home) in Palm Beach, and he explained that he was sorry about all this publicity; that he had hoped that it would not develop that I would be so much in the paper; that he was sorry if it embarrassed me. And I told him that it didn't embarrass me at all; that I thought he was entirely correct in appointing Rusk because Rusk would make an excellent secretary, as I had known Rusk a long time, and I was quite content.

[-15-]

And he was very pleasant. We chatted, and I spent the day there, and went swimming in his pool, and talked to his father. His father was very gracious. His father, perhaps to make me feel good, said that his son, the President, had been extremely interested in my being Secretary of State, but for reasons that we won't go into, it couldn't be done. So that was that. And then, we ended the conference in a very friendly manner, and it suited me fine. I was not a bit disappointed. In fact, I still think he made the right decision and that I am not—temperamentally, if you like—it's the best word I know—fitted to be Secretary of State. I don't think I would fit into that kind of a job as well as Secretary Rusk or a good many other people with a different background.

[-16-]

HOLT: Did he ask your recommendations, or advice, or did you volunteer any recommendations or advice on other appointments that...?

FULBRIGHT: The matter came up about an Under Secretary. I can recall recommending strongly Under Secretary Ball [George W. Ball]. I think he asked me about him; did I know him, and what did I think of him, and so on. And I did recommend him, and I recommended two men that I recall discussing as being very useful to him in this field were Ball and Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman]. There may have been some others. I can recall just those two.

HOLT: I've heard it said that you interposed an objection, a very strong objection, to the continuance of Bill Macomber, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations.

FULBRIGHT: That is entirely erroneous. I liked Bill Macomber [William B. Macomber, Jr.]

[-17-]

very much. Did then and now. I thought he was one of the ablest and most industrious liaison men, and I cannot imagine how such a rumor got started. Do you have any basis for it?

HOLT: I have no basis except one of the Kennedy White House staff people suggested I ask you that question because he thought there was something to it.

FULBRIGHT: There's nothing to it. I happen to have had a good deal to do with Bill Macomber when he was working for John Foster Dulles, and Bill Macomber was a most sympathetic and understanding man in that position. That's wholly a figment of somebody's imagination.

HOLT: Maybe the reason the Kennedy White House staff had that idea was because of the appointment of Brooks Hays [Lawrence Brooks Hays] as Macomber's successor.

FULBRIGHT: The appointment of Brooks was not my idea. In fact, I thought Brooks was well-situated in the TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] and I

[-18-]

often wondered why he wanted to leave it, and did leave it. Not because I don't care for Brooks Hays. He's a very fine man. I have a feeling about him as I did about myself—that temperamentally, it didn't seem to me he's cut out for that kind of work. But when he was suggested—and the idea didn't originate with me—I did talk to Brooks after it became perfectly evident that someone would be appointed because I think it was quite probable that a change would be made. Bill Macomber had worked with the Republicans and it is just the facts of life with regard to many of these appointments that somebody is going to be put in. And, Brooks—he's a personal friend. I'd known him as a schoolmate in 1921, '22. And, of course, I was more than glad to help him as a personal matter.

[-19-]

But as an objective judgment as to what he's suited for, I did not pick out that particular job. I thought he had an excellent job that did suit him. But it was pointed out that he was a great friend of—close friend, I think—of Otto Passman [Otto Ernest Passman] and others in the House, and might be of great use in such controversial matters as foreign aid. And, so I did recommend him at that stage. But this is in no way connected with a downgrading of Macomber, because I liked Macomber. Still do. Not only personally, but I think he's an able fellow.

HOLT: In that particular period in the late winter, spring, and early summer of 1961, there was a great search going on for an Assistant Secretary of

State for Latin America. Did you make any suggestions in this respect?

[-20-]

FULBRIGHT: I can't recall that I did. If you can name anyone under consideration, I may have shown a preference, but I didn't have any wide acquaintance with people who qualified for that position.

HOLT: There was...

FULBRIGHT: Who were being considered. Maybe I can...

HOLT: Well, among others, DeLesseps Morrison [DeLesseps S. Morrison] who was then, or had been recently, the mayor of New Orleans. I wondered if you ever said anything to the President about him or anybody else...

FULBRIGHT: As I recall, Senator Long [Russell B. Long] spoke to me about him. I believe he did. And he had had experience in Latin America, that is traveled quite a bit, and being in New Orleans, there was quite a lot of trade, as you know, going and coming among Latins. And I do remember recommending him, but this.... I don't think it originated with me. There were others who were

[-21-]

under consideration, and of those that were under consideration, I think I took the position that DeLesseps Morrison was the best one. I don't recall now who the others were, but this is the usual case with three or four people being mentioned. I did not personally know DeLesseps Morrison at that time, but.... He had been prominent in the press, and so on. And I remember discussing it with Senator Ellender [Allen J. Ellender] and Senator Long, and they both supported him and when I was asked about it I said it looked to me as if, among those being considered, that he might be very useful.

HOLT: When you were asked—do you mean when you were asked by the President?

FULBRIGHT: Yes. I don't recall that the President personally asked me. Sometimes I would be asked by people

[-22-]

like Kenneth O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] or someone else in the Administration. I don't recall specifically whether the President personally asked me or not. It's likely that in conversations I did say that to the President directly. Another man that I had known, I did recommend, was Moscoso [Teodoro Moscoso]. I had known him before. He had done such a remarkable job in Puerto Rico that I thought he might play a good part in the

Alliance for Progress. And he's one I have met before, and I have known the Governor in Puerto Rico [Luis Muñoz Marin] very well and he was very strong for him, and I think I made a suggestion that if the occasion arose, that we should use people from Puerto Rico wherever we could because of their cultural and linguistic relationship with other

[-23-]

Latin countries. I thought they might be very useful.

HOLT: Anybody else?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I don't know. I don't think I initiated it, but there is one, Carrion, who was also from Puerto Rico.

HOLT: Arturo Morales Carrion.

FULBRIGHT: Yes. Morales Carrion. I remember discussing him as being a good man. I don't recall, unless you can mention somebody—I didn't make a point of trying to recommend people unless they asked me about them.

HOLT: I don't have any others in mind. The day that President Kennedy made his first—sent his first State of the Union message to Congress in 1961, right after his inauguration. The day of his State of the Union message in 1961, he had lunch

[-24-]

here in the Foreign Relations Committee Room after addressing the Congress. Can you remember anything about what went on at that lunch?

FULBRIGHT: Well, all that I can remember of it was a very gay and pleasant occasion, and as I recall it, we had 15 or 20, wasn't it? Something like that.

HOLT: Incidentally, I might as well give you, as I should have before—we went over the White House appointment books for the period that Kennedy was president and extracted from it every time you appeared, and the guest list for that lunch is there, and there are some other dates on there that will probably be helpful to you.

FULBRIGHT: Well, as you can see from that guest list, they were all friends of mine. The Van Roijens, of course—Mrs. Van Roijen is a very close friend of my wife's [Elizabeth Williams Fulbright]. And we've known the Dillons [C. Douglas Dillon; Phyllis Ellsworth Dillon]—all of these people—for quite a long

[-25-]

time. There was nothing of any great moment that happened at that luncheon. It was what I'd call a gay and pleasant, sort of celebration luncheon. And I can't recall the specific points that would have any significance other than the usual pleasantries that occur at a luncheon like that.

HOLT: No bon mots worthy of...?

FULBRIGHT: Well, there may have been. I don't recall.... There were many there, Clark Clifford and the President himself and others, quite capable of it. Dr. Travell [Janet G. Travell], as you know, was at that time much in the news and a very attractive woman. Betty and I had met her. The others were more or less old friends; the Restons [James B. "Scotty" Reston; Sarah Fulton Reston] and the Grahams [Katherine Meyer Graham; Philip L. Graham] we've known for twenty years. It was a social luncheon, that is, in celebration of the new Administration.

[-26-]

HOLT: All right. Well, let's move now to some of the substantive problems of the Kennedy Administration and the first one I've got down here is the problem of Laos, more because it comes up chronologically than anything else. But on March 15 of '61, Kennedy proposed the neutralization of Laos and on March the 23rd, you and a number of other members of Congress went to the White House for coffee. On March 24, you wrote the President a letter sending him a copy of a Library of Congress study called "The Struggle in South Vietnam," and suggesting that the extent to which he might be willing to go in defending Laos could possibly be influenced by the stability in Vietnam. It would be embarrassing, to say the least, had Vietnam collapsed just as we were extended in Laos. Then you conclude, speaking to the President, "Your explanation of the Laotian situation was

[-27-]

extremely effective," and that leads me to believe that the purpose of this meeting with members of Congress on March 23 was a discussion of the Laotian situation, and I just wondered if you remembered anything about it.

FULBRIGHT: As I recall it, the situation, of course, was not good in Laos, as you know. We had briefings here in the committee, and I think the crucial question—there were many peripheral questions about various people there—Kong Le, and Souvanna Phouma, and others—the crucial question was whether or not we should put in troops there and really go all-out to try to save it, as I recall it. All the others were of secondary importance. And I recall that the military were asked what would it involve to put troops in there and how long they'd take and all that sort of thing. The main reaction of the members at one of these meetings was that there was

[-28-]

a fairly unanimous view that we should not undertake to put in, as I recall it, either 30,000 or 50,000 troops to save Laos. And I subscribed to that. I was not in favor of putting substantial American troops into Laos. As I recall, I believe nearly everybody who expressed themselves there—the congressional leaders—were of the same accord. So that I don't think that there was much difference of opinion about that. There were many reasons for that; the lack of communications, and the fact that the country was not approachable by sea, that even the airports were inadequate, and so on. And so we felt it inadvisable. There was considerable discussion of how it had happened, and why Kong Le changed over from our side. And I think as a result of the discussions in the committee and others, many of us felt that a great mistake had been made in regard to Kong Le,

[-29-]

that he appeared to be the best military leader they had. At least, these—Prince Boun Oum, I believe...

HOLT: Boun Oum

FULBRIGHT: ...and such would appear to be very ineffective leaders with no force. And it was very difficult situation.

HOLT: Did the President, at this or other meetings on Laos, have anything to say himself, or did he simply listen to you?

FULBRIGHT: Well, usually the procedure was a very simple one. He invited our comments. They stated the case. He would call on the Secretary of State to outline the situation from the political standpoint, and very often the military people to talk about it from their angle. The President was in the attitude of listening to our reaction to the alternative proposals that were feasible. He didn't, as a normal

[-30-]

case, himself say what he was going to do. He was merely getting the attitude or impression of what others thought and then he made up his mind on his own after he listened. I don't recall that he would, at the time, state very specifically just what he was going to do, which was quite proper. He would take all of these views then he would reach his decision, maybe sometime later.

HOLT: In connection with the problem of Laos, there was a story on page one of the *New York Herald Tribune* on May 4, 1961 by Rowland Evans with a headline, "Why Fulbright's Glaring at the White House—and a Cuban Secret," but most of the story has to do with Laos. I'm sure you remember it.

FULBRIGHT: Well, this is primarily Cuba. This

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relates to Cuba, doesn't it?

HOLT: Well, no, I think primarily it relates to Laos.

FULBRIGHT: Well, it's both. It deals with the Cuban matter and Laos and so on.... "Meet the Press." I was asked on "Meet the Press" what I thought about Laos. Before that, of course, we had discussed it in some of these meetings, and I was asked if I would approve putting in troops (American troops) into Laos, and I said, "No." This article blows that up into something much more important than it was because it was my feeling even before this. This is the conclusion that had been reached. At least, I thought that and had said so before, along with many others. This also mentions, as you will note here, the meeting about Cuba, in which I did oppose the Bay of Pigs invasion and did it

[-32-]

verbally at this meeting and, as you well know, because I consulted with you. As a matter of fact, you composed the memorandum which I sent him opposing the invasion, as I recall. That's the record and you were in full agreement with it.

HOLT: That's right, but let's finish Laos before we get to Cuba.

FULBRIGHT: All this says is that, "Last Sunday on 'Meet the Press' television, Senator Fulbright came out strongly and flatly against any use of military power in Laos." Well, any use of military power is a little strong—the main question was whether we should put in military—put in American troops. We were giving them assistance, that is, in arms and we had some advisers and so on. We were doing our best there to help the Laotians. But that's a different thing from putting in, say, 50,000 American

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troops. That was the point—the sticky point. Whether to do that or not. We had put a great deal of money in there, I mean material, in the amount, as I recall it, of around 250 or 300 million dollars worth of military equipment. But it did not look as if it were a feasible undertaking to put in troops.

HOLT: Well, on the day...

FULBRIGHT: I say, it's quoted, "I do not think the terrain and conditions are proper for us sending in our troops," the Senator said. "All other solutions must be

sought.”

HOLT: On the day that story was published, you saw the President alone for 46 minutes that afternoon, according to this.

FULBRIGHT: The reason I went is this article, I thought, misrepresented a situation, certainly with regard to

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our relations, because I was by no means either out with the President, or glaring at the White House, or even trying to be critical of him. I was simply giving my views as to what I thought was the wise thing to do, and as so often happens, particularly in the *New York Herald Tribune* which seems to foster controversy among Democrats, they had overstated the case, and that's why I called the President and asked to see him and explain exactly what I had in mind, and he showed no resentment. He seemed very cordial and accepted my explanation, I thought, in good faith, and did not evidence any resentment on his part. I believe he felt that this article clearly distorted what were the real relationships involved there. That information, I mean that suggestion, about both Cuba and Laos was simply in the course of ordinary

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business. You're asked to give your opinion; you give it. I could never understand that the "yes man" who just says, "Yes, everything you're doing is fine," is of any value whatever to a president or anybody else. If you don't state what you think about it, why it's of no use to him.

HOLT: Do you remember any of the details of that conversation with the President that afternoon?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I remember calling him and asking to see him and saying that I thought this statement was a misrepresentation of my position. I didn't wish for it to stand as being valid at all, and that I came there and said, "You know, I want to be of all the help I can to you, and if I'm not free to state what I think about it, well, I can't be of any help;" that I supported his administration and him personally and had the highest respect for him

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and so on, and it was that kind of a conversation. Nothing very dramatic. He was, as always with me, he was very cordial. He showed no resentment nor did he question in any way the sincerity of what I had to say. I can't remember the verbatim statements.

HOLT: There was a further meeting at the White House in June of 1961 after the

President had returned from his trip to Paris and Vienna where he had seen Mr. Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev]. And among the other things that came out of that Vienna meeting with Khrushchev was a statement on Khrushchev's part that a neutral Laos would contribute to lessening tensions. Do you recall that this was discussed at all in the meeting you had with the President after his return from Vienna?

FULBRIGHT: I remember such a meeting and the President—and my main impression was that the President was—what

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shall I say—much grimmer than I had ever seen him. The meeting with Khrushchev had apparently been a very severe—had involved a severe jolt to the President. Khrushchev was much more belligerent and threatening than he had expected. And he, in effect you know, said we've really got our work cut out for us because this man evidences every intention of being extremely difficult—all around the world. As for Laos, I think that, as I recall, Khrushchev had said we were following the wrong policy and that he wanted us to get out of Laos; make it neutral. But he said this, I think, all around. Berlin was, I believe, the most critical of all of them at that time. This was when he was beginning to heat up the Berlin crisis.

HOLT: That began shortly thereafter.

FULBRIGHT: Yes. But the main impression was that Khrushchev

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had been much tougher at that meeting than the President expected, and it made quite an impression upon him.

HOLT: The only other clear reference I have in this material to Laos is on February 21, 1962. Now this is eight months later. There was an off-the-record meeting at the White House regarding Laos, with you, Senators Mansfield [Mike Mansfield], Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen], Hickenlooper [Bourke B. Hickenlooper], and the President, and it lasted for an hour and forty minutes in the morning. The circumstances at the time were that the situation in Laos had generally deteriorated in February. The Premier, Boun Oum, had refused to meet with Souvanna Phouma. However, on the day of this meeting in the White House, Souvanna Phouma and Boun Oum did finally get together. Well, do you remember anything about the meeting in particular?

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FULBRIGHT: Well, I don't remember that specific meeting as such. It was a kind of a continuing discussion of the situation. I suppose always was the

possibility that maybe we ought to go in, and if I recall correctly, we were just a continuation of that discussion, and we were briefed—what usually happened, we were briefed on the situation—what did we think of it, and consistently throughout that, as I recall it, all of the members of the Congress, like Hickenlooper and Dirksen and myself, were reluctant to advise him to put in American troops. Now when.... There might be differences between whether you would compromise with Souvanna Phouma, or Boun Oum, or Souvanna Phong. I don't remember the specific discussions of those matters. They were daily matters—dealt with in accordance with, or in the light of, the most recent development. And I am sure

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you understand that, particularly during this period my election was coming up, that I didn't concentrate all my attention upon Laos or any other area. I was getting ready for the campaign, having a poll taken, et cetera, in Arkansas, and these meetings didn't make a very deep impression upon my memory.

HOLT: Speaking of the campaign in Arkansas, we discussed a moment ago the presidential campaign in 1960 and your role in that. Did the President play any role in your senatorial campaign in 1962?

FULBRIGHT: Do you mean, did he come to Arkansas or anything like that? Nothing that I can think of. Of course.... Well, I don't recall he ever made a statement or anything. I didn't ask him to and it isn't normal that I would have asked him to. The Arkansas Bar Association did, in 1962, in June, had asked

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President Johnson, then Vice President Johnson, to be their main speaker at the Bar Association, as I recall it about the 7th of June in '62, and he did accept and he made a great impression upon the members of the Bar and their guests at their annual convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas. But I don't recall that President Kennedy, or that I asked the President, to do anything. I do recall that on his way to open a highway in Oklahoma at the invitation of Senator Kerr [Robert S. Kerr], he stopped at—landed at—Fort Smith, which was the nearest air base large enough, I think, to take his plane, and made about a ten-minute speech. And, of course, on that occasion as he naturally would, he said some nice things about the Arkansas delegation, and specifically about me because I was up for election.

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That I do recall now. That was incidental to this other meeting. And he always, on appropriate occasions, made complimentary references to me, but he didn't come down and make a speech specifically for that purpose.

HOLT: Well, let's turn now to Cuba. So far as I'm aware, this story really

begins, I guess, about towards the end of March in '61 when you became involved in the consideration of the proposed invasion of the Bay of Pigs. But had you discussed the general problem of Cuba with the President prior to that time, that you recall?

FULBRIGHT: Well, there had been rumors, and pieces in the paper. If you will recall, there was particularly a piece by, I think a *New York Times* reporter, who went down to the training post, training camp,

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and the security was so lax that he just walked right through the entrance to it and right on into the camp before anybody ever discovered him. And he wrote an article about it and it became common knowledge, you might say, that preparations were being made for this. And, if I'm not mistaken, I discussed it with you and I think we had some briefings, or discussions, of it in the committee. I don't think we'd ever been officially told by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] just what they were doing, and if they did I don't recall it. Do you recall that we ever were told—to the committee?

HOLT: I don't recall it.

FULBRIGHT: I don't recall it either. It was mostly what you call discussions among members and others. And it was a little vague. We didn't know exactly what was going on other than these stories. You're

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inclined sometimes to discount those stories, and sometimes they keep mounting and are repeated to the point where you take them seriously. And, the idea jelled that they were really serious about this along in March, as you say, and I discussed it with you and we discussed what we thought were the elements involved, as you recall, and I asked you to put it in writing. Is that about right? We were going to—Betty (my wife) and I, were going to visit her aunt who lives in Delray Beach, just south of Palm Beach about 20 miles. And in a meeting, maybe at the White House, or informally, this matter came up and, I think, the President said, "Where are you going for Easter? Are you going away?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I'm going down on"—I think a Friday before Easter. I believe it was a Friday

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afternoon. Anyway, it was the same time we were planning to go, and so he said, "Well, come, go along with me." And he was taking—he took Congressman Fascell [Dante B. Fascell], and I think maybe one or two others, and of course, his staff, and they went to Palm Beach and I was met there by Betty's aunt, Mrs. Lodge, and Miss [unclear]. On the way down—you know, you had prepared this memorandum—and on the way down I asked the President could I speak to him a moment, so we went aside on a chair, and I told him I was

very concerned about this matter and I had prepared this as a memorandum and I showed it to him and he reads very rapidly, as you well know. And he read it then; he went through it—it was only ten or twelve pages—he reads very rapidly; and he said, “Well, that’s very interesting,” and, “We’ll talk

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about it later.” Then we rejoined the group. We got there, and he didn’t say anything about coming back with him on the plane at that point, but he called me, or rather his secretary called me, I think on the following Sunday, and suggested I come back on the plane with him, which I believe was Monday, if my memory serves me. It could have been Sunday, I can check that but I think we came back on Monday. I’m pretty sure it was Monday, or at least, it wasn’t Sunday. It was Monday or Tuesday. And we came in—left down there about 2:00 o’clock, one o’clock, one-thirty, or 2:00...

HOLT: It was April the 4th. I don’t know what day of the week it was.

FULBRIGHT: And, on the way back, he said, “We are having a meeting,” he says, “I’ve got a press conference”— at I guess, 4:30 or 5:00—almost immediately after he

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got in. We were met, of course, at Andrews and came in in a helicopter to the White House, and then he said, “I’ve got a press conference in the State Department’s auditorium and right after that we’re having a meeting, and I’d like you to come.” And he didn’t say anything more than that. He said, “It’s an off-the-record executive meeting.” So, I... He went on off with the usual Secret Service, and so on, and I came along in a White House car to the State Department, and I stood in the back of the hall while he had his press conference and then we went on upstairs and met in a room upstairs, I think on the seventh or eighth floor. When we got there, it was quite a collection. I mean, there were the Joint Chiefs, I think; Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] was there, and I don’t know what others, I think one or two others, but Lemnitzer was their spokesman. I believe

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he was chairman at that time, wasn’t he?

HOLT: I think so.

FULBRIGHT: Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles], and a couple of his assistants. One of them, I don’t remember his name, he had a very beautiful shock of wavy hair, I know; a very heavy-set fellow, a good-looking fellow. And Allen Dulles, and then Lemnitzer, and Adolph Berle [Adolph A. Berle, Jr.] was there and, of course, the President, and Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], and a number of

other people. I'm sure some of the desk people from the Latin American group, but I would guess...

HOLT: Was Tom Mann [Thomas Clifton Mann] one of them?

FULBRIGHT: I don't much think Mann was there. If he was I don't recall his speaking. A number of them, or only a few of them, did much speaking, and there was quite a group there; I would guess maybe 20 or 25 people in the room, sitting around this big table and many of them I did not know their names.

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And, the conversation led off with a statement by Mr. Dulles describing generally the situation in Cuba and then he called upon his aide of his who had just returned from the camp in Central America, who described in considerable detail the training these some 1,500, as I recall—approximately 1,500 Cubans—who were going to liberate their country, had been given this intensive training for nearly a year. As I recall it, he stated that this project had started approximately a year before, about March or April of 1960, and that they had reached a high state of training, of readiness, great morale, and they were eager to liberate Cuba. Well, he described in considerable detail the strategy that was to be followed and how they would take off for the ships, and the number of ships that they were going to land at this.... As I recall it, there were

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alternate places of landing, depending perhaps on assessment of the situation as it developed. He reported that their agents in Havana had stated their belief that if an invasion of this kind was mounted and if it took at all, I mean, if they made a landing, there would be an uprising of.... The best opinion they had—there would be an uprising of the citizens of Havana, and so on. There was a very good prospect that they would overthrow the Castro [Fidel Castro] government. And he reported they had these, I think B-26 planes that would give air cover, and they were going to fly from airports, I think, in Guatemala, as I recall it—maybe on one of the islands—I think it was Guatemala—and so on, to give the air cover, and that our ships and planes were not to take a part in it. They were to stand

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out of sight over the horizon and be available in case of maybe a rescue operation, or maybe one of the ships would founder or for other reasons they might help save some of them. But they were not to take a part, an active part, in either giving air cover or facilitating the landing. They thought that could be done without them in any case. And, McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] was there, as I recall it. He spoke. The military view—I'm simplifying it—but my impression is the military view was, "Well, if this intelligence is correct..." Oh, they went on into plans that if for any unforeseen reason there was a difficulty in landing, they should have an alternative plan. If they discovered that the plan had been discovered, and

preparations had been made to prevent the landing at the Bay of Pigs, they would go down the coast to

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some other place and land, and then they would go into the mountains and this group would constitute a guerrilla force. So, they had an alternative. Or, even if they landed and then ran into unexpected resistance, they could take off into the mountains instead of proceeding to Havana. All this was discussed.

HOLT: Did any of these alternatives include the use of American air cover?

FULBRIGHT: Not to my mind... Distinctly not. Because, as I recall, Secretary McNamara had said on this occasion that this did not involve the use of regular, national military planes, or ships. That this—that they were standing offshore and out of sight so that they weren't to be identified with it officially in any way, so that they couldn't say that this was an invasion by an official American force. This was a liberation by Cubans who were refugees, in effect,

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who had gone off and been trained, and were coming back to liberate their country. It was a Cuban affair. The military, I would say, didn't exhibit a great enthusiasm for it, as I believe that McNamara made it very clear that it was his understanding that the military, or naval planes, military forces of the American establishment, were not to be involved. I think he made such statements that that was his understanding; and that Lemnitzer testified to the effect that if these plans were carried out in accordance with—as they were outlined by the CIA—and I think he said if the intelligence reports about the sentiment in Havana and in the country were correct, that this would appear to them to be a feasible plan. And I think they emphasized that they had not been in on the original planning of it—that they were now being consulted.

[END SIDE 2; BEGIN SIDE 1]

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HOLT: O.K. You were saying that the military had apparently not actually made this plan but had been asked...

FULBRIGHT: That is my impression. They had not been in on the planning of it, or the instigation of it. It was essentially a CIA operation in connection with the refugees. I haven't described the considerable length of the discussion in justification of it. There was much said about if you shouldn't after.... They went around the table and he asked them, he called on them, I mean. Lemnitzer, I think McNamara, and the CIA did most of the talking. And he asked Adolph Berle who was

there—at that time was, I think, a special adviser on Latin American affairs. Just what you call a temporary assignment.

HOLT: He was head of a task force...

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FULBRIGHT: Task force. And he approved of it, and he thought this was fine, and that it was feasible, and had a good chance of success. Then the President called on me after all of this had been said. And, of course, I said again what is already in the memorandum which you have (I mean, it's a matter of record so I won't repeat that at this point) and made the arguments that, very briefly, as you know, were based upon our obligations under the treaties, and that even if it succeeded, it would be of very questionable value; that it was one of those cases where you might not succeed; you'd lose if you did succeed and you wouldn't win much either, so it couldn't be a very satisfactory expedition. Then after that they resumed discussion as to the reasons why it was good, and one of the arguments I remember was that, what a great disappointment it would be to these fine young men who were so

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highly trained if you suddenly said, after a year's training, that, "you can't do this," and deny them the opportunity to liberate their country. This inspired the thoughts, you know, that why shouldn't these be used as training cadres in other Latin American countries to resist Castro and to strengthen them, and so there were alternatives discussed. But in any case, I sensed that the President was very reluctant about this matter. It appeared, before the meeting was over, that the CIA and the others had come there with—this was to be the meeting which was to give the green light to proceed. Because, as I think I distinctly remember the President, right at the end, saying, "Well, gentlemen, I think we'd better sleep over this matter and not decide it today," as to whether to go forward or not to,

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that we ought to consider it further. And the meeting was dismissed. He didn't call upon the others around there. I mean, I think that was about all. There may have been one or two of the other military, but that was about the extent of it, the major part of the discussion being taken up by Mr. Dulles and his assistants. I rode back, as I recall it, to the White House in a White House car with Arthur Schlesinger, and he got out at the White House and I came on in the same car on back up here. I think I recall, and my memory isn't too positive, that Arthur Schlesinger said that he was very glad that I had said what I had. And that was about it. It left me the impression that he approved of it. I don't know that he said specifically that he did. I wouldn't want to go

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that far. But that he was very glad that I had said what I had. And I had thought that he approved of it. And that was about it. And then I went, I think—that was, say, a Monday at the most—I believe it was a Monday—I think on the following day, or maybe two or three days later, I went with Secretary Dillon to a meeting of the Inter-American Bank in Rio, Brazil.

HOLT: You came back from Palm Beach on April 4 and on April 7 you went to Rio.

FULBRIGHT: We were down there about ten days, I guess.

HOLT: ...returned from Rio April 16. As I recall, we left on a Friday and got back on a Sunday,

FULBRIGHT: Did you go with us to Rio?

HOLT: I did, yes.

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FULBRIGHT: Hickenlooper went.

HOLT: That's right.

FULBRIGHT: And didn't this start while we were down there? I don't...

HOLT: The Bay of Pigs started the Sunday we got back. Or the preliminary air attacks were that Sunday. The actual invasion of Playa Girón was early Monday morning, the 17th of April.

FULBRIGHT: Well, the next meeting was.... After it was over we had a meeting at the White House.

HOLT: April the 19th.

FULBRIGHT: And the President was very upset, of course; very grim about it. He merely related what had happened. The great controversy arose about air cover. I do not know any more than appears on the record. You have the record taken here. Except that Morse [Wayne L. Morse]—didn't he have a meeting of the Subcommittee on Latin American Affairs to go into the matter?

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HOLT: Several. That went on throughout most of May.

FULBRIGHT: Well, those records, of course, speak for themselves. I attended some of them. My impression is from what was said down there at the meeting, that one of the surprises—I believe it was a surprise to the CIA and all of them—that the, I think it was five or seven or something like that, of these training planes, jet training planes (T-34's, don't they call them? Something like that)—that they knew they had them, but they expected to be able to destroy them, by a bombing attack, I think. But in any case, they didn't apparently contemplate that they had been armed sufficiently so that they were effective fighters. Of course, they had been supplied the Batista [Fulgencio Batista] government before, I think before Castro, as I recall. They were just there. I think they knew these planes existed, but they didn't think they had any effective air force; that whatever

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they had could be destroyed. Or neutralized. When the B-26's that were to give the air cover came over, it was my understanding these jets had cannon mounted on them and shot down a lot of these B-26's. And, a question later developed about a second strike. I don't yet understand if there was anything contemplated other than the use of these same B-26's, or what was left of them. I didn't think that there was ever any agreement to supply air cover with American airplanes. That is, off of the carriers, or whatever. And, I think that's consistent with what I understood the plans were at the beginning; that regular American military planes were not to be used. Now, I don't know what the record shows on that, the testimony, I don't remember that. But I, at that meeting—the President was there and I know very disturbed about the failure of this program. It was a real disaster, as we all know.

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HOLT: What did he say about it? If you remember...

FULBRIGHT: Well, he described it in considerable length, you know, from the regular reports. The reports and the grisly details, I imagine you have that. The whole thing didn't pan out like they thought. They were met, as you know, with armored vehicles, and quite a number of people. The landing was bad. They sank, I think, some of the ships as they were approaching and the landing was—some of them got ashore all right, but they had a hell of a time, or a difficult time. And they were not able to disengage or go off to the mountains or anything else. They had a few of them get back on the beach, and a few got away. But a lot of them were captured, as you know, and a lot of them killed. It was a major disaster. There were a number of

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people standing around there. There were quite a number of them—fifteen or twenty of them. But the President did say, just as he got up and started to leave out of the room, he said in an aside to me, "You're the only one in the room that can say 'I told you so,'" which he did say. But he was very grim. He walked on out. We didn't have any conversation; he just stated that as he passed. And that was that.

HOLT: You did not say, "I told you so"?

FULBRIGHT: I didn't say a word to him during the whole meeting, as I recall it, and not many others did. A few maybe had a few questions, but I did not say anything. He said that to me as he was passing on his way out of the room.

HOLT: Well, so far as I can tell, the matter of Cuba stood fairly quiescent, that is in terms of contacts with

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the President, from the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs until early September of 1962 when discussion began over the Soviet Army build-up in Cuba. And there was a bipartisan, legislative leaders meeting at the White House from five to six o'clock in the afternoon of September 4, 1962 regarding Cuba and Berlin and the U-2. Do you remember anything about...?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I don't know whether it was that meeting, or there was a meeting very shortly thereafter, but they filled us in about the discovery of the missiles.

HOLT: The missiles were not discovered until later. That comes in October.

FULBRIGHT: Well, I don't remember that meeting particularly. It was, perhaps, just a briefing that they gave us. Very often those briefings got to be rather informal, routine things where the Secretary would go over it, and the CIA would fill us in, you know, and they're

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not very dramatic occasions. There are so many of them. I don't remember that one specifically. The one I remember, whenever it was, was this revelation of the missiles. They had stated that they had rumors of this and there had been quite a delay in getting the pictures because of the weather conditions. They'd had to schedule several flights but they hadn't been very clear because the weather was bad, but they finally did get some good weather and got very good pictures, and they showed us the pictures which had been blown up and you could see very clearly what the situation was. I remember that meeting very well.

HOLT: That would have been on October the 22nd, when, as I recall, you came back from Arkansas.

FULBRIGHT: I was in Arkansas much of this time because this was right in the middle of the campaign. Of course, I had two campaigns, and I was out of

Washington for three months practically all the time, from the preliminary

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to the primary which took place at the end of July, and then I was up here for maybe a couple of weeks in August after the primary. And then I went back to Arkansas to campaign for the general election. I had an opponent in the general election and I spent most of the time down there, and I came back especially for that meeting. They called up and sent a plane. In fact, it was a new plane. The President had never been in it, his newest plane. They sent it there to pick me up at Little Rock; then it came to Atlanta and picked up Senator Russell and Congressman Vinson [Carl Vinson], chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Then we came on to that meeting on the 22nd.

HOLT: There was a further meeting on the 24th with the same people. This was off-the-record. Those—and that’s apparently all of the contacts with the White House during the missile crisis, but can you reconstruct

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either or both of these meetings?

FULBRIGHT: Well, the meeting on the 22nd.... I came up on the plane, and Senator Russell and Vinson and I were the only three, as I recall, on it. And we speculated. We hadn’t been told what this was about, but we speculated, you know, that it was about Cuba. There had been some speeches by members of the Senate, I think Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] and others, about this matter, and we assumed that this was what it was. We discussed what was the proper thing to do. There were the alternatives of should we put an embargo and stop the Russian ships, or should we invade, or what we should do about it. And we, having nothing positive but purely rumors to go on and public talk (and I’d been down in Arkansas and I hadn’t even heard all of those very clearly because this was only a short time before the election and I was making speeches

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every day, nearly every day several speeches, television and such, and all the business that goes with an election). At the meeting itself, they outlined the situation and (this was about five o’clock), it was quite evident after the end of the meeting that the President had—they’d already come to their conclusion. This was a meeting not so much to ask our advice but simply to inform us about what had taken place and what their decision was. McNamara explained that they already started the procedure for gathering together an invasion force; meaning, troops had been moved into position, equipment, and so on. All preparations were underway. As I recall, he said ten days—they needed about ten days more to be completely ready for an invasion; to do whatever was necessary about it, as I recall it—necessary, as many as 300,000 men, and with all the necessary ships and

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planes. They outlined this procedure for a selective embargo, I guess you'd call it; selective quarantine.

HOLT: Quarantine, I think was the word they used.

FULBRIGHT: Russell suggested that this—under this provocation wouldn't it be advisable, and he recommended as I recall it, that since the provocation was very great and this was a source, and would continue to be a source, of danger and a threat to the United States with this missile base so close to its shores, that it would be the proper time to go ahead with the invasion and knock it out. There were two alternatives in that connection: we'd either have an air strike to bomb, or destroy, without invading, or invade and get rid of Castro. I believe he recommended that the final solution would be, the better solution would be, an invasion and at the same time get rid of Castro and the missiles. And I supported that position and

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stated, as best I can recall, that inasmuch as this was a very provocative situation, that I was afraid that to have to stop a Russian ship—I remember the question was asked, "what if the Russian ship doesn't turn back? What are you going to do?" "Well, we'll take it into port." "Well, what if it resists?" "Well, we'll have to sink it." I mean, they're not going to let them go in. I mean, if necessary, you had to sink it. If they won't turn back, and won't come into port voluntarily, why you have to sink it. It occurred to me then, and I suggested, that this would be more provocative to the Russians and more likely to escalate into war than if you attacked Cuba itself. And they had no real business being in Cuba and you were.... It was of a more defensive nature rather than if you attacked those ships because the ships would be on the

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high seas where under international law they had a right to be. If you attacked a ship, you were really attacking Russia directly, rather than Cuba. So, I thought that that might be less provocative of a real escalation of war and that since Castro had been so offensive and looked as if he intended to continue to be so, that this was quite a different situation from the Bay of Pigs; that they were really threatening us. At the time of the Bay of Pigs they weren't threatening us; they had just had a revolution and they were offensive, but that there was no direct threat to the United States. But under the changed conditions it could well be argued that legally we have the inherent right of self-defense under the United Nations or any other treaty whereas we didn't have that provocation or right to do it

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prior to that time. I thought Russell was right and that this would at least get rid of Castro and maybe we could do what we could with Cuba from there on. Well, anyway, it was quite evident that the President had already made up his mind. He said, "Well, at seven o'clock," (I think) "I'm going on television," and that the statement's already prepared, the speech was already prepared, and the decision had been made as to what course to follow. So this was, I would say, not seriously considered as a suggestion. It came too late in any case. But that was about it. We adjourned. He went out immediately and almost directly from there. We didn't get out until, I think until about 6:30 or something like that. I went across the street to an office where President Johnson—Vice President Johnson—and some others were, and watched it on television,

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that is, watched the President's broadcast on television from there. I think Walter Jenkins [Walter W. Jenkins] and three or four other people were over there. Not too many—six or eight people in Johnson's office right across the street. After we heard it, we were, of course, all very apprehensive as to what would happen when they stopped the ships. Of course, their judgment was correct; the ships turned around and went home and that was that.

HOLT: Well, that was on Monday, the 22nd of October. On Wednesday, the 24th, there was another meeting at the White House. Do you remember anything about that one and what happened in the meantime, and what went on?

FULBRIGHT: I'm not sure I stayed for that. Does it show that I was there?

HOLT: It shows that you were there.

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FULBRIGHT: I went back, I think, fairly soon. Maybe I stayed until the 24th. Two days later. Yes, I did stay for that. Well, that was only a progress report, is all I know, as to the way it was—what had happened. They just gave us a progress report. Of course, it turned out well and they were right in their judgment as to what the Russians would do, and the ships had turned back.

HOLT: The crisis was not finally resolved until the following Sunday when the Soviets agreed to take the missiles out of Cuba, by which time I think you were back in Arkansas.

FULBRIGHT: I think I, right after, maybe that meeting... I believe at the first meeting he said, "Stand by"—you know, not go back until we have another meeting. I think that's the way it was. And we did, and had the meeting. Then I went on back to Arkansas because I had commitments. This was getting very close to my election

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and I went on back to Arkansas.

HOLT: Well, now, the following March, March of '63, after the missile crisis in October of 1962, you went to Costa Rica with the president for a meeting of all Central American Presidents.

FULBRIGHT: Yes.

HOLT: At which, Cuba, among other things, was prominent on the agenda. Can you tell us anything about that Costa Rican meeting? How it affected Cuba, or anything else?

FULBRIGHT: As you know, we flew down—there was quite a group on that plane—quite a number of us, several congressmen, and so on. That was the time the crowd was so enthusiastic around the airport. I was supposed to be in the car behind the President and they got such a big crowd between me and

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the official delegation I couldn't get through it. In fact, the crowd was getting pretty unruly, in a friendly way, of course. And I just couldn't make my way through the crowd to the car so I walked all the way in. It was a hot, dusty day.

HOLT: You walked all the way from the airport to San José?

FULBRIGHT: Yes.

HOLT: That is quite a way.

FULBRIGHT: It's about five miles, I guess.

HOLT: Oh, it's farther than that.

FULBRIGHT: Well, it's a long way. I fell in with some fellow, I think he was a reporter, who also got isolated. The two of us—I can't think of his name, I didn't know him before I don't think—walked all the way to the hotel. There were terrific crowds in the town. It was pretty dusty there. The volcano wasn't as active then as it is now. The meetings

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were very formal meetings. I wasn't called upon to speak. The various presidents of five or six countries spoke. You know, the usual rather formal speeches. The discussions there, of course, had much to do with development of Central America. As I recall it, this wasn't essentially Cuba. It was much about the development of Central America, the progress toward their common market, and their common institutions. There were many exchanges of goodwill and all that sort of thing. It was a very cordial meeting. As far as Cuba goes, our main purpose there was to persuade them that they should unite in protection against subversion from Cuba. And most of them, as I recall it, in that group were all fairly friendly and agreeable on that. I don't think there was too much dissent. But as I recall, the emphasis was primarily upon the development

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of Central America, and that we were desirous of helping them. Had private conversations and casual ones with the members. It was the first time I had met young Somoza [Luis Somoza Debayle]. Of course, Figueres [José Figueres Ferrer], and I can't remember the names of all of them, but I met them all. They were all very agreeable to us. You probably have a list there.... It's hard for me to...

HOLT: No, as a matter of fact, I haven't.

FULBRIGHT: The presidents, I think, of all of those countries were there—I think five or six.

HOLT: What we're more interested in here is President Kennedy rather than those presidents. Do you remember anything in particular about his activities or statements? That is, statements that would not be on the public record at this conference?

FULBRIGHT: No, I don't remember any during the conferences. They

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had, of course, private conferences he did with each of these presidents privately. I wasn't there in those meetings. They had this tremendous, big dinner over at the country club. It was most elaborate; served enormous amounts of food, and all that.

I fell in with a man, the agricultural attaché there, very agreeable, and I spent a good deal of time with him talking about conditions there, and their agriculture. And I took a plane ride, I mean a helicopter ride, over the country. Took a good look at it from the air. That's the first time I'd ever been there. The main thing I remember of my personal conversation with the President was on the way down. He had quite a crowd. I didn't spend a lot of time with him personally. Mostly just visited with other people. But the main thing that

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sticks in my mind is that this was shortly after his budget message. At least, I think it was the first time I'd had an opportunity to talk to him about it. I had quite an argument with him, a discussion (it wasn't an argument), a discussion about the emphasis upon space. This was the first time I'd taken it up with him. I said I approved of his program, all except space, and I thought this was entirely out of line. I had hoped he could devote more attention to education and urban renewal development. We have a big project in Little Rock, and I was very impressed with the need for much more effort in this field than in going to the moon. His rejoinder was (in answer to my objections to this allocation of resources) that that might be so, there may be much to be said for money for that; but, he said, "I don't think you could persuade the Congress

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to put the money in those projects like that even if you didn't put it in space." In other words, if you cut the space from the five billion plus that they were asking, back to three, three and one half, he had no assurance nor any confidence that he could get the Congress to take the two billion difference and put it into these other activities. And that since they would spend it in space, and since he thought space had a great value, he would rather spend it there than not spend it at all; that this contributed not only to going to the moon, but to technological advance and scientific discovery, et cetera and he justified his program. But the thing that stuck in my mind was that even though my priority was better, he still didn't think we'd get it if we cut the space. That was the thing that I talked to him most about. I know on that trip I didn't talk to him very long.

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There were many other people there and that was the principal conversation I had with him.

HOLT: Well, let's go to Berlin then. In regard to Berlin, there was a story in Drew Pearson's column just the other day, on April 2 of this year, that says.... Did you see this column?

FULBRIGHT: My wife told me about it. She read it to me, I believe, at breakfast. I don't remember exactly.

HOLT: "During the first few days of the Kennedy Administration, Senator William Fulbright, now in the headlines over foreign affairs advice to the Johnson Administration, gave some less headlined private advice to the Kennedy Administration. He advised the new President that then was the time, the winter of 1961, to run with the ball on Berlin. Fulbright pointed out that Premier Khrushchev obviously was in a friendly frame of mind toward Mr. Kennedy, had offered to send a special ambassador to his inauguration, had released the American RB-47

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fliers, had sent a long letter of congratulations to JFK, was giving various indications that he wanted to get along with the new regime. Fulbright pointed out that since Berlin had been rankling relations between the United States and Russia for over a decade, and since Berlin was bound to come up anyway, it was best for Mr. Kennedy to grab the ball and run with it. The new President got similar advice from Adlai Stevenson, Averell Harriman, Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]. But dealing with the new Congress and faced with negative advice from part of his State Department, Kennedy delayed.” Is that right?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I think that’s an overstatement, about my advising him to run with the ball, and so on. Along about that time, there was a considerable discussion, of course, about Berlin and this, I believe, was prior wasn’t it, to his meeting with Khrushchev?

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HOLT: Apparently so, yes.

FULBRIGHT: I think so. And it was one of the very troublesome things. It was a critical issue between Russia and ourselves, and I certainly wasn’t the only one that was making suggestions or thinking about what we should do. And there was the idea that maybe we could get it off dead center by making some move toward trying to change the status that would give us uninterrupted access to Berlin in return (of course, we didn’t expect to get that for nothing) but in return for some form of independence or autonomy for Berlin itself as a state. Khrushchev had made the suggestions, I think, from time to time about a United Nations force in there, or making it an international city, or various suggestions of that kind and he was open to suggestion. I think it preceded this. And I did say, I believe, here in the

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in the memorandum on it, that (I don’t think I ever said for him to run with the ball or anything) it would be a good time to explore the possibilities of getting a bona fide land route into Berlin that was not subject to control by the Russians, or interruption by East Germans or Russians, in return for some alteration in the status of Berlin. Not particularly to be given to the—turned over to the Russians, but I think I had a memo—had my staff look up (maybe you did it or someone on my staff)—the way the Vatican City was set up inside of Italy at the time that the complete sovereignty of the Vatican City was preserved and that this might be a kind of a model that you could use in approaching Berlin. This would be an autonomous city in which we, without control of domination by either the Russians or East Germans or the United States or

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the West Germans, in return for, as I say, access to it wherever you could be sure that you could live and would have free egress and ingress to the West. I believe the suggestion that perhaps it could be considered an international city and maybe the European part of the United Nations might be put there as a kind of symbol of its international character. These were merely suggestions that in some way we could try to get this Berlin thing settled; at least, for a while in a less explosive status. But I think that column overstates it a bit. I was merely, along with others, making suggestions as to some way to get this out of an area of critical issues that kept bothering our relations with Russia.

HOLT: Did you ever, besides putting this in a memorandum, did you ever discuss it with the President?

FULBRIGHT: Yes, just along the same line. And I didn't pretend

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to have any exact solution, but we do have precedents for these cases. I think I also mentioned that, I believe during one period Krakow was such a state, was such a city. And just explored the possibility of neutralizing this issue, and I think I talked to him and why couldn't we open up discussions with the Russians to see what they'd do. They were always making suggestions and couldn't we move toward opening discussions even if nothing came from it. We would show our desire to reach some kind of an acceptable settlement of it, acceptable to both sides.

HOLT: What was the President's reaction?

FULBRIGHT: Well, as usual, he listened to it and he, I think he said, "Well, we are discussing these at any opportunity they're willing to through regular diplomatic channels," but he didn't take any action then and I think it was shortly, not too long, after that he had the meeting

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with Khrushchev in which he was very tough, hard-boiled, and that put the end to that, of course. And I would say with a view of Khrushchev's later attitude, there wasn't any basis for hope, even at the time I had that suggestion, for anything fruitful to come out of it. We weren't sure what his attitude was going to be, and he turned out to be much more antagonistic and belligerent, than many of us had hoped, or thought he would be right at that particular time.

HOLT: This began, as you mentioned, at about the time of the Vienna meeting, and either then or shortly thereafter, the Soviets came forth with a demand for a demilitarized, free city of Berlin. And this is the beginning of the Berlin Crisis of 1961. On June 23, of 1961, you had lunch at the White House to discuss Berlin. Those present, besides you and the President,

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were Mansfield, Russell—just three Senators—then Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Foy Kohler [Foy D. Kohler] who was then Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. You remember anything about it?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I think I remember that—by that time—this was after the Vienna meeting, as I recall.

HOLT: That's right, this was after...

FULBRIGHT: Well, then after Khrushchev revealed how tough he was going to be, then we all agreed, as I recall it, that we should not—couldn't afford to—back down. And this was the occasion, I think, when we discussed the build up of our forces. And I think more forces entered in to show that you're not going to be bluffed out of it. In fact, as I recall it, no one disagreed with that. Of course, your attitude toward these things is always influenced by what the attitude of your adversary is, and it was quite evident by that time that the

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only feasible policy was to be as tough as he was and he wasn't going to take any nonsense about it. And I think everybody agreed and supported the decision that was made to put more troops in and to pep up our defenses in Europe. I think that's what that was. I remember having discussions. And no one disagreed with that. This other, first, proposal was on an assumption that it was possible that maybe Khrushchev would not be so tough. Apparently, just going back and reviewing it, he was testing out the new President and he wanted to see, in Vienna, just how he'd react. And the reaction he got was the right one, at least from our point of view, I thought, and he didn't pursue it.

HOLT: Are there any other White House meetings or contacts with the President—that you remember—with the President during that summer of 1961, in regard to Berlin?

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He did—you remember, he made a speech to the country, I think on July 25, about Berlin. He sent you a copy in advance. You wrote him that note thanking him for it. And the wall went up in August, and then the Vice President went to Berlin, and then General Clay [Lucius D. Clay, Sr.], and then things began to calm down a little bit. Throughout all of this period is there anything else you recall at the White House in connection with it?

FULBRIGHT: I don't know whether it was about this time that I... I think I did have lunch with Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and O'Brien [Lawrence F.

O'Brien] down there in the restaurant in the White House (you know, down below in the basement) and advising or suggesting that this speech had been such a helpful one in outlining the issues involved, and that I thought speeches were more effective than press conferences; that I was hopeful the President would give many more speeches of this character on this and other

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issues. It was of great service to the public, in the understanding of the public, if he would do it. There was no one else who could get the audience—no one else could impress the people as he could. That's one of the things... I know I did at some time, I think that was about the time.

HOLT: What's your.... Leaving Berlin for a moment because this raises an interesting point, what's your appraisal of Kennedy as a communicator with the public or with Congress? How would you appraise his congressional relations—his public relations—how he filled the role of the presidency as a function of leadership and education in informing people?

FULBRIGHT: Well, I thought that in this role, as I mentioned here, when he really put his mind to it and made a statement on nationwide television, he was very effective. And that's why I say, I advocated this far

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more important than press conferences. I never did think that press conferences were very useful for the simple reason that I don't think the questions are very good and they are usually designed to develop some kind of partisan, or controversial, issues to make headlines, rather than really educate. I didn't then, and don't now, think that the usual press conferences are very educational, because of the subject matter. The President was particularly good at taking a subject and developing it logically and concisely and I thought he delivered it well. And I thought he was at his best in a good speech. Press conferences, not so good. As far as relations with the Congress, my own relations were, I thought, very satisfactory. He was always most cordial, and he listened. And I never was sure, of course, just how persuasive they were. I think sometimes they were. But I don't think he had the same touch in dealing with Congress that President

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Johnson has. I don't think he felt as much a part, or as close to congressmen, or understood them, or senators. Just why this is so, I don't know. It may be that because of his youth and, for other reasons, that it just didn't impress him as much. I remember I asked him, in connection with foreign aid—I told him about what the situation was, certain members who raised these points, they were opposed to this or that section, and wouldn't he take the time to talk to them personally. And he did. He nearly always did when I made these suggestions.

But for some reason or other, he didn't seem to be able to bring them around. This is a very mysterious thing. I used to be amazed at the effectiveness of Johnson, while he was Majority Leader, to get people who were ordinarily on opposite sides of the fence to come around and reach some kind of a consensus. How he did it, or

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what it was he did, I don't know. I know that he spent endless hours with them, and I know that he talked to them, and I have a hunch that he kept up with what their own interests were to a much greater degree and he knew what kind of quid pro quo to offer them in the way of, you know, of consideration for their particular interests. But anyway, I think he's a genius, Johnson was a genius at it. And I don't think that President Kennedy had this same touch. It's partly, I expect, because he didn't know these people as well; didn't know what they were so interested in; didn't know quite how to appeal to them. He had no record of having done things for them which inspired a kind of feeling that, "Well, he's been awful considerate of me; I owe it to him to do it," because he hadn't been in the position to do this. He had not

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ever had this background. Johnson had built up a, what you'd call a reservoir of obligations, if you like, or goodwill, that he could call upon in a pinch and that's the only way I can explain how he was so effective. Of course, Kennedy hadn't had this background. He had been in the Senate very little, yes, but not in a position to do anything for, or even to get acquainted with, the members. As I say, in the beginning, while Kennedy was on the committee he did not play a very big role in the activities of the Foreign Relations Committee. I saw him very seldom. He's been.... He became interested in the labor legislation and in the activities of the Committee on Government Operations, I believe, and he had much more to do with my senior colleague, he and his brother did, both through that activity, than he did in our committee.

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HOLT: Just for the record, his attendance record in the Foreign Relations Committee—in 1959, he attended 24 out of 117 meetings, and in 1960, three out of 96.

FULBRIGHT: Three out of 96. Well, this is what I mean. I didn't feel I knew him well. And I think this is true of most of the members, except those that he was thrown with. They didn't know him, and, therefore, he didn't have Johnson's approach on an issue. His, necessarily, was purely factual. And he could give a very intellectual and objective explanation of the need for it. But he couldn't call upon this personal angle, personal loyalty—that isn't quite the word—but it grows up among people that you do something for. I mean, when I say "something," nothing more than a vote for something that they're interested in and you may not be particularly interested

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in and you don't care how you vote. Therefore, you favor them, you give them a pair, or you do an errand for them, or you write a letter for them, friends, or you have—all kinds of small attentions that go on around a place like this. I can't remember anything specifically that Johnson did, but he showed great consideration for you and when you had a problem of any kind, he used to go to great lengths to try to help you with it. Then you might say that in the natural course of events when he had something he wanted, why you were inclined to do it. I think this is the way things work here as well as in other lines. And I think Kennedy suffered from a lack of this background of close association with the Congress, and I don't think he could actually call upon them, or at least he didn't seem to be able to influence them, to the same extent that Johnson could. I don't like to make these comparisons, but this has been in the press.

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And I think Johnson has an unusual capacity and a long experience in this kind of activity. Kennedy's relations—they were good. People like him. I never heard of many people in the Congress who dislike him, although in the country, arising largely out of civil rights, there had grown up considerable resentment. There had in my state as well as in other states. I didn't feel that resentment because as a national officer and so on, I fully recognized that he couldn't take the viewpoint of just one section; he had to try to take the national point of view. We could differ as to the wisdom of a particular action in the field, but his general attitude toward these issues had to be on a national basis. I think Johnson's is, too. He's taking a very similar attitude. But when it comes to actually influencing a particular action, or influencing a senator, or a group of senators, to vote like he

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wants them to, Johnson has a great advantage in both his experience and association and knowledge of these people. I think that's largely the difference. Kennedy's personality—I think he was a most engaging fellow. He had an extremely good wit. Every time you went there it was always a pleasant occasion. I've never seen him lose his temper. I've never seen him exhibit real anger. Now after the Bay of Pigs, he exhibited, of course, great concern, disappointment, but he didn't exhibit then any real anger at those who had advised him to do it or otherwise. He took full responsibility for doing it. He said, "It was my decision; I made it." He wasn't trying to put it off on anyone else. And I didn't think he exhibited real anger. It was, rather, that of chagrin and disappointment. But he was a, I thought, of a very fine temperament. The main thing

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he needed to make him a much greater, more effective president was experience, I think, in association and experience. But I think he would have acquired it—was acquiring it—very rapidly. And if he had lived, I think he would have been more and more effective with the

Congress and the people, because he had the native ability. He had the rare combination of articulateness. His impromptu and off-the-cuff statements were, I thought, among his best. He had a great facility for putting things in perspective, and putting them well, and in a very engaging manner. He had a sly kind of dry humor, that went with it very well, too.

HOLT: You mentioned every time you went to the White House it was pleasant. Can you take the two or three minutes we have left on this tape to say something about social life at the White House under the Kennedys?

FULBRIGHT: Well, he had a style and the way he treated people, and conducted official meetings, or informal meetings, that

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was extremely gracious, I think. If you went there to a private dinner, he was always, as I say, of good humor. I've never seen him surly, or glum, or depressed. He was always in good humor. He was, as I say, had an excellent, very unusual wit, a way of putting things. And he had extremely good taste, I think, in—well, in the first place, the food was much better than it had been before, and he was relaxed and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves. One of the most remarkable things, I think, is in these dreadful, official dinners, where you have a visiting head of state, and they're awful things, generally—I mean, I hate to go to them, normally. They're one of the burdens of public office. But he had, I think, a way of welcoming, or talking to, or about visiting dignitaries and their country, that was the

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most gracious that I've ever encountered in a public man. And he appeared to do it off-the-cuff. I'm sure he thought about it ahead of time, but nevertheless, he rarely consulted notes. He did it and it seemed spontaneous and genuine. It was in a way that I'd never seen it done by anyone else, either foreign or domestic. The only man I can think of off-hand who had that kind of grace was a man like Macmillan [M. Harold Macmillan], or a man like Churchill [Winston Churchill]; that type of quickness and a sense of appropriateness as to his remarks about people in an atmosphere which is dull with formality and usually they just mouth a lot of meaningless phrases about our friendship, and so on. But he was able always to call upon some kind of historical connection, or some personal reference, that is, a reference particularly to that person, that is, the visiting dignitary or his country. It

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was unusual and very gracious and always broke that feeling of, "this is just another routine matter." I thought he did it better than anyone else I've ever seen in that kind of a meeting. This is what I meant. Usually—I always felt very proud of the way he conducted himself under these conditions, which are very difficult conditions. Or, take the other extreme, that is, of the kind at a place like the Gridiron Club, which is one of the most difficult of all positions for any public official. He always carried it off. I think I saw him maybe once or twice. He

always carried it off with the spirit of the occasion. He could always be amusing and entertaining, and yet at the same time dignified. He didn't get down and engage in dirty stories. I don't mean that. But he had a very light touch that always made me feel that it was just the right word—the

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very appropriate things that he said to that occasion. He had a very sensitive nature to the occasion when he was speaking—better than anyone I have ever seen in a position like that except, as I say, a few like Macmillan and Churchill. I have seen him on several occasions. But most public officials, when we get under those circumstances, we usually freeze up and they are more formal than you can imagine and, consequently, dull as can be. That was one of his principal characteristics, I thought. And he always, in meetings down there, when he'd call and we'd meet with a group of congressmen, his conduct was very effective. But there was something lacking in this business of persuading them to do what he thought was in the public interest.

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