

Myer Feldman Oral History Interview –JFK#7, 5/29/1966
Administrative Information

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Interviewer: Charles T. Morrissey

Date of Interview: May 29, 1966

Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.

Length: 55 pages*

*Pages 317 and 327 are duplicated.

Biographical Note

Feldman, (1914 - 2007); Legislative assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1958-1961); Deputy Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964); Counsel to the President (1964-1965), discusses election night, appointing task forces, and presidential appointments, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

Myer Feldman, recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey, May 29, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Myer Feldman – JFK #7

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Seventh Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

May 29, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FELDMAN: Are you going to ask me a question first?

MORRISSEY: Only to suggest that we start with the morning after the election in 1960. What did you do next?

FELDMAN: Well, the morning after the election the first thing we did was talk to the President elect and ask him whether he had been informed of the results of the election. And he said that he had been. I

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think Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was there first and told him that there wasn't any question about it, that he had been elected.

MORRISSEY: Were you at Hyannis Port?

FELDMAN: I was at Hyannis Port, yes.

MORRISSEY: Let's go back to the night before. How hectic was it?

FELDMAN: The night before was a madhouse. I guess that we were pretty confident that we would win. We drove to Hyannis Port from Boston. In the car were Sorensen, myself, my wife – I don't know – one or two other people I guess. We rented a car in Boston and drove to Hyannis Port from Boston. In the car were Sorensen, myself, my wife – I don't know – one or two other people I guess. We rented a car in Boston and drove to Hyannis Port to get the election results. I stopped in very briefly at the house where they had a battery of telephones and there was a great deal of activity – people were very tense. There was kind of an air of confidence but at the same time of an uncertainty. We felt that the election would

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be close but that probably we'd win.

I guess about 7 o'clock we decided to go have some dinner. So we went to a restaurant. When I say "we," it was my wife, myself and Sorensen. We had dinner, and they had a great big television screen at the dinner. And as soon as the results started coming in, we noticed that Kennedy was ahead. And then this computer – I've forgotten what the number was – changed, and it looked like Kennedy, although ahead, might conceivably lose. I guess about 1 percent of the votes had been counted.

By the time we had finished our dinner, along about 9:30, 10 o'clock, Kennedy was ahead again and we felt pretty good. Ted went back to the house. I said I'd rather either stay at a motel room and watch television or go to the armory which had been set up with

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cameras and reporters and everything else and acted as election chief headquarters.

In the armory there were two rooms which were the Kennedy headquarters rooms. And there the members of the Kennedy staff would gather to watch the television and to be in touch with the house and to be in touch with places around the country also. Both the house and the armory had direct lines to key states. Well, I guess both the Kennedy family generally, who I talked to occasionally throughout the night, and ourselves were optimistic as the returns came in. We were always sure that Ohio was going to go for Kennedy. And counting Ohio in, there was just no question that we would win. It was only when it began to look as if Ohio was not going to give its electoral votes to Kennedy that we started having questions about the

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result. And then we started shifting to Illinois, and Illinois became the key state. You remember we couldn't get the states in the far West that early.

MORRISSEY: Were you assuming that California was going to go Democratic?

FELDMAN: Well, California was in the doubtful column. And in order to be sure that we had won, we had to assume that California would go against us. If California went with us then we had that many more votes. So, assuming that California went against us, if Ohio went with us, we won. And we thought that Ohio would be in our column up until the early hours of the morning. And I guess even to this day we don't know why Ohio didn't vote for us. But, as I say it wasn't until around....Well, along about midnight, one o'clock our

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biggest concern was why didn't Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] concede? He was so far behind the gentlemanly thing for him to do would be to make a statement announcing that he conceded the election to Kennedy. We thought that he probably was retaining the Nixon attitude up to the very end. And that was an incredible performance with the press he had that night.

But to come back to the feeling of the candidate whom I did not talk to except for once when I arrived. He seemed pretty relaxed. But, although he seemed pretty relaxed, we knew that it wasn't quite that way. He did go to sleep, we were told, oh, in the early hours of the morning. He went to sleep, I guess, before Nixon conceded. As I remember, Nixon didn't concede until about 10 o'clock the following morning. Isn't that about right?

MORRISSEY: Yes.

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FELDMAN: And he went to sleep after Nixon made a statement about 3 a.m. saying that he wasn't going to concede. And I remember that Sorensen went to the house to tell the candidate, John F. Kennedy, that Nixon was going to make that statement. I think it was he who told him that. Well, anyhow, to come back to the preceding night. With the doubtfulness of Ohio we got very nervous and became a little bit unsure of ourselves although by every calculation, by every one of the machines at the television network headquarters, it seemed that we would probably win. I guess all of us went to sleep about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning without celebrating a victory because we weren't absolutely certain – but with a great deal of confidence that we had won because by then we knew that even if we had lost Ohio, we were going to win Illinois.

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I remember Steve Smith saying to me over the phone that, “Well, we can always count on Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley]. And if the ballot boxes down state aren't in, why he'll hold a few ballot boxes in Chicago to equal them.” But we had some feeling that Illinois would be in our column. If we took Illinois, why, we'd have to win.

Then the next morning we were told there would be a meeting at the armory at which the candidate would appear and would make a statement to the press and to all the people who had been helpful in the campaign. So, all of us went to the armory to see him. And as

he came into the armory and went down the aisle between the people who were packed solid in there, it was just remarkable. It was a remarkable demonstration of how many people he knew because he stopped along the way....

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People who had done comparatively little during the campaign he'd stop and thank them. And he took two or three people aside in the course of just that short trip down to the platform and spoke a minute or so to them, saying the gracious thing and acting as the candidate should have after he was just elected. Now, there's no point in my going into what he said because that's part of history and the people who were on the platform and so on.

But, with his statement we then felt we had to get to work and do what was necessary to develop a program. We had the basis for the program in the speeches during the campaign. Now, I guess it must have been a few days after that that Kennedy called me and said that he had been trying to decide where I would fit into the picture. And I said to him

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of course I'd do anything he wanted me to do, but I had thought that I'd like to have the title counsel in my name, and I'd like to be in the White House. And he said he had hoped I'd say that. He said, however, that he had already talked to Sorensen, and Sorensen wanted to be special counsel. And he wondered what I would want in view of that. I said, "Well, I suppose then I'd like the title of Deputy Special Counsel." And he said, "That's fine." I knew at that time there was no such position. But I also knew that the President can create any position that he wants to create. So, from then on – and this was just a few days after the election – I knew what I would be doing. Nevertheless the newspapers kept speculating about whether or not I would be appointed Budget Director or

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whether or not I would be appointed something else. But my picture appeared in Newsweek and various other places as the new Budget Director. I guess I could have been appointed Budget Director if I really wanted that because there was no candidate for the job.

Well, as I say, I knew pretty much what I would do, Ted knew what he would do. When I next saw Kennedy, which must have been a couple of weeks after that, we met to discuss what the principal functions of the interim administration would be. He told us that he had had Clark Clifford prepare for him a series of memoranda dealing with the transition; he told us that he had also asked Dick Neustadt [Richard E. Neustadt] to work on papers which would show how the White House should be organized; and he asked us to work with them. He also told me –

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and I guess this must have been a basis for some of the newspaper stories - he'd like me to work in the Budget Bureau as a liaison with the Budget Bureau and the new Administration.

I was actually given an office over there and met with Maurice Stans, who was the outgoing Budget Director, regularly for the purpose of learning as much as I could about what was going on, for the purpose of informing Kennedy of what on-going programs there were and what changes would be necessary.

One of the first things I did under Kennedy's instructions in my job as liaison to the Budget Bureau was ask the Bureau to prepare a series of papers showing one, what ongoing programs they had in every department and every agency, two, a compilation of all the promises we had made during the campaign – all of the

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commitments we had undertaken and all the programs we had enunciated; and three, to make any suggestions they might have for either the reorganization of the various departments and agencies or for reorientation of the programs and policies to make them consistent with what our announcements had been during the campaign. And the Budget Bureau staff undertook this during the transition as one of their major functions. I still have a copy of what they produced. They produced maybe fifteen hundred pages of analyses, and they produced a book of maybe five hundred pages analyzing all the commitments we had made. We then boiled it down and showed it to Kennedy. I remember his comment, "Well my God, Mike, what'd you get me into?" because the commitments were not only the commitments which he made in speeches, they were also the commitments I had made in the course

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of answers to questions and in the course of statements by campaign organizations like the Farmers for Kennedy and Natural Resources for Kennedy and so on. So, this was a pretty good guide to how we ought to direct ourselves once we took office.

In addition to that, as I said, the second.... Well, before I come to the second major of personnel, along the lines of policy also, Kennedy said probably it would be a good idea to get together the best people we could find to develop programs along the lines of his speeches. In other words, let's get something specific in the field of educations; let's get something specific in the field of civil rights; let's get something specific in the field of natural resources. He had hammered on these things during the campaign. And he left it to us, to Ted Sorensen and me, to suggest first the

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number of what we came to call "task forces." I believe that this was the first time in American history that we used this kind of organization to develop a program. The first step was to decide what areas we wanted to have expert assistance in. We made a list for him to examine and comment on of, as I remember, twenty or twenty-five different areas that could be the subject of an intensive study. He went over them. He eliminated some, combined others, and we came out with maybe a dozen different areas. Then we discussed how we were to go about it. And the first thing he said was "Let's keep it pretty confidential. Let's not let the press have access to it until we know what the results are going to be." He felt that

this could be very embarrassing to a new administration if people that he didn't know, people over whom he

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had no control made statements that were released to the press. And his fears were actually realized in a couple of the releases that we had. I'll come to that in a moment.

But, having gotten a dozen different subjects, he then asked us to see if we could find people who could serve on the task forces. So, Ted and I made up lists of... We inquired from among our friends and among the people who had worked with us as to who the best minds in the country were on each one of these subjects. And we made up lists of people who could serve on one or another of the task forces. I remember some people kept appearing on more than one task force. For instance, I think Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] got his job because he was recommended so often for so many task forces. He was recommended for the task force on

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revenue, on taxation; he was recommended for the task force on getting the economy moving; and he was recommended for a third task force also. The question then became what do you select him for? Similarly, there were others like that. For instance, Lovett [Robert A. Lovett] was recommended for a couple of task forces on foreign policy; he was recommended for the task force on defense also and so on. So, what we had to do was take all these names and make sure we didn't put more than one person on a task force and select a chairman for each. This we proceeded to do and to present to the candidate for his approval.

MORRISSEY: Did you try to keep politics out of this?

FELDMAN: Yes. Although we didn't want any Nixon supporters to be on because, one, that wouldn't look good, and two, we weren't sure of what his point of view might be.

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Nor did we want any of the former Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] people on because this would have a stultifying effect. We wanted imaginative people. The composition of the task forces would indicate that.

Our greatest difficulty, I would say, were the task forces on foreign policy. And these, to this very day, haven't been released. We've never even released, I don't think, the membership of them. I know we haven't released the reports we received. A couple of the reports were by Adlai Stevenson, heading up the task force. He had as one of the people that directed them John Sharon [John H. Sharon]. And John Sharon I think did it, one, because it was a tribute to him to ask him to do it, and two, because he was always interested in getting a job, I suspect, with the State Department. I think John was disappointed that he was

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not asked to serve in an important job, I think he would have liked to have had the job that George Ball [George W. Ball] got. And he was considered for an important job in the Department of State. We had a lot of difficulties selecting that number three job. I'll come to that in a moment.

But anyhow, the task forces were eventually organized. And they were given their character and told to report. We tried to schedule the reports in such a way that it would give the country the impression that we were moving in this direction, and they'd be able to absorb what was happening without having some massive information dumped on them all at once. As I said, some of the task force reports were announced in the sense that the information got out. They weren't announced – it wasn't the press release.

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Information got out that there was a task force on it, but they reported in secret. Others, we decided, it would be useful to have the publicity that attended the report. For instance, it was decided the task force on education should have a public report. And we told the press that they were going to report on such and such a day. I remember that they gave their report to John F. Kennedy while he was in New York. But when he got the report, which was just a couple of days before he was supposed to receive it formally and show them what was in it, he was quite annoyed, quite upset because it contained what he thought was a very unrealistic program. And he correctly felt the press would feel that this was the program he was going to put into effect. As I remember, the first report

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of that task force called for an expenditure of about twenty-five billion dollars in the first year for education. I talked to ___ who was on it, who was the chairman of the task force, and some of the others and convinced them to reduce the dollar amount anyhow. So it became a thirteen and a half billion dollar education program. Even that was immense, but you couldn't control these people. They put in their report whatever they wanted to. They were completely independent. So, we accepted it. We had a one or two day headline, and we were attacked by the conservative press. And then they forgot about it. Actually, though, I have a feeling that that task force report is really the basis for the massive education program we now have in the

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Administration. I don't want to go into what the task force reports contain. I assume they'll be in the Library anyhow. I guess you're going to have both those that were not released and those that were released. I think it's interesting as to what part of the reports found their way into our actual legislative program. I'll come to that in a moment.

The second part of our major job between election and Inauguration was the

personnel job. Here I played only a peripheral part. The job was assigned basically to Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.]. He was supposed to comb the country and he was supposed to uncover the diamonds that had been ignored by previous administrations and set them in the crown of the administration. And he gathered around him various other people, whom you already know, who worked actively with him I guess.

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MORRISSEY: I'd like to hear you mention the four or five people that worked most closely with him.

FELDMAN: Well, Adam Yarmolinsky worked very closely with him. Ralph Dungan worked with him, and he worked with another group. At the same time the Shriver operation was going, there was a political operation which O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and Dick Donahue and Ralph Dungan worked. And Dungan kind of was a liaison between both of them. People would come to that political group for an interview. And just to give you one illustration of one interview....The political interviews were for minor jobs. Every major job went through the Shriver organization. Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], of course, actively consulted with Shriver. And these were three or four others who escape me right now. But it wasn't a small group. There must have been a half dozen

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people working on that. But minor positions to people that had to give the administration an all ethnic coloration; or had to reward people who had done things for us prior to the election all were handled by the O'Donnell group. And let me give you one illustration of how that operated.

I happen to have been involved in the appointment of Ed Re [Edward P. Re] as Chairman of the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission. Ed Re had been very useful to us during the campaign in suggesting the manner in which we could reach Italian voters, in making radio tapes, in making speeches in behalf of Kennedy. So, when we looked at, one, the people we had appointed so far, and two, some of the debts we owed, political debts owed we found that Ed ranked pretty high in that list – high in the list because he was an Italian. We hadn't

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made a great many Italian appointments. And secondly he had very good qualifications for the position. And thirdly he had been very helpful to us. He was then teaching, I think, at a law school – St. John's I think it was. St. John's in Brooklyn. And I guess it was Ralph Dungan that called him and said, "How about coming down here and talking to us about a position we have for you?" This was the middle of the term, and it must have been pretty difficult for him to make a decision as to whether he would come or not. He talked to the Dean and he finally called back and said that he would be down at the appointed time. He

came to Washington, and he was interviewed. As soon as he got in, he went to see Ken O'Donnell and Dick Donahue and Ralph Dungan. The interview lasted maybe a half hour. I wasn't there, but I was told about it. I was kept informed

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continuously because minority groups were also part on my interest. And I was told that the interview went something like this: "Well, we appreciate everything you've done for us." And Ralph said to him, "Tell us a little bit about your background and what you've done." Ed told them he was the author of some books, and he taught at law school; and that he had some other jobs and was a pretty active lawyer. Ken O'Donnell didn't say much. And after Ed had finished this recitation Dick Donahue said to him something like, "What do you think of the budget?" And he said, "I haven't had any thoughts about it. Why do you ask?" And Dick said, "Well, you know I just thought I ought to ask a question while I'm sitting here." So everybody laughed, and then they said to him, "Well, if you'd like the job of Chairman of the Foreign Claims and

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Settlement Commission it's yours." It was just as simple as that. And it was just a half hour or so. It wasn't based on any prior experience in that field, although he was an extremely competent fellow. But they were free to make this kind of commitment. And Ed Re was appointed to that job. He went back; he did quit in the middle of the school year; and he still is Foreign Claims Settlement Commissioner.

The other jobs, however – the jobs that the Shriver operation were picking – were much more elaborate, required a much more elaborate investigation, and were much more involved. And there was actually a file built up on every person appointed by way of that operation. In addition to the interview by Shriver or by one of the people working for him, there would be innumerable questions from lots of people. For instance, I guess I had to submit a

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statement of my reaction and what I knew about every single Cabinet officer that was appointed. One of the difficult appointment was the Secretary of State appointment. Now, I wasn't particularly involved in that. This was not my field. I didn't deal with foreign policy much. But, Bobby, I remember called me about that and said to me one day, "What do you think of Dean Rusk?" And I said I didn't know much about him, but I'd find out about him. He said, "Well, I wish you would check him out." So I first went to Who's Who to get his general background. Then I talked to my friends who might know about him. Then I talked to some newspaper men to find out what they knew that was adverse to him. I was more interested in getting the adverse reactions so that I could put those in the report so that we knew what we might get. And I remember in Dean Rusk's case

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one of the problems was the extent to which he could be charged with our China policy. He had been Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the Far East, and a lot of the newspapers had been very critical of him as a result of the Lattimore [Owen Lattimore] incident and as a result of lots of others. I was also asked about Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] from a different point of view. I had worked for Fulbright so I could write a memo about him personally, but, secondly, they wanted to know what effect his appointment would have upon the Negro and Jewish community. I would guess that Fulbright came very close to being Secretary of State. But his signing the Southern Manifesto, which I excused in my report on him – Fulbright's a good friend of mine – I guess prevented him from being offered that position. But I came out with a very,

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very high opinion of Dean Rusk. The only thing found against him was this China policy argument. He really was not responsible for that. He had really left the Department before that time. And after sending my memo in on him, I felt fairly certain he would ultimately be selected.

One of the other candidates for that, of course, was Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]. And Chester came very close to being appointed Secretary of State, too. But they finally decided that he'd do better as the Under-secretary of State rather than the Secretary of State for a variety of reasons.

MORRISSEY: Was it deliberate that second and third level people were appointed before Rusk was announced as the Secretary of State?

FELDMAN: No, I don't think there was any policy about that. When we did appoint a Cabinet officer first we would always consult him about the others. And that was the normal way of doing it.

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But in some instances we did select the other people first and just told the Cabinet officer who his associates would be and ask for his concurrence. If he had some strong objections, we probably would have to look for another Cabinet officer because by then we'd made commitments. I don't think it was deliberate in any way.

One fellow that I really had a lot to do with was the Secretary of Agriculture. I interviewed the candidates for that job. We had a great deal of difficulty. We wanted just the right type of person. And I remember, in talking to Kennedy, asking him whether it was essential that we had somebody with a farm background. And he said, "No. In fact it might be good if we had quite a change from the past history of Secretaries of Agriculture. Let's have somebody who is sympathetic to the

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farmer, but not necessarily somebody with a farm background.” And so we considered the following people: We considered Jesse Taft who was a vice president of the Bank of America. I can’t think of anybody farther removed from farming than he. And I wrote a memo on all the people for this position because this was one of my responsibilities. The Secretary of Commerce also was one that I was particularly interested in. But anyhow....

MORRISSEY: Did Taft come up because primarily he was a Californian?

FELDMAN: Well, that was one reason. Yes, it gave us some geographical diversity. But secondly, he had done some work in agricultural. He had some connection. His Who’s Who background had some....He had done some financing for agricultural communities. And we, in fact, did use him for a task force on agriculture. Another fellow we considered was the editor of the

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Des Moines Tribune. I’ve forgotten his name. We didn’t consider him very long. But we made him the chairman of the task force dealing with the commodity prices I remember – the wheat program. John Schnittker, who is now the Undersecretary of Agriculture, was very helpful during the campaign, and I said that he ought to be appointed to something. I’m ahead of my story, but Taft was actively considered and then rejected. And finally it came down to Orville Freeman [Orville Lothrop Freeman], George McGovern [George S. McGovern], and the fellow named Henckel from Missouri Farm Federation. Now, Henckel would have gotten the job. He was the person with the best qualifications, it seemed. He had been a good supporter of ours. On paper he looked superb. And when the time came to interview him, Sarge said he would interview him himself and then would let me interview. So, Sarge interviewed him. And

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then I came into the office, and Sarge left. I talked to him. Then I met with Sarge and he said, “What do you think?” I said, “Well, gee, Kennedy’ll go to sleep on him. He just doesn’t have the vigor.” Sarge said, “Well, we ought to expose him anyhow because John F. Kennedy has seen the record of Henckel and thinks he might be pretty good.” So, we snuck him around to the back entrance of Georgetown one day. The interviews by the candidate were being conducted at his home in Georgetown. So, we got him around the back door and in there without any of the reporters seeing him. And Kennedy talked to him for a half hour. And then he left. I happened to be in that house right after that, and I said, “Well, what did you think of Henckel?” Sure enough he said just what Sarge said he would, “He almost put me to sleep then. Let’s see who else we can get.”

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Well, that left McGovern and Freeman. Freeman seemed to....The only objection to Freeman – Freeman had everything; he was young, he was vigorous, he had the kind of ideas

we liked – the only objection to him was that he was a defeated candidate for governor. And we didn't want any defeated candidates in the Cabinet. But because we just couldn't find anybody else, we couldn't make any other selection, we agreed that....And we owed Freeman a considerable debt. We finally agreed that he ought to get the appointment. I must say that I favored Freeman all along. I didn't know McGovern too well then.

But we had to find something for McGovern too. It was my job to talk to McGovern about being an assistant in the White House in charge of Food for Peace. This had been one of the main points in our campaign so it was a major responsibility.

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McGovern decided to undertake it. I think he felt all along that he'd run again. And I remember meeting with him and his staff. Nelson Post, I think, helped him a lot and some other people. He was conducting a meeting before he actually took office, at which time I said to him that this would probably be the most difficult job in the entire administration because he didn't have any fixed lines of responsibility and he didn't have a budget; and what he had to do, without money, was to develop within the government a command. And he didn't have money to organize for that purpose; he just had a few assistants. He agreed to undertake it. And I think he felt at that time that it would be a good thing for him to do before he ran for Congress again.

MORRISSEY: Was Charlie Murphy [Charles S. Murphy] thought of seriously as a candidate?

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FELDMAN: Well now, Charlie Murphy's story is an interesting one. I guess the Charlie Murphy idea originated with me and Ted. We were having lunch one day and talking about who we could get for Secretary of Agriculture – Undersecretary of Agriculture or Secretary of Agriculture. And we decided to review the people who had worked for Truman [Harry S. Truman]. That seemed a logical thing. And of course high on the list was the counsel for Harry Truman, Charlie Murphy. And we said, "Well, what's he doing now?" And I found out that he was practicing law and that he had a kind of anti-trust practice, I was told. And so we said, "Well, let's see if we can find something for him." Well, we looked around. There just wasn't anything that fitted somebody who had been special counsel to a president. It had to be a pretty high level. So, I don't know whether it

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was I or Ted who said, "Why not see whether or not he'd be interested in being Undersecretary of Agriculture. That doesn't require any really detailed knowledge of farming. He'd get that from the staff." We didn't, throughout this, want anybody who was a farmer, as you can see, in charge of the Department because we had a different idea as to what the Department should be like.

So, we called Charlie and asked him to have lunch with us. He didn't know why. We went to the Senate Cafeteria and had lunch. And in the course of the lunch we said to him, "Well, Charlie you've served one president I know and you've worked pretty actively during the campaign....He worked for Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] during the campaign, he was charged with the intellectual side of the Johnson campaign. And I worked with him at that time because I was kind of in charge of the whole policy part of the

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campaign. So we had lunch with Charlie, and during the course of the lunch we asked him whether he had thought of joining the Administration. He said he hadn't given it much thought. We said we needed a good Undersecretary of Agriculture, and we'd be willing to talk to John F. Kennedy if he was interested in it. Well, he had never thought of that. This had never occurred to him. But I could see during the lunch that he got to be more and more interested in it.

By the time the lunch was over, he was definitely interested. He said he'd like to be considered for that. So we said, "Well, we'll get the candidate to consider it, and we'll let you know about his reaction. But his reaction will depend in part on the extent of Congressional support you have. You better go to North Carolina, which is the state you'll be

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appointed from, and talk to Harold Cooley because he's chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and he's from North Carolina and we would consult with him. You better talk to Ellender [Allen J. Ellender], also. He's chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee. And we assume you can get the clearance from your state senators." Charlie said he'd have no trouble getting clearance, although he couldn't get support from the state senators; but he'd work on Ellender and Cooley. And he came back to us after a few days with the story that Ellender would not oppose him though he wouldn't favor him. He had somebody else he'd like to have appointed to the job. And that Cooley didn't have any other candidate and was mildly favorable. So, with that to go on we went to John F. Kennedy, and John F. Kennedy was easily convinced

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because Charlie had a very good background. I think we selected Charlie just out of the blue.

This is true of other positions. It was true of Hickman Price [Hickman Price, Jr.] in the Assistant Secretary of Commerce's job. Margaret [Margaret Price] was National Committeewoman. She was from Michigan, and she was the chairman of the woman's division. She had been appointed chairman of the woman's division right after John F. Kennedy was nominated. She succeeded Kat Louchheim [Kathleen Louchheim]. We were good friends, and Margaret confided in me that she would like to join the administration but so would her husband, Hickman Price, who had been the active director of a pretty big organization in Brazil and was making a lot of money; but he'd just as soon give that up to

come back and serve John F. Kennedy. Well, we talked to Kennedy, and he was opposed to having a husband and wife team in the Administration.

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Certainly, he didn't want such a team in high administration councils. So Margaret and Hickman had to decide between them which one of the two we ought to press for. Margaret said that Hickman was the bread winner in the family, and that Hickman was interested in doing this; he'd had enough of his job in Brazil. So, the problem then became, "Well, what do you have him appointed to?" So, I went to talk to Luther Hodges, who by then had been appointed Secretary of Commerce. And I discussed with him various things. I'll again come to that. And I told him about Hickman's background; I told him what kind of a person he was. And Hodges said, "Sure, I'd be glad to appoint him Assistant Secretary of Commerce." And that's how he got to be appointed. Hickman actually wasn't even cleared with John F. Kennedy. Well, we told John F. Kennedy that

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he was acceptable to Hodges and I told him that I strongly favored him. And that's how Hickman Price got to be appointed. Kennedy just said, "Okay." I didn't know whether Kennedy had actually even met him. Kennedy didn't concern himself that much with the assistant secretary level. He concerned himself more with the upper levels.

But I said I would come back to my discussion with Luther Hodges. I knew that Luther Hodges would be appointed Secretary of Commerce. He was almost the first person that was appointed. I think Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] was the first. The only questionable Ribicoff's case was whether or not he would be Attorney General or some other Cabinet position. He favored Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. He did not want to be Attorney General. And Luther Hodges, who

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was head of our businessman's committee, was just the obvious candidate for Secretary of Commerce. So I began talking to him early. I had worked with him during the campaign. And I talked to him about his Department early.

We also talked to every other Cabinet officer about their program. Now, what we did was this: We took the budget information, and we took the campaign promises and we wrote a letter to every Cabinet appointment when it was announced. This letter, although cleared with John F. Kennedy, was over either my signature or Sorensen's signature – usually Sorensen's. We'd outline for them the material we had gotten from Budget which would indicate the main areas of concern to them, and we'd ask them for their suggestions regarding those areas of concern. We followed the letter up with a visit or two,

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or three or more. In Luther Hodge's case, we had a number of them. In McNamara's

[Robert S. McNamara] case I remember. . . . You know, he was appointed solely on the basis of an interview by Shriver – and very quickly. But after he was appointed, we wrote the regular letter to him, which didn't list in detail all of the problems of the Department of Defense; they were just too enormous. It just highlighted a few items such as he would have to decide what he wanted to do with a linear reactor that we were developing that had some military uses. I think we even mentioned the SST as one of our problems – supersonic transport and its military applications. Anyhow, these letters and these records are available and will be part of the Library. They're interesting descriptions of the basis for the program.

But, anyhow, we would meet. Now, in

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McNamara's case it was interesting. We wrote the letter to him and said we'd like to meet with him. And he said, "Well, you better give me a day to familiarize myself with this." We thought, "My God, a day. He can't know much in that brief period of time." But we found when we inquired that he was getting as many books and as many records and was talking to as many people as he could. He started at 5 o'clock the morning after the announcement. He rented a room over at the Shoreham, and from 5 o'clock in the morning straight through until very late at night he just worked solidly on all the defense memoranda and all the defense problems. And within a day or two, why, he had a superficial idea of what the problems were. It was just an amazing demonstration of how somebody can get organized to grasp the dimensions of his

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Department. We did the same thing, of course, with Agriculture and with Commerce and so on. Sometimes we would get not the Cabinet officer, but somebody he would appoint to represent him, to sit in with us at meetings over at the Budget Bureau with the Budget Bureau staff to go over these things. But at any rate by Christmas time of 1960, we were fairly well organized either with some. . . . I don't think all the Cabinet officers had been announced yet. But we had the program and the basis for a Cabinet officer assumption of duty. And we went down to Florida where John F. Kennedy was to meet with him and to go over with him the material that we had gotten together. We spent about a week down there, and he approved most of it. I remember it was down there that there was the first leak of the McNamara appointment.

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We found out about it late at night in the kitchen of the Kennedy home in Palm Beach. We were out in the kitchen drinking some orange juice and got a telephone call about 1 or 2 a.m. saying that the Washington Post had the story of the McNamara appointment. He just couldn't understand where the leak came from. And I remember his first comment – he said, "Well, here we are." There was Kennedy and Sorensen and myself. He said, "I guess this is what they meant when they talked about the kitchen cabinet." And then he got the call. He was a little annoyed, and he said, "I wonder how they got that story. They just get these

stories when nobody knows about it.” He told us that Sarge had just seen McNamara, he wasn’t even sure that he was appointing McNamara.

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MORRISSEY: Did you ever figure...

FELDMAN: Yes. We did find out where it came from. It came from him. He had played golf that day with Phil Graham [Philip L. Graham], I think it was. And in the course of that golf game he had mentioned McNamara. So, we found that it was true that the Ship of State is the only ship that often leaks at the top. I think that the meetings at Christmastime at Palm Beach were very productive. As a matter of fact, this was the first of an annual meeting at Palm Beach. Every year between Christmas and New Year’s from then on Sorensen and I would go down to Palm Beach to develop the program for the coming year. And this is where it started. It was down there, too, that he would be asked to make calls to various people. It was there that he called Walter Heller, I remember, and surprised

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Walter Heller by asking him to become Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. Walter just didn’t have any idea that he was going to be asked to do, or even if he was going to be offered a position. I remember that telephone call particularly because I didn’t see how he could make it. He was reading a newspaper at the time and it was suggested that he might call Walter and offer the job to him over the phone. So, he asked his secretary to get Walter Heller on the telephone. It was late in the evening, and he was reading the newspaper. I don’t remember which paper it was. But he was talking to Walter as he was turning the pages of the paper, and carrying on an intelligent conversation with him – asking him questions about the economy and asking what his

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point of view was and how we ought to get moving and so on – finally ended up by saying he’d like him to come down to Washington and join the Administration by becoming Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors. And by then he had finished the newspaper, too. He was talking and reading at the same time. So, he hung up. And I wanted to call his attention to an article. He was reading that paper because I told him there was a story in it that he should read. And I said, “You ought to read so and so.” He said, “I already read it.” And he proceeded to tell me what he thought of that article. So apparently he was able to do at least two things at once – read the paper and carry on a conversation. I found out later that this was typical of John F. Kennedy. Well, so much for the general

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procedure between the election and the assumption of office.

As we got closer to Inauguration Day, the tensions got greater and the burdens became greater. There was less sleep and more to do – more decisions to make even though personnel was finally settled upon. I remember, also, that Kennedy said in the course of it, “You know, I always thought it would be kind of fun to pick the people that were going to be part of the Administration. That would be one of the fun parts of being President.” He said, “After sitting through these decisions, it strikes me that this is one of the most difficult jobs of the presidency and carries with it the least pleasure.” So he adopted the policy – I think differently than Johnson – of not wanting to be too intimately involved in appointments. He only wanted to be in-

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involved in those appointments of people who would work very closely with him. The others he was content to delegate to others – with his approval, of course, on the record. But he didn’t have to see them. But, as I say, as we got closer to Inauguration Day, the tensions mounted; the night work increased; and there was an awful lot to learn. And we all felt a little bit unsure of ourselves until, in my case anyhow, one day we decided that we ought to see our counterparts in the Eisenhower Administration. So, one wintry day we called Kendall [David W. Kendall], who was Counsel to the President, and Jerry Morgan [Gerald D. Morgan], who was Assistant to President Eisenhower, and General Persons [Wilton B. Persons], who was the Assistant to President Eisenhower, and asked for an appointment to see them. Well, they were delighted. And we went in there one morning. We

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spent the whole morning, I guess, with Kendall. We asked Kendall what he did, and he proceeded to give us a brief description of the two or three things he did. I think he mentioned the fact that he determined whether or not legislation should be vetoed or signed, and he had responsibilities for court martials. And as we left that morning, we had more confidence in our abilities to do the job than we ever had before. Number one, because we couldn’t believe that anybody in that job could waste three hours the way he had wasted three hours with us. That was incredible. He must not have too much to do, we felt. And secondly, if he had to search for that much to do, he just didn’t have the same job that we had in mind. We went over the White House list of people and their jobs pretty carefully. We decided to

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combine, I think, about nine different White House jobs into the Special Counsel’s and Deputy Special Counsel’s jobs. The job that nine men had been doing for Eisenhower we put into ours – all the speech writing functions, for instance; the tariff and trade functions; the agriculture functions plus the Special Counsel’s job, and so on. So, we combined a lot into this one job. Then in talking to General Persons and Jerry Morgan, also we got the impression that they weren’t so good or they weren’t so bright that we had to be concerned about it.

MORRISSEY: We're running out of tape so let's just cut it there.

FELDMAN: Okay.

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