David W. Burke, Oral History Interview – RFK, 12/8/1971
Administrative Information

Creator: David W. Burke
Interviewer: Larry J. Hackman
Date of Interview: December 8, 1971
Location: New York City
Length: 57 pages

Biographical Note
Burke was Executive Secretary for the President's Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy, as well as assistant to the Secretary of Commerce and to the Secretary of Labor from 1961-1965; and legislative assistant (1965) and administrative assistant from 1966-1971 to Senator Edward M. Kennedy. In this interview he discusses Edward M. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) relationship in the Senate, and differences between the operations of their Senate offices; the Vietnam War; long deliberations about whether or not RFK should enter the 1968 presidential race; and RFK's 1968 campaign, among other issues.

Access
Open.

Usage Restrictions
According to the deed of gift signed July 1, 1977, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

Transcript of Oral History Interview
These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have

occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation
David W. Burke, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, December 8, 1971, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project of the John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of David Burke

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, David Burke of Albany, New York do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and the transcript of the interviews conducted at New York, New York on December 8, 1971 for the John F. Kennedy Library.

I hereby donate all literary rights in the aforesaid interview to the John F. Kennedy Library.

The tape and transcript may be opened to researchers at the discretion of the Director of the John F. Kennedy Library; his decision to be based on such considerations as potential embarrassment to living persons or their immediate successors, the interests of national security, or potential prejudice to the friendly relations between the United States and foreign nations.

This agreement may be revised by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

David Burke

David Burke

6 16 77
Month, Day, Year

James B. Rhoads

Archivist of the United States

July 1, 1977
Month, Day, Year

David W. Burke—RFK

Table of Contents

Oral History Interview

with

David W. Burke

December 8, 1971
New York City, N.Y.

By Larry J. Hackman

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

HACKMAN: I guess for the first thing, why don't you just start off the first meeting with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], the first recollection. Anything before you went to work with Senator Edward Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy]?

BURKE: Yeah, it was in the Labor Department. I guess it was in the early part of 1963. He came down to the Labor Department to have a joint press conference with Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor, about something to do with the youth employment program. That's the first time I ever saw him. In person I was very impressed with him. He was a very dynamic kind of person. It was clear to see in his relationship with other cabinet members—in this case, Wirtz—that he was clearly so dominant.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: I suppose because of his relationship with the President [John F. Kennedy] naturally, but also I think he would have been dominant anyway. I was also terribly impressed with his size. He was small.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

[-1-]

BURKE: And he was sort of ferocious looking. He was energy. I was leaving that day with Secretary Wirtz to go to a conference at the University of Chicago, and we would have to take an air force plane out. I remember something, just vague impressions, in the car going to the airport. Wirtz remembered something that he meant to tell Robert Kennedy and he was very anxious that his driver find him and get him, use the car radio, and do on and so forth. I was very impressed that day with the drive and the energy and the respect that he commanded, because I was so young and I was just in awe of him.

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything later, discussions with Robert Kennedy about Wirtz and the kind of job that Wirtz did in the administration or later in the Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] administration?

BURKE: No, no I don't. I never had a personal discussion with him about Wirtz, but I do recall one day that…. I guess it was an emergency airline dispute, a strike in the airlines. President Johnson was seeking emergency powers. I had had a background in that business—I had been executive secretary to the President's Labor-Management Advisory Committee [President's Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy]—and Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy were both on the Labor Committee [Labor and Public Welfare Committee of the U.S. Senate] and were hearing the testimony as to whether or not the Senate should pass an emergency measure to force the striking workers back. The same happened also in the railroad dispute. I remember Edward Kennedy, being senior, would ask the questions first and I would sit behind him for background and information that I had on it. Then when it was Robert Kennedy's turn, I would sit behind him. He seemed to relish going after Wirtz a bit. I don't think he had…. It wasn't a lack of respect for Wirtz—he was a hard man to have a lack of respect for; he was very open, very able—but perhaps it was a bit because of his eloquence that I always had the feeling Robert Kennedy was trying to put a pin in him…

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: …to deflate him.

HACKMAN: Were you around long enough during the Kennedy administration to get any feel for Wirtz's relationship with the White House and the White House staff?

[-2-]

BURKE: No. I was around with him long enough, but not close enough, to get

the feel of his relationship with the White House or the White House staff. After he became Secretary of Labor, I never detected any strain in the relationships, though I have some vague recollections of him being frustrated at some times, perhaps by some of the younger staff members in the White House.

HACKMAN: During the Kennedy administration?

BURKE: Yeah, during the Kennedy administration.

HACKMAN: Do you remember, then, anything else before you went to work for Edward Kennedy that….

BURKE: About Robert Kennedy?

HACKMAN: Yes.

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: Okay.

BURKE: Nothing personal.

HACKMAN: When you went to work for Edward Kennedy, then, was there an early meeting with Robert Kennedy just to discuss anything really?

BURKE: No. As relates to me in coming to work for Edward Kennedy, and so on and so forth?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: Political rules of the family, this kind of thing?

BURKE: No. Oh, no, there's nothing like that. No, I just went to work for Edward Kennedy, and one day in the new Senate Office Building [Everett McKinley Dirksen Senate Office Building] he introduced me to Robert Kennedy. Then he did that about five times in the future. He had to keep reintroducing me to Robert Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Yeah. This is over—what—several months, you mean?

BURKE: Oh, in the first three or four months or when we'd meet on the floor or

something, because Robert Kennedy would never take the first introduction. He'd just fly right by it.

HACKMAN: What do you remember in that first year, then, on coordination between the two offices? What could you see operating?

BURKE: Well, between the staff there wasn't that much coordination except in the case of the immigration bill because Adam Walinsky of Robert Kennedy's office, when he was an employee of the Justice Department, was a prime guy in the immigration legislation. So I worked closely with Adam to learn. I was trying very hard to learn very fast; I wasn't a lawyer. I had no experience in the Senate or in legislation or anything, and so I had to rely upon Adam somewhat.

The basic thing that I remember in the first year was the relationship of Edward Kennedy and Robert Kennedy on the Senate floor. There were the first inklings of some vying on the floor. Clearly, young Kennedy knew more about the Senate floor, and enjoyed it more, and knew more about hearings and enjoyed the procedure more than Robert Kennedy did. And there was always the matter of some joking.

HACKMAN: Did that every change? Did Robert Kennedy ever move in the direction of really mastering the Senate floor as Edward Kennedy did?

BURKE: No, no, he never did. I never saw it. He was very good in committee assignments, committee work, especially in public hearings. He had a great background as attorney general, and so on and so forth, in the almost adversary situation of committee hearings. But on the Senate floor, he never gave the same bow to procedures and formality on the floor that Edward Kennedy did. That's old stuff; most people will recognize that.

HACKMAN: Yeah. How would you compare his performance in a public hearing with actually getting down to writing a bill or work within the committee?

BURKE: Well, on the substantive side, his staff was very good. I saw a few instances where Robert Kennedy was introducing amendments in the labor committee that he didn't know very much about. Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] or Adam Walinsky would be sitting there biting their bottom lip, while he'd be trying to explain an amendment to a poverty bill or an education bill or something. It was clear that Robert didn't know much about it, but he had the presence and he had the personality to carry that off with the chairman of the committee when trying to explain the amendment in executive session, say. The chairman or some other senator would ask him a question about, "What does this mean, and what are you trying to do?" He'd say something like, "I haven't the slightest idea, but I know it's a good idea so let's do it anyway."

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: And someone would press him, "Well now, just explain it in more detail." He'd bumble and fumble and his staff guys would be having a nervous breakdown behind him. Edward Kennedy would write him a note, "I don't care about the other fellows. I understand it, Bobby," something like that which would just break him up in the middle of his presentation. So he never paid that much attention. He knew what he wanted to do. Whether the third paragraph was related to the fifth paragraph in the text of the amendment wasn't a matter of real importance to him.

HACKMAN: Just the lack of interest. Not lack of interest, but lack of taking the time to….

BURKE: I always felt he had faith in the staff people around him to make it do what he said it would do. He knew what he wanted to do. He knew what the policy direction was. He knew what the specific amendment's policy was; what the effect would be on the main body of legislation or on the people. He wasn't going to be sitting here and dickering over…. He was not Jacob Javits [Jacob K. Javits] in executive session.

HACKMAN: You know, some people have said that Edward Kennedy did get a lot more legislation on the books, got a lot more accomplished than Robert Kennedy did, while Robert Kennedy got the publicity. Would this kind of thing have contributed to that in a committee in accomplished anything because other people would not have

felt that he'd done his homework. Or was it other kinds of things?

BURKE: No, it wasn't that. In '65 and '66, which were the very active years in the legislature for domestic legislation, anything could be passed, practically. It wasn't this question of homework and having done homework, because Robert Kennedy had a great presence at that time in the Senate. He had come off a past experience and a past job in the executive branch that made most people take him very, very seriously. To vote down an amendment of his in executive session or on the floor, people had to really make sure they knew what they were doing. So it wasn't because there were any doubts about his substantive commitment to any piece of legislation or amendment. I think it was perhaps because, except in some real specific areas, he did not consider himself a legislator that way, that he was going to put in amendments, and so on or so forth. He had things he wanted to say; he had a tone he wanted to strike; he had general directions he was trying to set. He was trying to carry it forward from his past experiences, and John Kennedy, and so on and so forth. Meanwhile, Edward Kennedy was very concerned about this statement, that amendment, and so on and so forth.

HACKMAN: Are there things during that first year that did bring you in some close, personal contact with him, like poll tax or whatever, where you really got to know him better?

BURKE: Yes. Edward Kennedy discussed the strategy on poll tax with him quite a bit. I wasn't involved in all of that, but I got to know him much better. I got to respect him quite a bit for his savvy sense, his way of knowing how to proceed on something. But as Edward Kennedy's legislative assistant, I was never sure when he wasn't going to come on the floor and blow us out of the water…

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: …by asking us some tough questions or something. It was a very complex and difficult issue. He was always mindful when Edward Kennedy was on the floor with a piece of legislation that we'd worked very hard on and set the stage for, and Edward Kennedy had talked to many senators about and had many things standing pat and ready to go, that Robert Kennedy wouldn't come on the floor and start…

[-6-]

HACKMAN: Did that ever happen?

BURKE: …milling around. I think it did once on the immigration bill. I remember that he'd come on the floor and get into a dialogue with Edward Kennedy. The immigration bill was a difficult piece of legislation because it was removing from the books perhaps the most discriminatory piece of legislation that still existed at that time in this country. Asians could not come into the country.

HACKMAN: O.K. You were talking about the immigration bill.

BURKE: Yes, and the amount of…. The new bill that we were fighting for was a piece of legislation that would remove all the discrimination against the Asians, called the "Asia-Pacific Triangle" legislation [in the Immigration Act of 1924] that was in effect, and would also allow a far greater number of people in Africa and other non-Scandinavian, non-North Atlantic countries to come in. This should have been anathema to a lot of members of the Senate, who were more conservative and so on and so forth, about who they wanted coming in and who they didn't. Yet, we noted on the floor that we weren't getting a lot of southern amendments, for example. The one thing that was a matter of great concern to me—and I don't know to what extent Edward Kennedy shared it, but I think somewhat—was that Robert Kennedy would come on the floor and tell everybody exactly what a great piece of legislation this was because of what it was going to do. Then everybody would feel duty bound, because of who Robert Kennedy was, to protect themselves in their home state and start objecting to things and offering amendments

and what-have-you. So we'd always sort of sweat it out and whenever he'd march on the floor, hoping that he was there for some other reason like to go to the cloakroom and read the newspaper or something. That's sort of the tone of what the relationship was on the floor.

HACKMAN: Did you ever feel that his staff put him up to anything like that?

BURKE: No, you couldn't put Bobby Kennedy up to something like that. The only thing you could put Robert Kennedy up to would be if someone—not his staff—said to him, "Teddy's on the floor and it's a great chance to go over and tickle him."

HACKMAN: Yeah.

[-7-]

BURKE: He'd think that's a lot of fun.

HACKMAN: You said you come on just before the poll tax amendment was introduced so you wouldn't know much about the decision to introduce it really, the origin….

BURKE: No, no, no. When I came on the civil rights bill was up….

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: The '65 civil rights act. But Edward Kennedy had not decided to do anything.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: I forget what our first amendment was that we considered. I think it was changing the formula in the Voting Rights Act for when federal marshals would go in and when they wouldn't. We played with that for a while and then he changed his mind and decided the poll tax. I don't know how he got the poll tax in his head. I think it may have been the result of pressure from people in the civil rights movement who viewed the poll tax as a specific and onerous situation that they'd like to go after.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: So he received a lot of help from Joe Rauh [Joesph Louis Rauh, Jr.] and Clarence Mitchell [Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr.] and so on and so forth.

HACKMAN: Do you remember having any feeling at that point that Robert

Kennedy, and maybe Edward Kennedy, felt that particularly Robert Kennedy's advice had not been taken by the administration in putting together that '65 civil rights legislation, therefore we should….

BURKE: No, no, I had no sense of that at all.

HACKMAN: Did any difference in the way they felt about the Leadership Conference of Civil Rights people, on Mitchell, Rauh, and….

BURKE: I always felt, in the case of Clarence Mitchell, that they didn't view him as the best possible there. I think they had some political differences with him that were never clear to me. They respected him, but

I never sensed any great affection or bond there. But if Clarence Mitchell asked Robert Kennedy or Ted Kennedy to do something, they'd jump to do it. Of course, Clarence Mitchell was a professional fellow in that field. He didn't form those kinds of allegiances that might injure him in some other situation, given his cause; Joe Rauh being the same.

HACKMAN: You said you remember them discussing strategy on the poll tax amendment. Do you remember what problems….

BURKE: I find it rather vague at the moment to remember all the floor strategy problems and so I really….

HACKMAN: I haven't gone over that for years. Maybe I can look at it. Do you remember any discussions about what committee assignment Robert Kennedy should try for in the Senate?

BURKE: No, no, no, those would be discussions that, if he had them with Edward Kennedy, he'd have them alone. There was a lot of that. I was very sensitive to it as staff fellow, that Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy ofttimes when they spoke to each other didn't need staff fellows around. There wasn't anybody from Robert's office usually involved in those kinds of discussions, or from our office. There's a lot of myth about a coordinated legislative attack or coordinated stances from the floor of the Senate or who'll say what, when, and how and so on and so forth. I never detected that. There was always an underlying assumption of who was doing what. If Robert Kennedy was in one issue, we wouldn't be. If we were in an issue, well, sometimes he'd come into it, too.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: He felt he had that prerogative to step into Edward Kennedy's issues

more than Edward Kennedy felt he had the prerogative to step into Robert Kennedy's issues. But that was never overdone. I don't mean to exaggerate it. Robert Kennedy was something in those days that Edward Kennedy wasn't: mainly, a national spokesman. When he said something, it was President John Kennedy's first brother saying something, and the former attorney general of the United States. It made for quite a different strength of voice.

HACKMAN: Was there ever any discussion of one of the two of them leaving the Labor and Public Welfare Committee?

BURKE: No, not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge. Edward Kennedy always seemed to me rather delighted that Robert was on there and junior to him.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any cases where, because Robert Kennedy was the first brother and because of his relationship with Johnson or whatever, that your office picked up something that Robert Kennedy's office was interested in?

BURKE: No, I can't remember that. No.

HACKMAN: Nothing or….

BURKE: Unless it may have happened that way on occasions with Edward Kennedy, who'd picked up something. But certainly if any member of Edward Kennedy's staff picked up anything that they thought was good legislatively, a good issue or something, the last people they'd give it to was Robert Kennedy's staff. I always thought that the staff people, as is always the case, were holier than the pope. We exaggerated the competition that did exist to some extent between Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy in the Senate. While theirs was based more on something that would be laughed about later, ours was very serious between staffs.

HACKMAN: Was it talked about openly among yourselves, or how….

BURKE: Oh, no.

HACKMAN: Was it banter?

BURKE: No. Among the staff?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Oh, no, no. You could feel it there. I'm sure Robert Kennedy's staff

didn't feel it the way our staff felt it, because we were the staff to the lesser important Kennedy. Edward Kennedy's staff always had a real affection. I used to criticize Robert Kennedy's staff for not having it for their boss, which was unfair, almost

[-10-]

unheard of. Naturally, we were number two and we were far more competitive. Perhaps they didn't even know we were there, I'm sure. There was very little that Robert Kennedy could say that wasn't front page immediately, whereas Edward Kennedy never had any difficulties with the press, but we had to work harder in that situation.

HACKMAN: Can you remember departments and agencies that both offices had to deal with, that both offices regarded as real problems, particularly people who were hangovers from the Kennedy administration?

BURKE: Oh, gosh. I would guess, from our point of view, the one agency would be State [Department]—and again, it may be just a staff guy talking and Edward Kennedy may not have felt the same—but I felt we'd never get any cooperation out of William Bundy [William P. Bundy]. I never felt that we'd get a great deal of cooperation out of Nicholas Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] when we were working refugee problems, Vietnam, and so on and so forth. I guess State was the one that we felt most difficult. In thinking of other instances, I really can't.

HACKMAN: What do you remember about the relationship with OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity]? Was OEO more of problem because Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] was a brother-in-law, do you think?

BURKE: No, no, I don't think so. Well, I think while Shriver was at OEO the relationships with that were rather easy. It occurs to me that issues would arise from time to time where perhaps the staff at OEO or Shriver would think that our legislative approach or our recommendations were wrong. And maybe it was because we felt that because Shriver was there we should have everything we want, we got rather angry when they'd post an objection to something. So that's easy to exaggerate, the difficulties with that agency, but I have no intent.

HACKMAN: Now, what about with members of the White House staff? Do you have the feeling that if you people had something to deal with the White House staff on that they would have been much more cooperative than they would have been normally?

[-11-]

BURKE: Oh, yes, I do think that Edward Kennedy's office had an easier time with the White House staff, not that there were that many instances. I

think people who remained in the White House—and I'm not talking about Kennedy people who stayed on, as much as Lyndon Johnson people—had a greater affection, if that's the word, for Edward Kennedy and his people as being far more reasonable and far less threatening than Robert Kennedy and his people. I always think Lyndon Johnson was always very kind to Edward Kennedy in personal meetings, and so on and so forth. He just liked him better. He wasn't a threat to him. He wasn't a bothersome thing. There were no personal contacts.

HACKMAN: On the reasonable side as opposed to the threat side, could you see examples of where you thought Robert Kennedy or his office were unreasonable in their dealings with Johnson?

BURKE: No, honestly I can't. I think they were perceived that way. I don't think you can separate all the facts, and if you perceive a fellow who's a threat then you're more prone to see him as unreasonable. I don't know that much about specific instances with the White House staff on Robert Kennedy's side, but you could just sense that atmosphere.

HACKMAN: Maybe you wouldn't have overheard the conversations between the two, but at the time of the Francis X. Morrissey nomination, do you remember any talk between the two of them on whether to go ahead with it in the first place?

BURKE: I don't recall any talk about going ahead with it in the first place. I don't know how that…. That again was an internal decision that was made in the family somehow that Teddy would go ahead with that. I do know that Edward Kennedy was caught by surprise when Lyndon Johnson made the announcement. The method in which he made the announcement made us quite angry. He sort of singled Morrissey out and made a separate announcement for him from Texas, I believe. As to how it was determined that Edward Kennedy would take it, I suppose it was determined by a process of elimination. There were only two brothers left and one wouldn't do it, so the other had to do it. The common understanding is now that Edward Kennedy did it because of great affection for his father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and so on and so forth, which is rather unfair to

Bobby. It sounds as though he didn't have it. But I sensed, as most others would sense, that Robert Kennedy had no affection for Frank Morrissey. As a result, it seemed to me that he had little to do with it until it was clear that we were in a great deal of difficulty.

I went with Edward Kennedy to Everett Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen] trying to clear the way for Morrissey. Everett Dirksen was very kind and told Edward Kennedy that when he was a young man in Illinois after graduating from law school, he failed the bar the first time so he fully understood that this is a difficult situation and clearly a man shouldn't be held for it. When Edward Kennedy and I left Everett Dirksen that day, why, we thought,

“Isn't it nice that this nice man viewed another man's weaknesses with such largess.” Of course, that old fox, you know, I mean he had his way of conducting business. Then he clearly went after him. He became the leader in the fight. He became rather vicious. It was at the crunch of the Morrissey thing that I saw a lot more of Robert Kennedy involved in it than in the earlier laying of the groundwork.

HACKMAN: What kind of involvement?

BURKE: Well, when it was clear…. When we were doing the vote tabulation, I always felt, contrary to most other people, that we had the votes. Gerry Doherty [Gerald F. Doherty] and I were involved in counting the votes. Gerry, not actual, because he didn't know the Senate, but he stayed down there for a couple of weeks and was very helpful to me just as someone I could discuss it with. I did the vote calculation and I always felt that we had the votes for Morrissey. The price we'd have to pay for those votes was very, very high. I used to say to Edward Kennedy that he'd be speaking in front of ladies' teas in Altoona [Pennsylvania] and Peoria, Illinois for the rest of his life as a result of these votes. But we did have them, but we'd have to ask people. It was clearly twisting some arms.

I recall one day in Edward Kennedy's office when Robert Kennedy spent the whole day there trying to work out the question as to whether or not we had these votes or not, and whether it was worth it or not, and what to do tomorrow when tomorrow was the day. It was decided that afternoon that the nomination would be withdrawn. He was heavily involved in that and he was very unhappy during the whole period, Robert Kennedy was. He was very angry and very unhappy. There was no question of that.

HACKMAN: Angry at people who weren't supporting….

BURKE: No, just angry at the situation that they were in for no good reason, except it was Frank Morrissey. I don't say these things…. I have no feelings about Frank Morrissey, so I'm not being critical of him. But apparently Robert Kennedy had a history with him. He was angry about, “Why should they be in that situation at that time, giving Lyndon Johnson that opportunity, giving Everett Dirksen and the Republicans that chance?” And so you could just hear him make that case. He was just very, very angry about it.

HACKMAN: In looking at the vote, who was for and who was against, did you feel that he had a feel for personalities in the Senate?

BURKE: Robert Kennedy?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Not to the same extent that Edward Kennedy did.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Yeah, not to the same extent.

HACKMAN: Okay. Were there certain people in the Senate that you can recall that on legislation you would look to Robert Kennedy to go to and convince, that Edward Kennedy didn't get along with?

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: Nobody.

BURKE: No. Maybe Edward Kennedy did, but I never thought that Robert Kennedy would be the fellow you'd send unless it was someone that he had a long history with, and I can't recall any specific instances. But I would think Robert Kennedy had a far stronger relationship with a guy like John McClellan [John L. McClellan] of Arkansas just because of the years past, and maybe Stuart Symington [Stuart Symington, II] because of years past—things that they had been through, and they had opposed each other one time, still…. And Henry Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] and so on and so forth. But I can't recall instances where Edward Kennedy actually asked Robert Kennedy to do something.

[-14-]

HACKMAN: This is just a shot in the dark, but, do you ever remember any falling out between McClellan and Robert Kennedy during that period because of…. Well, it was understood at some point there was very much….

BURKE: Yeah. I understand the same thing, but I can't pinpoint it. I know that there was a problem. McClellan had an employee. I always mix him up with an Eastland [James O. Eastland] staff member. McClellan had…. Oh, I can't…. His name begins with F. He was I think, on the Permanent Investigating Subcommittee [Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations]. He's now a private guy in Washington, who is chasing down assassination stories.

HACKMAN: I don't know.

BURKE: Oh, he's a real cuckoo. Robert Kennedy couldn't bear him. Matter of fact, he got into a public fight with him one day at a hearing.

HACKMAN: It's McClellan as opposed to Eastland with which we're concerned.

BURKE: McClellan's staff's guy.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Whose name I'll remember someday.

HACKMAN: Can you remember people, on the Morrissey thing, that they felt were very disloyal on that? The name Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings]….

BURKE: Yeah. There's one. Joe Tydings is clearly the one that was felt disloyal, because he was the only one who was committed to an overt act other than voting. I remember the satisfaction that both received that day when Tydings had his speech ready to give and Teddy withdrew, and we hadn't told Tydings that he was going to do that. I know Robert Kennedy said something to Tydings as he left the chamber that day which was rather difficult for Tydings to take. That delighted everybody.

HACKMAN: Can you remember other instances of something like that happening and how they—particularly how Robert Kennedy—would react? You know, the old thing of forgive but not forget. Did you see that operating?

BURKE: Not too much, with the exception of the Tydings situation. That was very difficult, I think after that day there was little Joe Tydings could have done to win their assistance again, except in a rather pro forma sense. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: Well, you said Vietnam was your area, so why don't you just take off on that as much as you can and talk about conversations, about Robert Kennedy's major speeches or his comments on it.

BURKE: We never had much to do with Robert Kennedy's major speeches. Robert Kennedy was on a Vietnam tack that was different from Edward Kennedy's. He was on a tack resulting from who he was. He was an executive branch type of fellow: Bay of Pigs, missile crisis kind of background, Green Berets, John F. Kennedy early involvement kind of background. That brought him out in the area of terms of political settlement, international aspects of the kinds of settlements, and so on and so forth. Lyndon Johnson's communications with Ho Chi Minh, for example, would be a big thing with Robert Kennedy because it was a global strategy that he was talking about.

Edward Kennedy on the Vietnam war was in a humanitarian area, resulting from his chairmanship of the Refugee Subcommittee [Refugee and Escapee Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee]. I always felt, naturally, that Edward Kennedy was on the right track, that Edward Kennedy viewed the war in Vietnam as a political struggle, where unfortunately military might had been used and as a result, we were blowing up the voters

and creating refugee camps. Well, that isn't the way you'd win an election in Massachusetts, by hurting the people you're trying to get to vote for you. And so he was always attacking that: women, children, babies being killed, and so on and so forth and the inhumanity of it. So the thing was doomed because of that situation. He stayed much away until later on from the formula of the political settlement which was Robert Kennedy's thing.

I think as the thing came out, I'm more convinced than ever, that if more people had been on the humanitarian tack, it may have been faster to move the country around than on the political basis. As we see, the war has finally come down to a situation of My Lai, and tons of bombing being dropped on civilian populations is now a matter of great interest. Just what we've done to people over there and half of the guilt that we feel in this country about that war I'm sure is more Edward Kennedy's point than the fact that we didn't make the right proposal in Paris at the right time.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: However, they were operating at different levels, so Robert Kennedy's speeches would be one way and Edward Kennedy's would be another. I never really detected a great deal of interest in Robert Kennedy on what Edward Kennedy was saying about the war. He thought it was good and solid, and so on and so forth. The best thing that I think Robert Kennedy ever said about Vietnam, because of my interest in the humanitarian side of it, was on “Face the Nation.” I don't remember when. This was in a week after Dean Rusk had said, “The people have to understand that what we're talking about here is China.” That was the new rationale. They were changing every week. On “Face the Nation,” Robert Kennedy raised the moral question of whether a great power should fight another great power in the backyard of a weak nation and blow it apart and kill women and children for that. I can just personally remember how greatly taken I was with that, because at last I finally felt that Robert Kennedy was coming to what was the real problem with this war. And it wasn't just a political game of chess among big powers. We were actually doing things to people that we'd have to regret for a long, long time. But I'm not criticizing him for not taking that war position because his background was different and his responsibilities were greater and he talked in an international arena when he spoke in the Senate, while Edward Kennedy was trying to talk in a domestic one.

HACKMAN: Were there any attempts that you know of by Edward Kennedy to convince Robert Kennedy to go in this direction?

BURKE: No, no, no, no. I don't think Edward Kennedy thought Robert was doing…. He thought he was doing the right thing for him and he, Edward, was doing the right thing for himself.

HACKMAN: At the time in the summer….

BURKE: I do remember we were rather upset. It's not on the Vietnam issue. We

were upset when Robert Kennedy made the China speech because Edward Kennedy had made a China speech prior to that and received little notice. Robert Kennedy's Chicago China speech, of course, received big notice, and grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble. Not Edward Kennedy, but the staff was walking around there.

HACKMAN: But Edward Kennedy, would he ever make a serious remark on that?

BURKE: Clearly not, clearly not, clearly not. To Edward Kennedy, Robert Kennedy was a very, very, very important figure in his life. He was a man who displayed great leadership to Edward Kennedy. He was a man who had strength of purpose. Robert Kennedy, I always thought, to everyone in that family and everyone who was close to John Kennedy in a nonfamily relationship, Robert Kennedy was the pivotal reference point. He was it. It wouldn't occur to anyone—it wasn't a subservience—to be critical of Robert. He was all they, or we, had at that time. So my remarks aren't critical of him.

HACKMAN: But at the time of the two major speeches he gave in the Senate on Vietnam….

….Spring of ‘66 and then spring of ‘67, which were regarding his…. You know, the question was, do you break with the Johnson administration or whatever on Vietnam in full conscience?

BURKE: Yeah. Yeah.

HACKMAN: You don't remember getting involved in any of those discussions, do you?

BURKE: No. No. I can't recall. I'm sure Edward Kennedy must have. He must have spoken with Edward Kennedy about what positions he was taking. On the staff level we didn't have any big discussion.

HACKMAN: Can you remember things on how the two of them differed on the way they operated with their staff? Just in the way the office was organized or in procedures?

BURKE: Yeah. Again, recognizing the base from which I spoke, as an Edward Kennedy staff fellow. Robert Kennedy's office always appeared to us to be very disjointed and acrimonious. People were always snarling at people. People weren't talking to people. A major force in the office wouldn't talk to a major force in the office and, as a result, everybody seemed to have their own access to Robert Kennedy, sometimes good, sometimes bad. He was rather cool, I always felt, towards his staff.

He was always warm to Edward Kennedy's staff, much more so. He treated us with a great deal of respect. I always personally

[-18-]

felt, and it was always a source of great gratification to me, that he was always gentlemanly to me. And when people, would say, “Boy, he's difficult or ruthless,” and all those other stupid words they used to say…. I noticed that if I'd say something in a meeting, it was rare that he'd interrupt. He'd let me say something, which always made me, as a young fellow, feel good that he'd listened. I wasn't sure he'd treat his own staff that way. I had the feeling he was very tough with his staff, but they were a tough bunch of people. They were very aggressive and bright, and so on and so forth.

Edward Kennedy's office was more of a coordinated group. We weren't going for anything. Edward Kennedy wasn't going to be president of the United States. We just liked Edward Kennedy and we were just going to—and so it was more of what I'd call a Boston atmosphere.

We also saw it in the campaign of '68, as to who the staff guys were who came to the campaign from Edward Kennedy's side of the fence and who came from Robert's, and their difference in personality and how they behaved. We just behaved differently. I think it's because Edward Kennedy expected a different behavior from us. Robert Kennedy's office was a cauldron and it bubbled all the time. And, as a result, it was very good and very bright and very able and very aggressive. It was bubbling all the time. It must have been an uncomfortable atmosphere.

HACKMAN: What kinds of things, do you remember, would particularly upset him in terms of staff work?

BURKE: Robert Kennedy?

HACKMAN: Yeah. Is it across the board, or particular kinds of things?

BURKE: Incompetence would upset him. Lack of follow-through would upset him. Lack of preparation would upset him: if the speech wasn't absolutely the best. He was not easy with his compliments; he was not overly generous externally with his compliments. Yet, I know he felt very strongly about his staff, and I suppose you'd always feel with Robert Kennedy that if his staff was ever criticized, he'd defend them savagely. Yet, he never gave. If you did something for Edward Kennedy, and if the speech was exceptionally good or the legislation prevailed or something like that happened, he'd be very, very

[-19-]

generous in his compliment, and the little notes he'd write you and so on and so forth. It is important to staff people who always feel they're laboring in the bottom of the barrel some place. I never felt that Robert Kennedy…. It wasn't in his nature. He was going too fast.

HACKMAN: Do you remember things coming up where you did ask him or his office for help, either in writing to someone or whatever, that just didn't get done?

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: That he was kind of slow on?

BURKE: No, we wouldn't ask his office. I don't mean to exaggerate. The competition was there and they won.

HACKMAN: Do you remember ever going to him on Massachusetts things? Asking him for advice on anything?

BURKE: No. No. No. No. The expert on Massachusetts, as far as I was concerned, was Edward Kennedy; and clearly he was, because of the politician he was, that Robert Kennedy wasn't, in that sense.

HACKMAN: At the time of the '66 congressional and Senate elections or any other elections that came along, do you remember anything on coordination here? Who should go where or who either in both these courses….

BURKE: I think there was. I think there was some coordination on that. Edward Kennedy traveled extensively in ’66…

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: …to a lot of states. And I accompanied him to most. Clearly, at that time, what the import of all that traveling was, was to give Edward Kennedy an opportunity to talk to a lot of congressman who were running and needed his assistance and fund raising and endorsements. We hoped that the net result of that, working at the local level with congressmen and mayors running for office and senators running for reelection, and so on and so forth,

would redound to the benefit of Robert Kennedy if indeed he ever wanted to exercise an option. We found we were wrong in that assumption. Two years is too long for people's memories. Local politicians, especially the congressman, have very, very little power when it comes to putting together a campaign headed towards a convention. So we were wrong about that, but it didn't do him any harm. But I'm sure Edward Kennedy traveled in '66 to places and for people only after coordinating that with Robert Kennedy.

HACKMAN: You don't remember specific requestees of Robert Kennedy?

BURKE: No, if they did, they'd come directly to Edward Kennedy; but it wouldn't happen that way. It would occur both to Edward Kennedy and Robert Kennedy that that fellow in X was the right guy to go for and to speak for if he could fit it into the schedule.

HACKMAN: Let me just skip forward then, while we're on it, to '68. Can you remember any specific names that stand out where you thought some support may have been due that wasn't given? Or you could have expected just more cooperation?

BURKE: Just more cooperation from all around, we thought. But that was dulled by the recognition that Lyndon Johnson was the incumbent president. It's very, very difficult to expect people to come out of the woodwork and support you. Those who really, truly had come out of the woodwork were surprises, like Dougherty [William J. Dougherty] in South Dakota. Bill was creative in a very nice way.

HACKMAN: Was there ever a significant change in Edward Kennedy's relationship with Lyndon Johnson and the White House staff during the Senate years? Someone has said, and I think I read, that at some point there was a significant cooling maybe because of something Robert Kennedy was doing, or as Robert Kennedy began to consider '68 more fully….

BURKE: Cooling from what? Cooling from cold to…. When I said that I felt that the White House and the White House staff people were more open to Edward Kennedy than to Robert Kennedy, everything's relative. That didn't mean that they were carried away. Edward Kennedy's attack on the Vietnam situation after his trip there

in ’67-’68, the summer, may have done it, because we went to see President Johnson before he gave that speech and it was a cool meeting. Johnson was very pleasant, very nice, but it was clearly cool, and he was treating it in a rather offhand way. I suppose Johnson knew at that time that Robert Kennedy was seriously thinking about it. He had McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] difficulties, and so on and so forth. So there was no love at that point. I mean he knew….

HACKMAN: Can you remember seeing Robert Kennedy, or listening to Robert Kennedy talk to McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor], people like that during this period on Vietnam, and how he discussed this whole issue with them? Even Harriman [William Averell Harriman], I guess.

BURKE: I really can't pinpoint any specific discussions. I know he had a great deal of respect for those people. His discussion with them certainly would not be a cantankerous discussion, but I can't recall if it was or not.

HACKMAN: Do you ever get the feeling that his office, or Edward Kennedy's…. And do you know if Edward Kennedy's office knew a lot more about what was going on in the Johnson administration because of….

BURKE: I think Robert Kennedy did. I don't think his office did. I think he did or thought he did. I think Robert McNamara and other people that you've mentioned that were still active in the policy had a lot of discussions with Robert Kennedy. I think he did know an awful lot more. Now whether what he knew was truthful or not, I don't know and I wouldn't even know how to measure the effects of his knowledge on what he said. But Robert Kennedy wasn't the kind of a fellow that, if he spoke with McNamara and got information that wasn't generally available, he'd pass it on to his staff or speechwriter. He'd just temper the speech himself that much. I'm sure he had information that the rest of the people didn't know about.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any discussions with Robert Kennedy on whether either he or Edward Kennedy should take a trip to Vietnam? I know Robert Kennedy considered it sometime and then Edward Kennedy went.

BURKE: Yes. Yes, I do recall a discussion like that. I forget who was there. I remember the general tone of the discussion being that it was not a good idea for Robert Kennedy to go to Vietnam, because of the embarrassment that could be caused him while there by either side; also because of the position it would put him in when he returned, as having to say something or having to come to some conclusions that he didn't want to come to at that time.

HACKMAN: But then when Edward Kennedy went, do you remember just any discussions involving Robert Kennedy on the decision to go, or what Edward Kennedy should say when he got back?

BURKE: No. Oh, no, no, no, no. Edward Kennedy went for a rather specific purpose. We went to practically every civilian hospital and every refugee camp we could find that was in the area. I'm sure Edward Kennedy talked with Robert about it, but I don't recall any great discussion.

HACKMAN: Or after?

BURKE: Or when he returned. No. I remember one night bringing the speech

that he gave after his return, out to show it to Robert Kennedy. He was going to deliver it the next morning. But that was all.

HACKMAN: You mentioned earlier that sometimes Edward Kennedy would begin to deal with an issue and Robert Kennedy might come along and pick it up. Can you remember exactly….

BURKE: He wouldn't pick it up, he'd get into it.

HACKMAN: Nothing that he would take over to the point that Edward Kennedy's effort would be just submerged?

BURKE: Oh, no. No, no, no, no. All I'm suggesting is that, for example, when Robert Kennedy was spending a lot of time on the floor with Senator Neuberger [Maurine B. Neuberger] on cigarettes, Edward Kennedy stayed two hundred miles away from that issue. But you just never had the same feeling that Robert Kennedy would stay that far away from any issue you were working on. That's all I'm saying.

[-23-]

HACKMAN: Before we started the tape, you had mentioned several issues. We talked a little bit about the poll tax and immigration, and then we want to come back a little bit on the Teacher Corps. What do you remember about that?

BURKE: No, Robert Kennedy's involvement in that was minimal, except for the basic fact that it was his idea in the first place, or grew out of an idea he had. It grew out of the Prince George County experiment in Virginia, when the public schools in Virginia were….

HACKMAN: No, it's not Prince…

BURKE: Prince Edward.

HACKMAN: Prince Edward, right. vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] went down.

BURKE: That's right. vanden Heuvel went down and started this public school system down there. The results of that experiment were such that black children that were found with rather high IQ's, that were lying fallow for two or three years while—I forget what the state of Virginia called at that time—massive resistance, I guess, and caused the public schools in Virginia to be closed down. It was that experience and it was Bill vanden Heuvel's concepts arising out of that experience that got us going on the idea of a Teacher Corps. But I don't recall hearing, with Edward Kennedy's

attempts to get the Teacher Corps into existence, which he did, any great discussion with Robert Kennedy on it. I don't think there were. I really don't.

HACKMAN: Any other issues that you can….. What did you mention? Neighborhood….

BURKE: Oh, neighborhood health centers. No, that was strictly Edward. I just don't recall on legislative matters. With the exception of the Morrissey fight. I don't recall great confabs between Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy on the legislation, on the strategy for it, on how it should read, and so on and so forth. There was none of that to my knowledge.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem was absenteeism on Robert Kennedy's part, from hearings or from votes or whatever, in keeping him from accomplishing more, or creating any problems for whatever you were working on?

[-24-]

BURKE: I don't know. It didn't create any problems for what we were working on. I sometimes felt that it bothered his staff, because they were very aggressive and anxious and in such a hurry to do things. I recall one day in a Senate labor committee. Again the issue was a labor dispute, again the question was special emergency powers, and we knew that they would go over lunch and into the afternoon for testimony because the pressure was on the Senate to act very quickly. Robert Kennedy had a series of engagements up here in New York. He asked Edward Kennedy whether or not he should stay and cancel his afternoon engagements and sit through the hearings. Edward Kennedy told him, oh, definitely he should. So he cancelled his calendar in New York, and after lunch he came back to those hearings and sat there. Well, they were the dullest hearings that have ever been held in the United States Senate. And he sat there and fumed all afternoon long. He'd lean over and ask Edward Kennedy, “Is this how you become a good senator?” and that sort of stuff. Edward Kennedy would say, “Yes. You just sit there and wait your turn now, Bobby, and you'll be all right. I'll take care of you.” And so on and so forth. He just burnt all afternoon long. He didn't want to be there. Nothing was happening. It wasn't going any place. His presence was not affecting anything. And the testimony had no real impact on legislation because the main testimony had been received. Now peripheral people were coming to testify. I remember he was very angry and upset with that situation.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any issues in the Senate where they really disagreed philosophically on a matter of substance of just…. You know there's something here in the different directions they're going on in Vietnam but can you think of particular pieces of legislation?

BURKE: Well, there are rare occasions that they voted against each other. One was on the cigarette bill when Robert Kennedy would not go for the

compromise language on the side of the package. He was going all the way with that issue, and Edward Kennedy thought the first step in the area was very important. So he supported the final bill and Robert Kennedy voted against it. But basic philosophic differences? I can't, unless you have someone who positively told you….

HACKMAN: No, these are sort of general kinds of things. People have sometimes said that Robert Kennedy felt basically that the answer to a lot of problems was jobs on the poverty side. Maybe Edward Kennedy, in any of his discussions that you might have overheard, felt generally it was another direction: education or whatever.

BURKE: No. Well, yes, but that wouldn't to me…. You may be right, in that if I search my mind, I could think of some things, but to me they're rather unusual, because those aren't philosophical. To me a philosophic difference would be if one supported the poverty bill and the other didn't or one supported a certain education package and the other absolutely was opposed to it. I never saw that. I don't think reasonable people would expect to see that.

HACKMAN: Can you ever remember discussions between the two of them on Vietnam about what had taken place in the Kennedy administration?

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: What do you recall about both of their relationships with Senator Eugene McCarthy and his staff during the Senate years?

BURKE: As far as the staff is concerned, no relationship with anybody. Robert Kennedy felt strongly about Gene McCarthy, I think, but I don't want to put words into this because I never heard them expressed to me. But for my view of the situation, I always thought Robert Kennedy felt that Gene McCarthy was not as he appeared to be. He had memories of Gene McCarthy and Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] in the 1960 convention…

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: …when the most important thing in his life was almost bobbled, for it looked for a brief, split second that something was happening there. He was angry about that, I'm sure, at that time and that carried forward. Robert Kennedy never thought Gene McCarthy was the thoughtful intellectual that Gene McCarthy held himself up to be. He made quick judgments and I think his quick judgment on Gene McCarthy was that he was as opportunistic as everybody else and he had kind of…. Edward Kennedy's views on Gene McCarthy I never felt were that strong at that time. They are now, but they weren't then. I don't think Edward Kennedy's personal

evaluation of others was ever as strong as Robert Kennedy's. Robert Kennedy had very strong likes and dislikes. Edward Kennedy could always temper it with whatever chemical ingredient he had to temper it with in order to make things happen and work, and so on and so forth, whereas Robert Kennedy took very, very strong stands and was unyielding and unbending often times, I thought, in his evaluation of other people.

[-26-]

HACKMAN: You don't remember anything specific coming out of the poll tax vote on McCarthy where either one of them was extremely upset with McCarthy's….

BURKE: No. I do recall sitting on the floor next to Edward Kennedy when McCarthy voted and registering some surprise, and he said, "Well, that's no surprise. I expected that." So I'm sure that there was a community of feeling between him and Robert Kennedy that this guy would put it to them any time he could.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Are there other things you can think of before we start talking about the decision to run in '68. Either anecdotes from the Senate period or other substantive things that you got involved in that involved Robert Kennedy?

BURKE: No, not really.

HACKMAN: Just conversations between….

BURKE: Yeah. Not really. I find it hard to…. And the anecdotal thing always gets exaggerated and becomes untruthful anyway, I think.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. When can you remember getting involved in any discussions then of what to do in '68 on Robert Kennedy's side?

BURKE: The first time was when we came back from Vietnam and Edward Kennedy was going to give that speech. As I told you, I brought it out to Robert Kennedy's house. He was ready for bed and we sat in his house for a while. He asked me what I thought of a re-election year that we were in and McCarthy had already announced, and so on and so forth. I forget just exactly how I evaluated the year as I saw it. He asked me if I thought that he should run. I said I didn't, unless he was willing to take a loss and I didn't see that to be in his best interest. I told him I didn't think he'd win the convention; Lyndon Johnson was going to win. I didn't think Gene McCarthy would amount to anything. So I didn't think it was in his best interests. And he asked me how old I was. I told him. I guess at that time I was—four years ago—31. "So, you're close enough to 30. Why don't you think I should run?" He said, "You're the only guy I know around 30 who doesn't think

I should run." I told him, "Because it's a problem with us Boston fellows—isn't it?—that if you can't win, you don't run." I have ideological feelings as strong as anybody else. I hate the war with a different kind of intensity, but with the same intensity as others, but that still didn't mean that he should go out and get himself licked. He was a force that I thought should be preserved. His day would come and so on and so forth. Well, he sort of got a…. I don't think he liked to hear that.

I remember times after that when I'd see him. I'd be walking along with Edward Kennedy and we'd meet on the pathway going over to the Senate or something. I'd say, "Hello, Senator," and he'd say, "Tsk." That's all. He'd just look at me with disdain, and sort of a mock disdain, just joking, of course; I think, sort of dismissing me. I was the…. I didn't want him to run. And that was the first time. I remember I told Edward Kennedy about that conversation. I forget what his reaction was to it. But I felt very strongly that he shouldn't run. The next time I recall was here in New York at an office upstairs.

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you, my feeling would have been that was reversed. What were the exact dates of Edward Kennedy's trip to Vietnam?

BURKE: December '67 to January.

HACKMAN: Yeah. The meeting here in New York is in mid-December. At least the one, if it's the one at vanden Heuvel's client's…

BURKE: At shipping….

HACKMAN: …shipping firm.

BURKE: Ah, yes. All right. Was that before I saw him?

HACKMAN: So it's before. Okay.

BURKE: Then my feelings must have grown out of that meeting.

HACKMAN: Yeah. What do you remember about that?

BURKE: I just remember sitting there and listening and everybody hacking it around. It was a discussion, like a million of them. To tell you the truth, I can't even remember the conclusions of that meeting. It was sort of, "Let's keep doing what we're doing and let's keep…." I do recall at one time Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] and I went to Milton Gwirtzman's [Milton S. Gwirtzman] office and ensconced ourselves there and called people around the country, ostensibly to talk about

Robert Kennedy's book, who in their area should get it and who should get a nice note, and first names and everything. But clearly it was a ruse to talk to these people to test their sympathies. I didn't get a great deal of sympathies. I didn't get a great deal of sympathy on the phone from people; very wary. Of course, they didn't know me anyway.

HACKMAN: Yeah. This was about, when? Do you remember?

BURKE: Oh, gosh. Now you've thrown me, now that you've….

HACKMAN: After the first of the year, do you think?

BURKE: The sequence of these things…. I don't know when that was. Clearly, it was after we came back from Vietnam, I'm convinced of that. So that was three things, then, I guess. The shipping office meeting here—Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and Edward Kennedy were at that one. Then that night out at his house which was an unusual situation. I recall that because I often wondered after I left that night. We talked some time about it, and I was just very, very strong about it. I just felt very strongly he shouldn't do it. And then the phone calls. I must say after a few of those phone calls, my heart really wasn't in it. I thought it was a mistake. I thought we were crashing in on people and it wasn't a way to do it, not that I had an alternative in mind.

HACKMAN: Whose idea was it to make those calls?

BURKE: I forget. It must have come from Robert Kennedy. We wouldn't have made them without.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: At the same time, the 1960 delegate files from Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith] office were shipped to Washington. They were kept out

in my house in Arlington, Virginia. Joe Dolan would come over to my house in afternoons and we'd sit there at my dining room table going through files. It was really a precinct operation.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

BURKE: And we'd look through those and find who was dead and who was alive, and who was where and so on and so forth. That was a task that didn't seem to have any rewards in it either. There was so much we didn't know about those JFK delegates, and so much had changed, and Lyndon Johnson was

the incumbent president and had done something for this guy and that guy. Now that guy's a judge, now this guy's….

HACKMAN: Yeah. Right.

BURKE: And to think that we were going to go crashing in. The bothersome thing with Gene was already out there, and so on and so forth. It was really going to be a horrendous effort if he made it, and it was going to upset a lot of people and was going to be rancorous, and I didn't like it. I didn't think he was going to win the convention.

HACKMAN: At the time you were doing that, though, was it with the thought of just a preparation, or was it with the thought of making a specific round of phone calls?

BURKE: It was a specific round of phone calls, specific intelligence to bring back to him.

HACKMAN: And that's distinct from the first round of phone calls you made about the book.

BURKE: I don't know if they were connected or not. I can't remember. It all melts into one fog. The next time after that was when they did something for Junior Village.

HACKMAN: Right. The telethon.

BURKE: The telethon. The Sunday after the telethon there was a party out at Robert Kennedy's house with an awful lot of people there—Edward Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and myself and Bill vanden Heuvel and Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin]….

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

HACKMAN: Well, you were talking about the telethon meeting.

BURKE: Right. What did I say? Edward Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, myself, vanden Heuvel, and Dick Goodwin went for a walk around his backyard and we went down to the pool house. It was cold outside so we went into the ladies' room of the pool house and locked the door. We sat inside in the ladies' room. I remember ladies kept knocking on the door. “Is someone in there?” People wanted to go to the bathroom. We talked about it. The one thing I remember out of that was Dick Goodwin was very forceful about Lyndon Johnson and how Lyndon Johnson had to be

defeated. He wanted to know from Robert Kennedy if Robert Kennedy was going to do anything, because if he wasn't, Dick was going to take his typewriter and his car and drive to New Hampshire. Robert Kennedy said, “Go ahead. That's a good thing for you to do.” I always remember that because Dick Goodwin has received an awful lot of criticism from an awful lot of people about bouncing around. As a Kennedy person, I can never criticize him because I heard him ask specifically, tell him that he was going to do that.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Dick isn't the kind who'll ask. Me I'd do that. He told him what he was going to do. The clear implication was he wanted Bobby's okay. Bobby said, “Go do that. That's a good thing.” Bobby asked Dick if he should run. I believe Dick said yes, he should. And he asked vanden Heuvel and I don't remember vanden Heuvel's reply. I don't know how clear it was. He asked me. I remember my reply was as clear as it had been before: he absolutely should not run. Of course, he didn't ask Edward Kennedy in front of us. He could always talk to him later. So that was rather an inconclusive meeting. It only left him more in the air, I thought. And he wasn't in the air at the time. Then the next time I remember….

HACKMAN: Let me butt in. You don't remember a round of phone calls that night, do you?

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: Or that week?

BURKE: No, I don't remember them. No.

HACKMAN: Also, you don't recall anything that weekend on a poll on New Hampshire and how McCarthy was going to do, that came via Salinger, via

Howard Stein?

BURKE: No. The polls showed well, I think, on it at that time. The next thing I remember in a decision whether he should run or shouldn't…. There were two more things: one was—and I'm sure my sequence is right—a dinner at Robert Kennedy's house. Joe Dolan was there and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and Joan Kennedy [Joan Bennett Kennedy] was there; Edward Kennedy was there. I can't remember the others. Do you know who the others are?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: But I do remember Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] was there, because when I drove up to the house, I saw this great limousine outside. I couldn't imagine what the hell it was. Larry O'Brien was still postmaster general. I remember that night because when I walked into the house, there was a great deal of laughter about me. Larry O'Brien, before I got there, had reported what President Johnson had said about me following our meeting with him in the White House when we came back from Vietnam. He said something to the effect that he didn't know why the Kennedys always had these long-haired jerks around them. Of course, Bobby Kennedy thought that was the funniest thing, and if ever I needed a credential in life with Robert Kennedy, that was it. If Lyndon Johnson didn't like me, that was kind of funny. So, I was the butt of some jokes. That cost me a rather serious discussion. That discussion centered around, the decision had to be made and had to be made almost immediately. Jesse Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] had spoken to Bobby that day—one of the millions of times—to say that California had to go one way or another. If we couldn't do it this way then…. If you weren't going to do it, we had to know now, because if you want it now, we have to form a slate, and so on and so forth. Clearly, he was being driven very, very close to the decision. And I'm sorry I can't remember much more out of that.

HACKMAN: Anything on O'Brien? That would be of interest.

BURKE: On what O'Brien was saying?

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: I should remember something about that. Larry's a very, very able person. I don't remember Larry saying Bobby should do it or Bobby shouldn't. I don't remember anybody saying that except Ethel Kennedy. Larry

was there; Larry was clearly giving all the assistance he could in the evaluation of the numbers and the figures and the Jesse Unruhs and the other personalities before him. I knew at that point in time that Larry'd be resigning if Robert ever announced. It took a long time, it seemed to me, after that for him to do it. But I knew he would, because it was a great risk to him being there that night, and I thought it was rather silly. If he was going to be there he should have rented a cab or driven over by himself instead of being chauffeured in with a big limousine. It was kind of silly for a cabinet officer, because it was a rather disloyal thing for him to be doing. He was an officer in the cabinet of the President of the United States. That's kind of important stuff, I think.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: So, then the next thing I remember was when Robert Kennedy made the decision on television and announced that he was running. We

were all sitting in Steve Smith's apartment. When he arrived at Steve Smith's apartment there was a lot of jocularity and a great deal of relief. I mean all the tensions were off. We were finally going to do it, and I had the books there for the various states and who we had in the states off my cards that I had put together with Joe Dolan. I don't mean something I put together. Joe Dolan had a great deal of responsibility then.

HACKMAN: But the source of that was the ’60 cards.

BURKE: Well, the ’60 cards, plus just off-the-top-of-the head information: who do you know and who did I remember from going around the country in ’66 with Edward Kennedy? And so it was very soft; it was just soft as hell. After we had dinner, which was a lot of fun and a lot of…. We broke up into groups, I think by regions, as to how we were going to go. I remember Robert Kennedy was sort of pacing around the room. When I opened the book to A, Alabama, and the page was blank, I shouted out that perhaps we should reconsider. Turn to Alabama and it's blank. That was the last bit of lightness that we had. Then Robert Kennedy went into the den with Steve and with Edward Kennedy and started making phone calls, and so on and so forth. Clearly, the word was go. There was no question. He'd already announced it was go, much to my chagrin.

I remember we were sitting in Steve's apartment that afternoon. I got a call from my office that Edward Kennedy was in there meeting…. No. Robert Kennedy was in Edward Kennedy's office that very afternoon talking to…

HACKMAN: McCarthy?

BURKE: …Gene McCarthy. That's right. We knew something was happening and we thought, “What could possibly be happening? We're here.”

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Clearly, he made his own decision to run. There was no question whatsoever.

HACKMAN: Some people have said that he clearly knew he was going to run on March 7 or March 10, or something like that, but your feeling is that…

BURKE: My feeling…

HACKMAN: …he didn't know then.

BURKE: …is this: he may have, but if he did, he didn't tell anybody that I know of. And when he did decide to run, he decided to run. It wasn't sitting

down with a group of guys, saying, “Well, should I or shouldn't I?” and then a vote, and then he'd consider it. He surprised everybody, because we were sitting there still considering it, so we thought.

HACKMAN: And that surprise extends, as far as you're concerned, to Edward Kennedy and Steve Smith?

BURKE: Yeah. Well, then when we watched the Walter Cronkite news that night, I mean everybody just sat and watched it de novo. No one knew that all that was taking place. He was operating clearly on his own. He said something to a housewife here in Long Island, I guess, that….

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: And we heard that during the day and we thought, “Well, that was a slip. He's bumbling around.” So he wasn't bumbling around; he had decided that day he was going to run; he just did it, unless he told

Steve or Edward Kennedy. I don't see why they'd put on an act in front of everybody. But they didn't know what was going on.

HACKMAN: Let me just go back to a couple things. In that December meeting up here at the shipping firm or whatever, do you remember a discussion and a disagreement between Edward Kennedy and Kenny O'Donnell on a poll on Vietnam attitudes coming out of Massachusetts? Does that ring a bell at all?

BURKE: It doesn't ring a bell. It's amazing—isn't it—what you forget? Maybe that occurred. But unless it was very pertinent to the discussion, I don't know anything about it.

HACKMAN: It could have been just between the two of them.

BURKE: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Had there been any discussion about a possible Lyndon Johnson withdrawal? Was anybody making the case?

BURKE: Not to my knowledge. I was with Edward Kennedy on the night he withdrew, in a hotel room in Indianapolis. If Edward Kennedy had anticipated it, he wouldn't have been as shocked as he was that night. That was a shock.

HACKMAN: Had you talked with Edward Kennedy, let's say late '67 or early '68, at

all about his own feelings about a Robert Kennedy race, or can you see any development in his viewpoint over time?

BURKE: I remember, after we came back from Vietnam—it was in January of ‘68—I told Edward Kennedy that I was planning to leave. It had been three or four years that I'd…. More than that, and I thought I should move on and do some other things. There were other guys who could accept the job. He talked me out of that on the basis of, let's see what his brother was going to do. It seemed to me like he thought his brother was going to do something. I don't feel that Edward Kennedy ever really thought it was a wise thing to do. I just have a general sense, that general feeling.

I remember the night he came back from Green Bay [Wisconsin] after Robert's announcement. We took a long walk around Robert's house, and he was very, very, very concerned. I think the basis of his concern was what he felt was lack of preparation; that groundwork hadn't been laid. He saw it to be a very, very difficult matter. He thought at that point in time that the chances for success weren't good.

HACKMAN: Do you recall specific efforts that he made with people on the Hill, both in the Senate and on the House side, in checking feelings, late ’67, early ’68? Or is the-decision made to run….

BURKE: Oh, I remember he was calling around to people, and I remember there were some discussions about it, and he did it a few times. He'd go over to the House side and sit on the floor of the House, Edward Kennedy would, so he could get in a conversation with whoever was around on the floor. He used to do it in a very unobnoxious way. So he was attempting that. I don't know whether it was a contributing factor to a decision. People are pretty wary if the course doesn't seem very clear. Then other people in public life, especially with an incumbent president, are very wary. They're not going to come out and volunteer an awful lot for you.

HACKMAN: Someone has said that Tip O'Neill [Thomas P. O’Neill, Jr.] made some sort of….

BURKE: I'm sure he did and Eddie Boland [Edward P. Boland] and fellows like that were sounding around. There was no question about that. And I know the Senator talked to guys around Daley [Richard J. Daley] and Rostenkowski [Dan Rostenkowski] and those fellows. But I'm rather convinced in my own mind that nothing definitive came out of those counsels.

HACKMAN: You don't remember anything earlier on Daley's attitudes?

BURKE: No, no, no.

HACKMAN: Were there any other things considered, let's say, looking at it in the context of changing Vietnam policy, other than a run? I mean the Vietnam commission idea is discussed sort of at the last minute with him.

[-36-]

BURKE: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Can you remember other things that were discussed: Robert Kennedy as vice president, trying to get rid of Rusk, or any gimmicky sorts of things?

BURKE: Oh, there were and I can't remember them in any detail, but I do remember thinking that they were gimmicky, as you say; that it doesn't happen that way; that you don't go make a deal with Lyndon Johnson, you don't go make a deal on the Vietnam commission. I know those who were involved in it disagree and think that it was a good idea and should have been tried. I never thought those were very realistic things. It's harder and tougher than that. One man's president of the United States; another man wants to be president of the United States. Now if Robert Kennedy was looking for an out by getting some major concession from Lyndon Johnson on Vietnam, which I viewed the commission thing to be, then I was somewhat happier that he was looking for the out. But it always occurred to me, just as a single guy, that Lyndon Johnson could smell that fifty miles away and he would not acquiesce to anything like that. Why the hell should he?

HACKMAN: Yeah. Did you ever hear the two of them, Edward Kennedy and Robert Kennedy discuss that?

BURKE: No, no, no. Maybe. No. Maybe on the phone or something like that, but I really…. If they were seriously going to discuss it, they'd talk privately.

HACKMAN: What can you remember about what was happening in Massachusetts after McCarthy enters the Massachusetts primary? Was that unexpected? Was that a violation of any earlier agreement?

BURKE: Not to my knowledge. I don't think it was a…. There was no agreement. McCarthy didn't agree to anything that I could see. If people thought they had agreements with him, they were kidding themselves. He had rather strong support in Massachusetts. There's no reason to suspect he'd….

HACKMAN: Do you remember considering doing anything about this?

BURKE: Well, yes. Edward Kennedy considered doing something himself. Maybe he'd go into it. I remember it was discussed whether Robert Kennedy

[-37-]

should or shouldn't. Then he wasn't, so maybe Edward could go into it, and so on and so forth. And then it was just decided to write Massachusetts off because it didn't matter; the delegation that went there would be our delegation anyway. So why take the run and the risk? Why should Edward Kennedy take the run; risk the possibility that he wouldn't do well, given the intensity of feeling up there about the war and Johnson, and given the supply of money that was up there that McCarthy had? You'd be in a tough race in your own state, and it would reflect upon whatever Robert was doing if he didn't come off the way people would think he'd come out. It's almost analogous today to Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] in New Hampshire. He's got to be a superman to be considered doing relatively good. So I thought that the delegation was going to be ours anyway.

HACKMAN: Do you remember anything at all at the time that McNamara resigned from DOD [Department of Defense]? You said earlier that you….

BURKE: Yes, I remember that Robert Kennedy had been speaking with McNamara all that day, and perhaps before that, and was quite convinced that it wasn't a resignation by McNamara; that he was fired. He told that to Edward Kennedy. On the floor of the Senate that afternoon senators were standing up, saying nice things about Robert McNamara on the occasion of his resignation. Edward Kennedy sat down and said, “I'm not so sure it's a resignation. I think that he was pushed out.” John Pastore [John Orlando Pastore] leaped to his feet, along with other senators. “What? How dare you say that? How do you know?” and so on and so forth. At that point Robert Kennedy got up from his seat, walked by Edward Kennedy and said, “Good luck, Eddie,” and walked out of the doors and left, and left him standing there with Robert's information. Then he went over to the Pentagon that night, and that's all I know about it.

HACKMAN: You didn't hear anything later about it?

BURKE: I'm sure I did, but I don't….

HACKMAN: Can you remember at the time of the Tet offensive any problem on how you respond to it? Was it at all unclear as to how you would respond to it?

BURKE: No, I don't think so. I think that was clear to both Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy that the thing was a gone situation.

[-38-]

HACKMAN: You mentioned earlier Unruh's continued attempts to convince Robert Kennedy on California. Can you remember Robert Kennedy and Edward Kennedy discussing how much stock to put in what Unruh was telling them, and what Unruh's motives were?

BURKE: No, I remember nothing specific. My sense of the situation was that I think they put a great deal of stock in what he was saying. I have the feeling that it's Unruh's pressure that was pivotal at one point in time, and that brought the thing to the real head. If it wasn't for Unruh's pressure, I don't think Larry O'Brien would have been there that night, and so on and so forth. He, Unruh, was clearly a pressure point of some great significance.

HACKMAN: What do you remember about any efforts to work out anything with Gene McCarthy before Robert Kennedy announced? Both Edward Kennedy's trip up, but anything of importance.

BURKE: That was after.

HACKMAN: That was right after.

BURKE: The trip up was on the eve of the announcement.

HACKMAN: Right. Right. Right.

BURKE: I remember—to pick up the Dick Goodwin story again—that he did go to New Hampshire after he left the ladies' room of the pool house that day, after the New Hampshire election primary. And I think it was before Bobby announced—it was before Robert announced—Goodwin came to Washington to the Georgetown Inn. I went over to see him. Goodwin was trying to work out something. Maybe it was to split the effort: you take here, we'll take there; you do this, we'll do that, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Goodwin told me quite graphically McCarthy's strengths, how well he had done in New Hampshire and why; how well he'd do in Wisconsin, and how it was going to be very difficult to stop him. Rather than go head on head…. The war was the most important issue. Of course, Dick also realized nothing was more important than the presidency to get done what you want to get done. I think Goodwin felt that if a cooperative effort could be worked out, it'd force Lyndon Johnson out and Robert would eventually win it, and he thought that'd be good for the country. He thought McCarthy's efforts to force Lyndon Johnson out were going to bear some fruit, but not if Lyndon Johnson sat there and watched the two of them going tooth and nail.

The other side of the coin was that Lyndon Johnson was facing Wisconsin and it was too late for Bobby to get into Wisconsin, so they wouldn't be fighting tooth and nail. All the prognostication was that Gene was going to beat him in Wisconsin, or at least give him such

a tussle because it was really a head-on-head race then, with no surrogates in that situation. But, anyhow, I recall Dick's…. One of the direct results of that meeting, and that whole line of communication with Dick Goodwin was the trip to Green Bay on the eve of Robert's announcement, which was an unsuccessful trip.

It's a dangerous thing to go pay homage to Gene McCarthy, especially late at night. Gene McCarthy told me since that he never could understand why Edward Kennedy came to tell him what he already knew, and he didn't see much point in it. He thought that except for the thrill of flying around, he didn't see why he had to be awakened out of his bed by someone who wanted to do some traveling in the middle of the night to tell him something he already knew.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: He was very, very difficult about that meeting and very difficult, as I understand it, in the meeting. However, it's interesting to note—maybe Gene McCarthy didn't know this but—the trip was financed by McCarthy. Edward Kennedy didn't pay for that plane fare out there, and the private plane that picked him up in Chicago, I guess, and flew him to Green Bay was a…

HACKMAN: McCarthy.

BURKE: …McCarthy campaign bill. They paid for it. So clearly Blair Clark and Dick Goodwin thought that they were doing something and their principal…. Anyway, they paid for it.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: So it wasn't totally at Ted Kennedy's initiative. He agreed to go when Blair Clark and Dick Goodwin put it together.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Had Goodwin, in the earlier meeting you had with him, said that he had talked to McCarthy about the possibility of cooperation?

BURKE: No, I couldn't say that he said that but, I mean, that implication was so clear. What the hell, he was talking through Gene; he was all Gene McCarthy had at the time. Besides, I mean, he was the only real political fellow and the only fellow with any credentials. Of course, credentials with us were very high.

HACKMAN: In the work that you did with Dolan on the ’60 cards and everything, what kind of feeling did you get about Dolan's viewpoint on running?

BURKE: I never had cause to believe that Joe didn't think it was a good idea.

Joe speaks in very simple terms, and earthy. Joe said to me once that, "If the missiles are coming over, I want Robert Kennedy's hand on the button and not Lyndon Johnson's." Besides that, there was very little about it that he ever said to me, because he considered that everybody wanted Robert Kennedy to run.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: I never expressed myself. Joe was going through that, but I….

HACKMAN: Can you remember discussions before running about specific primaries? Maybe that night at Steve Smith's, or any time previous to that?

BURKE: Yeah. I remember a great deal of discussion about it, Larry, but there's nothing…. I wish I could be more specific about it. I mean the primary situation came down to one major discussion which centered around California. There's no question about that. Then all others that he felt he had to enter that were still open to him. There was some question about South Dakota. I guess Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was born there, but George McGovern [George S. McGovern] was helpful and stuff.

HACKMAN: You mentioned earlier Bill Dougherty. What did he….

BURKE: Yeah, he was going to put us on in South Dakota anyway. The first time I met him, he came into Edward Kennedy's office and he introduced himself and I sat down with him. He told me he was from South Dakota

and he was going to put Bobby Kennedy on the ballot. This was in '67. I said, "Well, have you spoken to Robert Kennedy about that?" He said, "No, I really haven't." I said, "Well, you can't just go do that." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because a fellow usually likes to decide for himself if he's going to undertake that effort of running for the presidency of the United States." He said, "Not in this case." He said, "I'm going to decide." I said, "Well, what does Joe Dolan say?" He said, "Who's he?" I said, "Well, he's Robert Kennedy's administrative assistant. I think you'd better talk to him about it." "I'd be glad to." "I mean if you really care about Robert Kennedy then you shouldn't do something unilaterally like that. You just shouldn't. It's not nice. It's not right, and it doesn't help him make a decision, and it may put him in a very embarrassing situation. It may hurt his chances," and every other reason I could think of because I didn't know if I had a nut on my hands or if this guy was on the level. So, "Oh, well."

So he left the office and he went over to Bobby's office. Of course, I called. I spoke to Joe and I told him that this nutcake's coming along and he better talk him out of it. I

remember Dolan talked to me after that saying that, “He's going to go do it,”—that he couldn't talk him out of it. He was going to go do it anyway.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Do you remember Dougherty mentioning whether he'd talked to McGovern and what McGovern's attitude was?

BURKE: No.

HACKMAN: Did McGovern have any kind of sufficient control over….

BURKE: No. No. My remembrance is that Bill Dougherty wouldn't care if he had talked to Michael the archangel.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: He was going to do what he wanted to do and that's the end of it. The Nebraska decision, I think, was kind of easy. It was looked upon as a state where there'd be some success. And Sorensen, Phil Sorensen [Philip C. Sorensen], would be out there, et cetera. South Dakota seemed to be a *fait accompl*i: Dougherty was going to do it anyway. Oregon you had to be in; also California and then, of course, New York, I think.

[-42-]

HACKMAN: Indiana?

BURKE: Indiana was a…. There was a lot of discussion about Indiana, about how tough Branigin [Roger D. Branigin] would be, a favorite son. What do we have going in Indiana? It's a tough state, and tends to be conservative, so on and so forth. I'm glad you've spiked my memory on these. There the decision was clearly made, and Robert made it very tough. He had to win it. He had to go to some place like Indiana. He had to win there, and if he didn't win there, well he had to just know that. And Indiana was clearly it, being the first. But if he had ducked Indiana, heading just for the upper tier and then the West Coast, it would look like a pushover. He wasn't going before a group of people who didn't look so good to him.

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: So Indiana was very…

HACKMAN: Do you remember making any earlier calls to Gordon St. Angelo, particularly as one….

BURKE: Yes, I remember, not an earlier call. I remember Edward Kennedy and I met with Gordon St. Angelo in a hotel in Chicago. We had lunch in a

room. Gordon St. Angelo said that if Robert Kennedy came into Indiana, he was pretty sure that Branigin, the governor, would enter as a favorite son. Now, he's trying to talk Branigin out of that, says Gordon, and his wife is too—Branigin's wife—because she doesn't think the old man should go through that, and so on, but he's a pretty tough country boy. It's going to be hard to talk him out of it. Gordon gave us the clear implication that his arguments with Branigin would have an awful lot more strength if we'd make some kind of arrangement with Gordon, that should Robert Kennedy ever be successful at the convention, that Gordon would be named national chairman.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: So, now we knew where Gordon was.

HACKMAN: This is after Robert Kennedy has announced, though?

BURKE: I'm sure it is.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: But he hadn't made the decision on Indiana.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: He announced on the sixteenth, and I don't know when he announced in Indiana, the twenty-something, I guess. Must have been in between there, and I don't know what we were doing out there.

HACKMAN: Do you remember earlier calls or, in that same period, conversations like this with people who clearly offered something for something?

BURKE: I don't recall it, and not with the same directness that Gordon St. Angelo put it to us. He wanted to be national chairman. He still wants to be national chairman. So that was reported back to Robert Kennedy, and that didn't seem to affect the decision that much. No one was seriously considering even Gordon St. Angelo for national chairman anyway. So then, Gordon St. Angelo…. Robert announced; Branigin became favorite son; St. Angelo became his campaign arm, and I thought he did a rather lackluster job.

HACKMAN: Yeah. New Jersey is another one that I've heard there was some discussion on, and I….

BURKE: There was some discussion on New Jersey, and Kenny O'Donnell was the fellow who was arguing against that.

HACKMAN: Right. And I had heard that Edward Kennedy took the lead for it. Do you remember that at all?

BURKE: I don't remember that. It doesn't sound strange to me. Edward Kennedy would perhaps be making the jump around the bases of the presence of people in New Jersey who had been John Kennedy people and who'd still be loyal and have some clout.

HACKMAN: Burkhardt [Robert J. Burkhardt] and people like this?

BURKE: Bob Burkhardt and Mayor Kenny [John V. Kenny] and all those fellows who voted on the jug.

HACKMAN: Yeah, right.

[-44-]

BURKE: It doesn't surprise me if some of the reports that Edward Kennedy was arguing for it, rather than…. I don't know if it was in juxtaposition with me on it. I could see some problems. But Burkhardt was important in New Jersey, as was the governor, Hughes [Richard J. Hughes], I guess.

HACKMAN: Right. Right. I had heard that O'Donnell thought, you know, that Hughes would come around. I just wondered if you knew why Edward Kennedy might have felt that?

BURKE: No, except I know Edward Kennedy had a good relationship with Governor Hughes—at least it appeared to me to be good—and with Bob Burkhardt.

HACKMAN: Maybe you can talk then about anything you did in the couple of days between the meeting in Steve Smith's and the announcement, such as if there were any preparations for the campaign that were made in that period.

BURKE: Ah, yes.

HACKMAN: Steve Smith is, like, on a Wednesday night?

BURKE: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Then Robert Kennedy announces—what—on a Saturday morning?

BURKE: Oh, yes. Yeah. The major effort during those days was devoted to the

announcement statement that I was involved in. No, those days sort of meld in my mind.

I can recall the morning of the announcement. We left Hickory Hill. I remember Robert Kennedy walking out of the house that morning; Ethel Kennedy was very happy and excited and just as bright as she could be. It's an interesting sidelight that I was talking to you about that night when Larry O'Brien was at the thing, and at the end of the meeting, he was inconclusive. Robert Kennedy shouted across the room to Ethel, who was sitting up against the wall, “Well, what do you think?” And she said, “Run. You'll beat him. Run and do it.” I said, “Robert, well, what are we all sitting here for? I mean the decision's already made.” He said, “She doesn't make all the decisions in this house.” But clearly he knew there was no question about her.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

[-45-]

BURKE: And then when we were leaving the house to go down and make the announcement, he wanted to bring along everybody from the house; all the staff and all the maids and nurses and dogs and everything. He just wanted to…. It was a great morning for him.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: He was nervous before it; he was very tense before it. He was having his hair cut upstairs and I was talking to him—a very sharp conversation, I don't remember just about what. But he was nervous and he was piercing and probing, and asking all sorts of questions that had no pertinence to what he was going to do that day at all, but just to see he was really going and Ethel was dressing him, picking out his tie.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: She was having a great time, and he was happy. When we got down there, I went with Edward Kennedy and some other people to Edward Kennedy's office. We watched it on television. Then immediately after that we started putting together the campaign. Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] and myself picked the girls out of the office for the “boiler room” and arrangements were made for the Dodge House. I don't know if it was made that very day or….

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: Clearly, you could see the Dodge wasn't going to be around for a long period of time.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Did Robert Kennedy come in—well, I don't think he did that

day—at least in terms of setting up an organization in terms of who does what?

BURKE: No, I really don't think he did. Edward Kennedy had a lot to say about that and fellows from past campaigns had a lot to say about that. Dave Hackett, on the organization, on the headquarters, and so on and so forth, had a lot to say. Robert Kennedy did decide that Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] would travel. He decided that the night before, I think. He did decide that speechwriters would do certain things, and it was decided that in the headquarters there'd be a staff of people who'd keep supplying releases and speeches and what-have-you. It was decided that Edward Kennedy and I would go to the nonprimary states. Clearly, Pierre Salinger was going to do the press, and clearly this and

clearly that. It was "clearly" things; things were going to happen; there were clear slots that people fell into. There was not much question about organization.

HACKMAN: No major problems, that you recall, of people being discontented with what they were first given?

BURKE: Oh, I'm sure there were. Oh, I'm sure there were.

HACKMAN: Over the first few trips then—there was the trip to the Midwest, Kansas; and then one to the South, Vanderbilt [University]; and then there was a swing way out West—can you remember sort of how things shook down in the early days? What kind of changes had to be made either in assignments or in….

BURKE: Yeah, some changes had to be made in scheduling. The scheduling situation wasn't good. I forget who was doing the scheduling in the headquarters, but it just wasn't working well. John Nolan [John E. Nolan] was tapped for that—an excellent, excellent person. The advance was going pretty good. I can't, except for schedule, which I think Bob Kennedy thought was unprofessional, remember any other major mechanical problem. And Nolan fixed that…

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: …beautifully.

HACKMAN: There was a meeting at Hickory Hill—I don't know if you attended—after several of those early swings, where there was some discussion, for instance, of changing speechwriters….

BURKE: Yes.

HACKMAN: …Gwirtzman for Walinsky.

BURKE: Yeah.

HACKMAN: I don't know if you remember that. I don't know what else really was discussed, but does anything stand out? Use of media? More kinds of media use? Less crowd appearances? Toning down some speeches?

BURKE: Yeah. I remember the meeting and I remember being there for a brief period of time during it, coming in and out for some reason. I guess

the meeting was broken up into sections, as I recall it, and I came in just for when we were going to talk about the non-primary states. But I remember the murmurs in the grapevine that some things were inside at the meeting, some things were shaken up. I can't remember the details or the personalities.

HACKMAN: How did things come to you and Edward Kennedy? How did your schedule develop? Were they mostly requests or your own initiative?

BURKE: We made up our own schedule. We'd call ahead and ask. We had friends in every state that could bring us in. A great deal of the schedule was determined by when state conventions were, or when the party in the state was going to caucus privately actually, and so on and so forth. So that it was rather disorderly, but very orderly. We were always in the right place at the right time enough. It was difficult; it was cold in the nonprimary states; in Pennsylvania it was cold as hell. In Missouri, Delt Houtchens [Delton L. Houtchens], the state chairman of Missouri, was the personification of the difficult state chairman. Edward Kennedy and I spent more hours in the office of the Speaker of the House of Missouri, trying to just win him over, just so they wouldn't go unit rule. That was the whole thing.

HACKMAN: Where was Hearnes [Warren E. Hearnes] on that, do you remember?

BURKE: Hearnes was opposed. I guess by now Hubert had announced, or was thinking of it, or was about to or was down in Latin America, coming back. Subsequently, everybody was all upset. All those big states were going for Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey. With Lyndon out, it was now Hubert. The unit rule was from our point of view such a horrible thing, because if the situation was otherwise…. My total remembrance of the nonprimary states—Arizona, their state convention—all of them were just a mess. It was just cold as hell. Michigan. We had no feeling that we were making any headway at all, no feeling at all. We just had to hope that those primaries were going to come along pretty good.

Now we spent an awful lot of time—Edward Kennedy—in Indiana, because Indiana was sort of our state because Gerry Doherty was sent out there. He did a miraculous job in getting that thing going. People don't give him enough credit for it. It was just miraculous how he got that going with people he'd met in Indiana and friendships he formed. Edward Kennedy viewed Indiana as his special responsibility. There was a great….

[-48-]

For the most part, the people who were involved in that primary were the best team. You know, if you look at the major primaries—Indiana, Oregon, California—there was never a better team than there was in Indiana. I say that as someone connected, who feels very close to the fellows who went out there and did it. I'd call Gerry Doherty up from the headquarters and say, "Do you need any people?" He'd say, "Yes, but don't send me any brains. I want legs."

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: And by that he meant he didn't want people from New York. He wanted Massachusetts guys—from Andover, Lawrence, and Lowell—and guys who were schooled in hanging signs, driving cars, doing things. So most of the state, geographically was in Doherty's domain. Gary [Indiana] and that county up in…. The name of that county escapes me. What the hell is it? Cook? It isn't Cook.

HACKMAN: No.

BURKE: So that everybody had a hand in it. Bobby spent an awful lot of time up in the Gary area, but the rest of the state, the southern part of the state, the middle part of the state, was all manned by a lot of people we brought in from Massachusetts.

HACKMAN: At one point John Douglas [John W. Douglas] goes out…

BURKE: That's right.

HACKMAN: …to Indiana. Were there any continuing problems of who was supposed to be doing what out there?

BURKE: Well, no. John Douglas was sort of a troubleshooter to see what was wrong, and so on and so forth. I never felt John's contribution was that helpful, simply because the situation was already in place when he got there and things were committed to, and so on and so forth. He's able. If Gerry Doherty is running a campaign and you send in someone to oversee him or something, he just keeps doing what he's doing. He doesn't even know you're there. He's not obnoxious or

argumentative; he just keeps walking around like an unmade bed and he gets things done. That's just the way he did it. And that was a good campaign.

[-49-]

HACKMAN: You had said earlier that advance was going fairly well. Do you recall any particular problems on advance in Indiana…

BURKE: Yes.

HACKMAN: …particularly Bruno's [Gerald J. Bruno]?

BURKE: Yes. Oh, sure, yeah. There were problems in advance in Indiana. Bruno was the prime example of the kind of campaign that we didn't appreciate, and by we I meant people associated with Edward Kennedy. We used to say that Jerry went through a state like there was no second ballot.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: Whenever we'd hear that he'd yell at a police officer, which is a crime punishable by death and eternity in hell in Massachusetts…. You don't yell at police officers. I mean those are your kind of people. You're with them, blue collar worker, and so on and so forth. You don't dress down little mayors whose one day in the sun is when a Kennedy comes through. Our view of advance was always that the advance guy went through a state, and when he finished, for the next five years he received Christmas cards from everybody whom he met. That's what advance was to us.

Internally in the headquarters in Indiana, to whatever extent there were tears and girls crying and fights and outrageous behavior, it always centered around advance: Jerry Bruno and Joe Dolan and the explosive mixture of those two which we always thought was counterproductive.

Edward Kennedy brought it to the attention of Robert Kennedy on a couple of occasions. One, I remember distinctly after a filming session up there, where we looked at some rushes and some proposed ads. Robert Kennedy and Jerry Bruno and Edward Kennedy then got together. At a minimum they said that Jerry should be friendlier with the Robert Kennedy forces in the various towns in Indiana, who were placed there by Gerry Doherty. But, Jerry Bruno thought those fellows didn't know what they were doing, so there was a lot of energy and time wasted on that and there was no need for it, I didn't think. There's no question in my mind that Jerry Bruno was an excellent advance man, but in a certain sense that's very unprofessional political behavior.

[-50-]

HACKMAN: Let me know when you want to call time.

BURKE: All right.

HACKMAN: A couple hours is…. You know, you're pretty…. Can you remember other places or other general problems about just finding constructive things for people that you knew in Massachusetts to do around the country?

BURKE: No, most Massachusetts people, I guess, we used in Indiana. The next place was Oregon. We tried it in California; California was different. The state was split in two; north and south, and we had to deal with Unruh's people, and so on and so forth. I never had much to do in California, so I can't talk too much about that. In Oregon our people did the best they could. They were a little out of place in Oregon, I felt. That's pine trees and eagles and everybody's washed, and it's nice and there's no hurly-burly. It's not like an Indianapolis where you've got tough ethnic groups and if you don't buy a five-thousand-dollar ad in their paper, they'll editorialize against you.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

BURKE: The real tough stuff which our guys knew how to handle very well. Oregon was sort of different. There was too much sun and air and light, and not enough rooms. But we could always use as many as we could get. I never heard it was difficult trying to come up with things for them to do. They were a good group of people. On the Robert Kennedy side, there were some of the most excellent…. There was John Seigenthaler in San Francisco. No one comes even close to John Seigenthaler. If we had had him in Los Angeles, too, it wouldn't have been 46%. I'm convinced of that. He's just so damned good. John Douglas and other guys like Dave Harrison [David Harrison] from Salem, Massachusetts, did South Dakota, which was fantastic.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem was it ever getting decisions made that Robert Kennedy needed to be consulted on, simply because he didn't have the time?

BURKE: No, no. That wasn't difficult. I never found that was difficult. You could always get him late at night. I remember one interesting anecdote if you'd…. It occurred in Indiana. We were

clearly quite nervous about Indiana early on because, as I say, we sort of viewed it as an Edward Kennedy state. Boy, we had to win that one. We were being told by some people from New York that the way we were doing it, he couldn't possibly win like that. What do you think, we were running for sheriff? This is big time. So we were very nervous about it.

Robert Kennedy announced early on in Indiana that he'd be in town, in Indianapolis, on a certain night at such and such a time. He wanted to see the entire thing laid out in front

of him. By God, he was going to make some changes and throw some bombs. He was going to shape that state up, because he was hearing all the bad news from his people.

So Edward Kennedy and I, having just returned from Vietnam, decided that we'd give him a Saigon briefing. So Gerry Doherty got a young lady who could print beautifully. She bought poster cards. We made up an organization screen premiere: issues, people, who's where, who's how, what everyone's doing, headquarters, what it looks like, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. There must have been fifteen or twenty poster cards on a tripod, plus we brought in people from around the state—guys who were working in the south, guys who were working in the north, guys who were working in the west—to report on their towns, and so on and so forth.

Robert Kennedy came roaring in off the trail with a CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] band outside the hotel playing, and he fought his way through that. He came upstairs and we got him a drink. We piled everybody into his hotel room at the Indianapolis Lincoln [Sheraton-Lincoln Hotel] or some place, where everybody died of ptomaine poisoning, and had this briefing for him. Seven minutes into the briefing—the room was hot and he had been campaigning all day—he starts to nod, falling asleep. So we clearly were succeeding and we were only on flip card three. And Jerry just kept right on doing with his little pointer, what we're doing, what we're not doing. A fellow from downstate who had come from Massachusetts is sitting there on the rug telling Robert Kennedy what his town looks like, and so on and so forth. Then, back to the flip chart. And we were losing him. Finally, Bobby called a halt to it and never again did he ever ask us, “How's things going in Indiana?” I'm sure if anybody, Bruno or anybody, complained to him about what Doherty was doing in Indiana, Bobby'd push it aside. He didn't want to go through one of those again.

I remember Edward Kennedy, Jerry Doherty, and myself that evening went back to our room and had a drink and toasted our good fortune. We had put him completely to sleep and ended the crisis.

HACKMAN: What kind of an impact did O'Brien, and then Goodwin, when he came from….

BURKE: Goodwin had an impact. I don't think O'Brien had that much of an impact, to be very frank about it. I remember when Goodwin first came. One night we were on the elevator in the Sheraton, in the—whatever the name of that hotel is in Indiana, and Edward Kennedy and myself and Goodwin were on the elevator, and the door opens and in steps O'Brien. For the first time, he's arrived in Indiana. The door closes and Goodwin says, “Well, Larry, sorry that we took your job away from you,” meaning his efforts with McCarthy. So that's the way that relationship started, and that relationship has never gotten much better. I never felt that O'Brien brought that much. What O'Brien did bring was, it was nice to have him there and it was symbolic that he came there. Ira Kapenstein was his fellow who came with him, just a great guy and very savvy and able.

He was the best thing O'Brien brought. Goodwin, since the speeches were already being written, and I don't think he wanted to get into that game anymore, he went into the film area, as you know, and into the media.

HACKMAN: Right, right.

BURKE: He became quite expert in that. Then you didn't see much of him. But I always liked it when Dick Goodwin was around because I think he's the best of all. With Goodwin, you know…. And the way he's been criticized for his activities in '68, as I say, from my point of view I could never criticize him, for I heard him ask to go to New Hampshire. That shouldn't bother a Kennedy fellow. Then, he came back when Bobby announced. That shouldn't bother anybody. Then after the death, the only criticism people could have of him is that he didn't wait a respectable period of time, but neither was the election.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem, if any…. Was there an overlap between what Edward Kennedy was doing in nonprimary states and what Kenny O'Donnell was doing in….

[-53-]

BURKE: There was a little bit of a problem. Kenny was taking the big, old industrial states, and so on and so forth. It was my feeling that Kenny was a little out of touch, that he was talking to guys who…. He was depending too much on that 1960 list. He was talking to fellows who were…. It may be an unfair criticism because I must confess some ignorance about those states and how they work anyway, but there were a certain group of states that we left to Kenny: New Jersey was one and Illinois was one, and Pennsylvania he was heavily involved in.

HACKMAN: Michigan, do you remember?

BURKE: Michigan, I don't think so. That was mostly us and UAW [United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Workers of America] people. I don't remember Kenny that much. The guy in Michigan who was our strength was the fellow here in New York State, Joe Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle].

HACKMAN: Right.

BURKE: He was great. He was excellent in Michigan and Los Angeles.

HACKMAN: You don't remember there being a problem as to whether Crangle was the guy or whether O'Donnell was the guy?

BURKE: I guess there was, and I think Bobby made the decision that it'd be Crangle in Michigan, because clearly, to the rest of us, there was no

doubt in anybody's mind that Crangle was the guy for that. I think Kenny sort of backed off anyway. I never had the feeling that Kenny was coming through. It was always on promises. Without being critical here, I think he didn't get to know anybody new.

HACKMAN: What about labor leaders? Did Edward Kennedy spend much time….

BURKE: Yes, he did, especially with the UAW people. We formed some very good relationships there. Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] was clearly neutral. I don't know if he was really neutral, but he set a policy and then when his executive committee met, they were neutral. But they could help us and they did. Labor leaders weren't coming to us, that I can remember. Well, some machinists, I remember. I'm not

very good about…. The Teamsters at one time made an attempt to see if they could get something done. A representative of the Teamsters came to Edward Kennedy and asked him what they could expect for Jimmy Hoffa [James Riddle Hoffa] if Robert Kennedy was elected president of the United States. The immediate question was, “Would Robert Kennedy now talk to Ramsey Clark about the possibility of Jimmy Hoffa being transferred from the mattress factory to the farm, so he could get outdoors?” And then eventually, if Robert Kennedy was ever elected, “What could we expect? And for that we may give some assistance.”

A day or two later, Robert Kennedy arrived in Indianapolis. I remember he was taking a bath. Edward Kennedy went into the bathroom and I went in with him, and related to him this conversation. Robert Kennedy said, “Well I'll tell you. What you can do is, you go back to your fellow from the Teamsters and you tell him that I will not speak to Ramsey Clark. As far as I’m concerned, Jimmy Hoffa can stay in the mattress factory forever. And if I'm ever elected president of the United States, he has a darn slim chance of ever getting out of jail.”

HACKMAN: Yeah.

BURKE: That was the end of that.

HACKMAN: Yeah, yeah. Any other labor leaders at all? I mean, from what I've heard, every one except the UAW was very cold.

BURKE: Pretty cold, pretty cold. There was not much going on elsewhere. Some fellows were helpful—Jim O'Brien with the Steelworkers [United Steel-workers of America]….

HACKMAN: Right. O'Brien.

BURKE: …but they were walking pretty thin lines because the sentiments of their union were elsewhere, or the union leadership was elsewhere.

HACKMAN: Anything on an understanding with Reuther on what might happen later?

[-55-]

BURKE: No, not to my knowledge. I do remember a long discussion in a hotel room in Detroit with some of Reuther's fellows that Edward Kennedy had, but I now can't remember anything about an understanding.

HACKMAN: Can you recall, especially after Johnson withdrew and Humphrey announced, major disappointments? People who you either would have presumed or who had indicated they might come to Robert Kennedy, who went the other way? I guess the couple that come to mind are Fred Harris [Fred R. Harris] and Terry Sanford [J. Terry Sanford]. Remember those?

BURKE: Yeah, there was some. The original thought was, when Johnson went out of business that night on March 31, we went to a law firm in Indianapolis and used their phones. We called all around the country to various political personages—governors, senators, congressmen—because we thought this was the time to reap some benefit of the withdrawal. All the conversation was very nice. Edward Kennedy spoke to all of them and did it for three or four hours. All the conversation was very nice, but still everyone was noncommittal. Fred Harris was a major disappointment to Robert Kennedy, I think. He thought Fred Harris was a good friend of his. I think he still would have thought Fred Harris was a good friend of his if Fred Harris had told him what he was going to do. Fritz Mondale [Walter F. Mondale] was not a disappointment. After all, Fritz Mondale was in the Senate because of Hubert Humphrey arranging for him to take his seat when he became vice-president. But Fred Harris had been a personal friend and a guest in Robert Kennedy's home—not on a guest basis, but a very close friend. It was my understanding that he didn't in any way indicate to Robert Kennedy that he was going to do this. I'm not suggesting he should have asked or anything. What I'm trying to say was, he never indicated. That was a major disappointment.

HACKMAN: Other people?

BURKE: Like you named, Terry Sanford. I can't list off the names. But you see, speculation began immediately about Hubert, so people went into a new holding pattern. We were disappointed that the efforts of that night and the next day or two, when we kept making these calls, didn’t produce any greater fruit.

[-56-]

What do you think? Is this a good place to….

HACKMAN: Yeah, it's time. I really don't have….

[END OF INTERVIEW]

David W. Burke Oral History Transcript – RFK
Name Index