

Donald R. Larrabee Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/07/1966
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Biographical Note

Donald R. Larrabee was a journalist for the Griffin-Larrabee News Bureau. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's time [JFK] as a congressman and a senator, JFK's professional relationships while in the Senate, and his 1956 vice presidential bid, among other topics.

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Donald R. Larrabee– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

DONALD R. LARRABEE

Washington, D.C.

January 7, 1966

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

LARRABEE: John F. Kennedy arrived as a freshman House member in 1946. I arrived that year as a freshman reporter writing for Massachusetts and New England newspapers. One of my jobs, of course, was to keep in touch with his activities. I don't think I was too impressed at the time. There were more senior members to watch, more important things to write, it seemed. He was a younger man with not much experience and

seniority, without much to say. The impression that seems to linger from those days is that of a skinny young guy who got to Congress on his father's money and a good personality, but who wasn't too serious about being a Congressman. His attendance record wasn't too good. There were bills like the Taft-Hartley Act from his committee which attracted his interest, but he was not one of the voices that commanded attention. I remember on a few occasions having trouble locating him. I went by the office frequently and felt that his assistant Ted [Timothy J.] Reardon and a constantly changing staff of secretaries seemed to have matters under control. Occasionally he would have something to say on issues that probably at that time were near and dear to both of us: a veteran and his attempts to

readjust to civilian life, the problem of housing, which was a serious one in the immediate post war world of Boston and other major cities. I honestly can't recall hearing him speak, though I know he did, on a few occasions on the House floor. I remember seeing him in downtown hotels running in and out of parties as a gay bachelor. I always thought he was gayer than I was. I remember less seeing him come in and out of the House chamber.

There is one occasion when he made news and I covered that. Floor leader John McCormack of Massachusetts couldn't control him. The only time it hit home was when young Kennedy became the only Democrat in the Massachusetts Congressional delegation who would not sign a petition to President Truman to pardon Boston mayor, James Curley. I remember Republican

Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts went along. But Kennedy somehow couldn't go along, and this made McCormack bitter for some time thereafter. Still, Kennedy hardly seemed dead serious about Congress or public life until he ran for the Senate in 1952 and won. I know now that he began to grow in wisdom and zeal for public service, and that he was maturing politically all along the way, but I must confess I didn't fully appreciate it or predict a great future for him until a few years after he came to the Senate. Even then I was quite certain that he could not be elected President -- not for his own qualifications or lack of them, but because he just didn't seem to fit the presidential mold. As a matter of fact, he didn't, at least historically as I had known it and understood it. It

just didn't seem to make sense. Kennedy and Congress actually took quite a while to become acquainted. They grew on each other and, of course, it was in those congressional years that I came to know him best. He did come into the Senate with great fanfare.

One of our papers in New England, the New Bedford, Massachusetts, Standard-Times, was a long-time conservative paper and it switched to support him. This was not, I am sure, due to his position on issues. It suited the publisher who was quite sore at General Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge and had a rapport with a Cape Cod neighbor named Joseph Kennedy. And I don't think the publisher, Basil Brewer, and Joseph Kennedy were so far apart ideologically. Nor Charles Lewin who was -- often acted for Mr. Brewer. I paid more attention to Kennedy perhaps because of this intense

interest on the part of the New Bedford paper, but we had -- do have -- other papers in Massachusetts, and I can say that the young Senator Kennedy was a new and exciting figure to all of them, and one that they wanted covered.

The thing that impressed me at the time, and in retrospect does today, was the way he decided very early in his Senate career to do something about New England's problems that had been discussed, and studied, and researched for years. Of course, freshman senators are supposed to be seen and not heard. He didn't immediately launch into national issues but quite quickly got into the meat of what was wrong with New England economically. First he hired a young researcher named Ted [Theodore C.] Sorensen early in those days in the Senate, and he began with him. This Nebraskan

began, presumably on the boss's orders, delving almost immediately into everything that had been done, and said, and researched on New England's problems and prepared material for a series of three major speeches on what was wrong with New England's economy and what could be done about it. I remember when that document was made available to us. It was a good inch-thick and nothing quite like that had ever been prepared or made available to reporters in Washington for New England papers. Kennedy's office sent it, I believe, to every major daily in New England, not just in Massachusetts. It was a fairly comprehensive review of everything that had been said and done, but it contained many, many recommendations for legislation in the national field which would be of benefit to New England. I don't know whether we want to discuss

that at any length of time, but I'd
be glad to. . . .

MORRISSEY: Is it covered in any of those clippings
that you have there?

LARRABEE: Well, I think probably it is. It is
covered in various places here, and essentially
I could say that this is something that
Senator Kennedy came to use a great deal
during the years ahead, in the Senate.
It was a Bible. He could draw from it on
any particular subject. It covered
transportation, and fishery problems,
textile problems and small business problems.
It even dealt, incidentally, with the trade
and tariff issue which, of course, had
always been a big one in New England.
Looking back over it, I realize now that
the Trade Adjustment program that he
proposed as President later was incorporated
in part, as a proposal, among many, to help

New England way back there in 1953. It is very much the same trade-aid plan that he later espoused. Of course, in that speech he said one of the things that should be done right away was for the New England senators to get together and talk about New England problems regularly, and unite as a bloc, to try to counteract what the Southern bloc in Congress was doing, what the Western bloc. . . . And these senators got together; they united on a point; and they made their views known to the Administration. They seemed to get further and so Kennedy called for the forming of a New England Senators' Conference. So, very shortly, with Senator Saltonstall, he issued a call, and his colleagues attended. And that was the beginning of what became a rather successful operation for a few

years with Ted Sorensen acting as the executive secretary, formulating the agenda and working out materials, passing memos along to the other senators, and following through with drafts of letters to the executive branch on matters where all the New England senators could unite for the common good of their region. This went well, I must say, until Ted Sorensen became a little more interested in his senator's possible candidacy for higher office, and I think it did reach a point, let's say after 1956, where Sorensen did not have the time to give to this, and the ball passed to staff members of Saltonstall and others. And just as an aside, I'd say the conference has never been the same as those early days.

I would like to say something about Sorensen. I should have known that any

young man who could dissect New England's ills so quickly, not being a native, who could prepare such a volume as this, would be valuable to a senator. He did go on to other problems more related to Kennedy's committee work and more national in scope. He gave his time generously and loved politics, and it seems to me now that he inspired Kennedy, although it may have been the other way around. They certainly were good for each other, whatever the case. Things began to happen when they became a team. This is when I noticed the change, and I think one can only speculate on what might have happened, what might not have happened if Sorensen and Kennedy hadn't gotten together. It's one that I like to think would never have been the same. The rest of the staff situation -- another thing that always

impressed me in the office -- any of the people later to go with the Senator to the White House -- there was a great esprit de corps, a loyalty, and devotion and dedication in the office. I remember the entire staff walking over to the galleries to sit and listen to the Senator when he made a major speech. I don't believe this is or was customary in the Senate, but I've never noticed it particularly since, except in the case of Senator Ted [Edward M.] Kennedy. This has happened since he has been in the Senate.

John Kennedy did instill a devotion and dedication in his staff, and he gave them great freedom to develop their own ideas and to talk with others who had something to say. I found it refreshing as a newspaperman to be able to call the office and talk with Ted Sorensen or

Mike [Myer] Feldman, Lee White or Ted Reardon, if it was a local political matter in Massachusetts or an office matter; maybe Fred Holborn about something in the mail or Evelyn Lincoln about an appointment or whatever it was. I could talk with them. I didn't have to go through a press secretary. John Kennedy did hire a press secretary for a very brief period. I don't pretend to know what happened there. It didn't last very long. It may have been a mutual thing. It's all over. But he obviously didn't need anybody in the office to promote him -- to promote him in the sense that a press agent does. And everything had always gone along very satisfactorily with each expert in the office speaking to his own expertise, whatever it might be. So it was different than it is in many, many offices.

Another point that I would make is that during those Eisenhower years, you might have expected his colleague from Massachusetts, the Republican Saltonstall, to get the great benefit of the White House connection and feeding out the big news of the Eisenhower Administration as it affected Massachusetts. But more than once I would hear from a secretary in the Kennedy office, with a big piece of news of a major contract or grant for Massachusetts that had been given to Saltonstall, but Saltonstall's office just wasn't geared up to move that fast to make sure that it was all right with the senator to call a reporter and give the information out. Sometimes Kennedy would get credit for Eisenhower Administration actions, or at least he would make the announcement and get the first word out. And this spoke a

little bit of the kind of office situation that there was there.

Now the 1956 Convention was a very memorable one for me. I covered that quite thoroughly. Up until the night before the nomination for vice president I think I had played along with the idea of a Kennedy candidacy for vice president but really didn't believe it would come about. Then I dropped in at the hotel rooms and saw the family and the Kennedy forces at work, saw the volunteers and all the hectic activity, and began thinking that they just might pull it off. Well, in following the Massachusetts delegation, we began to pick up indications that Senator John Kennedy had given a go-ahead to all of his supporters, in New England at least, to see what they could do if they thought they could pull off the vice presidential nomination. But he wasn't

going to become an active candidate for the office, and that was quite clear. There was sort of a basic plan that the Kennedy people agreed to. The Massachusetts delegates were willing to take part, would attend caucuses of state groups and bring the delegates around to meet the Senator on the Convention floor. And there was a group of volunteers working out of the Palmer House, and they had a pretty good supply of printed materials and buttons and that kind of thing. I remember Congressman [Edward P.] Boland of Springfield, Massachusetts, went over and bought some ties at a little haberdasher near the hotel, and he got somebody to sew Kennedy's name on them. It was a shoe-string operation. They were -- I think they honestly didn't feel they could pull it off in the beginning there.

MORRISSEY: Had any of those materials been prepared before [Adlai E.] Stevenson threw the vice presidential nomination open?

LARRABEE: I never saw evidence of anything but homemade stuff until about midweek, and I don't know. Somebody got a few buttons printed. I guess button manufacturers are available to do a job at a moment's notice there. This -- even this amateur effort with the streamers and the signs that they got going seemed to me were designed to create a bit of a boom to make Adlai Stevenson think something was happening and couldn't exactly ignore him. Congressman [John E.] Fogarty of Rhode Island came out with a public statement for Kennedy, and we had Boland working. Governor [Dennis J.] Roberts of Rhode Island was in this picture too, and he was in a committee of governors and called on Stevenson to consult him

about a running mate. Of course, there were -- the real strength of all this effort was in the Massachusetts delegation.

MORRISSEY: Was there any dissension within the Massachusetts delegation about Kennedy's candidacy?

LARRABEE: I cannot speak to that too well. I think maybe there were those who thought that it was a crazy thing to be jumping aboard, but I can't really recall at the moment. Then we move into -- I guess it was Thursday evening when they had the big meeting. Reports came out, at least, that Adlai Stevenson had Kennedy's name high on his list as potential running mates. I don't know if that was just something put out or whether he really did, but the political realists in the Massachusetts delegation shook their heads over any prospects that Kennedy

could overcome the opposition of what they understood to be the advisor to Stevenson who counselled against placing a Catholic on the national Ticket. At any rate, as is well known, Senator Kennedy did have a talk with the nominee and did come out and was one of those who spoke on the platform on his behalf. Then there was -- I can't be clear whether it was a Wednesday or Thursday night, but I think more likely it was a Thursday night -- when there was all this activity in the Kennedy hotel rooms and that went on till three or four o'clock in the morning, perhaps later.

I came to learn, and I think perhaps from Sorensen, that Senator Kennedy did not personally decide to seek this nomination for the vice president until about two-thirty in the morning Friday, and he had no

organization, very little money and wasn't seriously regarded as a candidate until the balloting got under way. But there had been great activity the night before, and there were Kennedy people visiting delegations all morning. Of course, he started with 104 votes -- I think his supporters claimed he had 100 of the 104 from New England. There weren't very many defectors there. John Bailey, as I recall, said he thought they were in as good a position as anybody could be. There were meetings with many of the political figures of the time, Carmine DeSapio, [W. Averell] Harriman's campaign managers. And all the New England delegates moved out and visited with their friends in the other delegations, particularly in the key states, New York, California, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan.

the local story that was going out over the wire during the balloting. [Name] Ketcher-Burway. He had already written his last letter to [Name] and won, and I worked his in the last and said, "I think this thing is going to Kennedy."

MORRISSEY: You mentioned DeSapio because you were there at the time he came in?

LARRABEE: I saw him come in the early morning hours for that meeting. DeSapio among many others. He was considered a rather important figure at that time, in that Convention. It doesn't seem so now, but he was. He was one of those who was consulted by the Kennedy people on that Thursday night-Friday morning session. So, of course, perhaps the rest is all history. What happened at the Convention. I saw -- I was sitting in back of an Associated Press reporter who was writing the basic story that was going out over the wire during the balloting, [Estes] Kefauver-Kennedy. He had already written his lead saying Kefauver had won, and I nudged him in the back and said, "I think this thing is going to Kennedy."

He ripped his paper up and wrote a new lead saying Kennedy had won the nomination. And then, of course, there was this to-do at the end which is still a little controversial as to just what happened. People had different ideas, but anyway we know what finally did happen. So that's pretty much the story on that, but it was a shoe-string operation, and it gave, of course, the spark to what developed later. And I think from then on Sorensen's efforts in the office were devoted to 1960 -- perhaps not always consciously, but it was moving in that direction. And we had this study which was circulated regarding the strength that a Catholic nominee could command in some of the big cities, and how he could take some of this strength away from the Republican's candidate.

MORRISSEY: Had you seen that report at the 1956 Convention?

LARRABEE: I didn't see it at the Convention at all. There may have been something of this sort there, but as I remember it -- the more important report on this was not available generally until after that Convention. I didn't recall it as something that was being passed around at the Convention. I didn't see it. I did see it later. Sorensen made available a copy of it, but as he was doing it, to interested reporters. But I had to ask for it. I had inquiries about it, and it proved to be a very good one for them. So as I say, in the years from '56 to 1960, the office seemed to be geared quite considerably to the presidential campaign, major speeches, and the major issues, and the Senator, of course, landed on the Foreign Relations Committee thanks to Lyndon Johnson, as I remember it -- picked

over Kefauver for that job -- and seriously was moving toward seeking the nomination for president.

MORRISSEY: Did you notice that as early as January, 1957?

LARRABEE: No. I didn't really. I knew of the. . . . Once I knew of this study of Catholic strength and voting strength in major cities, I was well aware of Sorensen's ambitions for Kennedy -- and because I probably discussed those things with him whereas I wouldn't have with the Senator -- and obviously aware of the ambition, but constantly doubting that this thing could ever be done because of the known feeling, the opposition, the very fact that it did come to the fore later, of course. In all honesty, I am not one of those who regarded John F. Kennedy as a man of destiny to become president at an early period, or even late, in his

Senate career. And I'll have to confess a conversation I had with his brother. One of those White House correspondents' dinners in the fall of 1959. I think Charles Bartlett had Bobby as his guest, and I had a dentist named Jim Kennedy as mine, so we sat at the same table. We got into a conversation about 1960 and the nomination. And I said I just didn't see how it could be done. And this really offended Bobby. He thought I was just echoing and mouthing the words of all the other newspaper people who said it couldn't be done and all the political leaders in the country who were saying it couldn't be done. And he said, "You really don't know anything about it. You haven't been out and talked to people, and you don't know." We had a little bit of an argument about it, and I remember months later in

Los Angeles seeing Bobby in a big crowd at the time of the nomination, just before it became an accomplished fact, but when it was very obvious. And he said, "Well, what do you think now?" I said, "I guess I was very wrong." And he said, "You weren't the only one." But I didn't know it was going to happen until pretty late in the game, I must say.

MORRISSEY: Going back to 1947, do you recall the famous speech that John Kennedy gave in which he criticized the American Legion, and this caused quite an uproar, not only from the Legion but also, as I understand it, within John Kennedy's office?

LARRABEE: Well, this is the -- it is one of those things that I have a vague memory of, the speech criticizing the Legion, but I can't for the life of me remember anything about it in detail. It's the first time I've

thought about it since then and I knew there was something.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall much attention being paid to Kennedy's individual opinion of the Taft-Hartley bill?

LARRABEE: I think -- I'm trying to remember now just what he did have to say on that subject, but my recollection was that he wasn't as violently opposed to it as others -- did he finally vote against it or for it, because I don't know?

MORRISSEY: He voted against it.

LARRABEE: Yes. But his opposition wasn't as strong and this is a recollection I have -- it wasn't as strong as that of many others. I can't say that there was a great deal of attention paid to it. I guess I didn't.

MORRISSEY: These are difficult questions because they go back in time nineteen years.

LARRABEE: They are and I'm afraid on' e
anything to refresh me ve!

MORRISSEY: Did you ever have the ng
perhaps John Kennedy wa pr' ervative
than his district? But sat ed
his district?

LARRABEE: Yes, I did have that li e was a
conservative on fi mat n a way
that was brought out very in that
Sorensen book on New Eng? I remember
doing a little writing hat. He
had a plea in there for nt if not
reduced federal spending at it would
strengthen the stabilit the whole
economy. Ju pulling nt or two
out of that . . . Of co , he was talking
in those Se se speech i 1953 about
New Englan' s problem' : repeatedly
insisted th t neither problems nor
the solut s he sug d were peculiar

in their application to New England alone. And he made the point once or twice that the sole answer to New England's problems didn't lie with Uncle Sam. If anything federal action wasn't enough, and unnecessary federal expenditures only served to increase our problems. That's a direct quote. And I got an impression throughout that he was more of a fiscal conservative.

MORRISSEY: Let me get the day you were quoting from.

LARRABEE: This is column of August 7, 1960, which is -- which quotes quite liberally from the speech as it pertained to his ideas on government economy. This is a speech of 1953, dealing with that.

MORRISSEY: That's the New Bedford Standard Times.

LARRABEE: The New Bedford Standard Times.

MORRISSEY: Did it strike you as odd that a Nebraskan should suddenly become the expert on the New England economy?

LARRABEE: Well, it certainly did, and as I think I said earlier, for him to be able to pull together all of the studies that had been made within three months and come up with a document such as this was truly astounding as a "foreigner", a non-New Englander. I thought it was quite amazing.

MORRISSEY: Kennedy voted for the St. Lawrence Seaway . . .

LARRABEE: Yes, I remember that.

MORRISSEY: And many of his constituents did not agree with that vote. Do you recall any specifics about this? Did you ever discuss it with him?

LARRABEE: No. I remember there was not a great deal of advance word on how he was going to vote, but there was a great deal of interest on how he was going to vote. But it came as quite a shock and surprise to, let's say, the business forces

in Boston who had always felt that any Massachusetts senator would see the wisdom of opposing the St. Lawrence Seaway, and they always had. And there was certainly strong argument. If I recall that speech, Kennedy went through the whole -- all the arguments as to why he should vote against the Seaway, but he came up with some brand new concepts of what it could mean to the New England economy, and drew a much broader picture. And my recollection is that he didn't suffer one bit from that speech, and that there just wasn't the political payola in being opposed to the Seaway that many politicians had thought through the years, many Massachusetts politicians. He had good sound reasons for voting the way he did, he stated them, and I don't think he suffered at all. That vote was probably the most controversial

one from a regional standpoint, that he made in those years because, otherwise, he was for everything that everybody had always been for, and against everything everybody had been against, as I recall.

MORRISSEY: Did you detect a feeling among some other New England senators that maybe John Kennedy in trying to become a senator for New England was perhaps too big for his breeches
britches as a freshman?

LARRABEE: Well, I think this was never expressed by any of them. And I think the fact that he was able to team up with the respected Saltonstall in this New England Conference and that they were jointly working on these problems made -- took some of that onus off it. There was Senator. . . . There is one senator from New England with whom he had differences and who thought he was too big for his breeches
britches. Never said so

publicly and I don't suppose I should quote that person, but I thought -- I can't say that there was any resentment among his colleagues from New England for his leadership there.

MORRISSEY: Some Massachusetts Democrats were a little upset by the close teamwork between Kennedy's office and Saltonstall's office. Do you have any specific recollections of anything to do with that?

LARRABEE: Yes, I can recall many times when announcements were made from the Kennedy office or the Saltonstall office, and they were joint announcements and it was specifically stated that they should be. And this had to be by prearrangement. I can recall Democratic congressional offices from Massachusetts making remarks. Oh you know, reactions to it were not favorable; they didn't like it. They didn't see why Kennedy had to

play along with Saltonstall. It might be to his advantage but they weren't getting anything out of it. Of course this team relationship with Saltonstall was one of the most unusual that has ever existed in the Senate. Very few senators of the same political party from the same state have this kind of understanding and working relationship. It worked to their mutual advantage in their dealings. They found ways of getting together on regional or rather state issues, common problems that didn't involve any great political philosophy. And this carried over to political campaigns for each of them. They never attacked each other personally to my knowledge and certainly not on the floor of the Senate.

MORRISSEY: Many people have said that John Kennedy was very much a loner during his eight years in the Senate. Would you say that is true?

LARRABEE: I think so, with the exception of his willingness to work with the other New England senators, which was to his advantage of course, particularly with Saltonstall. And on these matters there wasn't -- he wasn't going off on his own particularly, but it seemed to me he preferred to operate this way. I think Sorensen did. I must say there were times after 1956-7 when I would find press releases coming over from the Kennedy office that clearly stated that such and such a piece of legislation had been introduced and it was the Kennedy bill. And the Kennedy name was immediately attached to it. In some cases it was legislation that others had already talked about or filed, and a slightly revised version became the Kennedy bill. And this was a good public relations gimmick which I would say was used very well. It may have upset some senators, but instead of teaming up with others on

bills, I think he liked to go off -- of course, this related to what was going on, the ambitions that he had.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall any discussions with him or others on his staff whether or not Landrum-Griffin should be referred to as a Kennedy bill?

LARRABEE: I'd rather not talk about it because it's too hazy. I remember something about it, but I think I'd better not. That was an issue now that you speak of it, I can't remember.

MORRISSEY: One of Kennedy's biographers, and I think if my memory's correct, it's Victor Lasky, made the point that Kennedy's House office was poorly organized and underpaid.

LARRABEE: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Was this your impression?

LARRABEE: Well, in the House office it was sort of typical of most of them over there --- everything jammed in together pretty much

in one room. But Kennedy's offices later on were equally as much of a shambles in the Senate. They were all bumping into each other. There were too many desks, too many stacks of papers and all of that. It always looked very disorganized. I think we used to hear stories that a lot of the secretaries and the girls worked for love and devotion to the boss more than they did for the money that they were paid, but I always felt that -- well, this was something -- all we knew was a matter of public record as to their salaries. I always felt possibly, the Senator or the Congressman if he really wanted somebody, he could supplement the salary with his own money, and he may have done that in some cases. But I dare say there were some secretaries at the lower levels who were willing to work for considerably less

than they would have for another person.

This is certainly an impression that we had.

MORRISSEY: Hovering over the early 1950's was the spectre of what is called McCarthyism. Do you recall any discussions with John Kennedy about his stance on McCarthyism?

LARRABEE: I cannot. I cannot recall any discussion.

MORRISSEY: Did you cover any of the primary campaigns in 1960?

LARRABEE: No. I didn't. No.

MORRISSEY: Did you cover Kennedy at all when he was traveling in his campaign against Nixon?

LARRABEE: No.

MORRISSEY: During the years he was President, did you have any contact with him?

LARRABEE: As person-to-person, only on one occasion. I believe it must have been about February after he had been inaugurated in '61. A party was given for Ted Reardon which all the old friends going back to the

Congressional days in the House and Senate, staff people, newspapermen, photographers, friends of Ted Reardon, really. This was the party. No one knew when they went to it whether the President would appear or not but he did come out to the party and we had a brief meeting there in which I complained about the new television technique of using big auditoriums, you recall, to film these television press conferences, and the President just. . . . I said, "Why don't you recognize your old friends out there? We're jumping up trying to ask you questions." And he said that the lights, the television lights were so bright that he couldn't always distinguish people out there. But I think they did something to correct that. He did recognize me later and didn't seem to have any problem at all. But this was all. This was the only time

we met; the only time when we were together in that way, other than my being in a big crowd. I went down to the White House frequently to witness ceremonies and the one that really meant the most to me, along the way, occurred in the summer of 1961 when he signed into law the bill authorizing the Cape Cod National Seashore. This was something I had lived with from its inception as a bill by Kennedy and Saltonstall, watched them hammer it out, and work on it, up at the Capitol, and probably wrote more about that than anything else, and anyone else for the Cape Cod paper and the New Bedford paper. But it was fun to be there and see the thing come to its final conclusion, see it signed into law and walk away with one of the pens. Other than that, I didn't have that kind of. . . . I spent a great deal of time talking with the people

from Massachusetts and New England who worked at the White House, and I felt as a regional correspondent there was nothing I could report out of a Presidential press conference that would be any different from what my papers could get over the AP and UP. But I did try to write a great deal about the changing method of operation at the White House and the new people who were there. Some of the things that happened behind the scenes in just the housekeeping operations. How the Kennedys handled their gifts that went in, and the mail. Of course, I had entree to information there that I had not had before because there were people working at those jobs I had known at the Capitol and they were, again, quite free to talk about it, just as they had been at the Capitol. With previous Presidents, I had to go through the press secretary to get the

information. Two of the most delightful stories that I enjoyed writing were about trips through the mail room at the time of -- Christmas time, '61-'62, to see all of the gifts that American people pour in on the President, and writing about that. It was a new side of the White House that I hadn't known. But I kind of lost track of the man, except as everybody else saw him, after he went in the White House.

MORRISSEY: Did you cover closely the development of the Passamaquoddy Project?

LARRABEE: Yes, I did that too. That, of course, took a new turn with Kennedy in the White House when he directed executive agencies to make new studies which have now resulted in the first Federal Power Project in New England being authorized by Congress. But that was all stimulated by the fact that Kennedy was in the White House and working closely with Senator [Edmund S.] Muskie of Maine.

MORRISSEY: Last week you told me the story of watching the first Kennedy-Nixon debate on TV.

LARRABEE: Yes. I happened to be in New England, visiting the newspapers for which I write, and that day was in New Bedford, and went out to the home of the late editor of the New Bedford Standard Times, Charles Lewin, at his invitation, sat and watched that first debate together on television. And within less than a minute after the program was over, the telephone rang and Lewin excused himself. I could hear a great discussion in the background and cheers over the broadcast as far as Kennedy was concerned. When he returned he said, "That was Ambassador Joseph Kennedy calling to see what my reaction was to the program." I used to hear a good deal from New Bedford about things that were going on in the Kennedy household, probably routed through

the Ambassador through Mr. Lewin. They were very close.

MORRISSEY: Let me go back to the 1956 Convention. A lot of people have emphasized that the Kennedy-McCormack relationship didn't help John Kennedy get the vice presidential nomination. What's your view on that?

LARRABEE: Well, this has to be a theory because we all know that they were not warm or close, but John McCormack many times told friends -- and I think on one occasion in my presence -- that he did nothing to hurt John Kennedy. Now, I can only take his word for it. I'm not aware of anything he did.

MORRISSEY: I think I'm running out of questions unless you have any final comment.

LARRABEE: No. I don't at the moment.

MORRISSEY: Thank you.

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