

Benjamin A. Smith, II Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 12/29/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Senator Benjamin A. Smith, II

Interviewer: Ed Martin

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Biographical Note

Benjamin A. Smith, II (1916 - 1991) was a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts (1960 - 1962) who had been a classmate of John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s at Harvard University. This interview focuses on the political ambitions of the Kennedy family, JFK's early political career, and Smith's relationship with JFK, among other issues.

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For Presidential Libraries

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APPENDIX A

Attached to and forming part of instrument of gift of papers and other historical materials, executed by:

Donor

on _____

and accepted by the Archivist of the United States

on 1-10-2008

Official files and personal papers of Benjamin A. Smith, II, United States Senator (Dem., Mass.) 1961-1963. 42 cubic feet

Benjamin A. Smith, II—JFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

BENJAMIN A. SMITH, II

December 29, 1964
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Ben, your background with the late President Kennedy begins during your college years at Harvard. Can you recall the first occasion that you met the President?

SMITH: I sure can. That stands out very vividly in my mind. It was in the summer of 1936 and we were down in Edgartown, Massachusetts, for a yacht racing regatta and, of course, I had known Joe at college. It was the end of my freshman year and Joe and I -- although Joe was a year ahead of me -- we were out for the same position in spring football. So we were down there and I was just walking along the street one evening and I met Joe, and Ted Riordan was with them, and this younger brother and Joe said, "Ben, I'd like to have you meet my younger brother, Jack."

MARTIN: Where was this, Edgartown?

SMITH: Edgartown, yes. And we stopped and chatted for a while, and then the next two or three days we had some boat races and I saw him a

couple of times on the water, and we just yelled back and forth. And Joe was racing the Vic....

MARTIN: The Victura

SMITH: The Victura, and Jack was racing a star boat, and then after that I saw him again the following fall when he came to Harvard.

MARTIN: What was Joe like, Ben?

SMITH: Joe was a tremendous person, and Ted reminds me a lot of him, and he was I think more outgoing than Jack -- kind of very much like Ted.

MARTIN: Well, of course there was an age disparity there between the older brother, Joe, and Jack at that time.

SMITH: Yes, there was... well let's see. Joe was... he would have been a junior, I think, when Jack is a freshman. And then that fall I used to see Jack because I lived just about Joe in Winthrop House at college. Jack used to come over and Joe kept a pretty good eye on him.

MARTIN: There was some feeling that when Jack was an undergraduate at Harvard he always had a sense of wanting to compete or match whatever feats his brother did. Was this the case?

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SMITH: Well, it's right through the family -- they're great competitors, every one of them, and they appreciated other competitors. I think that's what drew us together in some ways. We all liked to win and we liked to do things to the best of our ability, and I guess that's an old Kennedy trait.

MARTIN: But you say when you were at Harvard you were a year below Joe?

SMITH: Yes.

MARTIN: Then that would have put you...

SMITH: I was a year behind Joe and a year ahead of Jack, so I was right between the two.

MARTIN: But I mean your associations in college were primarily with Joe. Or were they, a combination of both?

SMITH: A combination, and then we roomed together, Jack and I, and Toy McDonnell and this other fellow, Charley Holton. The four of us lived together in my senior year; Jack's and Toy's junior year.

MARTIN: Oh, I see.

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SMITH: So Jack was there until mid-year and then he went over to join his mother and father and the family in London when his father was Ambassador.

MARTIN: Ben, this may be a good time to bring this question up. There was always.... there is a legend growing that Joe was destined you know for politics.

SMITH: Positively. It was a fact.

MARTIN: Did he ever indicate to you at any time that he wanted... make that type....

SMITH: Well he never said it but I know that he was always with his grandfather and going with Honey Fitz to hear different political figures speak and during campaign times he was always interested in hearing the candidates. At that time boys in college didn't seem to be interested in politics and world affairs as they are today, and I think my association with Joe created a greater interest in this respect and I know many times he'd say "Ben, what do you say -- come on over tonight and we'll go over and hear Dr. Townsend?" when he was going to talk about the Townsend Plan, which at that time was many years ahead

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of his time. Well we'd go over to Ford Hall to hear Felix Frankfurter, or one of the other notables of the day.

MARTIN: Well did Joe do any speaking at that time?

SMITH: Yes, I think Joe took some courses in speaking about that time, and he was very, very interested in that and then of course Jack I don't think was too interested. I think he was more of a scholarly type. I think he might have gone into teaching or something like that at college.

MARTIN: Would you say he was shy as an undergraduate? Kind of withdrawn?

SMITH: Yes, I think so in many respects. Well not entirely, no.

MARTIN: What was college life like then in the late 1930s? I mean, this was in advance

of trouble in Europe of course but....

SMITH: The storm was brewing there: Chamberlain and Munich. Up until then I think it had been kind of peaceful, but I think it is all changed since then. I think there's a greater awareness by the youth today because of what has happened in the last twenty years, and I think it's gone along so that young men and girls today are conscious

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of what's going on in the world. And of course communications bring it right to them -- television and radio and the press -- something that happens in Europe is here in a minute -- where it used to take some time and communications weren't so good and the newspapers and all that.

MARTIN: How about social life at Harvard? I mean were there the usual round of dances? Did the Kennedys....

SMITH: Yes, I think so, but not overly. I think athletics were an important part -- going to football games, playing football, hockey, things like that.

MARTIN: Did you get down to the Cape?

SMITH: Yes, we used to go down there and some of those early great touch football games, I think, date back to that period.

MARTIN: Ben, who were some of the close friends of Jack Kennedy at Harvard?

SMITH: Toy McDonald was probably his closest friend there; and Charley Holten, our other roommate; a fellow by the name of Bill Coleman, who was killed in the War, was a great friend of Jack's and Jim Luminaire who is now over at Harvard; and of course Lem Billings and

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Rip Hart were both at Princeton at this time but they used to come up and visit on weekends and things like that and Jack used to see them a lot when he was down in New York, and some of the others.

MARTIN: Now Ben, when was it in his junior year or sophomore year that Jack left to go with his family to Europe?

SMITH: It was in the middle of his junior year after mid-years. That was the year we roomed together from September to January or February and then he went

over to England.

MARTIN: This was in -- when? 193....

SMITH: Let's see. That was 1939 and then he came back in the fall and finished his senior year.

MARTIN: Did he talk to you much about his experiences over there? I know he did travel a great deal around Europe.

SMITH: Yes, in fact, T and I were going over there to be with him that summer and travel in Europe. T did go over. I stayed at home. I had graduated and I went to work, and became engaged to be married.

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MARTIN: And then he...

SMITH: And then he came back in the fall, and speaking of politics I ran for school committee in my home city of Gloucester that fall, and Jack thought that was great. He really thought that was wonderful. It was the first time I had seen him become actively interested.

MARTIN: Were you successful, Ben?

SMITH: No, I lost that election by one hundred and thirty votes, I think. Later on when I was elected mayor, Jack was Senator at the time and I know he was very pleased that I won that one.

MARTIN: Now this brings us up to just about the war time. Jack went in the service in his senior year, I think. Didn't he join the Naval Reserve?

SMITH: Yes, I think he did. I had taken the Naval Reserve all through so I went in just before Pearl Harbor and I know Jack was very interested with me and he came in and went into PTs right after that.

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MARTIN: What about Joe? Was he already in service then?

SMITH: He was at law school but he went in before Jack, as I recall.

MARTIN: Yes. Well now during... of course you drifted... your paths drifted apart during the war. Did you have any occasion...

SMITH: Well we met a couple of times during the war when we both happened to be on leave back here in Boston. We saw each other then and I remember visiting him at Palm Beach about the time he was getting into the Navy. And I can recall then how he was so interested in what was going to happen after the War. We could see the war coming to an end and so many of us were just thinking about finishing it up and getting through with it. But not Jack. He was thinking about what would happen about disarmament and thing like this. He wanted to avoid making the mistakes that were made after World War I. He was very concerned about it even at the....

MARTIN: This was after his PT boat incident?

SMITH: It was.

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MARTIN: But there was a time too, Ben, that he spent recuperating at Chelsea Hospital for a while.

SMITH: Yes, that's right.

MARTIN: Did you ever get over there to see him?

SMITH: Yes, we did. We saw him then, and...

MARTIN: Was he sick... quite sick?

SMITH: Yes, he was pretty weak and seemed to me to have been pretty well run down at the time, you know. But he was a great fighter and really came back great. He was remarkable that way.

MARTIN: Well now when he started into politics -- I mean this wasn't apparently anything sudden that he decided to run for Congress?

SMITH: No, I think, as I look back now toward the end of the war, I remember when we were down at Palm Beach we had dinner one night with former Governor Cox of Ohio, and I think he was a Presidential candidate in the early twenties and I know at that time he and Jack had a great deal of talk about Congress and politics and the Presidency and at that time -- of course this was after Joe's

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death -- and I could see that he was kind of tending toward Government service.

MARTIN: Well, do you think that his decision to enter Government service was based upon his older brother's death or the fact that he was killed before he could enter a career of politics, now it was Jack's turn to take his place?

SMITH: Well, that's been said. I know the father had a great influence on the boys in this regard and I think maybe it was true that it just fell onto Jack's shoulders to be the one to lead the way in that area, and I think that's what happened.

MARTIN: Well, who was his counsel when it came to picking out this political career? Did he go up to see his grandfather, or was it his father?

SMITH: I think his father and his grandfather. I think it was a family thing generally. I think that's the way it was.

MARTIN: And this was in the beginning of 1946?

SMITH: Right.

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MARTIN: And I think the primary was in June of that year, Ben.

SMITH: That's right.

MARTIN: Well he apparently started to make some speeches right after he left the service and began moving around Boston. Then he had to work for the campaign. Did you work with him in the '46 campaign, Ben?

SMITH: No, I didn't Ed. The first campaign I work with him was in '52 when he went for the Senate.

MARTIN: Did you keep in touch with him?

SMITH: Yes, we used to be in touch and visit back and forth all through this time and kept in close touch and sometimes we might not see each other for six or eight months, but one thing about Jack, it didn't matter when you picked up his arm again it was just like you had seen him yesterday. And he was remarkable that way. You felt like you were with him all the time.

MARTIN: Yes. You know the type of people he recruited for his first Congressional fight. They ranged from such colorful figures as

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Patsy Mulkern to his roommates at Harvard.

SMITH: Yes.

MARTIN: He did recruit quite a number of Harvard friends to come in and help out.

SMITH: He sure did.

MARTIN: I know Tony Galuccio was one of them.

SMITH: Yes Tony was very close to him at the time.

MARTIN: And now after he won that primary fight and he went down to Washington, did you get down to see him operate as a Congressman, or...

SMITH: Yes, I was down there a couple of times during that time and he seemed to be enjoying it very much. A funny thing on that: I remember later on during 1960 when we were out in Wisconsin, during the primary out there. I had an area up in the Northern part of the State at a place called Hurley. It was one of the towns there, and I met this fellow who had been an Administrative Assistant to the Congressman from that area. And his name was Suds Moriarity

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and he ran a bar in his Hurley, which is quite a hot town in Northern Wisconsin. He had been Administrative Assistant to Congressman O'Konski and he told me "I remember the first time that Jack Kennedy came on the floor of the House, and he had this Ted Riordan with him" and he says "those two Irishmen are not going to last long around here." So during the campaign Jack visited that area and met this fellow, so I guess he changed his mind that Kennedy wasn't going far.

MARTIN: Well you say that you got into close association in his political path about the time he ran for the Senate.

SMITH: That's right, yes.

MARTIN: What do you do in that campaign?

SMITH: Well, they set up secretaries, you know, Kennedy clubs, Kennedy for Senator organizations throughout the state, and I helped in my area down in Gloucester with _____ and helped....

MARTIN: Ben, were you in politics then?

SMITH: I was on the School Board in Gloucester. I had been elected to the Board in 1951, I think it was.

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MARTIN: Now that was his first state-wide effort.

SMITH: That's right.

MARTIN: And he took on quite a formidable opponent in Henry Cabot Lodge.

SMITH: Yes, he sure did.

MARTIN: As a matter of fact down in your area, Ben, this was probably Lodge country.

SMITH: Well of course with Lodge coming from right next door, Beverly was solid Lodge down through there and it was hard digging that fall, I must say.

MARTIN: What was some of the reaction to his candidacy -- his fight against Lodge?

SMITH: Well, I think at first it was taken rather perhaps lightly because Lodge was so prominent, and where he had been one of those responsible for getting Eisenhower to run for the Presidency. I think they had Lodge way up on a pedestal but then as Jack visited throughout the State and revisited the same cities and towns, once,

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twice, three times sometimes, I think they gained a lot of respect for him and people began to realize what a coming fine figure he was.

MARTIN: Well, during his Congressional career he took some bold stands on issues -- some quite unpopular. Do you recall the time of his refusal to sign the Curley pardon?

SMITH: I certainly do, yes. That was the way right through his career. Then shortly after he was elected to the Senate -- the St. Lawrence Seaway certainly wasn't a popular stand that he took and as far as Massachusetts was concerned -- but later on in Wisconsin out there it stood him in good stead years later during the campaign.

MARTIN: Well during his Senate years now, in his first term in the Senate, this was about the time he had the back operation, wasn't it, he spent a long....

SMITH: That's right. Let's see, that must have been '54 I think, yes that's right.

MARTIN: And from time to time would you get down to the Cape to see him?

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SMITH: Yes, and I talked to him the day before he was going to the hospital. It was on a Saturday morning, the day of the Harvard-Cornell game, and I think he was going in that Monday and we had quite a talk about things. And although he was going into the hospital on this very serious occasion he was still talking about the coming election -- that was the time Furcolo was running against saltonstall, and he was very interested in what was going to happen there and the governorship and everything else.

MARTIN: Then in 1956 President Kennedy came quite close to being the Vice Presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket. Can you recall that occasion and were you out there at the Convention?

SMITH: Yes, I was a delegate to that Convention. And I remember, oh a week or ten days before talking with Jack on the telephone and asking him if he was all set to be Vice President. And he kind of laughed and you know he always repeated what you said. "All set to be Vice President? No, no, I'm not going to be" and I said "Who will be?" and he said "It will be Hubert Humphrey" and I must say at that time I said "who's he?" and Jack said "The Senator

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from Minnesota" and I recalled. And when we got out there for the Convention we started to talk about Kennedy and there were quite a few that didn't know who he was at the start of the Convention, but when it was all over they certainly all knew him.

MARTIN: Did he indicate his disappointment to you that he didn't make it?

SMITH: No Jack took it great. I can remember afterwards we walked over to the... he had a room at the Stockyard Inn -- and we went over there and I must say I was shedding a tear or two. You know you just get kind of upset about it, but he couldn't have been greater, and I think he realized what we realized later on -- that it was probably the best thing that had ever happened for him in that regard. And that night at dinner we talked about it a little more and I remember after dinner going back for Adlai's acceptance speech and the tremendous hand they gave to Jack that night in the -- not the Cow Palace, the other one -- the Stockyards Area or whatever it was called.

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MARTIN: Yes, that certainly enriched his prestige nationally.

SMITH: It sure did. And of course he nominated Adlai. He made one of the nominating speeches and I remember going out after lunch and he had had just one copy of his nominating speech he was going to give for Adlai and he had given that to one of the newspapermen who was going to make up some copies, but when the time came for him to speak he still didn't have it and I remember hustling around to try to locate that copy. We finally got it just in time.

MARTIN: Well, Ben, now he settled back for another four years in the role of Senator and then he began to move -- in early 1960?

SMITH: No, I would say right after the Chicago Convention of '56. I think he right off became the most sought after... or right after the election of that fall when Stevenson was defeated... I think he became the most sought after speaker of anybody in the Congress. I think during all those years up to 1960 he was covering every part of the country...

MARTIN: Would you say he was building a cadre in the various states?

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SMITH: Well, I think he was covering all the time, so that when 1960 came he was ready for it.

MARTIN: Well now, what role did you have in his national campaign? You mentioned going to Wisconsin with him.

SMITH: Yes. Well I...

MARTIN: Did you move with him on those various primary fights in West Virginia too?

SMITH: Yes, we went to West Virginia after that. And I can remember coming home after I had been out in Wisconsin for three or four weeks coming back home and it seemed to be so funny to get back to Massachusetts where there weren't people asking "What were you doing out there?" You know we were right in the midst of a real hot election out there where it meant so much, but around here people didn't realize how important it was. It was funny... and people saying "he hasn't got a chance"... "he's going to be the next president of the United States" but it was like so many things -- it takes time and I guess it went back before that

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too. And then we went from Wisconsin into West Virginia and he was great. I remember one of the speeches he gave on the steps of the Court House in Beckley, West Virginia. It was just off-the-cuff and it was as good as any I ever heard him give. It was one of the greatest ones. I

often wished somebody had had a record of it like so many that he did after that. They had them all down in book form but that was a real good one.

MARTIN: What could you consider his greatest primary triumph -- Wisconsin or West Virginia?

SMITH: West Virginia, by all means. I think that once and for all it finished the religious question that was so important in the minds of many. You know if he had lost that one I think things would have been altogether different.

MARTIN: Well, he had a closeness with Senator Humphrey even though...

SMITH: That's right. There was certainly a fine feeling there. I mean at first I had a tendency to dislike my opponent quite intensely, but Jack acknowledged "this fellow is a real good man."

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MARTIN: Did he ever talk to you about Richard Nixon? When they were Congressmen together they debated from time to time.

SMITH: Yes, a little bit, but not too much. I think down in West Virginia at the time they finally had a debate with Humphrey and they talked about it all through Wisconsin and finally they had one in West Virginia and at that time I remember talking to him about maybe in the finals in November there would be some debates with Nixon and be kind of indicated that he would welcome such an opportunity. And then right after that I saw Nixon on OPEN END (Susskinds') and I think he did a two-hour show and I watched a part of it and I said, "Oh boy, Jack will have no trouble with him" -- because he never -- just generalities all the time and Jack always had facts to back up his arguments.

MARTIN: Now in his campaign which officially began in January of 1960, when did he announce what everybody suspected all along, that he was going for the Democratic nomination, did you then uproot yourself and start moving with him?

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SMITH: Well it was around the first of February that I had a call one day from Bob Kennedy asking me if I could come out to Wisconsin for a week or ten days to help out, and that week or ten days soon became eight or nine months. We were at it a long time.

MARTIN: And you stayed right through the campaign? Did you move around nationally

for him, Ben?

SMITH: Well, after the Convention I went into New York State, and I helped in New York State all through August, September and October to election time.

MARTIN: Well he apparently reached back into his undergraduate years and just gathered all his Harvard companions and put them to work on his presidential campaign.

SMITH: Well, I think a lot of his friends turned to help, and this was something Ed that... I mean it wasn't 1960 that you knew he was going to be president, it was before that. I don't know, I think the people who knew Jack closely knew that someday he'd be the president. I remember even before he was elected to the Senate joking and talking about it.

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MARTIN: What was the reaction of his colleagues in the Senate? How did they rate him as a fellow Senator then?

SMITH: They all liked him, respected him. I remember going into dinner... they have a dining room for Senators only down there... and after I had been there for a few days I went into lunch there one day, and Senator Stennis of Mississippi said to me "Oh, I'm glad to see you here, Smith. This is your first time here. It's more often than I saw your predecessor" and I think Jack was a little apart from them. He didn't join in and I think he was so busy going here and there and moving so fast, and doing so much, that he didn't have too much time to generally mix with the Senators. I think that's the kind of feeling there was but they all had the greatest respect for his ability for what he had done as a Senator and they admired him a great deal.

MARTIN: Now, Ben, throughout the campaign you worked principally in New York and you apparently worked closely with Jack's brother, Bob...

SMITH: And throughout that campaign I coordinated with New York and with the regular Democratic Party in New York, and of course Mike

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Prendergast was the Democratic State Chairman at that time, and the job was to keep Kennedy forces and Mike's boys working for Jack, and that was a bit of a problem. I knew it was pointed up, especially when we were arranging a swing that Jack made from Buffalo -Rochester-Syracuse-Albany, it was on-again, off-again, how it was going to be done -- whether it would be by train, whistle stopping. It was a continuous fight but it worked out

fine. I think his trip into upper New York was one of the greatest things that had been seen up there in any presidential campaign.

MARTIN: Well, did he or Bobby give any indication as to what would happen to the Senate seat that Jack would have to vacate should he win?

SMITH: Well, Ed, no, I don't think so. I do recall one night in Binghamton, New York -- I think it was October 10 or 11, 1960. I was to meet Bob there and we were going to take a tour through the southern _____ Binghamton, pass over to Johnson, and then fly up to Watertown and then do all the north country. And that night I was waiting for Bob and I got to talking with a fellow from Massachusetts,

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A Labor man who was over there just in from Massachusetts, and he was bringing me up to date on the Massachusetts situation -- the election. Joe Ward was running for Governor. We discussed it and he volunteered that it was all set for Eddy McCormack to take Jack's place when he was elected to the Presidency. I didn't think too much about it, but the next day when we were flying to Watertown Bob was sitting across the aisle from me, and I said "Bob, what about Jack's seat in the Senate? Will you take it?" He answered "No, I don't think I'd do that." I said "No, I don't think it would be too good." He said "Who do you think it should be?" and I said "there's just one guy." He asked "Who's that?" and I replied, "Torbey." He said, "Is that what you think?" and that was that. And then he asked me what I was going to be and I said I was going to be the Ambassador to Ireland, you know -- joking -- thinking nothing about it. But later on after I was appointed to the Senate, I remember Bob coming into the office -- I took over Jack's office -- and he said, "How do you feel being Senator, Ben?" And I said, "It's terrific, it's great!" and he said "Is it better than being Ambassador to Ireland?"

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So he had remembered that earlier conversation.

MARTIN: Ben, what was the first indication you received that you were being considered to replace Jack Kennedy in the Senate?

SMITH: Well, after the election the different coordinators of the different states were asked to send in lists of people who had worked and helped during the campaign, and I had got a list together of the people in New York, and from time to time I used to talk on the phone with Bob about it, and at that time there was speculation and different ones were being mentioned for the job.

MARTIN: Can you mention some of the names?

SMITH: Well, I think Sheriff Fitzpatrick was one. I think Torbey was mentioned and I think there was a little speculation about Bob himself. One day when we were talking about different things, I said to Bob "How about somebody taking Jack's place?" and he said "Who?" and I said "How about myself?" He said "you wouldn't want that, would you, Smith?" and I answered "Surely, why not?" I didn't think much about it, but that's the way Bob was -- he got something on his mind and, boy, that was it. You know I never gave it much thought. So I think it was about

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the 19th of December and our local newspapermen called and said "Hey, there is something in the *Globe* this morning. What's the story? Are you keeping secrets from me?" I replied, "I haven't seen the paper this morning." So I looked at it and there was a little thing that somebody had said, "If I was a betting man, which I'm not, I'd bet that the next Senator from Massachusetts would be Ben Smith." But I had to go pick up my daughter at college and when I got home two or three reporters were waiting at the house and that was the first I knew about it.

MARTIN: But there was nothing you could give these reporters that was definite? Had you talked to Jack Kennedy at all about it?

SMITH: Sorry, I'm wrong. I hadn't gone home. My wife dropped me off at the office and went home with our daughter and they called me from there and said that newspaper people were looking for me, and calling, and there were two or three of them at the house now. They said "Furcolo is going to name you to take Jack's place" so I immediately tried to get hold of Jack. I called Washington; he was in

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Palm Beach. He wasn't in when I called but I got hold of Kenny O'Donnell, who said, "That's right, Ben, you're going to be it, and he's going to name you, and we told him he had until four o'clock today to do it." Kenny said, "I'll have Jack call you himself when he gets in." So I think around six o'clock I had a call from Jack and he said "What do you say, sir?" I said, "What's going on?" and he said "What do you think of it?" I said "Gosh, it's terrific." He said, "Look, you can be as good a Senator as anybody that's come along" or words to that effect, and we talked a little and that was that.

MARTIN: Did he, Ben, set any specific trends with you? I mean....

SMITH: No, no.

MARTIN: Well then you were sworn in. You had to receive your appointment from the Governor. What did you do, Ben? You went up to the State House, or were you summoned by him?

SMITH: Ed, there was some uncertainty as to when Jack would resign from the Senate, and he told me that Lyndon was urging him to stay until the very end. I think at that time Lyndon wanted to have him stay because

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he was in the same position himself and he wanted to stay, I think, right up to the 20th of January -- until they were sworn in as President and Vice President. And then I think he wanted to go to January 3, which is the date all new Senators are sworn in, so it was kind of uncertain, but finally I think Jack resigned on the 22nd or 23rd of December, but Lyndon stayed right on until the 1st. So after Jack resigned I called Governor Furcolo and we talked about it and he said he would look into the mechanics of doing it and would let me know. I didn't hear from him for two or three days so I think I called him the day after Christmas. Somebody, I think it was Kenny O'Donnell, who suggested "Let's hurry it up" -- tell him you want to get there and get settled and maybe get some seniority on somebody like Joe Hickey of Wyoming who might be coming in a few days early too. So I talked to Furcolo about this and finally pressed him to set a date, and he said "Why don't you come into the office tomorrow?" He was pretty vague about it so I said "How about one o'clock?" He said, "make it two." I was there about quarter of two, but he never did show up.

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MARTIN: That day he was...

SMITH: No, I didn't see him for two years, I don't think. He wrote me afterwards saying that he was sure I understood that he was caught in traffic and... no, he had a bad cold, that was it.

MARTIN: Well, what did you get -- a certification or something from him at that time? Was it a letter?

SMITH: Yes, and that's really all I needed. He didn't have to be there or anything but he said he would and so I waited. I still didn't have the paper and I wasn't about to leave the office because at that time things were happening kind of fast around the State House. There was a judgeship that was on and I think he appointed _____ that day and there was still talk that he might like to have the Lieutenant Governor, who was then... McCormack? Was he Acting? -- McLaughlin had resigned to take an appointment -- I guess it was Joe Ward, wasn't it?

MARTIN: It was Joe Ward.

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SMITH: Yes, that was it. Joe Ward was Acting Lieutenant Governor after McLaughlin had resigned. I think that was the way it was. And there was talk he was trying to get McLaughlin to appoint him if he resigned.

MARTIN: When you say there were no terms, did you have in your own mind the feeling that you were going into that seat principally to hold it for some other Kennedy?

SMITH: I think.... I always felt that Bob would run for it. That was my original thought and then Bob said one day, "Do your job and let's see what happens" or something like that. So I don't think anybody had anything really definite at that time, but I always had the feeling that it was going to be Bob until he became the Attorney General and then I thought it probably would be Ted.

MARTIN: Well, now during your service in the Senate, did you get up to the White House to see the President?

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SMITH: Yes, I used to get up there often, sometimes with groups of other senators for signing of bills -- the Cape Cod Seashore Bill -- or some other legislation that was passed. Or sometimes just by myself I would go for a swim with the President, and maybe have lunch and see a movie at the White House at night, something like that. You always thought it was going to be different every time you went there, but he was still the same Jack Kennedy all the time. I remember the day after he was elected down in Hyannisport his father talking and we were sitting there and he recalled when Roosevelt was elected. They had been friends for many years and he said "Things are never quite the same once they get to the White House" but Jack was still the same. He never changed a bit.

MARTIN: Did he ever talk about the Senate seat?

SMITH: He asked me how I liked it and what Senators I thought were good and what we were doing, and he was very interested in how I was progressing.

MARTIN: But there was no indication of any concern that you might want to keep the seat, or anything like that?

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SMITH: No.

MARTIN: During his term then you also would get away for boat rides or trips?

SMITH: Yes, we went down to Maine -- to their place on John's Island. It was Gene

Tunney's place where we stayed and we took a cruise on one of the Coast Guard cruisers and he just... it was hard to believe that at the wheel was the President of the United States.

MARTIN: Now in the late 1961 his brother, Ted, began moving and I believe he announced in March of '62 for the Senate, and then I would imagine there was...

SMITH: That's right. After he came back from that trip to Europe, and right around Washington's Birthday I think I made a statement that I was not running again.

MARTIN: Throughout his campaign then he was...

SMITH: Before we had talked -- Ted and Bob and I -- about Ted's plans.

MARTIN: Well, then did they indicate to you that when you were finished in the Senate fight that there would be other avenues open?

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SMITH: No, I don't think there was any talk about that.

MARTIN: Ben, when your Senate term was completed, what happened then?

SMITH: I went back to my own private business here in Massachusetts and that's what I've been doing ever since then. But I remember along about February or so one night my wife and I were at home sitting in front of the fireplace and the phone rang and the girl said "The President of the United States wants to talk to you." It seemed so funny to be sitting there at home and him calling me to ask how things were going. He was thinking ahead to 1964 and wanted to know if I'd be ready to help out in Ohio and I said "Sure, sure" and he asked me what I was doing and things like that. Shortly after that Senator Magnuson was talking to me about a problem of halibut and salmon fisheries in the State of Washington, and in Alaska. I had done some work with Magnuson on fisheries problems so I think he talked to the President about having me help out in negotiations of a fishing treaty between the Japanese, the Canadians and ourselves. So the President appointed me Chairman of the Delegation with the rank of Ambassador

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and we worked on the treaty. We're still working on it. President Johnson reappointed me to the same thing and we haven't completed the treaty yet, but came very close to it.

MARTIN: Ben, as a result of your long association with the President, while you

followed his career in that high office, could you see some of the decisions that he made as President the result of being influenced by experiences, events, or occasions that go back beginning with his school years?

SMITH: Well, I don't know, Ed. I think... let's see who was it -- the Duke of Wellington who said "the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eaton."

MARTIN: Right.

SMITH: And sometimes you think maybe some of the battles of our time were won on the playing fields around here -- not to mention Soldiers' Field. I think the _____ we were on at that time when we were in school and college, and I think all through Jack's life, and Bob, Ted and Joe -- all of them -- they were fierce competitors and

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they always played to win, and they admired people who would stand in there and fight for a principle and they did. And I think that was his way of life -- to do the very best he could all the time and I think everything he ever did was that way. He just did his very best. And he had a great sense of history. He admired people of bygone days that had done great things and I think he was just of that mold, and he was able to do great things.

MARTIN: And he had the ability of admitting a mistake?

SMITH: Yes, if he was wrong he was the first to admit it. And he had great capacity to do all these things and to take the ideas of other people and the judgment of others and combine them all and to come to a great decision.

MARTIN: His decisions to pick for the administration people... there was some criticism that he was depleting the ranks of the Harvard faculty, but his choices for people in his administration, do you believe that they were his drive to get the very best?

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SMITH: Absolutely. Oh, I think the people he picked... I don't think any other President at any time had such a great, fine caliber of people around him -- learned people -- people like Dean Rusk, Ken Galbraith, Mac Bundy, Jerry Weisner. I mean -- Arthur Goldberg, Byron White -- I don't want to name many but the type of people that he attracted was a successful thing for the country.

MARTIN: You know, Ben, historians say it is too early to assess the impact of his career

as President, but what do you think history will remember him most for while he was President?

SMITH: Well, Ed, my first thought is to point to something specific. But I really feel that what he did -- the way he was a great inspiration for the young of the country and to all people of our country to show that we could do a lot better than we had been doing and to strive for excellence in whatever we did -- in our daily lives, our service, our jobs, whatever we did. And I think this is true in business, athletics, politics, the arts, anything. We are really a chosen nation now with the greatest opportunities that any nation has ever had and that our

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young people especially should grasp the opportunity and build this country into a tremendously great one.

MARTIN: Now, Ben, what would you say will be your best personal memory? What stands out in your mind?

SMITH: Gosh, that's a tough one. I have many wonderful memories of Jack Kennedy -- so many I can't recall. But I remember one, Ed. That was right after his baby son, Patrick, died and I was going to see him. God, I'll never forget saying how sorry my wife and I were about the loss of the baby, and he just stood and said "God, he was such a cute baby." I mean, by the way he looked when he said this -- the President of the United States. There was just something about it I'll never forget. There are many happy memories, too, but that particular one goes through my mind a lot I guess because of what happened eventually.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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