

**Hans O. Jensen Oral History Interview – JFK#1 07/05/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Hans O. Jensen was a Nebraska political figure and Area Director, Department of Agriculture. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's Presidential campaign in Nebraska, the election of 1960, and agricultural legislation, among other things.

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Oral History Interview

with

HANS JENSEN

Lincoln, Nebraska

July 5, 1967

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Jensen, can you explain how you first became involved with John Kennedy?

JENSEN: Well, when Kennedy was in the Senate, I wrote him criticizing him for his position on the flexible price supports, and in doing so, I told him what this would actually lead to, that eventually . . . In the study of price supports, you will see that the market pretty well follows the price support, and so consequently, when you establish them at 90 per cent of parity, or 90 per cent of the average market price, the only way that support prices can eventually go is down. And I pointed this out to Senator Kennedy. And shortly thereafter, I was invited along with some other Democratic senators to meet with Senator Kennedy in Omaha. He was there on a speaking engagement. As we went through the reception line, why, he gave my arm a tug and said, "You're the fellow that's been writing me about flexible price supports, and I'd like to hear your actual detailed explanation as to why this was." And, "Could you meet me in room 745? Jackie and I and Caroline are going to have a little lunch down there if you'd like to come down." And I said, "Alright. I'd like to bring Mrs. Jensen." And we went down, and we went all through this in order to

orient him in why this would happen, and he said, "This makes sense." This was really my first personal contact with Senator Kennedy.

HACKMAN: When was this?

JENSEN: I would guess about 1954, or '55, or '56, somewhere along in there, at least he was still in the Senate.

HACKMAN: Did you attend the '56 Convention in Chicago?

JENSEN: No, I didn't.

HACKMAN: In this initial conversation with Senator Kennedy, how knowledgeable did he appear to be on agricultural issues? Did he mostly listen, or did he. . . .

JENSEN: Well, he was always a good listener. Senator Kennedy, I think he was sympathetic and wanted to learn about agriculture, and I'm confident that he felt that this was probably one of his weakest points, or weakest areas of information.

HACKMAN: Did you immediately, at this point, become a supporter of Senator Kennedy in the state, or how did this come about?

JENSEN: Not as such at that time, because I knew from talking to the man and also from reading of his activities in the Senate that this man was destined to become a national leader; he just bore all the earmarks of one. I had read a lot of his speeches and his thinking when he was in the Senate.

HACKMAN: Did you notice any change in his stands on agriculture in the period, let's say, '56 to '60?

JENSEN: Well, he advised me that he had taken this position on the recommendation of Senator Clinton Anderson, who was then Secretary of Agriculture. And this is,

or was--and I think still is--Anderson's viewpoint on price supports. So I can easily understand that he might follow his lead on this.

HACKMAN: But moving on from the earlier positions that he took, do you think that he continued to look to Clinton Anderson for advice?

JENSEN: Oh no. I'm confident that Senator Kennedy began to see the position from the position of Stuart Symington and Hubert Humphrey and Lyndon Johnson and others who did not agree with the sliding scale price support philosophy.

HACKMAN: How did you become actively involved in working for Kennedy in Nebraska? At what point?

JENSEN: Well, in the session of 1959, I was approached by [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen and Robert Wallace of the Kennedy staff, and this was approximately June 1, '59, to serve as chairman of the Nebraskans for Kennedy. I didn't have any idea of really what their mission was when they first called me out of the legislature. We had an hour and a half or two hours of consultation when they finally asked me would I do this. And after some thought and consideration, I agreed that I would. And I notified Sorensen and Wallace that I would do it and also requested some guidance in doing it because I had no idea exactly what they had in mind in the way of campaign and what I was expected to do. I knew how to conduct a campaign, but maybe not the style they wanted. And so, in the meantime, they apparently notified Senator Kennedy that I would do it, and he wrote me a letter or two thanking me for the decision.

And shortly, Bob Wallace came back out and very briefly, orally set up a plan by which we would set out to do this. I was to select twenty or so key people all over the state of Nebraska, geographically located, to construct a complete framework of Kennedy workers throughout the state. And along with that, in Nebraska, in order to enter the primary, you have to register and enter the primary, as such, as a candidate, and in order to do that, you have to petition the candidate to

enter the primary. We circulated the petitions in order to petition Senator Kennedy, and he came after the petitions had been circulated--by the way, they were over-subscribed some 500 per cent, his popularity and acclaim was way beyond anything I had ever expected--and so, he did enter the primary. I am confident at that time that he considered Hubert Humphrey his perhaps strongest adversary in the primary. And Humphrey did not come into the Nebraska primary, I assumed for reasons of his own, but he did not. So Kennedy ran alone, which in reality didn't give a lot of meaning to his campaign because, naturally, Democrats would nominate Kennedy when he was running alone.

HACKMAN: When you went out to look for these other people to help in this effort, were these people clearly for Kennedy, or did you have to try to convince them, at that point, to join the thing, or had they already been for him?

JENSEN: I had been in the Democratic Party politics ever since the [Warren G.] Harding, [J. Calvin] Coolidge, and [Herbert C.] Hoover era; this was the time that I made up my mind that the Democratic Party was the party who cared about agriculture and labor. And so, consequently, having been in it that long, I had a lot of contacts that I already knew about, and naturally, of course, I turned to people who I felt were interested and who were willing to work. And yes, I don't think I convinced very many because I don't think I had to. I had a pretty good working group before we even--well, a very short time after we once announced what we were going to do.

HACKMAN: Can you recall what attracted most of these people to Senator Kennedy? Was it his appearance at the '56 Convention, or his personality, or . . .

JENSEN: Well, yes, I am confident that the same thing attracted them as attracted myself and others: His personal concern for the welfare of his fellow man. The more you learned about Kennedy, the more you became impressed with this. But I think that this was the overriding factor that contributed to the support, the fact that he--because people knew that he was concerned about it. You need only think



about this little incident in the South Sea Islands when he rescued those fellows, those fellow shipmates of his. After all, he took considerable risk in doing so, and this was exemplified through his life, and I'm sure this was one of the things that contributed to people moving toward him.

HACKMAN: Had anyone else in the state, let's say following the '56 Convention, been working on his behalf?

JENSEN: Oh yes: Former Governor Frank Morrison was, in fact, perhaps even instrumental in Ted Sorensen and Bob Wallace soliciting my help. I'm confident that he was involved in it. I can't at this moment think of anybody else who might have been, but I think one of the things that contributed to this selection was the fact that I was chairman of the Senate Agricultural Committee and a Protestant and Lutheran, and I think Kennedy needed somebody in the state of Nebraska, an agricultural state, who would say, "Yes, this farmer believes that Senator Kennedy cares about the farmers." And I think this was one of the things that contributed to the decision.

HACKMAN: Going back to your role in agriculture, you were a member, at that time, of the Democratic Advisory Council on Agriculture. Could you talk about your role in that connection and what you were trying to accomplish?

JENSEN: Well, this was after Kennedy's election.

HACKMAN: I thought this was the advisory council which was set up by the Democratic National . . .

JENSEN: Well, I served on that one, too, but. . . . Oh, pardon me, I probably misunderstood you because after Kennedy's election I went to Washington and helped draft the farm legislation that was passed in . . .

HACKMAN: '61?

JENSEN: Yes.

HACKMAN: That emergency feed grains legislation?

JENSEN: Yes.

HACKMAN: What I'm talking about is the Advisory Council of the Democratic Committee. Weren't you a member of that?

JENSEN: Yes, I was, in fact, I was a member of the platform committee . . .

HACKMAN: Right.

JENSEN: . . . in Los Angeles, and Chester Bowles was chairman of the platform committee in Los Angeles. Yes, when we went to Los Angeles, naturally, we were attempting to get the Democratic party to support 90 per cent of parity price supports and a farmer-elected committee system to run the program just as we had under Claude Wickard because the strength of the farm program lies in the hands of these farmer-elected committees. Even though they're not perhaps professional people, as such, they are lay people who are really responsible for policy decisions, and real sound decisions, too. And I'm a firm believer in this. And we were concerned lest we lose this at the Los Angeles Convention. So I, along with others, did some preliminary work out there at the Convention to make sure that this was written into the Democratic platform. It spells out the fact that price supports shall be based at 90 per cent of parity and farmer controlled. I don't have a copy of it that I can put my hands on. I have one, but it's not here right now.

HACKMAN: Could you talk a little bit about how this Advisory Council worked before the Convention; how it went about getting together the idea that went into the platform; and how the group functioned? Was it basically discussion, or writing position papers?

JENSEN: Well, another lady and I, Mary Cunningham from Nebraska, was a member of this platform committee. And, of course, as a farmer and she as a farmwoman,

or has farm background, we were responsible for injecting the farm analysis, or language, into the platform from Nebraska. I don't know whether you particularly had in mind when you asked the question of how did we write it into it, we were patterning it as much as we could after the program that was adopted during Henry Wallace's time. And this was because this is a good sound approach of price supports under farm commodities and acreage restrictions because as long as we have the ability to produce more than we can consume and export, it's a must that there must be support prices adequate to compensate farmers for their work. And this is really what we were driving at, to see to it that this was guaranteed by the party. And we were quite effective, by the way, in getting that written into it because Orville Freeman has pretty much followed this line of thinking since he has been Secretary of Agriculture.

HACKMAN: What was the attitude of some of the other party leaders in the state toward Senator Kennedy in this period, specifically Governor [Ralph G.] Brooks, and Democratic National Committeeman [Bernard J.] Boyle, and Mary Cunningham, some of these people?

JENSEN: Well, Bernard Boyle, of course, was National Committeeman, and as such, I think he was, I know he was an announced Kennedy supporter because he supported, or voted for Kennedy at the National Convention as a delegate. He voted for Kennedy at the National Convention on the first ballot. Brooks was not a delegate, I don't believe.

HACKMAN: No, but he went to the Convention, I think.

JENSEN: Yes. I don't believe that Brooks was a Kennedy supporter, as such.

HACKMAN: There was some opposition to Boyle's election as Democratic National Committeeman, I believe, in the state convention of that year. I wonder if that involved the possible presidential candidates at all, or whether it was strictly a Nebraska thing?

JENSEN: I'm confident it was strictly a Nebraska thing.

HACKMAN: Was this Kennedy for President organization that was set up before the Convention, before the primary, completely divorced from the regular Democratic organization in the State?

JENSEN: Well, completely divorced is a little bit stronger than my feeling. We were here supplementing rather than completely divorced. Kennedy was a strong believer in an organization that was. . . . You want to remember this was before the National Convention, and there were campaigns for Symington; there were campaigns for Hubert Humphrey; and there were campaigns for Lyndon Johnson; and all of them, for that matter, had more or less of an organization. The other three candidates did not have. . . . Their campaigns were not as farreaching as Kennedy's, but they were there just the same. Bob, oh--well, I shouldn't try to recount the names, I guess, at this time. I don't think that's important. But then I met all of their people, at various times, and they were also active in attempting to elect delegates to the National Convention committed to these other people--Symington, Humphrey, and Johnson.

HACKMAN: Were the Kennedys primarily--if they were primarily interested in the primary, did their interest in Nebraska slacken because there was no opposition to Kennedy in the primary?

JENSEN: Oh, I don't think so. I think that Kennedy thought that his election in Nebraska, or his acceptance in Nebraska, was important because of the fact that at the time he first announced his candidacy he considered Hubert Humphrey his main adversary, he wanted to launch it in a state nearby, or in so-called Hubert Humphrey's back yard. But I don't believe that it slackened, as such. However, he had to overcome these hurdles, you might say, try his strength in various states. And, of course, the Nebraska primary being as early as it is--the Nebraska primary that year was in April--and so, consequently, that gives him an early proving ground. Later on, of course, he entered a number of other primaries

including West Virginia, which came later in the season, however. But I wouldn't say that his interest in Nebraska slackened. His assignment, of course, got bigger, especially after the National Convention. Then he had the whole United States to think about.

HACKMAN: Were the Kennedy people disappointed that Humphrey, or any of the other candidates, didn't enter the primary?

JENSEN: Well, I think they looked forward to a test of strength. Yes, I would think that--I think they were.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections of some other visits by Senator Kennedy into the state? That picnic up at Democratic National Committeeman Boyle's house, were you at that?

JENSEN: Oh, yes. Yes, at that time, Kennedy addressed the group that we had selected, the skeleton group of about twenty, along midafternoon, and he was impressed. In fact, he wrote me a letter afterwards saying that he was impressed with the people. Yes, and then he was back here again on various occasions, two or three occasions, where we went to Norfolk and Fremont and over to Columbus, where he stopped to speak, and in Lincoln and Hastings and finally, I believe, at Scottsbluff, where he was meeting people and speaking to them. We selected the spots that he was to appear.

HACKMAN: Was he making an effort to get the support of Democrats in the state, like Governor Brooks, who might not have been too strong for him? Who were the specific state leaders he was trying to bring over?

JENSEN: Well, perhaps all of them, as far as that's concerned. At that time Larry Brock was Congressman, and naturally, the support of Larry Brock was important to him. He had the support of former Governor Frank Morrison and a lot of other leading people, of course. I don't think he was ever very concerned about Bernard Boyle, particularly, as such. He felt that he probably could rely on his support. But he had people

like Senator John Munnelly who is now Postmaster of Omaha and really was effective in this campaign and has a tremendous following. I don't know that I can pinpoint people who he was particularly beaming at.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what Governor Brooks' objections to Senator Kennedy were at that point?

JENSEN: I went to him personally out at Los Angeles with the hopes of getting him to put pressure on a delegate that we needed real bad because at that time we weren't sure exactly that he could win the nomination, naturally. We didn't have any--when you're in a campaign, you simply run scared until you know the results. So I went to Governor Brooks personally, and asked him to intervene, or to put pressure on this delegate, but he didn't. He didn't really reveal his position to me as to why he felt he couldn't support Kennedy.

HACKMAN: At the time of the primary, I believe it was [Robert] Conrad and Morrison were the candidates for the nomination for Governor. Were you and the people who favored Kennedy clearly in favor of Morrison at that point, or was . . .

JENSEN: We didn't take a position. In fact, we tried our level best to keep from making any commitments, pro or con, for any candidate on the Democratic ticket because we couldn't help but lose. That was my feeling, so I stayed clear of it as much as I could, or as we could.

HACKMAN: What was Conrad's attitude toward Kennedy?

JENSEN: He was pro-Kennedy.

HACKMAN: So either one who was nominated would have worked for Kennedy. There was no problem there.

JENSEN: Yes, that's right.

HACKMAN: Could you tell at the time that the delegates were elected to the Convention that some of the groundwork your organization had done was reflected in the election of some of the delegates?

JENSEN: Indeed. In fact, we were also involved in trying to promote the election of the delegates we felt were pro-Kennedy, naturally. We had a job to do, and we did everything we could to elect delegates that were pro-Kennedy, and I think this did bear fruit.

HACKMAN: What about Russell Hanson who was state party chairman at that point? He came out on May 9 and endorsed Kennedy. Did you play any role in pushing this endorsement, or was it very important?

JENSEN: Yes, indeed, it was very important. Russell Hanson and I, and Mrs. Hanson and my wife have been long time friends and long time workers of the party, although I think he probably would have been a supporter of Kennedy's even without my pressuring him.

HACKMAN: What about your efforts in other states before the Convention on behalf of Kennedy? Was this at the direction of the Kennedy people from Washington, or was this at your own instigation?

JENSEN: No. When the primary was over with, why, naturally. . . . You see, we called our state organizations Nebraskans for Kennedy. When this was over with, I wasn't sure just what my role would be. I had been tremendously intrigued with the work that. . . . Or I was tremendously interested not only in what we had done but in the election of Senator Kennedy because I thought it was--well, he was my candidate, so to speak. So nonetheless, I was solicited by Bob Wallace one day if I would get on an airplane and go to Twin Falls, Idaho, to attend a convention for Democrats in Idaho for the specific purpose of soliciting delegates to Kennedy at that convention. And this became the first of about six or seven state conventions that I attended to do the same thing. And again, I would say that it was a very easy thing to do; the support for Kennedy was actually stronger in some other states than it was in Nebraska, or at least as strong. He had as much following, he had made as much of an impression upon people there as he had in Nebraska.

HACKMAN: Did you usually go to agricultural states and work with people in agriculture there?

JENSEN: Actually, of course, yes, yes. I think I was. . . . Each one of these places that I was requested to go by the Kennedys, I think that it was primarily agricultural states for the specific purpose of buttonholing, or soliciting farm delegates, or delegates who were farmers who would be willing to support Kennedy. And I think they felt that I had an easier approach to them because I know agriculture. I knew the problems of agriculture, and apparently the Kennedys felt that I knew the problems of agriculture.

HACKMAN: Was objection to Kennedy, as far as his agricultural stand, very prevalent at this time?

JENSEN: Well, prevalent--it was there right enough. In fact, I hit it occasionally: how could a fellow from Boston know anything about Midwestern agriculture? Yes, they had to be assured that he. . . . And I didn't always portray him as knowledgeable or an authority on agriculture, but I always portrayed him as a man who cared about agriculture, and that he was willing to embrace the Democratic Party platform, and this, generally, was enough to--or would suffice.

HACKMAN: Do you know who Senator Kennedy was looking to for advice on the farm problems at that time, or did you ever discuss substantive issues with him?

JENSEN: Oh, indeed. In fact, occasionally I happened to. . . . I have some correspondence here where he actually wrote to me about some of these things. But then I don't claim to be his guiding light on this. I'm confident that he resorted to people who were probably better known nationally than I was at that time.

HACKMAN: Aside from the effort to get the farm plank in the platform, what were you primarily involved in at the Convention?

JENSEN: Oh, well. Naturally, of course, having been in these other states. . . . Out at the Convention they set up kind of a big trailer house affair that was the Kennedy headquarters next to the--oh, what is the name of that arena in Los Angeles where the Convention was held?

HACKMAN: I don't remember.



JENSEN: Cow Palace?

HACKMAN: No, the Cow Palace is in San Francisco, isn't it?

JENSEN: Yes. Well, anyway it had some kind of a name like this. We were in constant contact with [Robert F.] Bob Kennedy in what was our particular role. My role was to be in continuous contact with some of these other states, especially North Dakota because Bob Kennedy felt that there were people there that were wavering. I'd been up in North Dakota to their convention and was personally acquainted with all of the delegates that were there, and so consequently, I was called upon to contact the various delegates to make sure that they stayed hitched.

HACKMAN: Who of the Kennedy people were working specifically with the Nebraska delegation at the Convention? Anyone specially in charge of it?

JENSEN: Well, Bob Kennedy was the chief you might say strategist in this, but the whole family was here. Well, I wouldn't say [Edward M.] Ted Kennedy was ever in Nebraska. I met him in other places; but Jack Kennedy's mother [Rose P. Kennedy] was here, and Bob Kennedy, and [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien, and [P. Kenneth] Ken O'Donnell, and [Stephen L.] Steve Smith.

HACKMAN: How effective were these people in working with Nebraska, with Nebraska delegates and Democratic people in Nebraska? Any problems?

JENSEN: Well, not particularly. I don't think they had any problems with the Democrats as such. Not all of the Democrats supported Jack Kennedy because we had sixteen votes, and only garnered some thirteen of them, but nonetheless, you must bear in mind that this is a tremendously conservative state, and we had some real opposition from one of the leading newspapers, still have for that matter.

HACKMAN: What were some of the specific objections that these people who favored other candidates had toward Senator Kennedy?

JENSEN: Mostly religion.

HACKMAN: Did you run into organized opposition on the parts of various religious groups during this time?

JENSEN: Well, let me answer it in two parts. In the party, the party people were sure we could neither nominate nor elect him. And, of course, outside of the party. . . . Naturally, there is some ground for this concern because ever since [Alfred E.] Al Smith's time, why, somebody cooked up the idea that a Catholic couldn't be elected president, and it got to be a kind of a byword, but there was really never any reasons to outlaw or to classify Catholics as ineligible candidates for the presidency. Religion shouldn't be, and I'm sure it isn't, an issue today. But, nonetheless, outside of the party then, naturally, of course, the opposition party would come up with such arguments as that if we elected a Catholic, it would be just a matter of time until the Pope would be calling the shots as far as our government is concerned. We had this all the time. But organized opposition, I can't say that I'd ever get organized opposition. We had anti-Kennedy literature thrown on our front porch by, oh, I would say perhaps some radicals that insisted on using this device.

HACKMAN: Symington got four votes from Nebraska. What was the source of his support? Primarily a uniting by the anti-Kennedy people, or was it an affinity for an agricultural state?

JENSEN: Right. I would say that his activity--Symington has been a tremendous supporter of farmers, taking second place maybe only to Hubert Humphrey. But Symington had, and still has, a lot of support in Nebraska because of his interest in agriculture. And I think this was primarily the reason for those delegates going to Symington.

HACKMAN: What was the reaction of the Nebraska delegates to the nomination of Johnson as vice president, and your own reaction?

JENSEN: Well. Johnson was. . . . I'm sure that the Nebraska delegates would probably have preferred Symington, I believe, although they realized the need to--I'm

confident that the reason Kennedy did this was because he needed the strength from the South, and got it. And naturally, those of us who were close to it realized the strength that this gave us and the need for it. And you have a matter of accepting it in that light.

HACKMAN: Were there any specific objections to . . .

JENSEN: Oh, as such, I don't recall anybody vocally expressing themselves as anti-Johnson.

HACKMAN: Did any of the disputes coming out at the Convention, carry over into the campaign and have any effect on people's role in the campaign as far as supporting the national ticket here in Nebraska?

JENSEN: I don't know that I exactly know what you're thinking.

HACKMAN: I'm thinking of the people who didn't vote for Kennedy at the Convention in relation to working for him then after he was nominated, in the state. Did these people work at all for your Kennedy for President organization, or not?

JENSEN: Yes, I didn't detect anybody dragging their feet once the nomination was over with. Of course, mind you, our organization was pretty thoroughgoing and pretty strong, and I probably didn't get in contact with anybody that had any anti-Johnson feeling--at least, as such.

HACKMAN: What were you mainly involved in during the campaign period, after the Convention?

JENSEN: You see, we formed voters Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson, and so it became my responsibility to set up groups within the various segments, like Citizens for Johnson within labor organizations. We had a Students for Kennedy-Johnson; we had a Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson; and we had a Senior Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson. In fact, we ran out of time before we got it all done.

HACKMAN: Was there any problem in the relationship of these volunteer organizations to the regular Democratic Party organization? Did the two work together, or did . . .

JENSEN: Well, I wouldn't say there wasn't any problems because there was probably a feeling that the Kennedy organization was attempting to take over the party although this was the last thing Kennedy wanted to do. Every time this came up, why, I did my level best to iron this thing out and tell them we're just supplementing and we're not taking over the party.

HACKMAN: Were there any of the Kennedy people from outside the state working during the campaign here with the organizations you had set up?

JENSEN: Yes, indeed. Bob Kennedy was in here on a tour on behalf of Donald McGinley, who was running for Congress, and also for Larry Brock, who was running for Congress; and Kennedy's mother was here in behalf of Jack Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Was there anyone specifically at National Headquarters that you worked with?

JENSEN: Mainly, Bob Kennedy, Ken O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien.

HACKMAN: How did the presidential race affect the race for the governorship and the other state races? Was Kennedy in any way a handicap to the people running for state office, and did they identify closely with the national ticket, or in some cases not do so?

JENSEN: Well, at that stage, I don't know that I could say that he . . . Are you saying did he strengthen their chances?

HACKMAN: Right, and did they identify closely with the national ticket in their own approach?

JENSEN: Morrison did, and it certainly didn't hurt him because he was elected.

HACKMAN: Was there ever any strategy evolved on how to approach the whole religious issue in Nebraska, any direction, let's say, from the Kennedy people as to how they would want to go about this?

JENSEN: No, although we laid some plans of our own where we went out and got people with a following to make expressions or write statements, and we put out a brochure and we circulated them over the signature, or over the statement by, oh, a lot of well known people like the president of Wesleyan over here, Vance Rogers, and anybody we could get. In fact, offhand, I can't just think of who they all were, but businessmen's groups, anybody we could get to that would sign a statement supporting Kennedy, we used it to put out this little brochure, and handed it to people in the hopes of influencing people.

HACKMAN: Was the group you headed at all connected with the Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson on the national level, or did this . . .

JENSEN: It came on afterwards, yes. In fact, I headed that same organization in the state. We formed it.

HACKMAN: What specifically did that group do in the campaign here in Nebraska?

JENSEN: Oh, this began work in supplementing the effort of the Democratic party. We attempted to set up a representative in every county with the hopes of influencing farmers at every opportunity. We attempted to pick people who were active and influential.

HACKMAN: What was the role of the various farm groups here in Nebraska as far as the campaign went? In the election, who supported Kennedy and who opposed?

JENSEN: Well, I don't know that farm groups at that time were taking a position. If anything, they took a position, the Farm Bureau took a position opposed to

Kennedy. And the Farmers Union, noncommittal. And the Grange has never been very active. At that time there wasn't much activity in the NFO [National Farmers Organization]. The National Farmers Union, of course, they took a real active role, and they do have a lot of following in the state of Nebraska. And naturally, of course, their role as such, their influence as such, did spill over into Nebraska, but the state organization as such didn't take any part.

HACKMAN: How successful did you feel Kennedy was in handling the farm issue during the campaign?

JENSEN: Real successful. I am confident that he made some real inroads as far as enlisting the confidence of agriculture.

HACKMAN: This wouldn't have had a negative effect on the vote in Nebraska?

JENSEN: No, indeed it wouldn't. Farmers in Nebraska are-- well, they're not always easy to understand, but nevertheless they know that programs are necessary and that Kennedy was a staunch supporter of commodity programs, and I think he had made real inroads into the confidence of farmers.

HACKMAN: Were you doing any speech writing for him at this point or any advising on the issues?

JENSEN: No. Oftentimes he would do this: He wrote out for some suggestions one time specifically, and I still have a copy of the statement that I wrote him; but he would make a speech, or prepare a speech, and then he would send a copy of it to me, and "Would you mind telling me what you think of it, and if you have some criticisms, would you voice them?"

HACKMAN: Did you attempt to get Kennedy to come into the state? I don't recall that he made any appearances after the Convention in Nebraska. Did this have any effect on the outcome, do you think?

JENSEN: I don't believe he came into Nebraska after the Los Angeles Convention. We did attempt to get him here, yes.

HACKMAN: What effect did the death of Governor Brooks have as far as the presidential campaign went?

JENSEN: Oh, I can't imagine that it had any effect on it. I don't believe it did. It gave probably the lieutenant governor, who stepped in as governor, a chance to. . . . Well, he is a Republican. It gave him a better, you might say, sounding board. So if anything, it probably was injurious to him.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

HACKMAN: Did you have any role in the selection of Robert Conrad to run for the Senate then in that period?

JENSEN: Well, if I did, it was minor. I was very much in favor of it.

HACKMAN: I recall at the time that there was some mention of yourself as a possible candidate?

JENSEN: Yes, I did consider it. In fact, we were on the way to file and ran into this thing--and I wasn't aware of it--that anybody that's an incumbent has to file five days earlier in Nebraska than somebody who isn't, and this eliminated me. I wasn't aware of this. I let it go too long. That's what it amounts to.

HACKMAN: Do you think then that Conrad replacing Brooks, and maybe you covered this in your previous statement, had any effect on the presidential vote?

JENSEN: Well, I don't think it hurt him. I think it probably helped.

HACKMAN: Was there any effort made in the '60 campaign, any major effort, as far as voter registration went? Were you involved in this? Could you explain how you went about that?

JENSEN: Oh, yes. Oh, indeed. Out at Los Angeles when the nomination was in the bag, Bob Kennedy immediately summoned us in two different groups, state leaders, to get this voter registration under way. At that point, he made this statement that seven of the ten who were not registered were Democrats, so we couldn't afford to let this sort of a situation exist if we could do anything about it. So he instructed us to go back and immediately set up somebody in charge of this voter registration. Now mind you, in Nebraska at that time, only the towns of over eight thousand people had to register. So there's only about seven or eight spots in the state that was really involved: Omaha, Lincoln, and Hastings, Grand Island, Fremont, I guess, and Scottsbluff. Nevertheless, Norman Otto was selected at that time to head up this voter registration. We attended a meeting in Kansas City; he and I went through all this in order to set up the machinery to get people registered, to set up people to contact and ring doorbells, like any other campaign to get people to register. Because, actually, it doesn't help Jack Kennedy or anybody else to come in and talk to people who were not registered.

HACKMAN: Do you recall who was in charge of the Kansas City meeting? Was it somebody from the Kennedy Democratic National Headquarters, or what?

JENSEN: Well, I believe Bob Kennedy was. I believe he was. I'm not sure of this, but I think he was.

HACKMAN: During the campaign was anyone specifically sent out from Washington by the Kennedy people to work?

JENSEN: After the national election was over, a fellow by the name of Ralph Horton came here; he was formerly from Syracuse, New York, and apparently had some kind of a contact with the Kennedys.

HACKMAN: I believe he went to school with Kennedy.

JENSEN: He was here to help us with it.

HACKMAN: This was during the campaign now?



JENSEN: Yes.

HACKMAN: What was his role?

JENSEN: Kind of a coordinator.

HACKMAN: Was he effective at all, or play any role?

JENSEN: Oh, I don't think so. It's hard to assess it. He had a real handicap in that he simply didn't understand agriculture. Naturally, as such, you just don't adjust to the Nebraska people just like that. Somebody who has lived here and knows Nebraska people would probably have done a better job. . . . He had some real handicaps in that he was not a Midwesterner.

HACKMAN: Going into the election then, what do you think was the primary cause for Kennedy's defeat in Nebraska?

JENSEN: An unfavorable press. I think that this, the biggest newspaper in Nebraska; it covers Nebraska daily; and naturally, of course, Kennedy could be classified as a liberal, and this newspaper is a real conservative paper. Their influence in the state of Nebraska is real, real hard to overcome.

HACKMAN: Do you know if Senator Kennedy ever made any efforts, direct efforts, in relation to the press here?

JENSEN: Not to my knowledge. He might have done it unbeknownst to me, too.

HACKMAN: As far as this newspaper then, what were their main objections? Economic, religious, agricultural policy, or was there any one specific thing they dwelt on?

JENSEN: Mainly federal spending. They have always assailed the Democrats for spenders, or as spenders, and they are great to mislead people into thinking they can have all these so-called governmental goods or services and still castigate the administration for spending money. You can't have your cake and eat it. And this is the thing they mislead people into thinking they can.

HACKMAN: What was the role of religion in the election? Did it have any great effect, do you think, in Nebraska?

JENSEN: Oh, I would be less than honest if I didn't think that it had some effect. I kept telling the press at the time that it did not, but then I never believed it myself.

HACKMAN: What about labor as a group? I had heard that some of the labor people, some of the delegates representative of labor, had not favored Kennedy. Was this reflected in the campaign, or do you know why they didn't at the Convention?

JENSEN: I don't know that I can give you any light on that. I wasn't aware of it that there was any anti-Kennedy sentiment among labor.

HACKMAN: Well, I think I had read this in the newspaper, so it may well have been the same newspaper that was misleading me by saying that labor did not back Kennedy. That's the obvious conclusion.

JENSEN: Omaha is our biggest labor group, and if I'm not mistaken, Kennedy carried Omaha by some ten thousand votes, but lost outstate, if my recollection serves me correctly.

HACKMAN: How do you explain Morrison's victory and Kennedy's defeat by such a large margin in Nebraska?

JENSEN: Well, it is hard to put your finger on it, but once Morrison was elected and. . . . Well, let's start out by Brooks' election. Under the former Governor [Victor E.] Vic Anderson's administration, he had as a highway commissioner a fellow by the name of L. N. Ress, and he got himself in real poor repute. He might have been a real good highway engineer, but a real poor public relations man, and so a fellow by the name of Senator Terry Carpenter undertook to castigate him, and flay him at every opportunity he could, and because of this--this is Hans Jensen's observations on it now, mind you, but I'm confident it's fairly accurate--because of this flaying by Terry Carpenter, Vic Anderson was defeated by

Governor Brooks. Alright, then Morrison came on the picture as a candidate for governor, and we had had one Democratic administration, and some of the opposition to the Democrats had been, you might say, laid at rest. The Democratic party has been becoming stronger in the state, and this is part of the strength that became evident here. Now when Morrison was elected governor, Morrison was a good governor, and people had confidence in him. Now then, when you ask me the question why did he run so good and Kennedy did not, perhaps the knowledge that Morrison was a good governor and had created a good image helped him tremendously, where the same person would cross the ticket when it came to Kennedy because he did not understand him as well as he understood Morrison. Confidence, that's probably the best word to use, confidence in the candidate.

HACKMAN: After the election then did you have any contacts with Kennedy or the people around him in the period after the election?

JENSEN: Oh, indeed, yes. From time to time I met with the various Democratic state conventions and, likewise, at the Inaugural, was invited as one of his special guests, sat in his box at the Inaugural.

HACKMAN: How did you become involved in what you were discussing earlier, writing the feed grains legislation in '61?

JENSEN: Oh, I think maybe at the request of either Ted Sorensen, or the President, himself. It could have been because my background, of course, is agriculture, and they were reaching for people whom they could tie to, who understands agriculture. They picked. . . . I think at that time I was the only one from Nebraska, but then they had some real well informed people from other states as well who wrote this legislation that we finally enacted.

HACKMAN: Is this the group that Fred Hinkle, who was President of the MFA [Missouri Farmers Association] was the head of?

JENSEN: Yes.

HACKMAN: Was there a great deal of disagreement among the group as to what was to be proposed? How did it work out?

JENSEN: No, no. Naturally, to iron out something like this or hammer it into proposals, we met with Willard Cochrane, Willard Cochrane was an economist from the University of Minnesota, and he was, you might say, the man who this feed grain advisory committee relied upon to write it up in such a manner that it could be proposed as legislation. There was some dissent, as such, because Willard was not exactly a high price support man as such, whereas those of us who were in there were high price support minded.

You see, to get yourself completely grounded in this sort of a situation, when Eisenhower was elected, we had a dollar and sixty-six cent corn, and we had gotten two dollar wheat. And lo and behold, before the Eisenhower Administration was through, ~~the~~ [Ezra Taft] Benson had lowered the price support on corn from a dollar sixty-six clear down to ninety-eight cents, even below, eighty-eight cents I guess it was--at least it was below a dollar. And the price of wheat had gone from two twenty-six to about a dollar eighty in this period of time. So consequently, when we sat down to write this feed grain program, we felt that we were going to reverse this trend. And Willard Cochrane's idea of this was not as strong as we would like to have had it. We were going for a dollar and twenty cent price support on corn this first step. You couldn't take it back all the way all at one jump; you couldn't do that because you'd demoralize the livestock industry if you did. In other words, the guy who had a bunch of hogs or cattle on feed, if we'd have gone right back to a dollar and sixty-six cent corn, it would have probably bankrupted him. So we knew we had to go by degrees, but the mark we were shooting at was for about a dollar and a quarter corn, or at least a dollar and twenty cent corn. When you ask about was there any difference of opinion, yes, there was, because I'm sure the group felt that. . . .

The first loan that Willard proposed to us was a dollar and four cents, which is only six cents, eight cents higher, which was a real disappointment to this committee. In fact, we were held over a day to try to revise it, and I myself, at 4:30 that afternoon after we had set there all day, I said to them, "I just don't believe we can sell this when we get to the country

with it." And when Fred Hinkle asked if this was the consensus of opinion, why, yes, it went around that table up in the Secretary's room in the department like a wave. Every one of them felt that it wasn't enough. So he came back with a proposal the next day for a dollar and sixteen cent loan, and this is where we finally settled.

HACKMAN: After the emergency feed grain legislation was passed, then I think the Department's approach in '61 was getting away from this commodity by commodity approach, and they were going to give the Secretary of Agriculture new powers to work with the ASCS [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service] committees on the local levels. Did you play any role in this legislation, or what were your feelings toward this approach?

JENSEN: Well, you want to remember, we lost the wheat referendum.

HACKMAN: That was in '63.

JENSEN: Yes. And you have to propose what you can sell as far as legislation is concerned. If the Congress won't buy it, you're not going anywhere. I don't know that I played any role in it. You see, I went to the Department as Area Director, and served eighteen months as Area Director, and then came back here. So I don't think I could say that I played any role. I had to get off the feed grain advisory committee, and did resign from it, once I accepted the other job. And once you become a member of the Secretary's staff, you do what the legislation proposes, and I actually had no hand in that part.

HACKMAN: You were back here then in time for the Wheat Referendum in 1963?

JENSEN: Yes.

HACKMAN: Were you involved in efforts to sell that program here in Nebraska?

JENSEN: Well, let's put it this way, that I was involved in an effort to get an affirmative vote. Naturally, I wouldn't have thought that farmers could be foolish enough to vote out marketing quotas. All this has done, actually, is to lower the price of wheat. Once we had to resort to a voluntary program, you just plain can't have as high wheat supports as we have had before.

HACKMAN: That's about all I have, unless you have some conclusions on President Kennedy.

JENSEN: I'm real surprised at some of the information you have of the background. I'm really amazed. No, I don't know that I have. I think I've covered pretty nearly everything that was in here. I wrote up a few notes.

HACKMAN: Well, let me skip back to something just a minute. At the '60 Convention there was a Midwestern farm group that was formed at the Convention. I believe maybe it got its start with a couple of people in the Iowa delegation. Do you remember playing any role in that, or how did this function?

JENSEN: Yes, you bet. This is at the Convention you're talking about.

HACKMAN: Yes, I believe Ellsworth Hays from Iowa was involved in it.

JENSEN: Yes, yes. In fact, we held some meetings purposely to head off this effort on the part of some of these Southerners to get through a plank in the Democratic platform that called for flexible price supports. And now, offhand, I don't remember the names of all of the people who were in this, but even the fellow from Pittsburgh, David Lawrence, (Governor of Pennsylvania), was, by the way, a supporter of high price supports with the Northern group, but he was real vocal in support of this. But the main efforts sprang from us Midwesterners and from Montana---I wish I could think of the name of the fellow anymore that was from Montana, but he was also real active, as I was, in this, because, gee, flexible price supports would have been the kiss of death as far as the Democratic party was

concerned in the Midwest, and possibly in agriculture.

HACKMAN: Who was leading the opposition group at the Convention? Was Clinton Anderson involved at that point?

JENSEN: [John, III] Holbman from Mississippi and [James O.] Eastland.

HACKMAN: Was there much of a fund raising effort necessary during the campaign here in Nebraska?

JENSEN: We did some of this prior to the time that, prior to the primary. We plain had to because we couldn't tap the party's funds, and didn't. But after the primary was over with, or after the Los Angeles Convention was over with, naturally, of course, we formed the Citizens for Kennedy group and in so doing, why, I set up, or we did, our organization set up various headquarters for Kennedy and Johnson throughout the state. We had two in Omaha, one here [Lincoln], and one in Hastings--well, we had about ten or eleven or twelve of them all over, scattered throughout the state. And I would do it by. . . . What we needed there was a headquarters where we could have the Kennedy-Johnson literature and somebody in attendance--and most of those were volunteers--and then I'd generally go to somebody who a few hundred dollars didn't mean much to and say, "Here, would you pay office rent", or "rental on this building until November 2, or 6?", or whatever the date was, and he would generally agree to do it. That's how we got the money for this kind of a thing without tapping the central committee's funds.

HACKMAN: Let me jump to something else completely. Do you know, from your point of view, if the fact that Nebraska didn't back Kennedy as far as the total number of votes in 1960, did this ever create any problems as far as getting federal funds for this state? Especially for Governor Morrison.

JENSEN: Well, I don't know that I would lay that to the Kennedy Administration, or the Johnson Administration, as such. I don't think that. . . . I'd sooner put

it this way: Here's a fellow like Carl Curtis, for instance, that hadn't any influence. Nobody cares much what Carl Curtis says up there. Nobody pays any attention to him. So when he comes up and he asks, for instance, for funds for the mid-state Power and Irrigation Project up here, and oh, yeah, it's been on the books for ten years but. . . . So he goes to somebody from Cook County, Illinois, and says, "Here, we sure need some money for the mid-state project up here. If we could have that, we wouldn't be so subjected to floods". And immediately the fellow from Cook County, Illinois, says, "Say, Senator Curtis, you remember the time I needed some labor legislation? You remember how you fought it?" Now I think this factor has much more of an impact on whether or not we get federal funds or not, the influence of our congressmen and senators up there, than perhaps Johnson or Kennedy as President has. But we just plain don't have any--our people up there don't have any following; they don't have any influence. I'm confident that if we had Ted Kennedy from Nebraska, representing Nebraska, we'd get some of these things.

HACKMAN: Were you ever considered for any other positions that you know of other than the job you took in the Department of Agriculture, any other ones ever discussed?

JENSEN: Well, I don't know. Probably my own fault that I went for this Area Director's job and thought that it would be what I wanted, and I found out that, number one, it was more flying than I had anticipated and, also, that you really didn't get into the policy level. I sometimes thought if I had it to do over again and I was younger again, why, I might try something else.

HACKMAN: I think that's all I have. Good. Thank you.