

Charles S. Murphy Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 6/30/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Charles S. Murphy (1909- 983) was the Under Secretary of Agriculture from 1961 to 1965. This interview focuses on the 1960 Democratic National Convention, the 1960 presidential campaign, and agricultural issues that arose during the Kennedy administration, among other topics.

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Charles S. Murphy– JFK #1
Table of Contents

| <u>Page</u> | <u>Topic</u> |
|-------------|--|
| 1 | Work in the Truman administration |
| 2 | Establishment of the Democratic Advisory Council |
| 3 | Democratic Advisory Council's role in the 1960 presidential campaign |
| 4 | Parties for Harry S. Truman's birthday |
| 5 | 1960 Democratic National Convention |
| 7 | Working for Lyndon B. Johnson on the campaign |
| 8 | Harry Truman's support of John F. Kennedy [JFK] |
| 9 | Appointment as Under Secretary of Agriculture |
| 11 | Obstacles to appointment |
| 13 | Previous knowledge of Orville L. Freeman |
| 14 | JFK's executive order on food distribution and the feed grain bill |
| 15 | The Kennedy administration's views on agriculture |
| 16 | Meetings with JFK |
| 17 | Organization of the Kennedy administration |
| 19 | Comparisons between the Truman and Kennedy administration |
| 20 | Visiting Truman about tax reduction bill |
| 21 | Department of Agriculture's involvement with Billy Sol Estes |
| 22 | Investigation of Sol Estes |
| 23 | Last meeting with JFK |
| 26 | Cabinet meetings |
| 27 | Special meeting on the sale of wheat to the Soviet Union |
| 29 | Learning of JFK's assassination |
| 30 | Meeting the plane that was carrying JFK's body |
| 31 | Transitioning from the Kennedy to the Johnson administration |

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This is an interview for the Oral History Project of the Kennedy Library with Charles S. Murphy, Under Secretary of Agriculture. The place is the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. The interviewer is George A. Barnes.

June 30, 1964

Q. Mr. Murphy, you have been in Washington and a part of the government machinery, both in the Legislative and the Executive branches, for rather a long time. Would you like to tell us how this career of federal service began?

A. I think it might be useful to start out by saying that I am a lawyer. I graduated from law school at Duke University in 1934, and in the fall of that year came to Washington to work as a legislative draftsman in the office of the Senate Legislative Counsel. (That is an office that performs drafting services for all Senators and Senate Committees.) I worked in that office until January of 1947, at which time I went to the White House as an administrative assistant to President Truman. I had come to know President Truman while he was a member of the Senate, and as a legislative draftsman I did drafting work for him from time to time. I served as an administrative assistant to the President for three years, and then in January or February of 1950 was promoted to the position of Special Counsel to the President where I served until President Truman left the White House in January 1953. Among other things, this work at the White House necessarily brought me into legislative policy questions, and that in turn into political issues. I worked with and for President Truman in his campaign in 1948 and acquired some background in campaigning in that way.

After I left the White House I practiced law in Washington. During most of the time that I practiced law I was special counsel to the Democratic National Committee, first during the chairmanship of Steve Mitchell, and later during the chairmanship of Paul Butler. In this connection I worked with Paul Butler in establishing the Democratic Advisory Council (which was done, as I recall, about 1955), which was an effort to draw on the intellectual resources of the Democratic Party and sharpen up issues in trying to formulate policy for the party. This produced almost automatically some rivalry with some of the congressional Democratic leadership. However, a very distinguished group of Democrats did participate in the work of this Advisory Council. Its membership included for example: President Truman, Governor Adlai Stevenson, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and a good many others. They met two or three or four times a year. I think this is of importance in connection with President Kennedy, as well as the Democratic party as a whole, because I think it had a profound influence in keeping the Democratic Party on the liberal side of the issues during that particular period in our history. In this work it was natural that I would continue to be in touch with people who were active in Democratic politics, including members of the Senate--Senator Kennedy and others. This was when I first got to know Senator Kennedy. I had known of him when he was a member of the House of Representatives. I actually got to know him while he was a Senator. I don't remember when or where was the first time I ever met him; but I did not become intimately acquainted with him.

Q. May I interrupt to ask if he was a member of or worked with the Democratic Advisory Committee?

A. My recollection of that is not clear. In the later stages perhaps in 1960 as well as I can recall, the Democrats that were prominently mentioned as potential Presidential candidates were invited to participate in the work of this council--Democratic Advisory Council it was called--and my recollection is that he did participate although not very much--to a rather limited extent. Senator Kefauver, I think, participated more. One of the stalwarts of that activity, by the way, was Kenneth Galbraith who was the chairman of our most general subcommittee--the subcommittee that handles everything that other specialized subcommittees did not handle.

Q. This council functioned right up to the time of the 1960--start of the 1960 campaign?

A. Up until the time of the convention it did. Before the convention it began to have relationships or to do staff work with the staff of the potential Presidential candidates--considering the preparation of material for the platform, considering the arrangements for the convention, and considering the arrangements that had to be made before the convention for the campaign that was to be carried on later. It is necessary, apparently, in modern campaigning to enter into contracts far enough in advance so that some of the contracts for services to be rendered during the campaign in the fall had to be made before the convention, and before it was known who the candidate would be. I remember that Ted Sorensen was designated by Senator Kennedy as his representative to work with the Democratic National Committee and Advisory Council in connection with these matters.

One thing I'd like to get on the record is Paul Butler's attitude about who the nominee should be in 1960. So far as I was ever able to tell--I was very close to him, and I think I was one of his most intimate friends, particularly in these political matters--so far as I was ever able to tell, he was strictly neutral. He never leaned one way or the other. He never knowingly gave any preferential treatment to any candidate. I always suspected that his first choice was Senator Kennedy, but he never did anything to further his interests or to impede them in comparison with those of anyone else, Lyndon Johnson, Adlai Stevenson, any of those.

There is one other incident that relates to this period that might be of interest. In 1959 President Truman was celebrating his 75th birthday, and he agreed that he would devote that occasion to helping to raise funds for the Democratic National Committee. The means for doing this was by a closed-circuit television show. They had, for this, different cities all around the country, here in Washington, New York City, Chicago, the West Coast, and I don't remember what the charge was, perhaps \$50 in some places, \$25 in other places, and possibly \$100 in some places. The party here in Washington, as I recall, was in Constitution Hall. Some places I think it was a dinner. In making the preparations for this, we wanted to have a party in Boston. In the early stages the efforts to get this arranged in Boston were not going very well, so I went with Paul Butler to see Senator Kennedy to see if he would give his support to the party in Boston for this purpose. The Senator agreed quite readily that he would. He said, I thought with a considerable amount of assurance,

that the party would be put on in Boston and that it would be a good one. It was done, and it was a good one, largely I think due to his efforts. I have in my files, I note, an exchange of notes with him in which I wrote him shortly afterward thanking him for this help and he acknowledged the letter I sent to him. I don't think of anything else that relates to this preconvention period particularly.

Q. During this time, this preconvention period, you were associated with the Democratic National Committee as part of your private practice of law, so that in the primary campaign where there were a number of candidates, you were in a totally neutral position.

A. That is true, I was totally neutral. It has been reported from time to time that I was working for the candidacy of Lyndon Johnson before the convention. That, however, is not the case. I was, as you indicated, associated with the Democratic National Committee, and because of that was required to be, and was, neutral.

Q. I think this brings us, unless you have some more to add to what we might call the preconvention period, up to the period of the convention itself. Were you present in Los Angeles?

A. I was present, I was sent out there for the Democratic National Committee without any particular or specific assignment but to be available to the chairman in case of need. At the moment, the only particular function that I was called out there to perform was to serve as "tally clerk." It developed at almost the last minute that no arrangements had been made for "tally clerks," so at the request of the chairman of the National Committee, Dave Lloyd, Dennis Jensen, and I believe Claiborne Pell, now Senator from Rhode Island, and I constituted

ourselves the "tally clerks." We took the official "tally" as the roll was called when Senator Kennedy was nominated.

Q. He was nominated on the first ballot.

A. That's my recollection.

Q. Were you involved in any of the conversations or considerations that went into his choice of a Vice-presidential candidate?

A. No, I was not.

Q. During the next period of his active candidacy, running against Vice-President Nixon, did you remain with the national committee? Did you move into any role a little closer to the campaign entourage?

A. Well, my situation changed some. My relationship as counsel, or special counsel, to the national committee was terminated at the time of the convention. However, I did want to serve as a volunteer in the campaign in the fall of 1960. I was not in a position to travel or to be away from Washington for extended periods. I had for a good many years campaigned each two years with President Truman. In 1948 I was away from Washington with him for six weeks during the campaign. It turned out to be an extremely bad time for me to be away from my family, and it got to be a very sensitive subject. When 1960 came along I was in no position to leave town again.

Senator Kennedy did have a staff of his own--a very capable staff. It was rather apparent that there would not be any particular need for the kind of services I could perform so far as his staff was concerned. On the other hand, it appeared that the Vice-Presidential candidate, Senator Johnson--did not have a very large staff at that time, and

might very well need some additional staff work in connection with his campaign. I volunteered to work in the Washington office that would back up the Vice-Presidential candidate in his campaign.

That offer was accepted and I was asked to supervise the office that would provide research material, speech drafts, and things of that kind for the Vice-Presidential candidate and his immediate personal staff. That office was set up in the Investment Building, I believe it was, at 15th and K Streets. We had there a staff of perhaps a dozen or so people, and I devoted substantially full-time work to that during the campaign. I had in that office with me David Lloyd; Kenneth Birkhead; Bess Abell, who is now Mrs. Johnson's secretary; Tyler Abell; Lane Kirkland, now executive assistant to George Meany; President of the AFL-CIO; John Burns, Jr., son of the governor of Hawaii; Bill Welch, administrative assistant to Senator Hart of Michigan --these are some of those I can recall.

During the course of the campaign we found that a good bit of the factual information which we pulled together by way of research was useful to, and used by, the Vice Presidential candidate. I think the drafts of speeches we prepared were used relatively little. Also, as the campaign went along President Truman began to do some speaking, and we prepared speech drafts in this office to send to him. We did a few special assignments for the immediate staff of President Kennedy.

To come back just a little bit, if I'm not mistaken, President Truman was not one of the original supporters of the candidacy of Kennedy, at least in the early days when Senator Kennedy's name was first being mentioned.

Q. Can you shed any light on the President's subsequent support of Mr. Kennedy's candidacy?

A. No, I really can't. He had a somewhat unhappy experience four years earlier--I guess it was in 1956 at the convention in Chicago. As I recall, he opposed the nomination of Governor Stevenson who was nominated notwithstanding President Truman's opposition, and after he was nominated, President Truman made a speech to the convention promising to support Governor Stevenson. I did work with him somewhat in preparing that speech. However, in 1960 he did not go to the convention. I was not with him at the time he made whatever statements he made, and I really don't know anything about the background, or about his thoughts on the subject other than what appeared in the public press at that time.

Q. As you said, most of your active work during the campaign was in the office devoted to the needs of the Vice-President. During this period did you have occasion to meet the Presidential candidate?

A. No. During this time I don't believe I saw either the Presidential candidate or the Vice-Presidential candidate, as a matter of fact. I think I remember that during the course of the campaign President Truman went to Texas and made a speech on the behalf of President Kennedy in which he spoke quite strongly against religious intolerance, and I did some work on that speech with President Truman.

Q. Were you at home in Washington on election night?

A. I'm sure I was. I don't have any actual recollection, but some time ago I decided the best place to be on election night is at home.

Q. Sir, unless you have something more to add in this period, we reach the period of the President's election and inauguration. During this time he made a number of appointments to his Cabinet. Orville Freeman was appointed on--at least the announcement was made on December 15. I believe your appointment followed without much delay--your appointment as Under Secretary. Would you like to give us any light on considerations that went into your appointment? When were you notified of it?

A. My recollection is that my appointment--or the intention to appoint me to Under Secretary--was announced on or about 20 January 1961. On account of other things going on about then, it did not create much of a stir in the public press. To go back, during the campaign I had no intention of going back into government service, nor any particular desire to do so. Actually, I had given it no thought. However, shortly after the election I made an automobile trip where I spent two full days driving an automobile with nothing much to occupy my mind, and I began to think about the possibility of going back into government service. For various and sundry reasons, I decided I would be interested in the possibility of being Secretary of Agriculture, which I was sure would be a surprising idea to everyone. Mainly because I thought it would be a surprising idea I thought it was not worth pursuing very vigorously, and I didn't pursue it.

Not very long after that Ted Sorensen and Mike Feldman asked me to visit with them for the purpose of telling them what I could about my experience as Special Counsel to the President during the Truman administration. We had a very good and, I hope, useful visit on that

subject. As the meeting was breaking up Sorensen asked me if I would care to come back into government service. I told him not really. He asked if I had given it any thought. I told him I had thought I would like to be Secretary of Agriculture but I didn't think that would make much sense to anybody so I had forgotten about it. Well, he agreed that it wouldn't make much sense to anybody, and he seemed to be willing to forget about it too. He did say that the President had already chosen the man he was going to appoint as Secretary of Agriculture--this was before any announcement had been made on it-- and he also referred to the fact that the President in his campaign had said that the Secretary of Agriculture would be appointed from the Middle West. That night, or the following night, I received a telephone call from Sorensen asking if I would be interested in the possibility of being Under Secretary of Agriculture. He said he was calling without making any offer or any commitment, but this matter had been discussed with the President-elect, and the President-elect had asked that he call me to see how I would feel about it. I learned later that this had come up for discussion with the President-elect and in the presence of Sorensen, Feldman, and David Bell, among others. David Bell had been my assistant when I was at the White House, and I feel sure he spoke well of me in this meeting. When I received the phone call I first said "no" and finally I said I would think about it for a few days, and I did. I talked to my wife about it. She was very reluctant indeed for me to agree to do anything of this kind, but finally she did consent and finally I called back and reported that if the President asked me to take the job I probably would take it.

Then began a somewhat interesting series of events. The President indicated through his staff that I would be his first choice personally but there was an understanding that this position would go to a Southerner. Since I had been in Washington for 25 years or more, the question might be raised whether I would be regarded as a Southerner for this purpose, and secondly the President-elect said that the man appointed to this position must be someone who was satisfactory to the new Secretary of Agriculture, Governor Freeman. The question was raised with me whether or not Southerners would support my appointment to this position. I should have had sense enough at that time not to start playing this game but I was intrigued by the answer to that question myself. So I volunteered to try to find out.

I began to let people know that I was under consideration for this job. It then developed that there were several rather active candidates from the South each with some supporters--fairly well fragmented since there were several of them. The other thing that became apparent was that the people from the South who were not already committed to someone else were generally willing to support my appointment with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I think it ended up that I was supported as first choice by perhaps a majority of people in prominent positions in the South--Senators, Members of the House, those who took interest and second choice of a good many other people.

I also had an opportunity to meet and talk with Governor Freeman about this. He indicated that he would be glad for me to be appointed to this position.

I didn't start out to seek this position, certainly not to make a contest for it, but I must say that once it became a contest, I didn't want to come out second. I was very generously supported by a good many people. I remember, for example, Senator Jordan of North Carolina spent a good part of his Christmas holidays that year on the telephone working to generate support for my appointment.

Q. One point, Mr. Murphy--the conversation with Sorensen as to your interest. Did he indicate at that time any of the considerations, other than purely political considerations, that entered into the President's mind--or the minds of the President's staff--regarding the kind of person, the kind of background required by the job of Under Secretary?

A. Not very much. I do recall that the President had some concern because the new Secretary of Agriculture was going to be a lawyer without any particular agricultural background. To also have an Under Secretary who was a lawyer without any particular agricultural background was a cause of concern to him. But I gather he decided other factors outweighed this particular problem and it is true and was then, whether it was talked about or not, that the kind of experience that is useful in this job is at least as much the kind you get in Washington in Government as it is a technical proficiency in agriculture.

Q. It has been suggested that the President may have even had in mind the fact that he wanted the leadership of the Agriculture Department to be in the hands of people who were not wedded to any particular school of thought or to any particular pressure group inside agriculture, but who were rather open minded...

A. I have no actual knowlege of that. I can only surmise that that is probably the case.

Q. One other question at this point. Had you known Orville Freeman previously, before you became so closely allied with him in this Department?

A. I had, but not very well. I had seen him in Minnesota several times when I had traveled through there with President Truman--usually on political trips. I had seen him at the Democratic convention in Los Angeles in 1960. There was a room back of the speakers' platform that was not assigned to any particular purpose, just for people to use from time to time--he insists he does not remember this story, but it's true-- I happened to wander in this room when he was sitting there working on his nominating speech for Senator Kennedy. I sat there with him for a while, and finally he asked if I'd leave him so he could work on his speech. When he was making this speech on teleprompter the teleprompter broke down. Without any warning he had to go off the cuff, which he did extremely well. I also happened back in this same room shortly after he finished delivering this speech, and he was sitting there still trying to recover from the shock of having the teleprompter go dead on him.

Q: When were you sworn in--when did you actually take over the job?

A. As I recall, I was actually sworn in sometime in March 1961, but I began work very shortly after the 20th of January as a consultant, I guess, on a day by day basis. I actually performed de facto the functions of Under Secretary although I was not authorized--legally authorized--to sign papers as Under Secretary.

Q. During those first days of the Kennedy administration at least two important things occurred that I can recall. These two important things happened involving the Department of Agriculture and agriculture generally. One was the President's executive order on food distribution. The other was the almost record breaking presentation, passing, and signing of the emergency feed grain bill. These appear to be the President's first official acts relating to agriculture. Would you like to elaborate on them, the circumstances, the events which surrounded these acts?

A. I don't have a great deal of first-hand knowledge about them. I think Secretary Freeman was largely responsible and instrumental in connection with getting the executive order on food signed so promptly. I believe also that this ties back to a promise the President had made when he was campaigning in West Virginia that if he were elected, he would do something about providing more and better food for needy persons. The feed grain program, I think we could say, was really a most remarkable achievement both in its conception, and in getting it passed by the Congress. I think that Willard Cochrane had a great deal to do with the conception of the program. A number of farm leaders, kind of an ad hoc advisory committee, were called to come in. I remember the Secretary personally got on the phone and called them, got them here in a very, very short period of time. They worked on this plan with Dr. Cochrane and the proposal was submitted to the Secretary. He adopted it, approved it, and recommended it to the President. He in turn adopted and approved it,

and it went to the Congress where the Secretary pushed it quite vigorously. It had a remarkable success and was, as I recall, the first major piece of legislation passed in the Kennedy administration.

Q. Now, in the Department work since the early days of the Kennedy administration, you have had a major role in the development and shaping of farm programs and agricultural legislation. I wonder if you would like to express your impressions of the general attitude of the President and his immediate staff toward agricultural problems generally? It has been suggested that his own background, the urban nature of the state he represented in Congress, didn't give him as keen an interest or deep an insight in the problems of American agriculture as he had into other problems?

A. Well, he did not have as much detailed knowledge about agricultural programs and agricultural problems as he did in some other fields. I think he understood the principal issues, and perhaps because he was not so cluttered up with detailed knowledge, was able to arrange the principal issues in a more orderly and meaningful fashion than some people who were more intimately involved with the subject. I think he did have a deep understanding of the basic issues in the field of agriculture, of the problems, the people in agriculture, a generally sympathetic attitude. I think he had something of an uncomfortable feeling about his lack of detailed knowledge of the field. This seemed to be the case from time to time.

His personal staff was pretty much oriented in the same way he was. Mike Feldman was the man he designated to be a kind of specialist in agricultural matters. We worked rather closely with him all during the Kennedy administration.

From time to time, as is usual and proper, differences of opinion developed between the Department of Agriculture and other agencies and departments of the government, including the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Bureau of the Budget. As I recall, without exception when these issues were not resolved by agreement and had to be taken to the President for decision and the Secretary took a strong stand, the President supported the Secretary of Agriculture. Sometimes he did it in just those terms: "Well, I'll go along with my Secretary of Agriculture."

Q. Could you give us one example of this kind?

A. Not without refreshing my recollection. I remember distinctly seeing it happen more than once sitting in the President's office.

Q. During this period you did perhaps have an opportunity to meet and consult with the President in your capacity as Under Secretary a number of times. Would you like to expand on that a little bit in terms of the impressions you got or the urgency of the matters you were discussing--the general attitude of the President.

Well, I went fairly often with the Secretary to see the President. I don't recall whether I went without the Secretary to see the President except to Cabinet meetings or the meetings called by the President when the Secretary was out of town.

The President was a man with a quick mind, with a vast amount of information, a very rapid reader--I think a very practical man. I did not know him at all well at the beginning of his administration. I got to know him better during his administration, and had an increasingly great respect and admiration for him as an individual, and as President.

Q. It's been said more than once that the Kennedy administration had its own special technique for dealing with problems of program development in a somewhat different way than other administrations. Did you have an opportunity to evaluate or appraise what you might call the modus operandi of the Kennedy administration--how ideas originated and came forward and were translated into action in the field of agriculture?

A. Well, not in the field of agriculture. What I was about to say was, that I did form some impressions of the operations of the Executive Office and its relationship to the departments and agencies in the Executive Branch of the government. My impression was that it operated to a very considerable extent on a personal basis as distinguished from an institutional basis.

A question that has been of considerable interest to me, since I worked at the White House, is the extent to which the White House is organized as an institution. It seemed to me, for example, that in the Eisenhower administration, particularly in the early days, it was over-organized. The President did not have enough to do with what went on in the President's office. It seemed to me that in the Kennedy administration perhaps it was a little bit too much dispersed. The President's relationships with individual members of his staff--this is the way he handled many problems, working on them personally with different members of his staff. If he had not been an extremely able man, and a prodigious worker, it seems to me he could not have kept the work going on that basis because without having the flow of work organized so that he would not get so many things that had to come to his personal attention he would have had a difficult time. I do think

it is a fact, though, that it worked extremely well. Whether or not I think it was organized, it worked extremely well, which is perhaps the best test of a system. He had some extremely able people on his staff and this had a lot to do with making it work.

In the field of agriculture the normal and traditional channels were followed pretty well, I think. Recommendations went to the Executive Offices of the President, through the Bureau of the Budget not only in connection with appropriations, but in connection with legislative programs. The regular legislative clearance machinery is operated by the Bureau of the Budget for the President. This takes care of the routine legislation which numerically, of course, is the big majority. On major program issues, the President would ask for recommendations from the Secretary of Agriculture from time to time and particularly in the fall of each year, when the administration's program for the next Congress was being made up. The program recommendations were considered by the White House staff, who regularly got comments from the Bureau of the Budget and Council of Economic Advisers as they should have, and by and large there was agreement among the staff agencies and the Department of Agriculture. Occasionally disagreements developed that were sharp enough and persistent enough that they had to be taken to the President for decision. This is the way it is supposed to work, and did.

- Q. Knowing that you have been a member of two administrations one can't avoid asking questions as to whether or not any comparisons or differences became apparent to you in the way the two administrations functioned --as a matter of governmental technique?

- A. Well, there are differences. I'm not sure how good of a position I am in to judge them because I'm in a different place in this administration. I don't believe I would be prepared at this time to generalize about that very much. I was, of course, much closer to President Truman. His personality, of course, was different than President Kennedy's, but I suspect there was more similarity than most people would think offhand. They both were quite decisive men which a President has to be.
- Q. Sometimes I gather that Presidents have to be prepared to make unpleasant decisions as well as pleasant ones?
- A. That's right. President Truman, when he had a serious or hard decision to make would first determine how much time he had in which to make it, and then he would see how much information he could get on the subject, how much advice he could get on the subject, and then he would make the decision on that basis as best he could. He was not given to looking backward particularly to worry about whether or not he had made the right decision. But like President Kennedy, he had a vast background in the field of government, a vast amount of knowledge about the problems and about the issues. I think it is true of both of these men that they had settled many many issues in their own minds over a period of years in the Congress, and when these issues came up again they pretty well knew how they felt about them.
- Q. Would you like to recall just a little bit about the shaping of the agricultural program?
- A. Well, before we get to that, since we're talking about President Truman and President Kennedy, I might tell this little story. In

September 1963, you'll recall Congress had under consideration a tax bill--a tax reduction bill--that had been recommended by President Kennedy and was a cardinal point in his legislative program. This bill would have provided for a very substantial reduction in taxes. About the time that the administration hoped to get this bill reported out by the Ways and Means Committee in the House, President Truman, who was in New York City, was reported in the newspapers as having said that he thought there ought not to be a tax cut until the budget was balanced. The budget was not balanced, and it was not anticipated that it would be before this tax cut was made.

I got a call about this--first I heard about it--from Ted Sorensen, as I recall, late one morning. Within an hour or two after that, I got a call from President Kennedy about it, and he was quite sorry that this had happened. He wanted to know if there was anything that could be done about it. He and I agreed finally that I would go to New York to see President Truman to see if anything could be done about it. Secretary Freeman was out of town at the time. Right away I called President Truman on the phone, made a date to see him in New York--actually, I believe, I was not able to get him on the phone so I left word with his son-in-law, Clifton Daniel, to tell him that I was coming. I got on a plane and flew up, getting there late in the afternoon. I went to his hotel and waited until he came home. I talked to him for an hour or two, and then came back and made a report to President Kennedy in the form of a memorandum dated September 10, 1963--it might be just as convenient if I referred to it. He asked me to tell President Kennedy:

1. He's terribly sorry he made the remark.
2. He wants to help President Kennedy all he can and would not for the world intentionally do anything to embarrass him or injure his program.
3. The comment in question was not planned, but just popped out in reply to a question of a newspaper reporter.
4. This is a matter of conviction with President Truman and he cannot take it back.
5. He would keep quiet on the subject in the future.
6. And finally, he would write to President Kennedy when he got home.

Now, incidentally, after President Kennedy's death, not very long after that, President Johnson sent me to see President Truman. In the course of my visit with him, the question of the tax cut came up again (you will recall this was finally enacted after President Kennedy's death). President Truman's position on this matter was still the same, and he was still willing to keep quiet about it.

- Q. During the early years of the Kennedy Presidency, the Department of Agriculture was heavily involved in the affairs of Billy Sol Estes, which became something of a national cause celebre. Would you like to talk just a little about the situation and your part in it, particularly your testimony on the Hill?
- A. I'd be glad to, particularly as it relates to President Kennedy and in this case the Attorney General, Bob Kennedy. First, in the regular course of my business, I had a number of routine contacts with Billie Sol Estes, who at that time, according to all the information we had, was a completely respectable and highly respected citizen of Texas. When it developed

later on that he was not the kind of man we thought he was, there was, as you know, a considerable investigation of his affairs, including the dealings he had had with the Department of Agriculture.

In a very early stage of these investigations we invited the Department of Justice to send the FBI into the Department of Agriculture and investigate thoroughly and completely every lead no matter where it might take them, from the bottom to the top of the Department of Agriculture. The FBI did this. We were investigated quite completely. Incidentally, according to my recollection, I personally was interviewed by the FBI 13 times in connection with this matter. Also, the Attorney General made available to the Department of Agriculture attorneys in the Department including one Assistant Attorney General who helped to get to the bottom of all the leads in this case.

Because of this, the Department of Justice and the Attorney General, and, I'm sure through him, the President, were thoroughly familiar with the things that had happened in the Department of Agriculture, including any part that I had had in the transactions with Estes. I think in this case that the Kennedys did just what they should have done. Now remember they did not know me very well personally. In fact, they had every reason to look carefully, thoroughly, and objectively at the facts to see the extent, if any, to which I might be involved in these Estes matters. Having looked at the facts, they found that I had not done anything that was subject to criticism. Having found that, they supported me completely and fully during the investigation of this matter by the Senate Committee. For example, I remember just the day before I was to go up to testify first, the Attorney General called me on the telephone and said: "Charlie, I

just want you to know before you go up there to testify that we know you're all right!" and I said to him, "Thank you, Bob, I'm glad to know it!" Then after I testified, the President himself called me on the phone and congratulated me on my testimony. He said that he thought I had made a very fine presentation. That's all that occurs to me on this.

Q. So as far as you know, the White House has been completely satisfied with the outcome of the Department's handling of the Estes matter, and of your own part in it?

A. They seem to be completely satisfied with my part in it. Incidentally, the then Vice-President, now President Johnson, complimented me quite highly from time to time after that about my testimony before the McClellan committee. For some reason the analogy that occurred to him was Mickey Mantle, and for several times after that he would see me and say something about Mickey Mantle!

Q. Now, Mr. Under Secretary, what was the last time that you can recall seeing President Kennedy, and what were the circumstances?

A. I do recall. Secretary Freeman and I went to see him on the 20th of November 1963 about regular business of the Department of Agriculture. Our appointment with him was about the middle of the day. When we had concluded the discussion of our regular business with him, he spoke of two matters which seemed to me to be of particular interest. The first was a reference to the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations. We had been having prior to that, and still are having, considerable difficulties with the Common Market in connection with these negotiations--real doubt if they want to use these negotiations to liberalize international trade. These difficulties have tried the patience of

all the government officials who have been concerned with these matters and President Kennedy, of course, was paying a great deal of attention to these trade negotiations personally.

- A. At the conclusion of our discussion President Kennedy said some things that were somewhat surprising to me and, I thought, of sufficient significance so that not very long after his death I wrote a memorandum to President Johnson reporting what President Kennedy had said on November 20. It was, first, that President Kennedy was--to use his words--not so stuck on the Kennedy Round of negotiations and that if we could not get a good bargain out of the Kennedy Round of negotiations he thought we should make no bargain at all.

Second, he wondered if we had not made a mistake in encouraging the creation of the Common Market in the beginning.

And third, he thought it probably was fortunate for us that Britain had not gotten into it.

These thoughts were, I think, somewhat divergent from what had been the main current of thought within the Administration until quite recently and that is why I thought they were, and still think they are, of particular significance as indicating the frame of mind that President Kennedy had reached after going through some years of these difficult negotiations.

One other thing that, I think, throws some light on his personality... As we were leaving, the President said to Secretary Freeman and me that we should wait a minute because he had something he wanted to show us. He went into the next room which was the office of his personal secretary, Mrs. Lincoln, and came back with a clipping from the New York Times of that day, or the day before, in which it happened that there

were two articles just right next to each other. The headline of the first said "Cash Dividends Setting A Record Pace" and then there were a number of specific instances where leading corporations were declaring extra dividends, splitting up stocks, and things of that kind. And then in the adjoining column was an article headed "Economic Policy of the U. S. Assailed;" and Speakers at Foreign Trade Parley Voice Dissents." And then the body of that text told about how various people in the business world were attacking the economic policies of the Administration. So, here we had something that in my experience is not unusual, incidentally, that the business world is attacking the Democratic administration at the same time they are enjoying unusual prosperity.

- Q. The President very definitely found this amusing and this is why he called it to your attention.
- A. That's right. He was laughing about it, and wanted to share his fun with somebody.
- Q. Well, now, before we close off, Mr. Murphy, I'd like to ask you just in general if there's anything you want to add in the way of special calls from the White House or any emergency situations that might have occurred--
- A. I don't think of anything that would not be reflected pretty well in the files. The President did call me on the phone from time to time for miscellaneous reasons. I don't remember any special calls, any special reasons that he called me.
- Q. Would you like to say a word about the cabinet meetings that you attended?

- A. Well, I did attend cabinet meetings from time to time when Secretary Freeman was absent from Washington. I don't recall that there were any of unusual significance. There were a number of them where budget matters were discussed, where the legislative program was discussed. I remember one where the tax bill was discussed, in particular, and where the President indicated that the passage of the tax reduction bill would be a very major item in his legislative program and he wanted everyone in the Executive Branch of the government to give support to the effort to get it passed by Congress.
- Q. In your judgment the Cabinet meetings were mainly focused on broad questions of policy, I suppose.
- A. In my judgment, based not only on the Kennedy administration but on the Truman and Johnson administrations as well and what I know about others, Cabinet meetings are largely ceremonial occasions. It is most too large a group to really come to grips with important problems and actually reach decisions. In recent years another group has been established that to a considerable extent, I think, replaces the cabinet in national security matters and perhaps foreign affairs matters as well. This is the National Security Council. It is about the same size, I believe, as the cabinet and there's a considerable amount of overlapping. But there's not complete duplication. Some Cabinet members are not on the National Security Council and some members of the National Security Council are not members of the Cabinet. President Kennedy did use the Cabinet from time to time to get expressions of viewpoints from members of the Cabinet. Certainly no major decision was made on the basis of discussion at any Cabinet meeting that I attended.

Q. So the business of the various departments and agencies of the Government which require White House decision is conducted not through the instrument of the Cabinet meeting but through the instrument of the White House staff and--

A. And special meetings. Now, I have been to--although the Secretary of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture are not represented on the National Security Council--we have been represented at special meetings that the President called from time to time to consider special problems. One, for example, was the sale of wheat to the Russians. You remember this was an active question in the fall of 1963. In this case the President did call in a number of Cabinet members, a number of agency heads that are not Cabinet members and had a rather lengthy and full-dress discussion of this question going into the pros and cons, the implications and, I think, to a considerable extent he did use this meeting as the occasion when he made up his mind as to what to do about it. I think this was a meeting where he actually reached a decision to go ahead and authorize the sale of wheat to the Russians. It lasted more than an hour, I think. Perhaps as much as two hours.

Q. There were other occasions of this kind where he would on a specific question call--

A. That is true. Now in this case members of his White House staff, people in the different Departments that were interested--the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, the Treasury Department, had given a lot of study to this question. The staff work was pretty well completed and had been quite extensive. So it was ready and ripe for a Presidential decision. He had been

aware of the staff work as it was going on. This was not a completely new and fresh question to him at that time. So this was, I think, the normal, orderly and proper way for a Presidential decision of importance to be made. You have this culminating process where the staff work is brought together, the issues are laid out for the President for his final review and he makes the decision, and in this case did.

Q. Was there dissent among the various people at the table at this particular meeting? Were there several points of view expressed, or was the general consensus that we should do it?

A. My recollection is that there was general agreement on the main proposition. There were perhaps different points of view expressed by subsidiary questions. But I don't recall that anyone recommended against the sale of the wheat to the Russians. There was more doubt about the Congressional reaction and the Congressional acceptance of this than anything else that I recall. I believe there was no division of opinion about the merits of the question. And I think it was generally agreed and accepted that the overriding consideration should be the effect on the foreign policy of the United States. That is, foreign policy consideration was put ahead of purely economic considerations. And this was not a decision that was made simply because it was a good thing economically, although it was a good thing economically. It did help with the balance of payments problem. It did help with the budgetary problems of the United States. But the decision was made primarily on the basis that it would be a good thing for foreign policy reasons.

Q. Mr. Murphy, were you in Washington on the 22nd of November, the Friday on which President Kennedy was assassinated? Would you tell us a little bit about how the word came to you and the actions that were taken in the Department by yourself and others?

A. I was in Washington. Secretary Freeman was on a plane en route to Japan with most of the other members of the Cabinet. I was Acting Secretary at that time. I returned from lunch on Friday the 22nd and after I got to my office returned a phone call that I had received from Ray Ioanes, the Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service. When I spoke to him he said that he had just gotten word that the President and/or the Governor of Texas had been shot, and he was so upset about it that he did not want to talk to me about business at that time. From then on we began, of course, to follow very closely reports that came in by radio and television as to what had happened. There was a considerable amount of confusion, and it was an hour or two before it was definitely established in the news reports that President Kennedy had been shot and was dead.

I wondered then if first we should not close the Department of Agriculture as a mark of respect. I called the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission to ask his advice on that matter. He said that he thought perhaps something should be done, but it should be done on a uniform basis throughout the Government and he would consult with some of his colleagues and let me know what we should do. He called back not very long after that and said it had been decided that the Government offices should close two hours early that day as a mark of respect to President Kennedy. So the Department of Agriculture was, along with other Government agencies, closed early.

During the latter part of the afternoon I received a call from the White House asking that I come to the White House about 6:00 p.m. to go out to the airport to meet the plane that was bringing the President's body back to Washington. I did go to the White House, and took Tom Hughes with me. We went to the East Wing where we had been asked to go and there were assembling representatives from other Departments. Since most of the Cabinet was on this plane on the way to Japan, most of the Departments were represented by Under Secretaries. I remember that Averell Harriman was there. Franklin Roosevelt was there. Arthur Goldberg, Supreme Court Justice, came in with Mrs. Goldberg. This group waited there and from time to time got reports as to the plans for meeting the plane. These plans were changed from time to time and at one point we got word that it had been decided, by whom I do not know, that we should not go to the airport to meet the plane. Justice Goldberg and Under Secretary Roosevelt left to talk to someone and came back later with word that the plans had been changed again and we were to go out to the airport, Andrews Field. And we did. There were two or three helicopters that were available and took us out. There were other people who did not have space on the helicopters that went by car. Tom Hughes was among those who drove out, as I recall, in the Secretary's car. He reached the airport before the plane arrived with the President's body in it.

We all waited there, standing outdoors on the ramp at the airport. The plane did arrive with President Kennedy's body, Mrs. Kennedy, President and Mrs. Johnson on the plane. The casket with the President's body was taken off the plane. Later President and Mrs. Johnson got off

the plane, spoke to a few people in the group, and he made a brief statement at the airport. Then he entered one of the helicopters and came back to Washington. Our group returned to Washington in helicopters, as I recall, and went to the White House and from there went home.

In the meantime, this plane with the Cabinet members on it had been turned around, was returning to Washington and it reached Andrews Field not very long after midnight that same night. And Tom Hughes and I went out to meet the Secretary at that time. I don't think of anything else that is not generally known in connection with this time.

Q. The next day was a Saturday, and as I understand it, you spent the day, or part of it, at the office.

A. The next three days, I think, the Secretary and I spent most of the time in the office, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, doing what we could to help with the problems we had, doing what we could to prepare for a transition from one President to another. Business, very critical business, had to go on. We just had to do the best we could.

Q. Thank you.

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