

Sidney L. Christie, Oral History Interview—7/16/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Sidney L. Christie
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Biographical Note

Christie, a judge on the Eighth Circuit Court of West Virginia, discusses the 1960 Democratic primary campaign in West Virginia, and John F. Kennedy's impact on West Virginia during his presidency, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

SIDNEY L. CHRISTIE

July 16, 1964

Keystone, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: This interview is being recorded in the Federal Building, Bluefield, West Virginia, July 16, 1964, with Judge Sidney L. Christie. Judge Christie has already prepared both a long statement which he gave to the press after the West Virginia Primary, as well as a letter he wrote to his children, which will accompany the tape. These documents cover a great many items that would ordinarily be covered in this taped interview; therefore, the Judge has said that he is willing to discuss in depth some of the individual items which are already covered in the documents which will accompany this tape.

Judge Christie, as a seasoned West Virginian, why did you feel that the President's [John F. Kennedy] religion would not be a factor if he decided to enter the West Virginia Primary?

CHRISTIE: This issue was discussed by the President and me only on one occasion, October 11, 1959, in the lobby of the Daniel Boone Hotel, in Charleston, following a speech that he made there to the Young Democratic Club of Kanawha County. He inquired on that occasion if I felt that his religion would be a bar to his running in the West Virginia Primary, and I recall distinctly telling him this: I said, "Senator, I can best answer your question with this example. A few months ago my daughter [Dixie Christie] approached me to obtain my consent to her marrying a Catholic boy. They met while they both were in West Virginia University. I am a Protestant, and my daughter was a

Protestant. The young man that she proposed to marry was from Hinton, West Virginia, and was a devout Catholic. I told my daughter, Dixie, that I would give my consent to her marrying a Catholic boy provided she would embrace his religion, that from my experience over many years in practicing law and dealing with domestic problems, I had found that the matter of division of religion, in a household, was not good. She was willing to do

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this, and in due course they were married in the Catholic Church. Now, if the same proposition had been put by me to my father and mother 30 years previous, I was convinced that their answer would not have been the same as my answer was to my daughter, and that the period of 30 years since the campaign of Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith], when Bishop Cannon [James Cannon, Jr.] injected religion into the campaign against Governor Smith—this period of 30 years—had wrought a tremendous change in the thinking and tolerance of the American people, and I felt that if he did not try to evade the issue—if he brought the matter out in the open in the very beginning so that a whispering campaign would not be started against him—I saw no substantial bar in his religion toward his making a successful campaign in West Virginia."

YOUNG: Judge Christie, on page 13 of your letter to your children, you tell the story of an event in which there were references to the fact that Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] perhaps was not as astute in summing up the West Virginia political situation as were the Kennedys. Would you elaborate on the difference in the nature of organizational support sought by both Senator Humphrey and then by Senator Kennedy?

CHRISTIE: Well, that has reference to the approach that each candidate and their managers took to entering the West Virginia Primary. As I recall, when Senator Humphrey came to the state, he contacted and placed his campaign in the hands of the principal labor leaders of the state. That, in my opinion, was his biggest mistake because while labor is strong and effective in certain parts of the state, the record over the years show that they had not been too successful in putting over their candidates. In contrast, when Senator Kennedy and his forces came into the state, they approached and made arrangements with the established political leaders in the various counties, and I think it was just a question of the Kennedy campaign being conducted through the regular political channels and through the regular political organizations in the state, whereas the Humphrey campaign was more or less handled through labor leader circles.

YOUNG: Judge, you've also indicated in your letter that many people felt and realized at the time that perhaps a vote for Senator Humphrey was really just a vote for someone else. Would you, on the other hand, be able to indicate any difference between the campaigns of the two Senators in terms of political philosophy, promises,

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platforms, that sort of thing, did they really differ in terms of future proposals either for West Virginia or for the nation as a whole?

CHRISTIE: No, I couldn't say there was any marked difference in their philosophies, and in the approach they took in reference to issues. The effect each had on the electorate was quite different because most of the political leaders realized early that Senator Humphrey had no chance at all of ever becoming president of the United States at that time; they suspected that he was fronting for another candidate, and the political leaders were faced with the proposition of going with a real and bona fide candidate who had some chance of becoming president of the United States, and going with one who was more or less a synthetic candidate and had no chance of ever becoming president.

YOUNG: You would say, then, that the campaign revolved around the possibilities of real victory, organization, and personalities, and hot issues then might be the fourth item on the list?

CHRISTIE: I would say that, yes sir.

YOUNG: Well, Judge, you played a very prominent role in bringing Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr. into the state of West Virginia, and his work was particularly significant in your section of the state, I believe. Could you comment on the special appeal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr., and why he was so effective?

CHRISTIE: I think the real appeal of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. stemmed from his relationship to his father. This area of the state, prior to 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president, was dominated by the coal operators, and they also dominated politics in this area of the state. With the advent of President Roosevelt, he made it possible through legislation for the coal miners to organize and to bargain collectively with their employers and, as a result, soon thereafter most of the coal miners, practically all of them, changed their political affiliation from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party. Up until 1933 in my county, McDowell, for example, it was overwhelmingly Republican, but after the right to organize was granted, following the election of President Roosevelt, then the picture changed to where it became overwhelmingly Democratic and has remained so ever since.

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YOUNG: Judge, you pointed out a political parallel in terms of the Roosevelt name between the '30s and then the early '60s, is there also a parallel in the economic conditions between the '30s and the late '50s in McDowell County or in southern West Virginia?

CHRISTIE: Not exactly. All through the '30s the economic situation was bad, there's no

doubt about that, but there was hope. While the mines only operated a day or two a week and there was great distress in the coal fields in that period, nevertheless everyone felt that eventually things would be better. The men were still there and the coal mines were still there, the only thing lacking was sufficient work. Comparing the situation now with the situation then, the difference is this—now, by reason of mechanization, there is no hope in the minds of the unemployed that they will ever become reemployed in the coal mines regardless of how good the coal business is. The production of coal in McDowell County, and the coal fields in general at this time, is perhaps as much or more than it ever has been, but it is being produced by machinery rather than manpower, so it doesn't make any difference now if production stepped up 50%, it wouldn't employ any appreciable larger number of men.

YOUNG: Then the nature of Senator Kennedy's campaign had to be more than one of just talking about getting more men back into the coal mines. What did Senator Kennedy propose as a solution to this problem during the Primary campaign?

CHRISTIE: He proposed that if he were elected president, he was going to help West Virginia, he was going to help the coal mining areas, and he did after becoming president, do everything within his power to help the situation. One of the first things he did after becoming president, I believe it was the first official act after assuming office, was the putting into effect the Food Stamp Program.

YOUNG: Judge, before we started this interview, you told me a rather amusing story of the fact that after the primary victory in McDowell County you were so besieged by reporters that you didn't get any of your regular work done because of press interviews, and, as a result, you prepared a press release of your own which explained your reasons, at least, for believing that Senator Kennedy had such an outstanding victory in McDowell County; then I think you mentioned that you had some chat with President Kennedy about this. Would you tell that at this time?

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CHRISTIE: Yes, there were a great many reporters from newspapers and magazines in the county, not only during the 1960 Primary campaign, but afterwards. During the campaign many of them called at my office and talked the campaign over, and I told everyone of them that, in my opinion, Senator Kennedy was going to beat Senator Humphrey in McDowell County. They invariably said that was contrary to all other information they had received. The basis of my statement to that effect stemmed from the fact that I had made it a point like any political leader should do to sample public opinion, and by that process I had determined that public opinion was definitely in favor of Senator Kennedy. Now, one of the reporters that I talked with was Mr. Peter Lisagor [Peter L. Lisagor], Washington correspondent for the *Chicago Daily Mail*. Peter Lisagor was raised in Keystone. After his father died his mother moved the family to Chicago, and I knew him when he was a young man. I went to great pains to explain to Peter why I felt Senator

Kennedy was going to win in McDowell County and also in the state. That was on the occasion when Senator Kennedy was speaking at a rally in Welch on May 3, 1960. I learned later from Peter, when he returned to Welch in 1961, I believe on a visit, that he prepared a story for his paper predicting that Senator Kennedy would win the West Virginia Primary, but later on he got cold feet and was afraid to send it in. He explained that that was the biggest blunder he had ever made since he had been a newspaper reporter—that he had a scoop there and didn't recognize it.

YOUNG: What was President's reaction to your press release? I think you said that he found out about it or you sent a copy to him.

CHRISTIE: One of the reporters that came to see me after the primary was Mr. Edward T. Folliard, a reporter accredited to the White House and who writes for the *Washington Post*. He did an article on the West Virginia Primary, and he told me that the news release, which I had prepared and given to the newspaper people, had reached the hands of Senator Kennedy, and the Senator had gotten a great kick out of the fact that "Sid Christie had become a celebrity."

YOUNG: Judge Christie, since you spent a good deal of time with the Senator when he was campaigning in West Virginia, do you have any particular anecdotes or memories of humorous experiences that happened during the campaign?

CHRISTIE: The only one I can think of, would be the fact that I suppose I'm the only one in West Virginia who had to buy him a shirt. This came about by the fact that when he came to

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Welch to speak at a fund-raising dinner in 1959, he came from Bluefield, in the car of Mr. Laurence E. Tierney [Laurence E. Tierney, Jr.]. Mr. Tierney's chauffeur did the driving and put Senator Kennedy's baggage in the rear of the car. After we arrived in Welch the chauffeur got lost or disappeared for some reason, and when the time came for us to get the Senator's baggage out of the car, we couldn't find the chauffeur. The Senator's shirt was soiled after an afternoon of handshaking and visiting around Welch, and he wanted to put on a new shirt, or a clean shirt, before going out to the dinner meeting that evening. So since we couldn't find the chauffeur to get his baggage, I went down to one of the stores in Welch and bought him an Arrow shirt.

YOUNG: As an observer of the West Virginia scene following President Kennedy's Inauguration, do you think that the people of West Virginia felt that President Kennedy kept his promises? Were they pleased with the New Frontier policies, domestic policies?

CHRISTIE: I think they generally were. I think they all realized that the President, during

the short period that he was in office, did everything within his power to help West Virginia in any way that he could reasonably do so. I have in mind the north-south highway additional allocation which came about after he became president and for which he was largely responsible. He received a great deal of criticism from other states by reason of increasing West Virginia's share of the allocation. He also endeavored to get new industries into West Virginia and did do so in some instances, but in those cases he ran into many problems, one of which was the opposition that arose in another state from trying to get an industry to move into West Virginia. If he had not met his tragic death, I'm quite confident that he would have been successful in having established in West Virginia a major new industry—the electronics industry. That was the primary purpose of my visit to him and his associates at the White House on January 16, 1963. We were dealing with the Otis Elevator Company on the question of establishing an electronics industry in West Virginia, and it had progressed to the point where it was determined to place the mother-plant at Huntington and that the first satellite-plant would be located in McDowell County. The Vice President of the Otis Elevator Company came to interview me in Welch, then a man representing one of their engineering branches, came to see me, and the matter was progressing and apparently satisfactorily, and I feel confident that had it not been for the President's death that something worthwhile would have come of it.

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YOUNG: Judge Christie, how would you evaluate from the standpoint of four years later the effect of the West Virginia Primary on West Virginia itself as a state in its relationship to the rest of the country?

CHRISTIE: First of all, let me say that the President was very grateful for the help that he received from West Virginia, and he never forgot nor overlooked an opportunity to let everyone know that he appreciated what West Virginia had done for him. This, in my opinion, showed a fine trait in the man. Now as to the publicity he brought to West Virginia, I would say it was good. Up until the West Virginia Primary, West Virginia was little known in many parts of the country, and frequently she was associated with the state of Virginia. So after the great amount of public light that was brought to West Virginia by reason of the 1960 Primary and the Kennedy-Humphrey campaign here, and the frequent references to West Virginia that the President made continuously thereafter in the context of his gratitude for what the fine people of West Virginia had done for him—I think it identified West Virginia in the eyes of the whole country as being a state and being a people that was tolerant, understanding, and was capable of taking a situation, judging it on its merits and coming up with a just answer.

YOUNG: Well, do you think that Senator Kennedy left any legacy of political awareness in West Virginia, any residue that remained here separate from the national implications that you have mentioned?

CHRISTIE: President Kennedy remained very popular in my area of the state and I assume

that his popularity continues in other areas. I notice from this recent Primary election that many candidates seemed to think that it was beneficial to connect their candidacies with the name of John F. Kennedy.

YOUNG: Judge, what do you really feel was the real worth of President Kennedy—the worth of a man?

CHRISTIE: In my time I have been associated with, and have come in contact with, a great many people in public life—especially people seeking public office—and I do not believe that in all my experiences that I ever was associated with any individual who impressed me as Senator Kennedy did. His warm personality, his dynamic energy, and his ability to communicate with you, all proved to me early in my acquaintance with him that he was a great man.

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At this time I would like to give a few excerpts from a speech I made at Welch, West Virginia on May 3, 1960, when I introduced Senator Kennedy to a campaign rally on that occasion, which pretty well answers your question:

(1)“He is a man of demonstrated courage, energy and fortitude. In our body politic, it is not difficult to find men who can see what is wrong; but it is most difficult to find men with the courage and skill to do something about it.”

(2)“He is a man, while born to great wealth, has dedicated his life to public service—both in war and in peace.”

(3)“We are now in a period of history that calls for the best we have. The problems that confront us, both at home and abroad, are awesome and frightening. They cannot be met by the timid and the meek; they call for bold and courageous and intelligent leadership. In times past, when great crises arose, the exigencies of the period produced men equal to the occasion, and the innate instinct of the American people in turning to them at the proper time is a paradox of our history. I have in mind men of the caliber of Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt [Theodore Roosevelt], Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The great problems of their day called for greatness, and they were great. The problems of today are great, and Jack Kennedy is great. He has vision, he has indomitable courage, he has all the qualities of a great leader; he has that certain ‘something’ that draws people to him; that gives them faith and confidence. Yes, he is truly the man of the hour.”

His subsequent nomination and election, his program to the Congress and the invigorating influence he brought to bear not only in this country, but throughout the world demonstrate very clearly, I think, that on that evening of May 3, 1960, in the County Court House at Welch, my introductory remarks were remarkably descriptive of the man and foretold rather accurately the imprint he would leave on history. Regrettable, indeed, is the

fact that he was not permitted to exert his full potential for the benefit of mankind everywhere.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Keystone, W. Va.

November 26, 1963

Dear Dixie, Virginia and Clark:

Now that the life and career of President John F. Kennedy are over, I thought you might like me to chronicle the events that brought us together and the friendship that developed between us.

I first met Mr. Kennedy on May 9, 1959. Our Democratic organization in McDowell County decided to stage a "Fund-raising Dinner" in honor of former President Harry S. Truman's 75th Birthday, and on February 14, 1959, I wrote Senators Randolph and Byrd to assist us in getting a suitable personality of national reputation as principal speaker for the occasion, suggesting to them the names of Governor Adlai E. Stevenson and Senator John F. Kennedy for the role. In response to this letter I received a telegram from Senator Robert C. Byrd on February 20, 1959, as follows:

"I am pleased to inform you that Senator Kennedy has graciously agreed to speak in McDowell County. The Senator wishes to delay until next week the setting of a definite date. I am sure you will want to write to him direct and supply him with all information necessary."

Through subsequent correspondence the date for the dinner was arranged for May 9, 1959, in the auditorium of the Browns Creek Elementary School at Welch. I, along with others from our organization, met the Senator at Mercer County Airport near Princeton and on the way to Welch the topic of conversation was of a general nature concerning our area of the state.

He did not give me on this occasion any indication as I can recall that he had presidential aspirations.

The dinner was a great success. The attendance was in excess of 1,000. Senator Byrd could not attend because of a prior speaking engagement in Clarksburg, but Senator Randolph was able to come and introduced Senator Kennedy.

On May 20, 1959, I received the following letter from Senator Kennedy:

"Dear Sid:

"The job you did for me in West Virginia was nothing short of phenomenal, I think. The fact that you packed in the largest group ever to be served in the school is a real sample of your leadership and ability. It certainly left me with a warm feeling for Southern West Virginia.

"You know that I am deeply grateful for your help, Sid, and I hope we can get together again soon.

"With every good wish, I am

"Sincerely,
John."

I next talked with Senator Kennedy in the lobby of the Daniel Boone Hotel, Charleston, the morning of October 11, 1959, the day following the "State Democratic Dinner", held the previous evening, at which he was the principal speaker. Mrs. Kennedy was with him during our discussion and this was my first acquaintance with her.

On this occasion he told me he was seriously considering trying for the presidency, and asked my opinion as to the possible effect his religion might have on his candidacy in West Virginia. I told him that I felt a great change had occurred in the country since Al Smith's catholic religion was used so effectively against him by Bishop Cannon and others and that I did not believe the fact that he was a catholic would be an absolute barrier against him carrying West Virginia if the matter was handled forthrightly, open and above board, so as to cut the ground from under a "whispering campaign" before it got started.

I have since heard from a reliable source close to the President that this encouragement on my part considerably influenced his ultimate decision to enter the race.

Following this conversation, on November 10, 1959, he wrote me as follows:

"Dear Sid:

"Jackie and I certainly enjoyed seeing you in Charleston during our visit there last month. I was impressed with the dinner which the Young Democrats put on for me in Charleston but I shall never forget the marvelous meeting you arranged in Welch.

"I wish I could see you more often because I value your judgment and want to stay in touch with you. You may be sure that I will always welcome your comments and suggestions.

"I expect to return to West Virginia in 1960 and hope to see you again when I do.

"With every good wish, I am

"Sincerely,
John F. Kennedy."

Then on December 28, 1959, I received the following letter:

"Dear Sid:

"Because of your past interest and friendship, I am sending the attached statement to you for your information and to solicit any thoughts you might have concerning it. I would appreciate your comments and suggestions and would be very grateful for your support.

"With kindest regards, I am

"Sincerely yours,
John F. Kennedy."

The enclosure referred to was an announcement by him, to be made January 2, 1960, of his candidacy for the presidency. While I am sure I replied to this letter, I have been unable to find a copy.

Between the closing of the Wisconsin Primary and the beginning of the West Virginia Primary campaign, I received a telephone^{call}/at about 11 o'clock P. M. our time from Senator Kennedy. He was somewhere in Arizona at the time. It seems that after the close of the Wisconsin Primary he flew to the West Coast and was on his way back to West

Virginia to plunge into the campaign here. The purpose of the call was to arrange a meeting with me in Charleston. I could not attend, because of court engagements, but had a couple of trusted friends to meet him in my place. It was a strategy meeting to hammer out plans for the conduct of his West Virginia campaign. By that time Senator Hubert Humphreys, who opposed Senator Kennedy in the Wisconsin Primary, had also entered the West Virginia Primary against him, and the principal labor unions had thrown their support to Senator Humphreys. This may have been due to the fact that Senator Kennedy had only recently served on the Senate Committee that investigated corruption in labor unions, principally the teamsters, to which his brother, Robert, was counsel, or to the fact that he had steered through the senate the Labor-Management Reform Act.

Some days later, perhaps around the middle of April, 1960, he accompanied a motorcade through McDowell County, speaking at every town. I met the motorcade at Keystone, where he made a speech from the top of an automobile. After I had introduced him to the townsfolk, he went on to Bluefield where he was to make a television appearance that evening. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., Kenneth O'Donnell, who later became his appointment secretary in the White House, and Pierre Salinger, among others, were with him on this occasion.

He next returned to the county on May 3, 1960, just a week before the primary election, to attend a Rally at the Court House at Welch which I had arranged for him. I introduced him to the packed house on this occasion in these words:

"It is a rare privilege that is accorded me on this occasion. It is a privilege I little dreamed would ever come my way --- of introducing one who may well become the next President of the United States.

"I do not feel equal to the occasion.

"Our guest is a great American. You have come here to hear him; not to hear me. I shall therefore make my remarks brief.

"I came to know Jack Kennedy for the first time a little over a year ago when he came here as guest speaker at a Democratic Fund Raising Dinner.

"We then little suspected that he would return so soon. We are nevertheless most happy to have him do so. He came then to help us; he returns now for us to help him.

"Many things could be said of Jack Kennedy: what he stands for, what he has done, what he proposes to do. I do not propose to dwell on these here. Reams of newsprint and millions of feet of television tape have been devoted to him since he was last here.

"Suffice it to say, that he is a man who has served his country well -- both in war and in peace;

"He is a man, while born to great wealth, has dedicated his life to public service;

"He is a man of demonstrated courage, energy and fortitude.

"In our body politic, it is not difficult to find men who can see what is wrong; but it is most difficult to find men with the courage and skill to do something about it.

"His fearless leadership on the Senate Committee for the Investigation of Corruption in Labor Unions; and his skill in steering through the senate the Labor-Management Reform Act will serve to demonstrate my point. Many saw the need for both, but it took real courage for one in political life to champion them. Jack Kennedy had that courage. The country is the better for it.

"We are now in a period of history that calls for the best we have. The problems that confront us, both at home and abroad, are awesome and frightening.

"They cannot be met by the timid and the meek; they cannot be swept under the rug much longer; they call for bold and courageous and intelligent leadership.

"In the past, in times of great crises, the exigencies of the period produced men equal to the occasion, and the innate instinct of the American people in turning to them at the proper time is a paradox of our history. I have in mind men of the calibre of Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"The great problems of their day called for greatness, and they were great.

"The problems of today are great, and Jack Kennedy is great.

"He has vision, he has indomitable courage, he has all the qualities of a great leader; he has that certain 'something' that draws people to him; that gives them faith and confidence. Yes, he is truly the man of the hour.

"This great throng and the warm reception he has received while in our county must be very gratifying to him. I have told him that the people of McDowell County are broad-minded and liberal in their thinking; that they are willing to accord to others that which they would have accorded to them; that his candidacy here will be judged on its merits - not on the basis of bigotry and intolerance.

"I am sure you join me in these sentiments.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the great Senator from Massachusetts and the next President of the United States ...

JACK KENNEDY"

By this time in the campaign, he had developed laryngitis, because of which it was necessary that he cut his speech short. His brother, Teddy, was with him on this occasion and took up the slack.

From the Court House I took him to a private reception in the Community Room of the Appalachian Power Building, which I had arranged so that he might meet some two hundred people, republicans as well as democrats, who were there by invitation. After he had had time to mingle with them for about thirty minutes, I ushered him through the kitchen and out the back door, so that he could go to his hotel room for rest. He was just about all in; but somehow he managed to continue the campaign at other places in the state until the campaign was over.

Seven days later, on May 10, 1960, he received in McDowell County 13,896 votes to Humphrey's 2,720, which, it turned out, was by far the best showing for him of any county in the state.

He received the primary election returns in the Charleston Television Studio, and, according to a letter I received February 25, 1961, from Charles G. Peters, Jr., of Charleston, who spearheaded his campaign in Kanawha County, the Senator made an unsuccessful attempt to call me election night. Mr. Peters' letter in this regard being:

"I know the President called or tried to call you that night - which was an indication of how important we thought your support was."

After the President's death, referring to the primary election night of May 10, 1960, Harry Hoffman, Editor of the Charleston Gazette, who was in the Studio with Senator Kennedy as the returns came in, in an editorial dated November 24, 1963, had this to say:

"The man who felt a few days earlier that he could not get more than 40 per cent of the primary vote found he had carried the state by better than 60 per cent. And his victory in McDowell County, a key county in any West Virginia primary, was overwhelming.

" 'That Sid Christie is fantastic,' he said to one sitting beside him, 'utterly fantastic.' "

John M. Bailey, of Hartford, Connecticut, at the time of the West Virginia primary campaign, was the Chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee of his State, and who later became Chairman of the Democratic National Committee after Senator Kennedy was nominated at Los Angeles, came to see me twice during the primary campaign here. He was the most experienced politician that I came in contact with from the Kennedy camp. He was working for the Senator, but, being a stranger in West Virginia, he had to rely upon others for information. I gave him a list of people to see in southern West Virginia and he later wrote on February 22, 1960, in part, as follows:

"Let me say that wherever I went everybody spoke the highest of you and I only hope that some day I will have as fine a reputation as you have throughout West Virginia."

After the primary, on May 13, 1960, Mr. Bailey also wrote, extending his thanks and the thanks of Senator Kennedy for the help I had been to them, and inviting me to attend the Los Angeles Convention to be held in July. Up to that time I had given it no thought at all.

Mr. Bailey wrote me again on May 16, 1960, telling me that if the Senator was nominated and elected, to rest assured that I would have an invitation to the Inaugural, and that we would "celebrate that event together."

After the November election, fearing that Mr. Bailey might overlook the matter, I wrote him on November 18, to which he replied on November 28, 1960:

"Is not this a strange coincidence. When I played golf with Steve Smith, who is Jack Kennedy's brother-in-law, I referred to the fact that the one thing I had to make sure to remember was that I had told Sid Christie that he would receive an invitation to the Inauguration. You can rest assured that you will.

"You know, looking back, I am sure that my visit to you in your upstairs office was one of the most important things that happened in the entire campaign. The job you did in your county on primary day and again on election day was without parallel in the United States."

The general election vote, referred to in the above letter, in McDowell County, was: Kennedy 19,481 - Nixon 6,449, which, like the primary vote, surpassed in majority any county in the state.

The promise was kept, and I in due course received choice tickets to the Inauguration and to the Inaugural Ball, but, as you know, your mother and I were unable to attend because of the sudden illness of Clark with appendicitis.

While at the convention in Los Angeles, Senator Kennedy invited Mr. Harry Hoffman, Editor of Charleston Gazette, Mr. Robert P. McDonough, of Parkersburg, who headed the Kennedy for President Committee in West Virginia, and myself, to his private quarters in the Biltmore Hotel in the late afternoon of Wednesday, July 13, 1960, where he told us in confidence that he had iron-clad assurances of enough delegates to

nominate him on the first ballot. He left his suite with us and we all rode to the street floor in a private elevator. In the excitement of the occasion, I forgot my straw hat, not missing it until we got on the street. I never tried to go back for it. Mr. Hoffman wrote an account of this meeting in the Thursday, July 14, 1960, edition of his paper, the part thereof pertaining to me being:

"On one of those quick back tracks to the Biltmore, Kennedy had a word with Sidney Christie, the head of the Democratic organization in McDowell County, where Kennedy scored such an overwhelming victory in the West Virginia primary.

" 'The most interviewed man in America' said Kennedy with a wide smile to Christie. He had reference to the large number of newspapermen who contacted Christie after the primary in search of the key to the Kennedy victory. And he wanted to have a longer chat with Christie, perhaps Thursday or Friday."

Here, I might point out, that following the May primary, the wire services, Life, Time and Newsweek magazines, and reporters from all over came into McDowell County to interview me and to analyze the vote here. Many of the reporters were here before the primary and I told them then that the sentiment was running strong for Kennedy, but since Humphrey had the support of organized labor, they all seemed to feel that Kennedy did not have a chance. Peter Lisagor, who was born and raised at Keystone, and who is now the Washington correspondent for a Chicago paper, talked with me at length the evening of May 3, 1960, was advised by me that Kennedy would carry the county with a sizeable majority, and he told me about a year ago when he was here on a visit that he wrote a story in line with my prediction but later got "cold feet" and did not send it to his paper; that he had since always regretted missing the "scoop."

Upon reaching the convention floor after my visit with the Senator in his hotel suite, I passed the word around to the West Virginia news and television media that the Senator had told me his delegate strength was enough to nominate on the first ballot, so that they could flash the news back home, and here is the way the story came out in the Friday, July 15, 1960, edition of Elkins Inter-Mountain;

"Sidney L. Christie, McDowell County Democratic stalwart, who is a delegate to the convention reported extreme satisfaction concerning the Kennedy nomination at the close of the Wednesday session.

"Sid, as Mr. Christie is affectionately known throughout West Virginia and Democratic party circles throughout the nation, said:

" 'In a talk with Senator Kennedy in his private quarters at the Biltmore Hotel an hour before the convention assembled Wednesday, he assured me that he had sufficient delegate votes to nominate him on the first ballot. He was counting on 784 first ballot votes and actually he received 808'".

I did not ^{again} see the President until just before the November, 1962, election. He came to Wheeling to speak in behalf of the democratic candidates that year, and I was invited by some friends in that area to be in the receiving line as he alighted from his plane at the airport. He recognized me immediately and was very warm and cordial. Later that evening I had a few words with him on the platform before he began his speech.

I did not see him thereafter until January 16, 1963, at 4:30 o'clock in the afternoon, in his office at the White House. I did not go to the White House with the idea of seeing the President, but after talking with several of his Special Assistants with whom I had become acquainted during the campaign, viz: Theodore Sorenson, Timothy Reardon, Larry O'Brien, David Powers, Ralph Dungan, Kenneth O'Donnell, Richard Donahue, Mike Manatos and Pierre Salinger, the first thing I knew they

had arranged for me to see the President. I was taken to the Cabinet Room and assumed that I would be ushered to the President's Office by an aide, but, instead the President came to the Cabinet Room to greet me. To go from the Cabinet Room to his office, we passed through the office of Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln, his long-time personal secretary, and with whom I had become acquainted in Los Angeles. He paused for me to shake hands with Mrs. Lincoln, after which we proceeded to his office. After a brief discussion on how I had been, etc., he asked if I would like to look around outside and as he threw open a set of french doors we both walked on to the porch and while there a little white dog came from under the shrubbery and he remarked that it was the dog Khrushchev gave him.

Returning to his private office, I attempted to apologize for encroaching upon his time and to tell him how very greatly I appreciated his kindness in seeing me, when he broke in: "Judge, you need not feel that way, because you own a chunk of this place." He then inquired about how "things" were in West Virginia and mentioned some of the things he had done since taking office to help the economy of the state. I told him that Senator Byrd was working on a project designed to be of great benefit to the state and that it would probably need a little boost from him at the proper time. At this point he called his Appointment Secretary, Kenneth O'Donnell, in and told him to make a note of the matter and to keep him informed on its progress. The project is still in the making and if and when it is consummated it should prove to be of great benefit to McDowell County.

I then arose to tell him goodbye and as our hands grasped he pulled me to his side and said: "Wait a minute, Judge, we are going to have a picture taken." I protested that I did not rate such a

great honor, but he insisted, nevertheless, and by this time two photographers were there and snapped our pictures twice. After some more small talk, I bade him goodbye and left by way of Mrs. Lincoln's office. As I approached her desk, she smilingly inquired how many prints I would like to have and I told her whatever was customary.

The thought then struck me that it would be nice if she could have the President autograph one of the photographs to each of my children and upon mentioning this to her she said that she knew the President would be glad to do so. I then gave her the names and addresses, and each of you did later receive a photograph, autographed by him to you, mailed directly from the White House. He also autographed one of the photographs to me personally in these words:

"With warmest personal regards to Judge Sidney Christie from his friend, John F. Kennedy."

I value it very highly, and I am sure you treasure yours.

I last saw the President in person June 20, 1963, at Charleston, where he came to celebrate with the people of West Virginia the observance of the 100th birthday of their state. After he spoke from the top of the steps of the capitol, he came down and mingled freely with the large crowd who were there to see and hear him, then returning to the Rotunda of the Capitol, where I was privileged to greet and talk with him. Upon departing, I remember well his words: "I hope to see you again soon, Judge." Some present who overheard this parting remark saw in it a reference to my appointment to the federal bench, which was then pending, but I cannot say what he meant by it. I do know, however, that he did later clear me for appointment and the

customary investigatory work, a prerequisite to the official appointment, was in progress by the Justice Department at the time of his death.

As sort of a sidelight to the Humphrey-Kennedy campaign in McDowell, I might mention an incident that occurred in Wyoming County just before the Primary election. A dinner in honor of Judge R. D. Bailey, an old and distinguished citizen of that county, had been arranged by his friends for the evening of May 7 at Pineville, and Congressman James Roosevelt had been secured as the featured speaker, but since Senator Humphrey was in the area campaigning for himself and since Robert Kennedy was also in the area campaigning for his brother, they were both invited to the dinner and were called upon for brief remarks. Senator Humphrey spoke first in this vein:

"I learned today that there are 51 states, the 51st being 'The Free State of McDowell' and that its governor is the Honorable Sidney L. Christie."

When the laughter had subsided, Robert Kennedy responded thusly:

"We are conducting a more intelligent campaign, because it was only a few hours after we entered the state with our campaign, we learned that there is a "free state of McDowell", and that Sidney L. Christie is the Governor."

The above quotes are taken from the May 7 edition of The Welch Daily News. These comments were, of course, jokingly made and they evoked loud laughter from the large crowd present.

Actually, I found Senator Humphrey and his wife very charming and delightful people. He is a very able senator, and everything that happened since pointed to the fact that he and Senator Kennedy were then and always remained the best of friends.

The occasion of the Pineville dinner was the only time I saw Robert Kennedy during the campaign. He did not come to McDowell County. I later saw him in Los Angeles, and again in his office in Washington after he became the Attorney General. I saw Edward Kennedy only once - the time he accompanied his brother to Welch on May 3. A sister, Mrs. Peter Lawford, came to the West Virginia delegation on the floor of the convention and spent considerable time with us. She said that her brother, John, had asked her to do so. Her personality is very similar to that of the President.

Needless to say, I am proud to have been privileged to know John F. Kennedy and to have had the opportunity of playing a small part in placing him at the head of this great nation of ours. In retrospect, it would seem that my introductory remarks of May 3 in the Court House at Welch were remarkably accurate when measured by the appraisals others have since made of him the world over. He will surely take his place in history beside the great leaders mentioned.

In his death, I have lost a close personal friend, but far more importantly, the nation and the free world have lost their most promising chieftan. But we must not despair. The course of world events will continue to move forward. President Johnson, who was here in October, 1958, and again as our Veterans Day Speaker just eleven days before the assassination, is well known to us in McDowell County. He has the capacity, the experience and the training to carry-on. The country is safe in his hands.

With Love,

Had

MEMO: I prepared this to hand to the many reporters from the metropolitan press who swarmed in here after the Primary for information from which to make an analysis of why Senator Kennedy won such a decisive victory in McDowell County over Senator Humphrey.

S.L.C.

1. FOUNDATION FOR POPULARITY:

The foundation for Kennedy's popularity in McDowell County was laid on May 9, 1959, when he appeared here as guest speaker at a fund-raising dinner sponsored by the Democratic Executive Committee. For an affair of this sort, tickets were, of course, sold to those who have more than a passive interest in democratic politics. There were over 700 tickets sold. Kennedy made a sincere and forthright speech which was well received.

After the dinner, a private reception was held for him which was attended by some 200 of the more prominent political dignitaries of this area.

At both the dinner and the reception he mingled with the crowds and made them believe that he was really glad to be there among them.

2. HUMPHREY NEVER CONSIDERED A BONA FIDE CANDIDATE:

No one with any intelligence ever considered Humphrey anything more than a "synthetic" candidate for president. The people knew that he was simply running "interference" for Johnson and Symington, and Senator Byrd interjecting himself in the race in behalf of Johnson had a great deal to do with the crystalization of this belief. Such belief thus prevailing, the people had to make a choice between voting for a real or genuine candidate for president, on the one hand, or a fictitious one on the other hand.

The average voter is more perceptive than he is usually given credit for, and in this race, he clearly saw through the smoke screen and chose to place his vote for the real rather than the synthetic candidate.

3. LACK OF FAITH IN EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION - SEARCH FOR A COURAGEOUS LEADER:

For the past seven years, the Eisenhower administration has provided the country with passive and vacillating leadership. They have not shown courage when courage was needed. Starting with the

withdrawal from Korea, followed by their failure to support England in the Suez crisis and the more or less capitulation to the demands and threats of Nasser, Castro and others of like ilk, the people have become extremely apprehensive as to the future of our country, and they have reached the point where they are searching desperately for someone who can "save them." This apprehension or fear in the hearts of the average citizen is more real than one might imagine.

We have seen our country slip from the dominant power in the world to one where people like Castro can insult and threaten us with apparent impunity. This is new to the American people. Now, instead of being respected as we used to be, we seem to have reached the point where the trouble makers of the world do not hesitate to insult us at will.

This situation has gradually forced the people to seek out someone who has the qualities of leadership and the courage to restore us to our former position of prestige and respect in the eyes of the world. They did not see this in Adlai Stevenson. They apparently do see it in Jack Kennedy.

They see our country now, in foreign and world affairs, where we were in domestic affairs in the depression years. They saw in Roosevelt then what they hope they see in Kennedy now - one who can provide them the leadership that they are so hungry for and so vitally need.

4. PEOPLE SEE A CONNECTION BETWEEN ROOSEVELT AND KENNEDY:

The most effective theme used by Kennedy in this campaign here was his pledge to take up where Roosevelt left off. This simply tied in with the search of the people for a leader who will do something for them. In this county, where the population has declined almost a third in the past ten years, due to unemployment brought about by automation in the coal mines, one can well understand why the people here chose to vote for one who has "some chance" of being president, rather than for one with no chance at all.

Kennedy was able to convince them of his sincere desire to help them; of his pledge to help them if he should become president.

While Humphrey promised more, his works were not accepted, simply because the people knew that he would never be in position to help them. They knew that Humphrey, while a great liberal and a sincere man, would never get to the White House, whereas they felt that Kennedy had at least a 50-50 chance of getting there.

5. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, JR:

The appearance of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. in this area, per se, had little or nothing to do with Kennedy's victory. Indirectly, however, it did tend to show a similarity between the need for leadership in the depression days of the early 30's and the need for leadership now; and since Kennedy's theme was that he would take up where F.D.R., Sr. left off, F.D.R., Jr's presence may have helped to dramatize it.

When young Roosevelt and Kennedy toured a section of the county together, the people were out to see Kennedy not Roosevelt. Roosevelt appeared to have a cool and distant personality and did not attempt to ingratiate himself with the people as Kennedy did. It was definitely Kennedy's "show" when they were here.

6. COSMOPOLITAN POPULATION:

Our population in this county is made up of about 25% colored and 75% white. Of the whites, perhaps 15% are of foreign extraction. Most of the latter are of the Catholic faith. Methodist and Baptist are the two strongest Protestant faiths in this county. We have a very small native population. With the development of the coalfields around the turn of the century, people came in here from other states and other countries to work in the coal mines. Consequently, our population is very cosmopolitan and we are not burdened with the prejudices that are ordinarily found in sections where family and ancestral traditions predominate.

We have had colored law enforcement officers, attorneys, doctors, teachers, members of town councils, etc., in this county for over forty years, and there have never been any racial troubles of any consequence.

