

**Carter Burden Oral History Interview – RFK #2, 12/3/1974**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Carter Burden  
**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene  
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**Biographical Note**

Burden, a New York society and political figure who worked in Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) New York City Senate office from 1966-1968, discusses RFK's 1968 presidential campaign in New York State, including the staff and strategy of the campaign, cash flow problems, and attempts to form coalition slates of delegates with the Eugene J. McCarthy campaign, among other issues.

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Carter Burden—RFK#2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

Carter Burden

December 3, 1974  
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

For Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program  
of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay. Maybe what you can start with is any meetings or discussions you can remember about what you would be doing in the campaign and how your role evolved?

BURDEN: Okay. I was not involved in the—I guess there were two—large meetings at Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith] apartment. But needless to say, I got a certain amount of feedback and gossip from it. But basically I was somewhat surprised but pleased when he made the decision and then made the announcement. I think he made the announcement and, as I recall, it was St. Patrick's Day because he came up to New York that day.

GREENE: You mean his own announcement?

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: It was the sixteenth, the day before.

BURDEN: The day before. He came up to the city on the seventeenth, I guess, because I met him and was with him in the parade. Well, as to the

campaign itself, of course, the first thing that happens, I guess, is total paranoia sets in. Everybody wonders what they're going to be doing, or if anything. Nobody wants to be stuck back running the office. I can't remember precisely the amount of time, but it seemed for quite a while, there was the usual state of chaos. I went, as I recall, to a couple of meetings over at the Pan Am [Pan American] Building, in...

GREENE: Steve Smith's office.

BURDEN: ...Steve Smith's office. It was very clear to me, and I think to everybody else, that you had to really go out and find a place for yourself, that nobody was going to.... You know, you couldn't just wait around and wait for the invitation. That whole period was so frenetic and

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so hectic, that now, in retrospect, it's kind of a blur to me.

GREENE: Well, eventually you became the head of the Citizens for Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] in New York.

BURDEN: Right.

GREENE: How early do you remember that decision taking place?

BURDEN: I don't really remember. It's standard operating procedure for the Kennedys not to make decisions like that, to use as few titles as you possibly can, to have as many people competing for the job as possible. That makes it kind of hair-raising, and I don't know exactly how efficient it is, but anyway that's the way it operated.

BURDEN: Tom [Thomas M.C. Johnston], I think, was anxious at the outset to become Steve Smith's deputy or assistant. I recall from the very beginning he got out of the office as quickly as possible, and hung around with Steve as much as possible. So there was sort of a vacuum, quite frankly. I don't think that Tom wanted to be stuck in New York. The real glamour and the real action obviously was on traveling with the candidate or doing something in Washington. So in a way there was a kind of a vacuum. People generally, I think, wanted to go to Washington. In that sense it just evolved, because I was here and stayed here, and I think that was fairly sensible judgment on my part.

GREENE: What did you have to do in the early stages to set up this operation in terms of organizing headquarters or whatever was involved in getting a staff together, and that sort of thing?

BURDEN: We had virtually no money. They weren't giving us any money at all

so we had to.... Really it's like, you know, bleeding a stone for any kind of paid staff. I remember I did finally get money for a secretary and that kind of thing. I worked with Sal Catale in getting the 38th Street headquarters which Steve approved.

GREENE: Sal Catale?

BURDEN: Sal Catale.

GREENE: I don't recognize that.

BURDEN: You don't know him?

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GREENE: No.

BURDEN: He's fairly important. He worked for Steve in that office, and I think he was there for—I don't know—fifteen years or something. But he always was the treasurer in the campaign. He was the money man. Nobody quite knew exactly how he operated. But he worked for Steve and I think he was the.... Well, he certainly was the treasurer in New York state and I think he had a lot to do with—what's his name—Carmine...

GREENE: Bellino [Carmine Salvatore Bellino].

BURDEN: ...Bellino, nationally. He just, in fact, left the Park Agency [Inc.].

GREENE: That's interesting. It's a name I may have heard in passing, you know, but usually when people talk of money, they talk of either Carmine Bellino...

BURDEN: Steve.

GREENE: Yes, or the woman up in Boston, whose name at the moment for some reason slips my mind.

BURDEN: Yeah, I know who you mean, too, but I don't remember it.

GREENE: What was the division of responsibility? Like how did you coordinate what you were doing with say, what Ronnie Eldridge [Ronnie M. Eldridge] was doing or Bill Walton [William Walton] was doing?

BURDEN: Originally, it was just really me and John Burns [John J. Burns] and Jack English [John F. English]. We set up the storefront on 38th

Street, and they were operating out of the hotel across the street. All three of us were ostensibly reporting to Steve. I can go into that in some detail...

GREENE: Yes. Go ahead. Sure.

BURDEN: ...because there was some conflict and some controversy there.

GREENE: Yes, why don't you do that.

BURDEN: Then they brought Bill Walton in, really as my boss, but I knew him and we got along very well. He was a very good mediator, but he wasn't really particularly interested in doing the nuts and bolts stuff anyway.

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GREENE: Do you think that's why he was brought in?

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: As kind of an arbiter.

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah, very much so. And he was very good at what he did. Then Ronnie wanted a job and we spent some time trying to figure out how best to use Ronnie's talents.

GREENE: There was friction, wasn't there, between Ronnie and English?

BURDEN: There traditionally had been a lot of friction. There was friction between me and English. There was one thing, it was the only time, I think, the Senator had come into New York during the campaign, and had set up sort of a reception over at the UN Plaza [United Nations Plaza], at the Inn of the Clock. I was preparing sort of material to give. They were all delegates and political people, and so forth. I printed up a list of the committed delegates, or that I thought were committed or that were supposedly committed or I had been told were committed, and distributed it. Apparently, the Brooklyn delegates—I understood there was some problem there, but we were counting on them—I put them down as committed. Of course, I guess it was Steingut [Stanley Steingut] didn't want anybody committed. They were playing the old double game. The next morning English came screaming into my office and started, I mean with his eyes bugging he said, "You've lost the election. You've blown it right here." I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" I mean, he was absolutely out of his mind and screaming at me.

But there always is going to be the friction in a campaign. There were particular problems in New York because it was not one of the priority states. It was his home state. There was the image of an important campaign, but I think we probably had a total budget of



about a hundred thousand dollars. So in a way there weren't that many important jobs around.

GREENE: Was English.... I'm interested in that because I've heard that story before. I always thought that the explosion sort of took place during the reception. It wasn't until the next day.

BURDEN: No, it wasn't. It was not until the next day. Now, it could have been later on. It was not at the reception definitely, because I remember vividly his stalking into my office.

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GREENE: Could you do anything at that point to recoup your losses?

BURDEN: Well, I then went to Walton and he laughed, and he sort of smoothed the whole thing over.

GREENE: So it wasn't as bad as....

BURDEN: No, I mean it was bullshit, frankly. It probably was good that it smoked those guys out.

GREENE: Actually, they were people that you had at least an informal commitment from, but Steingut....

BURDEN: Yeah. He was saying, "They're yours, but, we can't say that."

GREENE: You didn't get any feedback from the people themselves, that you'd put them in an embarrassing....

BURDEN: No.

GREENE: No.

BURDEN: No.

GREENE: What was the conflict?

BURDEN: If they were publicly committed, then Steingut lost some of his leverage, obviously. I mean, that's the whole game.

GREENE: Right. What were some of your own problems with English and Burns, or shouldn't I link the two together?

BURDEN: Well, they were linked. I've always felt that John was more reasonable and a lot easier to work with. We were trying to set up campaign operations. Technically we were supposed to be separate from the political organization or the structure. There was very little money to go around. We had money for a storefront in Queens, and there was a great fight over that because English wanted it to be operated by—what's his name—the guy who was indicted and convicted, the former district attorney, Mackell [Thomas J. Mackell].

GREENE: Mackell.

BURDEN: So that was a constant problem which they finally won, and they finally set up the so-called store front in the third floor of a motel that nobody could ever find. It was ridiculous. There was ongoing friction, which is

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healthy to some extent because you should have a separate citizens operation and a separate political operation. But when you're competing for the same dollar and when there's so little money, it really made it very difficult.

GREENE: What about the feud between, at least the friction between, Ronnie and Jack English?

BURDEN: As I recall, Ronnie always hated Jack English, I think. I don't really remember what it went back to, but she was always bitching to me and to Walton what a disastrous thing he'd done recently. I don't remember anything really that important or that specific, it was just a general kind of running feud.

GREENE: Was Walton successful at sort of running interference?

BURDEN: Yeah, he's very good at that. He's very calm and he's been through it all before, and people tend to get hypersensitive and hyper-excited. I certainly did. I remember I never before apparently spoke in my sleep, but I used to sit up in the middle of the night and start talking about Queens in my sleep. It's the only time I think I've ever talked in my sleep.

GREENE: At least Scarsdale. Queens.

BURDEN: Walton was a very, very calming influence.

GREENE: So you didn't really resent having him...

BURDEN: No, no.

GREENE: ...superimposed above you that way?

BURDEN: Initially I did, but it worked out almost immediately. If he had been a different personality and had not been as secure as he was, I would have resented it a lot more.

GREENE: Did he get along well with Ronnie as well?

BURDEN: Yeah. I mean, the three of us used to continue to have lunch for several years thereafter, as a matter of fact.

GREENE: Whom would you ultimately be responsible to? Was it Smith or O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]? How did that work?

BURDEN: O'Brien came in once with Ira—what was his name?

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GREENE: Kapenstein.

BURDEN: Kapenstein, yeah. You know, all the illusions about the well-greased Kennedy machine. I mean anybody that's ever been in it...

GREENE: Right.

BURDEN: ...has different thoughts about that. I think technically we were supposed to report to him. He came in one day and I spent a couple of hours with him, and English and Burns spent a couple of hours with him. He just sort of listened and nodded and was very genial, and then left. Then we really never heard from him again. So basically it was Steve. To get any dough, and to get any sort of real approval to go ahead with something, I would usually go to him. He was more accessible. The strategy was that New York would take care of itself. He was in big trouble in New York. I mean I don't think that the result would have been that much different if he had lived and had come in for that final week.

GREENE: Okay, let's back up a little and start from when the campaign first begins. What was the political situation? Could you see immediately how bad it was?

BURDEN: Yeah. It was evident in the beginning, because people were already committed to McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy]; people who would automatically be the people that you would be reaching out for. There was, of course, very, very strong feeling. We had these delegate slates. They were doing

some campaigning. We got a good deal of feedback from them, and it was all quite distressing.

GREENE: Are you thinking mainly of the people who were pro-McCarthy rather than the Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], later Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] support? Were they more troublesome to you, the McCarthy....

BURDEN: Yes, absolutely. I was more familiar obviously with the city and with the suburbs than with upstate. There was no question that it was McCarthy.

GREENE: Could Kennedy, if he had come out earlier, you think, have cut that off? Was it the late entry that made it so difficult?

BURDEN: Yeah, I think definitely. Because who really knew McCarthy? There were a lot of people, the traditional liberal establishment in New York, especially the old guard, was never very pro-Kennedy. I don't think they were unhappy they'd have a good reason to be against him. They might well have....

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GREENE: Why don't you speak specifically of some of the people you're thinking of.

BURDEN: The original reform movement, if you will. The Stanley Lowells [Stanley H. Lowell] and the Eleanor Clark Frenches. People like that, who were increasingly less important probably in terms of what really was going on politically, but who were names and who were money, and so forth. But there's no question that, in pure popular terms, McCarthy was way ahead of Kennedy in the city.

GREENE: What about in places like Queens when you start to talk more about the regulars?

BURDEN: There it was another problem. They were playing a very careful self-serving game. They wanted to go with the winner. The whole incident with English was indicative of the kind of thing that they were trying to do. They would say privately that they were for Kennedy, but they wouldn't dare say it publicly. Well, I was always very suspicious of that. I know, for example, Ronnie felt very strongly that English and Burns were making the same old mistakes, and they were simply going to get screwed in the end by Steingut and the organization. I think there's probably a good deal of truth to that.

GREENE: When you would talk to these potential delegates and they would give you the impression that they favored Kennedy, did you ever try to get

a commitment? Or did you have to be satisfied with the hope that maybe eventually they would come out publicly? How far could you push them, I guess, is what I'm really asking you?

BURDEN: Well, see, English and Burns didn't want anybody talking to these people.

GREENE: But themselves.

BURDEN: Yeah, but themselves. I think that I felt and certainly Ronnie felt that they should be pushed more.

GREENE: Would they deal with you just as easily as they would with Burns and English?

BURDEN: Yeah, basically.

GREENE: They didn't make those distinctions really?

BURDEN: No, they didn't.

GREENE: Okay, what about the selection of delegates? Did you

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kind of have to take them where you could find them, or...

BURDEN: Yes.

GREENE: ...was that....

BURDEN: I mean, for example, the slate in Manhattan or in the seventeenth congressional district was anything but the strongest slate, but it was the best that we could come up with of recognizable names. Of course, it turned out to do very badly. I think it would have done very badly.

GREENE: How were you able to coordinate with English and Burns on that?

BURDEN: Well, I remember vividly Bob Law [Robert A. Law] would come at least three times a week and bitch about what were we doing for him. He was out there with his neck stuck out, and where was the campaign. There really was no campaign, for the delegates. It would have been in a way impossible and an enormously expensive thing to do. But the whole plan was that he was supposed to turn it all around and galvanize it in one week by his presence. It certainly would have made some difference, but I think we were way behind.

GREENE: Did you ever have a tally?

BURDEN: Yeah, we did. I don't really recall exactly what it was, but I mean it was not very encouraging.

GREENE: Was it actually that Kennedy would have been behind, do you think, or that he just wouldn't have made the kind of a showing that he should have as the state senator?

BURDEN: I think that he was behind quite frankly. I was constantly trying to get more priority given to the New York campaign, and I think that's probably in the nature of things. You always think what you're doing is more important than what somebody with a larger perspective may think. But I had several discussions with Steve where I emphasized the problems, and that I thought there was going to be trouble.

GREENE: What was his reaction?

BURDEN: You know, very noncommittal. They didn't come out and tell you that they had decided to make New York, you know, low priority because there just wasn't enough money to go around. But you got the message fairly quickly.

GREENE: What about in upstate New York? Did you have much to do with that, or were you relying a lot on Bruno's [Gerald J. Bruno]....

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BURDEN: Yeah, pretty much relying on Bruno.

GREENE: But did you keep tabs on it? Or not even that much.

BURDEN: Yeah, we kept tabs on it.

GREENE: Loosely.

BURDEN: But again, he was a little empire unto himself too. It makes it very difficult when everybody considers that they have a personal relationship with the candidate. I think it's true in any campaign basically.

GREENE: What happened when Johnson withdrew? Did that make very much difference?

BURDEN: It was interesting because he was coming up to.... In fact, that thing up on the walls, the statement, was one of the drafts that was done that night with his changes on it.

GREENE: For the next morning, you mean?

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah.

GREENE: That statement? Yes.

BURDEN: I went over to the UN Plaza before he arrived and everybody sort of collected there. Certainly the initial reaction was euphoric, but I think as time went on a lot of doubts arose and there was certainly a good deal of uncertainty as to exactly what effect it would have.

GREENE: Would you say Kennedy was euphoric at first, or he was more cautious?

BURDEN: He was very, very cautious. I did not go out to the airport, but I remember him coming in to the apartment, and everybody gathering around and congratulating him, and he didn't want to be congratulated. He was very quiet, as he generally was, as a matter of fact, and noncommittal. I went with him the next day when he had the press conference with the Overseas Press Club [Overseas Press Club of America].

GREENE: Press conference.

BURDEN: I mean, it certainly wasn't negative. Actually, now, I remember them going out with him to the airport the next day, I mean after the press conference, I think in the afternoon. He had meetings in the apartment that morning

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and then, I think, left that afternoon. Ronnie and I were in the car with him and he started talking about it, at least, that I heard, for the first time. I think he was really disappointed. There was a cause in running against Johnson. There was a definite disappointment. I remember him saying, with Humphrey that you just chase his ass all over the country and you just work twice as hard as he did, but that the spirit and driving motive behind what he was doing was sort of dissipated by Johnson's withdrawal.

GREENE: Did he talk about Johnson's withdrawal at all in terms of the issues that were involved?

BURDEN: Not really. I think that, at least in that conversation, it was very much

in terms of how it affected him and how it affected the campaign and how it affected the future, and how it made it an entirely different campaign, which indeed it did. There was a good deal of discussion and debate the night, before about the statement and what approach to take, and so forth. Adam [Adam Walinsky] did one draft, I think, and Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] did another one.

GREENE: Do you remember what the basis of the discussion was?

BURDEN: It was basically, I think, a question of tone, of how self-righteous you were to be. It was very confusing and ephemeral at that point. Nobody really knew quite how to react, as a matter of fact.

GREENE: Was there much discussion on how much to praise Johnson and just how much credit to give him?

BURDEN: As I recall now, Adam and the younger Turks wanted to take a much harder line than Arthur Schlesinger and the sort of older guard. I think basically the outcome was more Schlesinger than Walinsky.

GREENE: I was wondering if they felt they were going out on a limb to some extent by giving Johnsons too much credit because of the chance that he would come through in the end anyways.

BURDEN: They were. Exactly. There was a good deal of concern about whatever he said, and how it would be interpreted, and not wanting to go too much one way or too much the other way.

GREENE: Was there any kind of a briefing for the press conference the next day? I don't mean briefing, but like you used to go through sometimes before different press conferences.

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BURDEN: No. Johnson's speech was—what—I guess at nine o'clock or something, and he probably got in about ten thirty or eleven, and he finally went to bed, I think about two, and left everybody in the living room to work it out really. I mean, it almost had not been resolved at that point.

GREENE: Did he contribute much towards the way he thought it ought to be done, or kind of dumped it in your laps?

BURDEN: He really pretty much dumped it in their laps. I recall him being very passive and very quiet during the whole thing. And I in fact remember



him, when he got up to go to the bedroom saying, "Well, work it out." I think he attached much less importance to what he said than other people were at that moment.

GREENE: There was no question, at that point, that Humphrey would come out though?

BURDEN: No, none.

GREENE: That was just assumed?

BURDEN: Absolutely assumed.

GREENE: Okay, what about the whole issue of working out....

BURDEN: And I think that...

GREENE: Excuse me.

BURDEN: ...the next day in the car, he definitely saw Humphrey as his opponent and not McCarthy.

GREENE: Did he say anything about Humphrey in terms of what kind of opposition he would be?

BURDEN: No, there was a kind of resigned quality to it. It was obviously, you know, a lesser campaign in his eyes. It was just going to be a question of sweat, and much less of issues.

GREENE: Do you think at that point he really understood how powerful McCarthy was going to prove to be? I mean, how strong an opponent?

BURDEN: I don't think so. I remember being in the car with him before New Hampshire. He really sort of dismissed McCarthy. I think it was obvious to everybody that they didn't particularly like each other, as only two types of

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Catholics could dislike each other. He saw him, I think, as ineffectual and indecisive, and certainly at that point not as a real threat. I think even to the end, or at least to that point after Johnson resigned, he was still...

GREENE: Underestimating him.

BURDEN: ...underestimating him. Now, I was not in Oregon or California. I assume that at that point they began to take him somewhat more seriously.

GREENE: You didn't at any point let him know, in terms of New York or at least the city and the suburbs, that it was McCarthy that you were....

BURDEN: Yes, I did. The one opportunity that I had to speak to him.

GREENE: Did he seem surprised?

BURDEN: No. I think he probably tended to put that in context, in that we were overreacting. I mean, just because the old-line reformers who hated him and who he didn't particularly like were against him, there was nothing new in that. He wasn't really as concerned as we were, that we were overreacting to that.

GREENE: What about the decision, if there was one ever really made, to try to get some joint slates together with McCarthy and the efforts of coalitions around the state? Was that ever discussed with anyone other than yourself and English and Burns, or was it at that level?

BURDEN: It was pretty much at that level, as I recall. I mean there was discussion of it, and I'm a little bit vague as to what transpired. I think there were some joint slates, weren't there?

GREENE: Yeah, in nineteenth district in Manhattan...

BURDEN: Right, right. Exactly.

GREENE: ...you had two McCarthy and one RFK delegate. Do you remember that...

BURDEN: Yes.

GREENE: ...who worked on it?

BURDEN: No, I don't.

GREENE: Do you know why it would have worked there?

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BURDEN: As I recall, we figured that was the best we could do, and that an independent slate would definitely lose. That's the west side, right?

GREENE: Right. Same thing.

BURDEN: Yeah, and that one out of three was better than zero.

GREENE: Yes. I was thinking really more in terms of how you got the McCarthy people to cooperate, because it seems like in other places they were the ones that stood in the way.

BURDEN: That's something probably Ronnie would.... I don't remember about that, frankly.

GREENE: Okay, what about in the twenty-seventh which is Rockland, Sullivan, and Orange [counties]? It's Dow's [John Goodchild Dow] district? There McCarthy had two delegates and one alternate, and you had one delegates and two alternates. There was also an agreement there that whoever won, the other would withdraw and support.

BURDEN: Right. That, I think, was Dow's doing. Everybody had a great deal of respect for Dow. Was he supporting Kennedy or McCarthy? I can't remember what.

GREENE: I think he was supporting Kennedy.

BURDEN: Yeah. Well, anyway, we had a lot, of dealings with him. I wasn't sure whether.... There were a number of people who had been supporting McCarthy, who were receptive to Kennedy, too who there was certainly a good deal of communication with. As I recall, Dow really put that together.

GREENE: Did you see these coalitions—or efforts at coalitions, because there were others less successful in a sense—mainly as means of stopping an administration victory, whether Humphrey or Johnson, or more as a means of minimizing McCarthy's strength?

BURDEN: Yeah, I think that probably Walton and I and Ronnie were more wary of that than the others, but obviously the premise was that if McCarthy withdrew, that those would be Kennedy delegates and not Humphrey delegates.

GREENE: Were you trying to get that kind of arrangement sort of written into the deal, that whoever....

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: Yes.

BURDEN: Absolutely. That was really the stated and non-stated assumption.

[BEGIN TAPE 2]

But then, of course in Brooklyn, there was the reverse of the situation, and that was the biggest block of delegates in the state, and they were either Humphrey or Kennedy. Certainly Steingut's position, he wanted to keep a foot in both doors. So there was a definite decision, which I suppose was sensible; but as I said, I had less confidence in it than Burns and English, that not to run a Kennedy slate.... I think Ronnie felt that there should be an independent slate in Brooklyn, that you could never take their word for it, and we would just end up getting screwed. But a lot was hanging on an understanding with Steingut.

GREENE: Was anybody other than you and Burns and English in touch with Steingut? Would Steve Smith have been?

BURDEN: I'm sure that probably Steve Smith was. I remember at the very beginning, in the first days of the campaign, they took a suite I think at the Hilton [New York Hilton at Rockefeller Center], and Steve would have around-the-clock meetings with groups of people from various parts of the state and labor and Rockland, and that kind of thing. He certainly had several discussions with Steingut and the other organization powers at that point. Their ego is such that they would insist on dealing with Steve...

GREENE: With Steve.

BURDEN: ...at some point. Yeah. At the very least, yeah.

GREENE: What about the effort in Rochester [Rochester, New York]? Did you get involved in that at all, trying to put a coalition together there which almost succeeded and then fell through?

BURDEN: Yes, I remember that now.

GREENE: Do you remember who you were dealing with up there for McCarthy? Who were the tough people—let's put it that way—on the McCarthy side? I know you were working with some of the people. The names that I've heard are Sarah Kovner [Sarah S. Kovner] and Costikyan [Edward N. Costikyan]...

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: ...Ickes [Harold M. Ickes] and Mrs. French. Were they generally the people you were....

BURDEN: Well, Sarah Kovner and Ronnie were age-old enemies, and Sarah had always been anti-Kennedy. Costikyan also was a great Kennedy hater. So was Ellie Clark French basically. So English knew Sarah Kovner. It becomes all very inbred, you know, at this point. Very often the actual candidates become the least important consideration. I mean, you've got a long history of relationships and rivalries and problems, and so forth. I guess Harold was, of course, very close to Sarah and also I think had worked with English. I'm not sure that the question was in terms of....

GREENE: Well, were those the people you were dealing with and if so, you know, what were the problems in dealing with them? Which is really what you answered, what you're saying now. Was there anybody from McCarthy that you had...?

BURDEN: Do you mean in terms of Rochester, would we deal with them?

GREENE: Well, generally in terms of coalitions.

BURDEN: Yeah, I think basically they were. I think Kovner more than Costikyan.

GREENE: Was it a matter of convincing them that it was to their own benefit rather than...? Was that about the only way you could really...?

BURDEN: Yeah, they've all been through it so many times. I mean, so little in politics is ever directly stated anyway. When it was their interest as well, then obviously they were receptive. I'm trying to remember about the whole Rochester situation because that rings a bell, but I'm.... Who were the people involved?

GREENE: That's the problem. I really should know more details about it. It's been so long since I've discussed that with anyone. I don't really remember. I have a vague notion that it was.... I really don't remember. I just know that that was one of the places where you came very close, and then sort of at the last minute it fell through.

BURDEN: I remember that.

GREENE: What was the impact of Johnson's withdrawal on that whole process? Did it really make a difference?

BURDEN: Not really because it didn't affect.... And the

McCarthy people were very committed and, I think, certainly resented the assumption that they would automatically come over to Kennedy. So I mean, those lines were drawn pretty hard. I think it made things easier as far as the non-McCarthy slates that we were trying to work with or trying to nail down.

GREENE: Was that just during the interim period or also once it became clear that Humphrey was on the move? Was there just a short period that you felt....

BURDEN: No, I think that generally.... For example, in Brooklyn, that Humphrey was not all the same thing as an incumbent president and that it was less of a conflict for them.

GREENE: What about in Queens? Wasn't Weinstein [Moses M. Weinstein] back and forth on that whole thing?

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he was back and forth on that whole thing. And then with Mackell in the middle, and then Mackell trying to preempt him. I mean, there was so much local politics involved in this whole thing. As I recall, there was, I think, a general feeling that Humphrey was a lot weaker than Johnson probably would have been.

GREENE: I wonder if that hardened McCarthy's people at all, giving them a sort of replenished hope also.

BURDEN: I think it did. They saw it almost as much of an opportunity for them as it was for Kennedy, really. I think they were looking forward to a big surprise in New York. I think probably from the point of view of the national press, for what people were expecting in New York, it would have been a surprise. You know, McCarthy would have been.... That on top of California would not have helped.

GREENE: Right. I've heard some optimistic reports on New York. That they never really sounded very realistic.

BURDEN: Right. Yeah. I would be curious as to who....

GREENE: Well, Burns for one. I don't think I'm telling any tales out of school, but, I mean, Burns felt that New York was kind of in the bag or at least, he did, you know, a couple of years ago when he talked about it.

BURDEN: I think he's really out of his.... Yeah. Yeah.

GREENE: He said something like, I think if I remember the numbers right—what did you have, 114 delegates?

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BURDEN: Yeah, something like that.

GREENE: That he thought you could get all but perhaps fourteen. You would have had at least a hundred.

BURDEN: That's bullshit. That was just not true at all. John tends to be optimistic about things.

GREENE: Maybe it's also partly the people he was talking to. Could it have been?

BURDEN: Well, I think it was how he chose to see the situation. I think he totally discounted the McCarthy thing because the real McCarthy problem was really not their problem. It was more our problem than theirs. They were dealing with Steingut and O'Connell [Daniel P. O'Connell] and Crangle [Joseph F. Crangle] and so forth, and the McCarthy slates were generally local grassroots slates.

GREENE: What about after each of the primaries, starting, of course, with Indiana, Nebraska, Oregon? What were the results? Did you get on the phone each time? What did you do to see if there had been a shift in the wind?

BURDEN: Well, I had a certain amount of contact with Oregon because Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] was out there. He was a very close friend of mine and we talked frequently. He was certainly predicting problems from a relatively early stage. So I was not very surprised about the outcome. I was concerned because I think it hurt again in New York. I mean it gave added fuel to the whole McCarthy thing in New York as well. One reaction to that was, it guaranteed that there would be.... [Interruption] People were gradually wending their way back to New York towards the end at California, and you were expecting a high-powered lead.

GREENE: Let's see, was that all there was....

BURDEN: Was it two weeks or a week?

GREENE: I think it was more than.... June 4th was California and...

BURDEN: New York was the...

GREENE: Twelfth?

BURDEN: ...twelfth or fourteenth, something like that.

GREENE: It must have been a Tuesday, so....

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BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: It was probably a week—that's right—if it was the twelfth.

BURDEN: I think it was a week...

GREENE: That's right, too. That's really nothing.

BURDEN: ...which was not much.

GREENE: Was there anybody that you can think of, let's say, after Indiana or Nebraska, that you were able to get at least soft commitment from, who seemed impressed?

BURDEN: My memory fails me on the specifics. I recall a continuing hard going quite frankly, harder than I expected. There was really very little movement in his direction in New York that I was aware of.

GREENE: Were there particular people that were surprises or disappointments, where you really thought by the previous relationship you should have had, and that you really couldn't get?

BURDEN: Yeah, I think there were people, and again nothing comes to mind specifically, but people whom I thought we certainly would have a shot at, who should be with us, who were already committed to McCarthy and not at all receptive; and really were angry. I mean, there was a good deal of anger.

GREENE: Did you have Kennedy doing any calling in this period to some of these people?

BURDEN: Yeah, yeah. We made up a list and Burns and English made up a list and went to him. God only knows, it was very hard to find out whether he ever made the calls or not. He did make a few, but his call list must have been...

GREENE: What about Ted [Edward Moore Kennedy]? Would he do any of that



for you? Was he useful in New York?

BURDEN: Yeah, he made some of the political calls, but he was less involved than Steve. I mean, very often it would be Steve instead of Teddy that would.

GREENE: What about campaigns in some of the special areas, like black areas? Do you remember organizing that...

BURDEN: Yeah.

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GREENE: ...and who'd have gotten involved? Was Graves [Earl G. Graves] doing...?

BURDEN: Yeah, I think Earl immediately saw....

GREENE: Till he got out.

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: What do you mean, immediately saw?

BURDEN: Well, yes. He was one to sense opportunity. He immediately got out. I mean, I think he went out to Indiana, didn't he?

GREENE: Um-hum. But before that, he had supposedly done at least some minimal organization and left some people in his stead.

BURDEN: Frankly, I think that was bullshit. There were a few of his cronies who, you know, he felt he could rely on to contain the situation.

GREENE: For him.

BURDEN: Yeah. I mean, from the perspective.... I knew much less about state politics and local politics than I do now. Looking back, I'm amazed at some of the things that I probably overlooked. It just occurs to me. I don't know what we did with Sutton [Percy E. Sutton] at that point. Maybe Sutton was not as significant as he is now in terms of the....

GREENE: Well, he was, remember, being considered for the Senate at that point. Well, just earlier than that, and before Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson].

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: So he was sort of a major figure.

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: But I don't think you ever got him to, you know, really actively commit himself.

BURDEN: No, I mean he's a fairly hard man to get committed anyway. We had a whole operation committee. I don't remember what the hell they were doing, though, so far as the.... I think there was a tendency to assume that we had the black vote anyway.

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GREENE: What about your own contacts with labor which had been an ongoing responsibility? Did you keep those up?

BURDEN: I did and very much so. I mean, there was not a hell of a lot of labor support for him. I certainly stayed in contact with the people in New York who were supportive of him, like some of the UAW [United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America] people, and so forth.

GREENE: In fact, there was a UAW convention the same time at the Inn of the Clock, right after Indiana.

BURDEN: Right.

GREENE: Did you go out to that in Atlantic City [New Jersey]?

BURDEN: No, I didn't.

GREENE: Because he was followed the same evening by Humphrey.

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: Do you remember?

BURDEN: I think at that point they tended.... When he was a senator, there was no.... I mean, I was doing the labor stuff. As I recall, when the campaign started, that came into O'Brien's area of responsibility. So something like the Atlantic City thing I would not do.

GREENE: What about Alex Rose in New York? Did you see him at all?

BURDEN: Yeah, I remember seeing him twice, but again that was somebody that it was not the best politics for me to try and deal with, that it was somebody you'd try to get, you know, Steve to deal with.

GREENE: Do you remember the results?

BURDEN: Not specifically, no.

GREENE: Okay, the only other specific group I can think of is the Jewish group which, of course, is your big problem area down here. Is there anything that we haven't touched on as far as they're concerned? Did you bring any rabbis in this time?

BURDEN: Oh, yeah, they were always trying to bring rabbis in. Again, now, with whatever it is.... God, it's six

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years, I guess, isn't it?

GREENE: That's right.

BURDEN: I can't get hold of exactly.... I mean, I know we did do some things, but I'm sorry....

GREENE: Okay. Well, there was one. I know there was a speech again that same day or two at the Synagogue Council of America. Did you have anything to do with setting that up?

BURDEN: Yes, I remember that, and I remember, I think, working with Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] on that. A good deal of importance was attached to it. I mean, that's all I can recall at this point.

GREENE: You mentioned money, and the fact that you didn't have any. How much did it really affect what you were doing in terms of materials and staffs and just generally the way you were running everything?

BURDEN: I thought that, you know, it made a big difference at the time. I wonder in retrospect if I'd been Steve Smith whether I wouldn't have made the same decision, because I was not concerned with California or with Oregon or what the demands were there. It was very hard to get an independent operation going with some seed money, without being able to open at least a storefront in the different boroughs, and so forth.

GREENE: You really couldn't even do that?

BURDEN: Well, I just remember we fought for weeks over this thing in Queens.

GREENE: And that was basically finances?

BURDEN: Yeah. It was who was going to get the money. I knew that if Mackell got it, forget it. You know, it would be Mackell, period. It could not be used to attract independents or sort of, anything other than the political hard core.

GREENE: Would you attempt, or would English attempt, to get Steve to come in on something like this to try to....

BURDEN: Yeah, there was always a certain amount of that, and that's where Walton was very supportive of me and very helpful, because if English was having a conflict like this, then he would always try to go to Steve. Then Steve

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would call Walton very often and get the other side of it. And I remember going to him a couple of times directly. I don't remember specifically what it was about.

GREENE: Did he just simply say, "There's just no money for this. It's all going into the primaries?"

BURDEN: Basically, yeah.

GREENE: Was it a matter also of overconfidence, you think? At least in the beginning?

BURDEN: I don't know. You had to do it one step at a time, you know. If there had been a lot more money, then you could perhaps have done better in New York, or had a better operation in New York. But, you know, they couldn't really worry about New York until they worried about California, I suppose. So I think there was a tendency to underestimate the problem in New York. But I think even if they were aware of it, I don't know what else they necessarily could have done, because it took everything where they were.

GREENE: How was Kennedy's spending in New York compared to McCarthy and Humphrey?

BURDEN: They both, I think, spent a lot more than he did, yeah.

GREENE: A lot more. Even McCarthy.

BURDEN: Oh, yeah. Well, the McCarthy campaign was a very expensive campaign. They spent probably five or six times what he spent in New York. It was well funded. They had a lot of the liberal money in New York that Kennedy could have used, but the money that Kennedy did raise in New York was used elsewhere.

GREENE: That's what I was going to ask you.

BURDEN: I went to one thing with him at.... What the hell's the guy's name? He's a friend of Abe Hirschfeld [Abraham J. Hirschfeld]. I think he was a shoe king or something. I think he went bankrupt subsequently. But it was a dinner for about twelve people. You know, everybody was making a commitment of more than twenty-five thousand dollars. We didn't see any of that money in New York.

GREENE: Was it understood right from the start that you wouldn't?

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: There was no campaigning for funds on a lesser scale

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to keep in New York? Or was it just very hard to do?

BURDEN: It was very hard to do. You know, we could have set up, I think we did tables, and sell buttons and do that kind of thing, but what does that bring in? That money, anyway, was really McCarthy money. But, really any kind of fundraising in New York went into the central campaign.

GREENE: Did you have a lot of material shortages, too, as far as buttons and banners and all those things?

BURDEN: Oh, yeah. The chronic shortage in that.

GREENE: Who could you go to on that?

BURDEN: Well, very often I remembered getting some of the unions to help in producing literature. I ended up having to try and do it that way as opposed to.... I tried Steve, but it just was not forthcoming, so we just had to make do.

GREENE: Where did you succeed in that?

BURDEN: Well, as I recall, we were able to produce some literature with basically donated printing, and paper.

GREENE: Locals, kind of thing? Or was it UAW money, or what?

BURDEN: It was the local. It wasn't the UAW. What money the UAW spent, they spent it through the UAW. They were not, you know, pouring money into the campaign necessarily. There is a lithographers, and they got that one. You know, it was very hard. We had to try and explain it to everybody else, which was difficult. They couldn't understand why.

GREENE: Have you ever seen this schedule for New York? You must have. It was made up, supposedly, which would have.... Do you remember putting that together?

BURDEN: I remember being involved in it.

GREENE: Were there a lot of...?

BURDEN: I remember now, that Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] came in the week of the California primary, I think. But I remember, as a matter of fact, spending time with him...

GREENE: Who else was...?

BURDEN: ...and giving him my suggestions and my thoughts. I think what he did was, he would talk to me and he would

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talk to Burns and Bruno and English and Bill Walton, and so forth.

GREENE: Do you remember how you felt about the results? Whether you thought it was...?

BURDEN: Well, you're never satisfied, you know, because you never get everything that you want. I remember this "possible stop by dinner honoring state Senator Bob Garcia [Robert Garcia]."

GREENE: Was that something you disagreed on?

BURDEN: No, I think at that point I suggested it, which with the advantage of experience I'm not sure that I would have. This is this goddamned Mackell storefront.

GREENE: What does it say on that?

BURDEN: The “Queens Reception hotel, near JFK International Airport [Kennedy International Airport].” from proposed New York campaign schedule for June 8, 1968.

GREENE: That was the one that nobody could find?

BURDEN: Yeah, it was ridiculous.

GREENE: Did you have much in the way of disagreement with English and Burns on putting this together?

BURDEN: Yeah. But as I recall the way they did it, we didn’t all sit down together and argue it out. He would...

GREENE: See you each individually.

BURDEN: ...see you individually, yeah.

GREENE: But did you see the final product, or a draft, or some proposal?

BURDEN: Yes, I think I saw a draft. I don’t know whether it was this final.... The upstate stuff, Bruno did. I remember setting the thing up for Bedford-Stuyvesant.

GREENE: Is it the twelfth? Can you tell from that? Is it only one week that that covers?

BURDEN: No, it’s longer than that.

GREENE: I think it was the eighteenth. No, let me see. It couldn’t have been the nineteenth. Twelfth.

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BURDEN: Well, the last day in here is Monday, June 17th. It should be the eighteenth?

GREENE: The eighteenth. It must have been.

BURDEN: So it was two weeks.

GREENE: Two weeks, yes. Do you remember hearing a discussion that, after

California, there would be a major organizational or strategy meeting at which the whole campaign would be re-examined?

BURDEN: Yeah, I think so.

GREENE: Do you remember how you felt about that? Was it the kind of thing you were anxious for?

BURDEN: Yeah. I think from my perspective we were finally, you know, getting the attention that I thought we deserved. It was an opportunity to criticize Burns and English.

GREENE: Could you get much of a feel from Steve Smith on how he felt about the disagreements you were having with them? Did he side with one side or the other?

BURDEN: He's pretty good about that. You know, he would say to me that English is out of his mind, and I'm sure he'd say to English that I was more than out of my mind. He'd had a lot of experience in...

GREENE: Diplomacy.

BURDEN: ...diplomacy. I mean.... I can remember all that. Remember the Rosenthal thing?

GREENE: What's that?

BURDEN: That was one of those one night attempts, coffee reception with Thomas [Franklin A. Thomas] and Rosenthal [Benjamin S. Rosenthal.].

GREENE: Oh, with Benjamin Rosenthal.

BURDEN: District 65. I think they're the ones that did the printing for us. Abe Hirschfeld.

GREENE: Was there any discussion before California as far as what the effect would be of the influx of all those people that would be coming into New York at that time?

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BURDEN: Well, there was a certain amount of dread on our part.

GREENE: Anxiety.



BURDEN: Yeah. The sort of constant.... I felt productive in the campaign and I felt that I'd found my niche, and although there were aggravations with the people we were dealing with, and to some extent with Burns and English, I was pleased that I hadn't gotten sucked into the sort of camp following routine that I think most everybody else was involved in. As the date drew closer, some of the initial paranoia returned, because there was always a feeling of, they're all going to blow in here and we're going to get walked over, and so forth. And there would have been a certain amount of that. I mean, that's inevitable in any campaign. As I say, in the beginning is one of the few times that I really disagree, and was critical of Tom Johnston, because I felt that he had a responsibility as far as the New York office was concerned, and that he simply dropped everything and was out pursuing his own position.

GREENE: Was that just a unilateral discussion, do you think, on his part, to just do it? Or was it requested by Steve Smith, or someone else?

BURDEN: No, it wasn't.

GREENE: No.

BURDEN: Because, I mean, Steve and he, eventually they did not work well together, and that did not really work out. I think it was unilateral. The way it affects everybody, probably with the exception of Steve Smith or somebody like that, is the total uncertainty and fear about what your position is going to be. I think that was the one thing that Tom was concerned about. It turned out that he was, I thought more secure than that, but he was just as insecure as everybody else. You know, there was just an unbelievable sort of neurosis and paranoia about who was over at Steve Smith's office now and everybody was looking for angle.

GREENE: Somebody once called it the in-the-room syndrome.

BURDEN: Well, that's a very good way of putting it exactly, exactly. You know, just became frantic about it.

GREENE: Really, the people who were there all the time were sort of in torment. I mean, people like Dutton [Frederic G. Dutton] and Walinsky.

BURDEN: Yeah.

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GREENE: It was like a never, never world. Is there anything else on the campaign, or anything else in general, that you can think of that we should talk about?

BURDEN: Not offhand. You've been very good with your informed questions, because with six years it's hard to bring some of it back. I don't know. Did we talk last time about the funeral and all that? Because that is fairly vivid?

GREENE: No, we didn't.

BURDEN: Yeah.

GREENE: We never really go into that.

BURDEN: Okay. Yeah.

GREENE: We sort of always draw the curtain at the assassination.

BURDEN: Right.

GREENE: I know you've said, in the book that was done, Jean vanden Heuvel's [Jean Stein] book, there was quite a battle. I know that you were sort of at the center of that.

BURDEN: But I think that probably is not particularly relevant.

GREENE: Well, one interesting thing about the whole aftereffects is what happens to people, you know, in terms of the convention and where they go and what they do. I don't know if you have any observations on that.

BURDEN: I think it's a very difficult situation, and I must say one of the things I respect Howard Samuels [Howard J. Samuels] for doing, for example, is that he really spent weeks or months after he lost, finding places for people in the campaign. I don't think there was much effort made in this case. It was also, you know, forty times larger. Everybody was relatively well qualified and could fend for themselves, but I'm sure that there were people who really were left in the lurch.

GREENE: In terms of the office staff, the people from the Senate office, I think there was.

BURDEN: There was. Of course, the whole Ford Foundation thing.

GREENE: Right. And even the lower echelon people. Joe Dolan, I know, did a lot of...

BURDEN: Yeah, that's right, that's right.

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GREENE: ...contacting. I was thinking more in terms of the convention, and what happens to people in terms of Robert Kennedy's support, and where it goes and what efforts might have been made to give it some direction.

BURDEN: I went to the convention—I'm not sure exactly why, but I guess because I had been planning to—and spent a lot of time with Steve there. I, in fact, saw Teddy that one day that he was there. It was very exciting and dramatic, but I had no particular role to play. There was a moment of anticipation and expectation, if Teddy had become a candidate, then there would have been something for everybody to do.

GREENE: Do you think there really was that moment of...

BURDEN: Yeah, I think there was. I think there really was. I think it was very brief and intangible, I suppose. But I certainly got that feeling, and I tended to be skeptical generally about how Robert Kennedy probably would have done. But I got the impression that emotion can affect a convention in fact. You never know, but I mean there were certainly an awful lot of people asking and so forth.

GREENE: You weren't involved in any scouting activities, at that point, to see if there was support for...

BURDEN: I remember running some errands for Steve, and contacting people; and people coming to me with questions and relaying the questions back, but they were very tentative about any kind of real scouting or lobbying effort. I mean, the fact that they were there was indicative of some interest, but there was a basic ambivalence, I think, on everybody's part.

GREENE: Is there anything else you can think of?

BURDEN: Of course, the minute you leave I think of endless...

GREENE: Well, that's all right. If you do, you know, I can always come back sometime.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

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