

Milton S. Gwirtzman Oral History Interview – RFK#5, 04/28/1972
Administrative Information

Creator: Milton S. Gwirtzman
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Biographical Note

(1933 - 2011). Chief speech writer, Robert F. Kennedy Senate Campaign, 1964; director or public affairs, Robert F. Kennedy for President, 1968; author (with William vanden Heuvel), *On His Own: Robert F. Kennedy, 1964-1968* (1970), discusses RFK's 1968 presidential campaign in Oregon and California, among other issues.

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Fifth Oral History Interview

With

Milton S. Gwartzman

April 28, 1972
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: Well, last time we left off in Oregon, or at Oregon, just beginning. Do you want to give a brief explanation of where you were and when and how long?

GWIRTZMAN: I said last time that immediately after the Indiana primary I went to Oregon for two days then went on to California. I don't think I got back to Oregon prior to the night of the primary. So that I was not very much involved in the Oregon campaign. The two days I was there were, let's see, in the second week of May. I believe there were three weeks between the Indiana primary...

GREENE: Wait a second. [Interruption]

GWIRTZMAN: ...and the Oregon primary. I went to Oregon primarily to find out what the major issues were and what major issues should be developed for the primary in that state. I spoke to Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] who had been there for three or four weeks, to Edith Green [Edith S. Green], to some other people I knew from the state, and to the small research staff that Bill had gathered in Oregon, led I think by Ken Olsen. At that time, Bill was saying that things were going badly in Oregon, that not enough attention had been paid by the candidate or the campaign organization to the state, that the early polls that had been taken, showing Kennedy

[Robert F. Kennedy] far ahead, were changing. Edith Green was not as pessimistic as Bill was, but she felt that there were certain very important speeches that Senator Kennedy should make when he went there, that would help him, and certain places he should go.

I then went to California, then back to Washington. I transmitted that information, and also Bill's sense of urgency. He had been talking

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to other people at headquarters about it, but it was probably already too late to organize well in the state. Large numbers of people went out for the last two weeks or so but the McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] organization had been working since the late fall, and there wasn't much that could be done, on an organizational basis, in that short period of time.

GREENE: You said last time, too, that you were running the wrong kind of a campaign in Oregon, that you were running a California kind of a campaign, thinking that it was being observed from California, but it should have been a quieter sort of thing. Did you sense that when you were out there, or is that just hindsight?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it's hard to sense the mood of an entire state in a trip of a couple days.

GREENE: Yes, but did that come out of contacts with others?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. There was a memo that was written by Fred Schwarz, Jr. [Frederick A.O. Schwarz, Jr.] from New York who was out there, on what sort of issues the senator should make, and how he should go about campaigning in the state, which did recommend the more low-key approach. That was not done, first of all because the senator didn't have enough campaign time in Oregon to do it that way; secondly because to do that he would have had to change his entire style of campaigning, and he wasn't sure that it could be done naturally, it might look artificial doing that—you know, getting into a car and driving around from town to town. He didn't have the time and it wasn't his style. And because the leadership of the national campaign organization still felt that what was done in Oregon would be part of the campaigning in California, where an entirely different approach is necessary. Now, had they realized that they were going to lose in Oregon, I'm sure they would have changed that evaluation. But all our thinking was done within the framework of the poll results which still had Kennedy comfortably ahead.

GREENE: What kinds of things did Mrs. Green say ought to be stressed in speeches?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I can't remember specifically, but there was an event which was to be the senator's major event on his first day there after Indiana, which was, I believe, a mock convention at a high school.

GREENE: Right.

GWIRTZMAN: This was a traditional event that all of the candidates went to. And then the next day there was a Chamber of Commerce luncheon. She recommended topics for those, and the topics she recommended were used. I can't right now remember what they were but you can check them. So we did follow her guidance and issue advice.

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GREENE: You said last time, too, that she was the wrong person to head the campaign in Oregon. How soon did that become apparent and in what way was she the wrong person?

GWIRTZMAN: Did I make it that blunt?

GREENE: I think I wrote down just what you said, you said that she was the wrong person to head the campaign.

GWIRTZMAN: Only in one respect. I mean, she was very well-known in the state and she was, probably of all the political leaders in the state, the one who had the confidence of Robert Kennedy and had worked for the Kennedy organization over several years. But like many political leaders, she tended to be exclusive rather than inclusive as far as bringing in new people. She wanted to run the campaign with her organization, people loyal to her. Now, she's a congresswoman from one of the four or five congressional districts, and she did not have the kind of alliances in the other areas, outside of Portland, that were needed. So perhaps what I should have said is that there might have been a co-chairman; make her chairman for the metropolitan Portland area and someone else for the other congressional districts.

GREENE: Did she have personal problems with Kennedy's staff people, too? I know there were some people she just wouldn't even allow in her state, but some...

GWIRTZMAN: That's true.

GREENE: ...who didn't she want to come in?

GWIRTZMAN: People with whom she had not had good relations in the past for various reasons. I tried to get two people I knew and had confidence in, who were Oregonians, to come into the state. One was Jack Rosenthal [Jacob "Jack" Rosenthal], who had been Ed Guthman's [Edwin O. Guthman] deputy at the Justice Department; and the other was Nick Zumas [Nicholas H. Zumas]. Jack couldn't do it. I think he was acceptable to Mrs. Green. But Nick Zumas was not acceptable

to her because he had worked for her in the House [of Representatives] and then left her staff to take another job, against her wishes. So she was exclusivist as to those kind of people, too.

GREENE: What about Wes Barthelmes [A. Wesley Barthelmes, Jr.]? I know he, on one of the memos you gave me—I forget which one it is—says he's one of the people she said she'd like to have come in there. Was he ever approached?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know. I know he wrote at least one memorandum about the Oregon campaign early in the national campaign.

GREENE: Yes. In fact, this is where it is, it's that March 29 state by state breakdown, and under Oregon it says she wants an aide, Wes Barthelmes or Chuck Paulson [Charles Paulson].

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GWIRTZMAN: Chuck Paulson was made the state campaign director at her suggestion.

GREENE: Okay. Anyway, can you comment to some extent on the McCarthy campaign in Oregon and the problems they had?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, just from what I knew from Bill and from the other people I talked to, it was a strong campaign with strong grassroots presence and it had been organized for a long period of time.

GREENE: Did the kind of an organization and kind of a campaign they were running make for difficulties for you because of contrasts in style?

GWIRTZMAN: Probably. McCarthy's style was more conducive to Oregon, it was a lower-key style. He didn't have the advance procedures to get out crowds and things like that, those techniques were not usual in Oregon politics and I guess some of the voters resented them. But again, it's very difficult, because an apparatus is created for a national campaign and it develops a certain way of doing things. And that sort of a large crowd procedure, which worked very well in Indiana and was necessary in California, it would be hard to suddenly stop it and then turn it on again because people such as advance men have certain ways of doing things.

GREENE: What are your recollections of the business about whether or not to debate McCarthy in Oregon?

GWIRTZMAN: I was in Los Angeles at the time and so I was not aware of what was going on. We were not asked for any recommendations about it. I know the story about how various people began to feel that a debate

was essential, that Kennedy was reluctant to debate, that there was a confrontation between him and some members of his staff over the issue, that McCarthy made it a major issue at that point in the primary, Kennedy is refusing the debate, and that McCarthy's strategy peaked during the visits both candidates made, the same day, to the Portland zoo.

GREENE: Yes. You were not consulted at all long distance, or I had the feeling maybe some of the younger staff members tried to get you to put pressure on him?

GWIRTZMAN: No, no.

GREENE: No. Would you have gone along with his decision not to debate there?

GWIRTZMAN: I generally tend to favor debates in that sort of a situation because a candidate has no way of turning around the issue of "why don't you debate." Newspapers want a debate because it's exciting and the public tends to feel that debates are useful. So, once the opposition starts making the issue, it becomes a difficult one, and

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the best way to handle it is to agree to debate. You can agree to debate under terms and conditions which are most favorable to you. If the candidate feels that debating the other candidate would give the other candidate unnecessary exposure, would create an audience for him, you can have the debate on radio rather than television, say. Or have the debate just before the election when most people have already made up their minds. There are a lot of ways to do it in order to minimize the damage, defuse the issue, but if you don't want to debate, you have to be prepared to take all the damage that comes from the other candidate having this effective issue against you.

GREENE: Well, I know in your book you mention that even though Robert Kennedy had apparently made up his mind, there was some research done in Oregon in the event that a debate did take place. Did you get involved in that at all or not until California?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I was in Los Angeles a few days before the Oregon primary when Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] broke off from the Oregon campaign to come to California for a couple of days. He sent me a memo saying that there was a possibility of a debate and that if it was going to be decided to do it, it would be decided very quickly and the debate would take place shortly afterwards, so there would not be sufficient time to prepare for it beforehand. For that reason there was nothing to be lost in beginning preparation for it before they'd even decided to do it.

GREENE: Okay. What did you do at that point?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't remember what we did prior to the Oregon primary in California. However, the group that was working in Washington under Bill Smith [William Smith] undertook to.... [Interruption] That group made a very thorough analysis of all of the differences between the positions McCarthy had taken and Kennedy had taken, and made suggestions as to how to handle those differences in the debate. This included the substantive issues as well as the political issues. At the same time—well, not exactly, but later on—after the Oregon primary I made up debate preparation notes for a debate in California. We tried to anticipate what the questions would be because the format... [Interruption] ...was limited to answering questions and then a closing statement.

GREENE: Closing statement, that's right.

GWIRTZMAN: Given that format, the most important thing to do was to try to anticipate the questions, to anticipate what McCarthy's answers would be, and to recommend what the best counter would be under two circumstances: one, when Senator Kennedy was asked the question first; and secondly (and more difficult) when Senator McCarthy was asked the question first.

GREENE: And who worked on this with you?

GWIRTZMAN: All the people who were working on the research staff in California at that time.

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GREENE: But was this sort of your area? Were you in charge of getting it all together? Or didn't it work that way?

GWIRTZMAN: Peter [Peter B. Edelman] and I, I think.

GREENE: Well, do you want to talk about it specifically?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, are we off of Oregon now, onto California?

GREENE: No, we aren't, but as long as we're talking about the debate.... Maybe we better finish with Oregon and then go on. Getting a little off the track here.

Well, one other thing on Oregon that I'm sure didn't affect you when you were in Oregon, but you may have had some feedback in Los Angeles, and that is the Drew Pearson charges about the Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] wiretap. Did you get into that and how to handle it or to respond?

GWIRTZMAN: No, because I wasn't involved in that during the Justice Department period. That, I think, was handled by the people who had been in the Justice Department feeding material to Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], who was with the senator in Oregon and who answered the charges in Oregon.

GREENE: I know there were some things done in the black areas of Los Angeles but I didn't know if you were involved. Well, is there anything special on the Oregon speeches? I have a number of them here where I can guess the influence.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, the only one of those that I remember something about was the speech at the synagogue in Portland on Israel.

GREENE: Yeah. Neveh Shalom?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Now, Adam Walinsky and Jeff Greenfield were opposed to the senator giving a speech on Israel there. They felt that the sort of position that he would have to take, before such an audience was not in keeping with the general foreign policy position that he had been taking during the campaign; it was much more of a hawk position. The impetus for that speech came out of several events and several people: first of all, the fact that the senator was having the same sort of difficulty in the Jewish communities in 1968 that he had in the beginning of the campaign in 1964, and one of the reasons for that, as expressed to him and his campaign aides by Jewish leaders who were favorable to Kennedy, was that they didn't know what his positions was on Israel. You remember that the day after the Indiana primary, the senator was in New York and had a meeting with a group of rabbis. (I covered that in my book.) And again, just as in 1964, he found it difficult to believe that these people didn't think that he was a strong enough friend of Israel—after the record of the Kennedy administration and the statements he had made as a senator from New York. But he bowed to their judgment that this was not

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getting through. And the only way to get it through would be to make a major speech, which could then be distributed; although in New York what he had done, he sent a message to a Jewish conference, which was distributed in New York.

But then you get to Oregon, where there was a small but significant Jewish community and the same question appeared. You asked the Jewish leaders, "What should Robert Kennedy do to help combat McCarthy's strength in the Jewish community?" and they said, "Make a speech on Israel." But Adam and Jeff didn't feel it was appropriate. Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] got involved and felt very strongly that he should make one and in fact submitted a draft. Adam and Jeff thought the draft was unacceptable, being unacceptable hawkish. How could someone running for president on a platform of "no more Vietnams" make an open-ended military commitment to any other country? they argued. I think a few adjustments were made in the draft, but not many.

GREENE: Did you get into this at all?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, yes, just to the extent that Mike called me, and I'm sure he called other people. He wanted to make sure that the draft wouldn't be changed at the last minute. I think it was given substantially—not maybe precisely as Mike had written it—and there was probably qualifying language in there which tried to gear it more toward the other positions he'd been taking on foreign policy, but the specific proposals were the proposals that the Jewish advisers had suggested. And the reason it's so important is because that is the speech, as I understand it, that Sirhan Sirhan [Sirhan Bishara Sirhan] saw on television, and which might have persuaded him that Kennedy must be eliminated.

GREENE: Yes. There was a second one in a Los Angeles temple, too, that was mentioned. Maybe he saw that, too.
What did you tell Feldman? Did you go along with his position, or were you more sympathetic with Adam and Jeff?

GWIRTZMAN: I was more inclined toward his position.

GREENE: Do you have any feeling for what Robert Kennedy thought about it? I think Jeff is the one that told me that Robert Kennedy felt uncomfortable with this staunch pro-Israel position, that he felt it was too black and white.

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GWIRTZMAN: Yes, but he bowed to the political realities and at the end he got rather enthused about it, as indicated by the things he added at the end of the last page of the speech in his own handwriting, saying, "We will support Israel, we must support Israel." As long as he was going to do it, he wanted to do it right.

GREENE: Had this ambivalence he felt ever been expressed to you?

GWIRTZMAN: Several times, over the period of all four years. You see, he didn't feel, even though he was a senator from New York and representing a large Jewish constituency, that he could be pro-Israel to the exclusion of the other countries in the Middle East; because the Kennedy family had credit in the Middle East. President John F. Kennedy

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had had relationships with all the Arab leaders, even though he had been very committed to Israel's security. And Robert Kennedy had a sense about that. He didn't want to do things

that would cause difficulty for him if he were elected president. But time after time during those four years, events occurred which made it necessary for political leaders in the United States to choose up sides. All of his colleagues had no trouble coming down strongly for Israel. And so, with some reluctance, he did too. Of course, that reluctance was realized, I think it was apparent to the Israeli leaders. Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had a very strong, vocal, unequivocal position on Israel and was getting a lot of support because of it. So the political realities were such as to push him toward the unequivocal position.

GREENE: There's nothing else on the speeches that comes to mind? You said you did go back to Oregon on primary day?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. The senator campaigned in California during the day of that primary, then he left from the Burbank [California] airport and went up. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] and I were supposed to fly up with him in order to fly back with him. So we went to the Burbank airport—he was running quite late—we waited for about an hour there, and then he arrived. Just as he arrived he got the first returns from Oregon, which were not favorable. And when he got off the plane he heard that that trend had continued and that he had lost the Oregon primary. I think he pretty well accepted that outcome during the flight, and thought about how he was going to react to it during the flight.

GREENE: Was there discussion along those lines?

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know. I think there probably was. None with me.

GREENE: Do you think that the early returns were just his expectations coming true or had he really...

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know because I wasn't in Oregon with him and didn't know whether he felt he was going to win in Oregon. I was very pleasantly surprised by his reaction. Jack Rosenthal, who worked with him in the Justice Department, once said to me during the New York State campaign in 1964, when Kennedy was running behind, "He's okay as long as he's winning, but once he starts to lose he'll be a very, very difficult man to deal with." Well, that wasn't at all true. He was extremely gracious, he didn't complain, he didn't blame anybody except himself, he was very, very kind, went out of his way to be good to Mrs. Green, to Bill vanden Heuvel, and to the other people who had worked up there who felt terribly, because not only was it a loss, and a damaging loss, but also the first loss that he had ever had, and they felt, to some degree, responsible for it. He did all he could to make them know that he felt that he was responsible for it and not them.

GREENE: Can you describe what you saw as the immediate impact on the campaign? There are some people that say that it actually helped.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it didn't help the campaign at all because in the context of the real race, which was at that time between Kennedy and Humphrey, Kennedy had lost the position that was critical to his strategy of being a primary winner. He'd lost a primary, and that made it easier for the Humphrey people to go around into the non-primary states and combat the argument that we had been making, which was that Kennedy can win and Humphrey can't. They could now say, "Well, if you can't even beat McCarthy in Oregon, how can you beat Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]?" We had been saying that Humphrey wasn't in any of the primaries because he was afraid of facing Kennedy. I had suggested that they have an informal primary, that Kennedy challenge Humphrey to an informal, nonbinding primary in Pennsylvania, just to show that he was willing, that he was anxious to take on Humphrey in a primary and that Humphrey was the one who was being reluctant because he was politically weak. Well, it's harder to make that argument if you lose, so the Oregon loss hurt the campaign very badly. And it came at a difficult time, because Humphrey was picking up a lot of delegates and this helped Humphrey. Where it did help, probably, was in the feeling about Kennedy in California; because he no longer represented a monolithic powerhouse. The people there felt: "He's lost, he's become human." There was some sympathy for him. I suppose that aided the campaign in California.

GREENE: Just to pursue this suggestion of yours in Pennsylvania, to whom did you make it and how seriously was it considered?

GWIRTZMAN: I wrote a memo to Ted Sorensen about it. I don't know whether it was seriously considered. It probably would have been very difficult to arrange, and all you were going to end up with was Humphrey saying no.

GREENE: Do you remember at what point you....

GWIRTZMAN: This was while I was in California prior to the Oregon primary, just at the time when Humphrey started gathering a lot of delegates and we realized that we were in a difficult position, where he was the real opponent and yet there was no way we could get our hands on him.

GREENE: Yes. Which was exactly how he had it planned. Okay. Is there anything else on Oregon that comes to mind?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: Okay. What was the status of things when you got to California then, after having gone to Oregon and back to California?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I was just in Los Angeles. There was a large campaign headquarters that was being manned by the local people. I don't think there had been much organization in the southern part of the state. This was just after Frank Mankiewicz [Frank F. Mankiewicz] and others had gone in to organize groups with whom Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] had not organized.

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The staff headquarters in southern California at that time was, made up mostly of liberal intellectuals from the Fairfax [Calif.] and Beverly Hills area. You had the beginning of some of the Chicano leaders coming in, some of the black leaders coming in. But that didn't really start until Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] got out there on a fulltime basis, which was—when,—about three weeks...

GREENE: That's what I would have said, about three weeks before.

GWIRTZMAN: ...before.

GREENE: Yeah, I think that is about right. How much opportunity did you have to observe the Unruh people and what problems would you see with them?

GWIRTZMAN: None. I just worked with some of his staff people in the headquarters, and they knew the state but I couldn't sense whether or not they had difficulty working with the other groups and factions. By this time they were probably on the defensive, because other new people had come in. As always happens when the national people come into a state, the local people who had been there get demoralized because they don't feel that they haven't been doing well, and they feel that these nationally famous people are coming in and taking over their functions. It usually takes a week or so for the two groups to start working together.

GREENE: Did that seem to happen? Did it iron itself out after a while?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, I think so.

GREENE: Did you get involved at all in discussions about what groups to emphasize? You know, there was some debate about where to put the emphasis, on the suburbs or on blacks.

GWIRTZMAN: Not particularly. I know that with the blacks and Chicanos, we realized that Senator Kennedy had the support of those groups, but it was a problem of getting them out to vote. So the question would be how much time and money and people should be devoted to that, as opposed to the other groups which had to be wooed. Frank Mankiewicz was very much involved in the problem of wooing the liberals and Jews; Jess was concerned about the blue collar workers in places like

Downey [Calif.] and Burbank. If you look at the schedule, and the things the senator talked about, and campaign organization, you'll

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see that efforts were made in all those areas, that one wasn't done to the exclusion of the other.

GREENE: Did you have to do a lot of new research in putting your materials together?

GWIRTZMAN: Some. There was a group of law school professors and others in California who had constituted themselves as a California Kennedy issues group, and who put together material on all the local communities, and also very good papers on the California issues. That was a big help. We used them whenever the senator was going into a new area of the state.

GREENE: They didn't, as some of these academic groups do, tend to get too bogged down?

GWIRTZMAN: This one didn't, not nearly as much. Our function really became to take that material and convert it into pamphlets, newspaper ads, help the television people decide which of the commercials were most appropriate, and then to make recommendations on what sort of visual events the senator should include in his campaign. Now, a lot of people including Fred and Ed Guthman, who was in Los Angeles as a newspaperman, were very sensitive about the social issues: law and order, welfare, the blacks, things like that. And Fred was also, from his experience as manager of the Brown [Edmund G. Brown] campaign two years before where Reagan [Ronald Reagan], the opponent, had been very successful in utilizing those issues against Brown.... Guthman felt that these issues could be made effectively in the suburbs. He suggested that the senator go out to street corners and just talk to groups of citizens about crime and about riots, about black people, and give them his positions, because he [Guthman] felt that that would be Kennedy at his most persuasive, and that, rather than have speeches and rallies these small rap sessions, if they were covered on television and if television spots were made from them, could serve as an effective campaign vehicle. We also considered making his speech to the International Association of Police Chiefs in Hawaii stress the crime and law and order issues.

GREENE: And you vetoed that idea, didn't you?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] was the one who was considering it. It was never done, probably because it would take a day to get to Hawaii, make the speech, and come back. Had the group been meeting

in California, he might have spoken to them. But again, the purpose of that was to get the same kind of identification with policemen that a candidate gets by going to a police lineup or speaking at a police academy.

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GREENE: Different subject again: Did you get much of a feel for the money problems, particularly in California?

GWIRTZMAN: No. I didn't know there were any.

GREENE: Maybe there weren't. I meant, were there any and were you aware of anything?
Okay. What about McCarthy and Humphrey's activities in California?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, let's go back for a minute. There were a couple of other issues. The political issue by that time was becoming Humphrey, because it wouldn't do any good to win the California primary if Humphrey had already lined up enough delegates from other parts of the country to win the nomination. So we did make suggestions about how to treat Humphrey during the campaign, even though he wasn't there, and how to draw the theme of change, that the Democratic party in the primaries was voting for change, and that Humphrey did not represent change. We alleged that Humphrey had thrown away his credentials as the leader of the progressive forces within the party, the so-called progressive center.

That theme was established in a news conference that the senator had when he came to California after Oregon, to begin his intensive campaigning. That would have been after the Nebraska primary, the fifteenth of May, or maybe he came down from Oregon at an earlier time. He said, "Even now the forces of reaction are gathered." He was talking about what was going on in the non-primary states. What he wanted to do was alert the voters of California to that situation, so that they would not indulge in the luxury of voting for McCarthy over him, since McCarthy couldn't win and he could, and he had to have a good victory in California in order to stop the erosion that was taking place in the non-primary states.

The other issue that came up was the issue of employment in the aerospace industry, because in a speech or in answer to a press conference, I think in Michigan, he had expressed opposition to some aspect of the space program. This was used against him in California. So we had to do something to persuade the aerospace workers that we didn't want to see them lose their jobs.

GREENE: And how did you do that?

GWIRTZMAN: Again, through a statement which was released and printed in the industry journals, and through an appearance he made at an aerospace plant. He made, I believe.... Didn't he make a speech at the TRW [Thompson-Ramo-Woolridge] plant on that subject?

GREENE: I'm sorry, that's not one of those that I have, but that doesn't mean anything.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, he made an appearance and issued a statement. So he did make an effort in that direction.

GREENE: Can you remember other occasions when you ran into that problem, where something that he had said that was a wise political move in one place came back as a problem in another?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, this one wasn't done as a wise political move. I mean, he just did oppose this particular space project and he said so. It just got a great deal more attention than he thought it would get, especially in California. But he did not have a problem of inconsistency in his campaign, except maybe with the new emphasis on law and order in Indiana. It wasn't that he changed positions, it's that he occasionally changed the issues he was emphasizing; and that gave the impression he was trying to change his stance.

GREENE: Right. That's really what I meant. Well, could you see evidence in California of Humphrey and McCarthy working together with their goal to defeat Robert Kennedy?

GWIRTZMAN: I didn't. I remember that that was being said. See, you had the Lynch [Thomas C. Lynch] slate, which we called the Lynch-Humphrey slate, Lynch-Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] slate, and it was running a separate campaign, but I think that at some point, some of those people went to work for McCarthy in order to stop Kennedy

GREENE: Do you think that McCarthy even after Oregon was underrated by the Kennedy people in California?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Again, in California as everywhere, he came from a position of running badly in the polls, came up very quickly and took a good deal of the undecided vote. I don't think that, except for that one poll in April, Kennedy ever received less than fifty percent of the vote in the polls. But in fact he got 46 percent.

GREENE: Forty-six, right. This is again jumping ahead, but while we're talking about percentages, did he ever express to you a feeling that he had to get fifty percent in California to be a viable candidate?

GWIRTZMAN: No. I mean, he knew he had to win to be a viable candidate. He knew that the Lynch delegation was not going to get much of a vote, so if he were going to win at all, he'd have to be pretty close to that

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percentage. But I don't think he ever set fifty as the benchmark. That was the benchmark that was set by the press; after polling and talking to people, they arrived at the conclusion that he should get fifty percent. So on election night, that became the standard which he had to meet.

GREENE: Yes, because of course the press after the shooting and everything, the emphasis was on what a happy occasion it was and what great momentum there was, and really I had the feeling that it was quite a disappointment.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it wasn't... The interesting thing is that unlike Indiana, where the first network television projection—and those are the first thing that people get; politicians no longer get returns from key precincts any faster than the networks because the networks have a lot of money to spend on getting them themselves. In Indiana the first projections were very low, 39 percent, and that created a psychological problem which Kennedy recognized for political leaders around the country, because if they were going to go to bed thinking he only got 39 percent, it wasn't good. So he set up very quickly a counteraction to show people that he was doing better than that. In California, the opposite was true. The initial projections were fifty percent or higher. They started about 55, went down to 50 and held there. He went into the ballroom believing he had 50 percent. It wasn't until the next day that it went down. Now, if nothing had happened to him that night, and he had ended up with 46 percent, I think you're right: many of the media would have considered that not necessarily a defeat, but not the kind of impressive victory he needed to eliminate McCarthy as a credible candidate, and to hurl the gauntlet of "I am the people's choice" in front of Humphrey. And that, plus what was in store for him in New York, would have hurt his candidacy badly in my judgment.

GREENE: Do you remember discussions, did you get involved in discussions, about how to handle McCarthy in California, particularly when McCarthy started to get really nasty and attacked Robert Kennedy for the mistake on his voting record and that kind of thing?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, remember that these campaigns always have a tendency to degenerate. After the experience we had with the McCarthy record, we hadn't made any attacks on McCarthy at all. But we got into California after McCarthy had won in Oregon, after the debate had been set, and then after McCarthy had started saying totally false things—like the ads he put in the newspapers saying that Kennedy was responsible for the invasion of the Dominican Republic when he wasn't even in the government; things like that—Kennedy felt these tactics gave him license to respond, in the same way that he waited to attack

Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] until Keating had attacked him. It was more self-defense than anything else.

GREENE: Some of that did come out in the debate, didn't it? I believe one of McCarthy's ads was discussed.

GWIRTZMAN: There was one series of exchanges in the debates about it, when Kennedy was critical of McCarthy's ads and McCarthy was critical of Kennedy's statement about his voting record and they had an exchange like that. And McCarthy withdrew one of the inaccurate ads about Kennedy as soon as he knew that it was running. And he also said in the debate that he had not seen that ad, that it was not the kind of ad he would have approved.

GREENE: Is that the kind of a denial taken on its face value?

GWIRTZMAN: McCarthy said he had not seen the ad. He said, "When I saw what it said, I said, 'Stop it,' and they stopped it as soon as they could. Which is not quite what happened to the voting record of McCarthy that was distributed across the country and which is being mailed out at this date right now." So again, this mailing was not being done by the Kennedy organization. If, in fact, it was being done at all.

GREENE: Were you aware of that? Were you aware that this was being mailed out?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: And you took McCarthy's denial at face value, it wasn't the kind of thing that...

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, because if the ad runs, it's very tough to catch.

GREENE: Yes, because they do these things, get it out, have the effect, then deny the whole thing.

GWIRTZMAN: I don't think he would do that.

GREENE: You don't. Was that something, by the way, that you had talked about in preparation for the debate?

GWIRTZMAN: Oh, yes. We tried to anticipate all the questions, and the so-called scurrilous literature was a question that came up.

GREENE: Was there anything that came out as a surprise in the debate, that you hadn't prepared him for?

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GWIRTZMAN: No. Those papers were the most thorough written preparation for a debate that I'd ever seen, especially the papers sent from Washington. There was a one-foot high stack of papers. Kennedy didn't read all of them, but in the oral briefing that we had the day of the debate, we anticipated and covered all of the questions that came up on the debate.

GREENE: How was he in that kind of thing? Was he quick to pick things up?

GWIRTZMAN: Where a subject was raised that he probably had under his belt and could handle, he was quick to move on to something else. And where a subject was raised that called for deciding how to discuss it, then he participated in discussion and made up his mind as to what he was going to say.

GREENE: Can you remember specific issues which required some discussion?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, for example, we knew that McCarthy had, on several occasions, called for the resignation of J. Edgar Hoover, and we anticipated that might be a question asked in the debate, and in fact it was. On the elevator going down from the hotel suite in which he was preparing, at one point I asked him.... I mean, he had said that he would respond to that question by saying "I don't want to get into personalities, Mr. Hoover's done a good job." And I asked him, "Would you really keep Hoover?" And he said to me, "If you think that J. Edgar Hoover and I could stay in the same administration for one minute, you don't understand." But he didn't feel that it would be appropriate, politically or otherwise, for him to call for J. Edgar Hoover's resignation while on the political stump, it just wasn't his style.

GREENE: What about the statement that McCarthy's plan would mean moving people from the inner city to Orange County [Calif.]?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, do you want to go through these others?

GREENE: Yes, sure. Go ahead.

GWIRTZMAN: The areas where preparation was most necessary were in giving him the California facts and figures to illustrate the various national issues. What we anticipated McCarthy would do was covered in that memo that I gave you, that he would be cool and restrained and wouldn't attack Kennedy directly when Kennedy was in the same room with him, as he had when they were campaigning separately. There was a very definite strategy, which was that to the people whose votes we

were trying to change, the one thing we had over McCarthy was not our position on issues against his—because there was general agreement—but the fact that Robert Kennedy had had experience in all of the areas that were of current concern. I think it was first Adam Walinsky who wrote a memo strongly suggesting that wherever possible, Kennedy beat his own drum saying, in answer to a question, “Well, you know, I was attorney general and we had that problem, this is how we handled it.” Or on foreign policy: “I served on the executive committee during the Cuban missile crisis and this sort of thing came up.”

GREENE: Was there anyone who was afraid that that kind of . . . Well, Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] warned about nostalgia and harking back.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it didn’t apply so much here because this was a matter of experience. McCarthy had his own experience in the Senate, which he referred to. In fact, he knew that Kennedy was scoring points on this theme, because he devoted half of his closing statement to sketching out his own experience. The danger was that Kennedy was not the kind of guy who liked to beat his own drum, to talk about himself. But for this purpose, he subordinated that dislike, and he did so. If you look at the transcript, you’ll see that on three or four occasions he incorporated references to things he had done into his answers. If you want to ask about Orange County speech . . .

GREENE: Yes. Well, I was trying to think. I was asking you about the statement that he made, that McCarthy’s plan would mean moving people from the inner city to Orange County, which became quite a controversial remark.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, this was an area of policy that Kennedy had been working on for a long time: The basic question of public policy which divided liberals and blacks was do you use public money to improve the ghetto or to help blacks move into other neighborhoods. The hearings that he held in the Senate, the study he did, the bills he proposed, Kennedy for a couple of years had been very much on the side of building up physical and social structures within the black areas before attempting integration because residential integration was something that would be very strongly resisted, especially if the blacks coming into white neighborhoods were people who, because of the deprivation they had suffered in the ghettos, weren’t able to adjust easily to suburban community life. It was tied up with deep fears about property values, home ownership values, and the image many whites had of their neighborhoods.

So it was a very sound position Kennedy took, and it was the position that many, many blacks had taken in the debates with their fellow blacks on this. We knew when McCarthy had issued his

position paper two, three weeks earlier, calling more for moving the blacks out rather than improving the ghetto, we knew that this was a very legitimate issue between two candidates because they were on opposite sides of an issue that was being debated by people who were very sincerely concerned with the problem.

Now, when the thing was raised during the briefing we had to prepare for the debate, and Kennedy gave his.... And Peter Edelman, who was an expert on this subject, raised the various ways the questions could come up, and Kennedy gave his answer. Again, remembering our interest in using California facts and illustrations, Jess Unruh, who was sitting in on the briefing, when he heard McCarthy's position expressed he said, "Well, you know, in order to drive that home with a good California example, what he is saying amounts to taking ten thousand blacks from Watts and moving them to Orange County." Which in effect was what McCarthy was saying, because that's where they would go if they were leaving Los Angeles and were to be resettled. That must have stuck in Kennedy's mind, because he used it on the debate. At the time that Jess suggested it, no one argued, no one said it was unfair, shouldn't be used, because it was a good illustration of McCarthy's program, it wasn't distorting his position at all.

Now Jess I'm sure realized that there were political implications in there. We were criticized, the senator was criticized for using it. It was considered a blatant appeal for the Orange County conservative Democratic vote. Senator McCarthy carried Orange County, Kennedy didn't, so the statement didn't change votes in Orange County. I think it was a very legitimate way to illustrate a point in the debate, to show the natural and probable result of an opponent's policy with which you disagree.

GREENE: Uh huh. Was Robert Kennedy generally satisfied with the way the debate went?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. He thought he'd won, but not overwhelmingly. He thought that he'd accomplished his main point, which is to eliminate the issue that McCarthy had made, and was making, of Kennedy's refusal to debate him. He also was glad it was over.

GREENE: Was he upset about the way the end of the program went? Remember when....

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, because he had been told that he would have, I think, a minute or a minute and a half for his closing remarks, and he had kept them to that time limit. McCarthy far exceeded the time. He made a very eloquent presentation. Kennedy felt that he could have made a good presentation, too, if he had violated the rules and exceeded the time. I think he did feel that in terms of the answers to the questions generally, he was clearly ahead, but McCarthy took extra

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time to get in the last word and by doing so salvaged some of his credit.

GREENE: That's interesting because it was my understanding that Kennedy—that seems impossible because the format was set ahead of time—that Kennedy did not realize that he would have that opportunity to sum up and that he was asked to do so and he, you know, quickly put things together in a very hasty fashion, and then McCarthy was well prepared with, as you say, an articulate and comprehensive summary. But your impression is it was more a question of how much time he would have. [Interruption]

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

GWIRTZMAN: Kennedy took a couple of minutes, because he was told in the briefing that that was all the rules allowed him.

GREENE: Did you get involved at all in the arrangements about the format? Were the Kennedy people generally satisfied with it or had they wanted something else?

GWIRTZMAN: No, they were satisfied with it. Another thing about debates is that the candidate who has to accede to the other candidate's requests for the debate can usually get his way with ground rules.

GREENE: You mean as a bargaining factor.

GWIRTZMAN: Yes.

GREENE: The other thing I wanted to ask you about the debate was, were you preparing him and were you thinking mainly in terms of the California primary, or were you looking at this for the most part for its national exposure.

GWIRTZMAN: The California primary, because it was very important to do as well as possible against McCarthy in California.

GREENE: Were there any things that you were preparing him on which you might have done different, or where there was a debate as far as how it should be approached since it would be viewed on national television?

GWIRTZMAN: No, because California is so large and really so representative of the country, that, except for trying to put in some California facts and figures, you wouldn't change your approach. All of the questions asked were national questions, but they were the issues in California, too.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the debate that you can think of? [Gwartzman shakes head, no.] Well, the next thing that I had was about campuses and organizing young people generally. You've spoken about that in relation to other states. Is there anything in particular about California?

GWIRTZMAN: No.

GREENE: What about getting involved with the CDC [California Democratic Council] and other liberal groups?

GWIRTZMAN: No, I think the next thing is the issues that the senator was more reluctant to speak out on.

GREENE: Okay.

GWIRTZMAN: He seemed more reluctant to speak out on the more philosophical issues, such as the nature of the presidency. McCarthy had expressed a viewpoint about what a president should do and what his relationship should be with Congress and on foreign policy. It was quite a different concept of the presidency than had been followed in recent past. It looked ahead to the more limited presidency that many observers were to come to favor after the Nixon experience. And there was some idea that Kennedy would make an issue about that but he didn't because he felt the issue was too abstruse. He wanted to talk about the specific hard issues that people were thinking about every day.

GREENE: Was this just in keeping with his general nature to steer away from the theoretical?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes.

GREENE: Did that come up in relation to the debate? Were there people who were prodding him to discuss things like that?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, that was one of the things that we put forward in our presentation of what McCarthy was saying but he didn't take any great interest in it.

GREENE: You know, it just reminds me, off the subject, of the interview that he did with David Frost, only a portion of which appeared I think during the campaign and the rest appeared in a special program after he was assassinated. Did you have anything to do with preparing him for that or is that the kind of thing he just would go into?

GWIRTZMAN: No. He would go into that.

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GREENE: Because it was so obvious there, too, that he was very uncomfortable with the lines of questioning that Frost was developing that were theoretical.

GWIRTZMAN: “Who are you” and “What are your values,” yes.

GREENE: Okay. Were there any things that he spoke about in California for the first time, that he raised then?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, there were some speeches he made on subjects that he hadn't previously covered in his campaign, but they were all subjects that he had talked about as a senator: welfare, for example, welfare reforms, a program that he had been working up. Had he not run for president, he would have brought it to the floor of the Senate. So he didn't create new issues for California, except for the political issue about Humphrey, which he hadn't talked about before.

GREENE: Do you have any feeling of, at the time of California, by the time of California, how he felt about Humphrey?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, he didn't like the fact that Humphrey seemed to be doing so well. I'm not sure the extent to which he was made aware of that by the political staff. I don't know whether they protected him from that or not, but it was obvious that Humphrey was winning one convention after another in the non-primary states and was getting endorsements from important leaders in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan. Delegates were slipping away from Kennedy, and in so far as they were slipping to Humphrey, I'm sure he didn't like it. He didn't like it. He didn't feel that it made sense, or was right for people to reject Johnson and then take Humphrey.

GREENE: Well, can you comment on any particular problems on issues and putting speeches together in California? I've got some of them listed here, some of the major speeches.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, we had a problem with the welfare system in a speech in Van Nuys [Calif.] on May 15. People in California, politicians in his headquarters in the state, felt that the speech shouldn't get as much publicity as the people on the plane wanted it to get. The latter prepared it to be released a couple of days before, so it could be given a lot of attention. The press office in California said, “No, this speech is going to hurt us and let's downplay it.” That created a hassle. That's the only one of these that I can remember.

GREENE: How was that hassle resolved?

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GWIRTZMAN: Well, the people in California did not release the speech and the people traveling with the senator got mad about it and made them promise not to do it again.

GREENE: Is there anything else on California? I feel like there's so much.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, the whistle-stop tour of the...

GREENE: San Joaquin Valley.

GWIRTZMAN: ...San Joaquin Valley. I worked on that with John Bartlow Martin, giving the senator material about each stop, local stuff. John went with him on the trip, wrote stuff as they went along. That was a successful trip and I think he did well in that area. That would be down in Modesto [California] and through that area.

GREENE: The wine country.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, it was the agricultural country, generally. It was the train trip that President Kennedy had taken.

GREENE: Did he like that kind of campaigning?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, I think he did. He was very pleased with the Wabash Cannonball trip. Then they did one in Oregon which Herb Schmirz as the chief advance man put together there and which they felt was successful, and they did this one. There's something about a train campaign which is different because it's a media event and a candidate seems to have more rapport with the crowds speaking from the back platform. In part, that's because a train is such a rarity in cities these days.

GREENE: I don't have anything else on California unless you do.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, security measures. The only thing I remember about that is something he would never have been aware of: there was a death threat that came in the headquarters one night when he was in Los Angeles, which was referred routinely to the police.

GREENE: The Washington headquarters?

GWIRTZMAN: No, the California, Los Angeles. The last three weeks of the campaign I was in Los Angeles.

GREENE: And it was handed over to the police?

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GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Someone called and said that his brother had left the house with a gun and said he was going to shoot Kennedy. They got the guy's name and description.

GREENE: You never got involved in discussions with people who were involved in that end of it and concerned?

GWIRTZMAN: Security? No. I mean, Bill Barry [William Barry] was there, he was a former agent, he was armed, and I assume he could handle that. It's not the sort of thing you think of in a campaign.

GREENE: It's funny, because some people said that they were conscious of it all the time, particularly when they were out in the open, in the streets.

GWIRTZMAN: I wasn't.
Again, the major releases were on subjects he had treated in depth in the Senate over the past two years. You see, where he was pursuing such a hard schedule, he really didn't have time to consider new policy initiatives except on a very ad hoc basis. The best thing to do was to use some of the programs that had been developed in the Senate, whether or not they were the most relevant programs to the political situation in California. Now, Peter was very much of the opinion that they were relevant. I'm talking here about welfare, poverty, and urban programs, now, these are all black-oriented, poverty-oriented. But they were the things that the senator had been working on, all the things that he was most involved with over the previous two years and he could give a good speech about them, with much personal involvement. I think he probably preferred to do that than to have to sit down and try to shape a policy, late in the evening or early in the morning, on new issues.

GREENE: To what extent was this program for the urban crises a response to McCarthy and some of the things

GWIRTZMAN: I don't know that it was.

GREENE: Other than the debate, was there any reaction to McCarthy's criticism of Kennedy's plans for the ghetto that you can recall?

GWIRTZMAN: No, not that I can recall.

GREENE: Were you in charge or did you work closely on putting together these three....

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GWIRTZMAN: No, all of those Peter had the greatest role in, and then Adam and Jeff did the writing. I don't know whether there were new proposals in there that he had not made in his speeches on the floor, they might have, just updated those. The welfare one, I think, that was a new proposal.

GREENE: Did you get involved at all in trying to get attention for them in the press?

GWIRTZMAN: No. Was any special effort made on that?

GREENE: Well, I think they had some problem in the beginning with the releases because they were not getting the kind of attention they wanted.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, people who work in issues in a campaign never think that they get enough attention, because the issue material is not as interesting to the newspapers as political material.

GREENE: Right. But anyway, this was their response to people who didn't think Kennedy was serious and whatnot. Okay.

Are there any areas where you considered it a problem to develop a position that was consistent throughout? Well, we've more or less talked about that, where things he was emphasizing in one state became a problem in another state. Was there anything else, other than the law and order?

GWIRTZMAN: No. When you get into a California primary you don't really think beyond it because it's such a large place. So the best thing to do was to reach as many people as possible with the good television that we had, and get other stuff into print. We did not consider the campaign as simply one where the candidate makes speeches. That was just one small part of it. He really had to reach people in a lot of other ways. And in California, a very important thing is the kind of excitement that you generate, the number of people who come out. Look at the schedule, there's an awful lot in the black and Chicano low income areas because they want to get those people out to vote. They thought the people'd come out to vote if they had a chance to see Kennedy in person.

GREENE: In the literature about the campaign, particularly Witcover [Jules Joseph Witcover] I guess, much is made of how the debate thing emphasized the kind of generational differences that were supposedly prevalent in the campaign, and we've talked about that; but was there anybody that you can think of who disputed the whole general thrust of the campaign and where the emphasis was and the issues and who felt different things

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should be emphasized?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, the generational difference was probably also ideological. There were people who felt that he should give more attention to the issues that they felt, and that the polls showed were really bugging the voters. Those would be crime, social unrest and such things. There were several people who thought that. But aside from what he did in Indiana, he didn't veer too much in that direction, because he was in a campaign, he was the person that he'd been for the last few years and he really had to express the concerns that had been the emphasis of his public career, especially the more recent phase as a senator.

GREENE: Would you say that the people who had been the most influential during the Senate years, probably Adam and Peter from an ideological point of view, were also the most influential during the campaign or was there....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, of course, in a campaign a lot more people come in. When you're in your Senate office you speak mostly to, I mean it's only the Senate people who work with you all the time on what you're saying and help you to direct your views. Others suggest things from time to time. If you do something in an area where they have special expertise or interest, they have input. If you make what they think is a mistake they tell you. For example, in his speeches on Vietnam he got a lot of comments. But when you get into a national campaign, you get a lot more people. And a lot of those people had worked with him for a long time before he got to the Senate. So the influence of the Senate staff has to become less because before, it is 900. And this is especially true if they're not with him all the time, and especially in Kennedy's case where, for the last several weeks, he communicated on issues to other people mostly through Fred. So Fred, who had not been at all involved on the Senate staff, was critically important.

GREENE: Do you think that that really altered his position on any of the issues?

GWIRTZMAN: No, because if you look at what he was talking about, one advantage that the Senate staff had is that they were doing the speechwriting. Nobody else was doing it and so they got a great deal of input that way. We just went over some of these issues, and they are the issues affecting the poor, other new politics issues—they were the emphasis. Now that's.... Whether or not you think that those were the best issues to stress really isn't relevant, because the candidate can't change himself to go into the campaign. People catch on to that very quickly.

GREENE: Yes. Do you feel that there were any Robert Kennedy

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positions or anything during the campaign that was misunderstood and that perhaps hurt him in the course of it, that you had difficulty getting across?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes, I think that he had difficulty getting across the substantive proposals he was making, and difficulty in persuading people, that these were things worth focusing on; because when we took polls, or when people voted in primaries, they didn't say they were voting for Kennedy because of what he said about welfare or what he said about housing or ghettos or things like that. They were voting for him because they liked him because he was a Kennedy. You had to put the issues forward to keep the newspapers happy and have some substantive content to the campaign, but the time was too short for him to create new issues in a comprehensive way. He did project his kind of personality, his concerns about new problems of the country in that campaign, and they are not the things that John Kennedy talked about. He did get across his feelings about poor people and black people. The events of the campaign were such as to make that possible. I mean, Martin Luther King was assassinated shortly after the campaign started. Nobody talked about anything else for two weeks. Things Kennedy said in Indianapolis and things he said in his other speeches about that got across. He campaigned in black areas a lot and that got across. But I don't think that's the reason people voted for him. I don't think people voted for him because of his views. Many did it in spite of his views on these issues.

GREENE: Well, maybe what comes through is a feeling about the kind of a person he is and where his concerns are more than the specific proposals.

GWIRTZMAN: The politicians in the states, and polls in the states told us that these were not the things to talk about because there was a conservative trend then. But he couldn't run as a conservative candidate. In that sense McCarthy, even though his views on many things were more radical than Kennedy's, came across as a more conservative candidate because of his style. Nobody was afraid of McCarthy, nobody was really very.... Well, first of all, they didn't think he was going to be elected, so he couldn't do the things he was talking about, but also when he talked about them, no matter how far out his position was, he stated it in such a cool, matter of fact way that nobody really believed that he was going to do what he was advocating. He was no threat to them, or to the status quo. Whereas with Kennedy, people knew that he felt strongly about these things and he would change things. That was an advantage and it was a disadvantage.

GREENE: Can you remember your last conversations with him? Were they the night of the....

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GWIRTZMAN: The night of the California primary. When he came back from John Frankenheimer's [John M. Frankenheimer], he had dinner and then went up to his suite. There had been a party going on in the lower.... There were three levels, as sometimes happens: There was the ballroom party for anybody who worked on the campaign; there was another suite where key people and people higher

up in the campaign gathered; and then there was his own suite. He was supposed to come to the second suite, but he never did and so a lot of the people in the second suite went to his suite. I don't even think it was his room, but just one or two bedrooms. There were an awful lot of people, everybody just crowded in there, talking and chattering and watching television and working on statements and working on the politics of the thing, and he was making phone calls and talked to Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] for a while. When he really had to have a private conversation he went into the bathroom with whomever he wanted to talk to because there were just so many people in the bedroom itself. As the word got around that that's where he was, everybody tried to get up to the two bedrooms: press people—Jimmy Breslin [James Breslin], Sandy Vanocur [Sander Vanocur]. I talked to him once in connection with a statement he was going to make.

GREENE: Who put that together, by the way?

GWIRTZMAN: I'm not sure. I think Frank Mankiewicz had a lot to do with it, I know the first part about the—what is it?—baseball analogy, Frank came up with. I think Dick Goodwin had something to say about it. I pointed out to him that he should say that—because there was a South Dakota primary that same day—which he won with over 50 percent of the vote—he had that night won a clear cut victory in the most rural state in the nation, and in the most urban state of the nation, California being the most heavily urbanized, even more so than Rhode Island or Massachusetts. I suggested he should say that to show that his candidacy had a broad base, rural and urban. He was very proud of how he did with the farmers in Nebraska and South Dakota. He used my suggestion in the statement he made on television just before he was shot.

We talked about that and some of the other things in the statement. I didn't talk to him for long, because he had a lot of things to do. And then at some point he decided to go downstairs, and I and a group of other people went walking out with him, down the hall to the elevator. It was too many people for one elevator so I didn't get into the elevator with him, I took the other elevator and so I did not go down with him and into the ballroom with him. I went down in the other elevator, went around the hotel and into the main part of the ballroom. There was some confusion because the Associated Press reported that I was with him when he was shot. It wasn't me, I don't know who it was. So I didn't see what was going on. But had I taken the elevator.... You know, at some point there are just too many people,

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you drop back because you can't really be useful from that time on, but had I taken the elevator I probably would have been in with him and out with him. But I didn't, I just observed his speech. I stood with some of the television people on one of their raised platforms when he made his speech. I vividly remember thinking that the scene, while he was making his television statement, had a surreal quality: the tremendous excitement and tension in the air, as this huge crowd in the ballroom, which had been waiting for him for a couple of hours, and had been relishing the victory, responded so powerfully to every sentence he spoke. I remember sensing almost a frightening suppressed violence in the way the crowd

roared back at him. I remember feeling that this sort of mass crowd response, which had built up to such a fever pitch, was almost too strong, dangerously strong, the crowd an object for a demagogue. I had never seen an intensity, in one room, in one election night, before or since. But then I remember thinking, "That's just because this is California, and they go overboard here." This was before the shooting and unrelated to it, but I sensed this strange violence in the air in that ballroom.

And then he went out and people were just milling around and ready to leave. I was with Tony Beilenson [Anthony C. Beilenson], who was a California state senator who had run in the primary for the Senate nomination and lost that night to Cranston [Alan M. Cranston]. So I didn't know anything that went on during the shooting. But my last conversation with him was just purely business, matter of fact. And then I heard, as we were going down the hall to the elevators, the incident I related in the book where he had a conversation with his daughter about what she had done that day, which I felt was very important to put in because it showed that at this very hectic time politically, he still took time to shut out the rest of the world and just talk to his daughter.

GREENE: The only other thing I guess that we've got is this post-California tentative agenda that you gave me, and I'm very sorry that I couldn't read your handwriting so that I can't...

GWIRTZMAN: That's too bad.

GREENE: ...question you about your comments on the agenda, but maybe looking down it you can comment on some of the things that stand out as important subjects, that would have been discussed at that meeting if it had taken place. Do you have a copy of it?

GWIRTZMAN: No. Dave Burke [David W. Burke] told me what they were intending to do; that is, first of all, that the political people who'd been working in the various states and in the national headquarters were going to tell him where he stood, state by state. I don't know whether he had been informed in that much

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detail, up to that time. In fact, I doubt very much he had been. And then relations with Senator McCarthy, the thought was to be more conciliatory toward him now.

GREENE: Was there any real thought at that time that he could be drawn out?

GWIRTZMAN: Even though he would be waspish, the thought was that you could be more conciliatory toward him now that you've beaten him than before. Explicit staff level cooperation with him was already going on to some degree at the lower level, staff level.

GREENE: In what....

GWIRTZMAN: Well, Al Lowenstein [Allard K. Lowenstein] was involved in that. Just the realization that at some point they'd have to come around. I mean, to the extent that the two candidates were going to keep fighting one another, it could only benefit Humphrey, and that there should be some common planning so that as soon as it was clear who was going to go on... You know, only one of them could really go into the convention, and hopefully the later primaries would determine who that one could be. The hope was that where there were state conventions, the Kennedy and McCarthy people would combine to elect joint delegates in order to prevent Humphrey from splitting them and getting more delegates than he should and these delegations would then vote for whomever of the two lasted to the convention. This strategy was successful, I think, in Colorado. I don't know whether it worked anywhere else.

GREENE: A few places in New York. I just was under the impression that McCarthy had shown no willingness at all, that he had every intention of going to the end.

GWIRTZMAN: Well, that was true for McCarthy, but I guess at his lower level there were some people who, especially after California, would be willing to go along with this. Interestingly enough, it was the very strategy that had been suggested, back in the middle of March by Arthur Schlesinger, and which was alluded to in the announcement statement.

Now, evidently Senator Kennedy wanted a quick book to be written called Kennedy and McCarthy: Does It Make a Difference? Kennedy against McCarthy, does it make a difference abroad, does it make a difference at home, in the ghettos, etc. In other words, taking their positions, showing that his were more realistic and would do more for the country, and the book would make the point that McCarthy had already won his battle, which was to eliminate Johnson and to change the direction of Vietnam policy, that that was done when Johnson retired and announced the beginning of the

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negotiations; and that McCarthy couldn't beat Humphrey but Kennedy could. All those points were to be made in this book. I suppose that Arthur Schlesinger would have been asked to write the book.

GREENE: That was something that they would have brought out before the convention hopefully?

GWIRTZMAN: Yes. Third was the national public opinion polls and how, with the primaries, ending polls among candidates, among all presidential candidates, could be used as a substitute for the primaries during the period of nine weeks between the last primary and the opening of the convention. Sure, Gallup [George Gallup] and Harris [Louis Harris] would take their polls, and that perhaps with the right kind of speeches and campaigning during that summer period you could

influence those polls, and then use the polls on the delegates, psychologically, to prove Kennedy could win the election and Humphrey could not. Then, perhaps, at the time of this post-California primary meeting they were going to discuss my suggestion of an advisory primary in Pennsylvania. I'm not sure.

GREENE: How did you picture that working? Would it be a special election?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, the party leaders in Pennsylvania would say, "In order to help the delegates make up their minds, we'll designate a date on which Democratic party voters could go to the polls and they will receive ballots on which they could mark their preference for the nomination." There would be no law. The party could do it by itself, set it up and urge the voters to participate; there was nothing to stop it. This had been done in the West Side of New York in some connection, and they got people out to vote. It had been done in community action groups where people vote for representatives. It's not required by law but they have a vote on electing people to the community board.

The next item was the New York campaign. I wrote here that Bill Walton [William Walton], who was sent up there to be the out of state coordinator, was fighting with John Burns [John J. Burns] and that a suggestion was going to be made that Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] go there and take over because he would be a stronger person. Kennedy said that shouldn't be done, that he would have Steve Smith go back after the California primary and do it with Larry, and that the emphasis would be on informing the voters who the Kennedy delegates were, because in the New York primary, then as now, the name of the candidate is not listed with his delegation. Only the delegates' names are on the ballot, with no indication of whom they are pledged to. You have to mail a letter to the voters and you also have to give them palm cards before they go into the polls to help them vote for the right people.

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The next item is speech topics and strategy. First, the attitude on the peace talks. At that time, two months had elapsed since Johnson asked that the talks be resumed, and nothing had happened. So the euphoria of Johnson's March 31 announcement about the bombing [halt] was beginning to dissipate. Ted Sorensen, it says here, said he thought that was a most important issue, that Kennedy should have a clear position on the talks and on criteria for moving them along to get them started and show he was supporting them. Next, what strategy should be in the speeches toward Humphrey. I wrote here to make people aware that he could have entered the primaries and didn't, that he was the candidate of the bosses, but that this would be delicate because the bosses were people who, in the end, Kennedy would have to go to himself for votes at the convention, so that Kennedy couldn't say this himself; but perhaps the point could be made another way.

Next, the attitude toward McCarthy. This idea that the nomination of Kennedy would be the only way to finally achieve all the major ends that McCarthy entered the race for.

National television appearances. The suggestion was going to be made that the senator had not used television properly in the campaign—this refers to television news, not

commercials—and that perhaps he should buy time for half-hour discussions during the summer. Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] did that in 1968, with little success.

The next item was the convention, the physical arrangements—credentials and other procedural disputes. Now this was going to be important because the hope was to try to get a... It looked like it would be a close convention and we were behind—we wanted to force a vote on a procedural issue that we would win and that would break the logjam, give Kennedy momentum and be interpreted as a critical vote, which would help him get delegates. This was what was done in 1952 when Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] and Taft [Robert A. Taft] both came in without enough delegates, but the preliminary procedural votes on seating certain delegations—the so-called “Texas delegate steal” issue—went Eisenhower’s way; and once his delegates were seated, he almost had sufficient votes, and more important he had the psychological momentum to get other votes to win on the roll call. He was able to win the convention by winning the procedural disputes, because he had the popular and moral side of those disputes. Sorenson was going to be in overall charge, of this, but someone else, whose name I can’t see, was going to be in charge of the legal aspects of it. I’m not sure who that is. They were planning to storm the convention credentials committee. We knew the McCarthy people were going to do this, and Kennedy was going to join. The hope here, I guess, was that the two candidates would get together to try to stop Humphrey from getting a majority on the first ballot; that his support would then wane, that one of them would come on to win, and that that one would be Kennedy.

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GREENE: Yes. That was the overall strategy, wasn’t it, to prevent the first ballot nomination?

GWIRTZMAN: They were going to discuss whether or not to challenge the unit rule, which was working in Humphrey’s favor. If they could win the preliminary challenge on the unit rule, that would stop the Humphrey momentum. The strategy was to be prepared to do so unless the unit rule turned out to be in Kennedy’s benefit.

Next, campaign staff organization: who should be in the travelling party and who should be at headquarters? Edward Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] was to travel a great deal, but Steve Smith, after the New York primary, was to work primarily in fundraising from Washington and to be the de facto campaign manager also.

Going back, the strategy was that if you could win a key preliminary fight at the convention, then the rest would cave in, Humphrey would cave. And we would try to do this on a moral issue, like the seating of the Mississippi black delegation, or whether or not a unit rule should be in effect.

GREENE: Was the traveling party going to remain more or less the same?

GWIRTZMAN: I don’t know.

GREENE: Was there any discussion about the criticism that had been leveled at Kennedy about his, the tactics with the crowds? Some people criticized his childish behavior, and was there any major strategic change planned?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, I don't think so because we realized that was just his manner. Ever since he started speaking to crowds, which was in 1964, this was the way that he'd done it and he really couldn't change it. A guy has to have some fun when he's campaigning.

GREENE: Yes. It would seem a little late to start shifting images. Is there anything else?

GWIRTZMAN: Well, that's all I can think of now, unless you have some general questions. Why don't we take a look at the passage?

GREENE: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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