

**Paul Corbin Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 11/18/1965**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Paul Corbin  
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**Biographical Note**

Corbin, a campaign worker for John F. Kennedy (JFK) (1960), Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee (1961-1964), a campaign worker for Robert F. Kennedy (1964, 1968) and an independent political consultant (1964-1968), discusses organizing Gerald Thomas Flynn's 1958 Janesville, Wisconsin testimonial dinner, forming JFK's Citizens' Committee, and his reasons for supporting JFK, among other issues.

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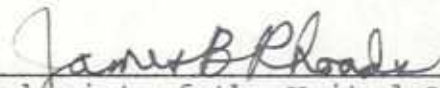
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## Paul Corbin—JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

With

Paul Corbin

November 18, 1965

Alexandria, Virginia

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CORBIN: My entry into the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] campaign began in December of 1958 when Pat Lucey [Patrick J. Lucey], who was then State Chairman of the Democratic Party in Wisconsin, invited me to his home to discuss the possibility of Jack Kennedy entering Wisconsin for the purpose of entering the primary, which was held in Wisconsin...[Interruption]

We met at his home. Pat had written down a tentative list of cities where Jack could possibly go in and get a large crowd to make a good impression. He had listed Milwaukee, Green Bay, La Crosse, and Madison. We had discounted Milwaukee and Green Bay and La Crosse because of the huge Catholic centers that would not be a true reflection of the enthusiasm and support that he was getting. It would be more or less a captive audience because we realized that every Catholic would buy a ticket.

Then we came down to a discussion of Dane County, which was an intellectual center; there were certain dangers about Jack Kennedy's appearance in Madison because there were rumors of his association with Senator Joe McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] and Bob's [Robert F. Kennedy] serving on the Committee. The results were rumors that Bob Kennedy had gone to Joe McCarthy's funeral. We realized that we'd be walking into a hornet's nest.

I suggested in my hometown of Janesville, Wisconsin—there's always a saying about Janesville, which is in Rock County, that people read the Bible every morning, go to church every Sunday, and vote Republican every two years. Pat, I discovered later, was just drawing me out. He thought I was crazy. I said, "No."

We have a large labor force all organized under U.A.W. [United Auto Workers]. Although the leadership of U.A.W. were pledged to Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], the members in that local union had a record of independent political action. Eighty-six percent of them were homeowners. The Catholics who were there were mostly Republicans, but I felt that that would really give us a true reflection of the support that Jack Kennedy might have. Pat Lucey said, "Well, Paul, what is the record crowd we've ever had in Rock County?" I said, "Well, we've had 225 people. That was for a victory dinner for Senator Proxmire [William Proxmire] after defeating Joe McCarthy in 1957." He said, "Could you hit 225?" I said, "I believe I can." "Well," he said, "if you can get 225 or 250 and break the record, we'd be in business." I said, "Fine, Pat. You have the power, Pat, to select the city?" He said, "Yes, I do." I said, "Well, in order not to take you up the merry path, let me just check it out."

So, I got on the telephone, and I called a road builder by the name of Tom Ryan [Thomas Ryan] who came from the oldest respected family in the city. He was a Catholic, very active in the Republican Party. His entire family were Republicans, highly respected. I had sat in a barbershop in 1956, and Tom Ryan sat in the next chair. We were discussing the Chicago Convention. Tom Ryan mentioned that he liked that fellow Jack Kennedy, which was surprising to me coming from a Republican. I said to Pat, "Let me call Tom Ryan and find out if he'll buy some tickets to this dinner." But knowing Tom Ryan was civic-minded, that if I used the approach that this would be good for the city, having Jack Kennedy come, he might buy a few more tickets. This was 11:30 in the evening.

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I called Tom Ryan at home. Frankly, I hadn't spoken to Tom Ryan more than twice in my life, although we lived in the same city. I called him up, and I said, "Tom, my name is Paul Corbin. Do you remember me?" He said, "Yes, I do." I said, "We're at a meeting at the Palmer House in Chicago. Jack Kennedy is here, and he is thinking of coming into Wisconsin more or less just to reconnoiter and probe the possibilities of running in the primary. We have delegates here from La Crosse, Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Madison who are bidding to throw this dinner. I'm here more or less as self-appointed spokesman for the city of Janesville, and I'd love to have him in our town. They're offering guaranteed ticket sales. La Crosse promises 700; Green Bay promises 1,500. I will say one thing that Pat Lucey, the state chairman, who's a friend of mine, as you know, Tom, is on my side. He's trying to help me to get it to Janesville. I wonder if you could possibly help us out." "Why are you calling me for, Corbin?" "Well, I remember the incident in the barber shop." "I knew you would," says Tom. "How many tickets do you think I ought to buy?" "Well," I said, "it isn't that I'm asking you to become part of this Kennedy campaign. I'm just asking you on the basis of a citizen of Janesville to see that we'd like to get him in." He said, "Well, I think it would be good for the town to wake this town up to have a fellow like Jack Kennedy. But, frankly, how many tickets do you think I ought to buy?" I said, "Well, Tom, I think you

ought to buy fifty.” “Oh,” he says, “I’ll have to take it up with my father [William H. Ryan, Sr.] as chairman of the board of the company [P.W. Ryan Sons]. I couldn’t do that. I thought I’d buy a couple, maybe for me and my wife, and maybe two for my brothers [William H. Ryan, Jr. and Donald Ryan]. But I couldn’t dream of buying fifty tickets to a Democratic dinner.” I said, “Now, Tom, you’re talking like a politician. And I’ll tell you another thing, Tom: it’s too late. I appreciate your buying four or five tickets, but they’re going to just decide this right now. The Senator wants to use the telephone. It’s a good try anyway.” “Wait a minute! You mean to say they’re deciding tonight?” “Yeah.” “Oh, what the hell. I don’t want to be the guy that’s going to stop them from coming to Janesville. Sure, put me down for fifty tickets. I’ll buy it.” “Thanks a lot Tom. I’ll get in touch with you in case we win.” “That’ll be all right.” Click.

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Pat Lucey said, “The man’s crazy.” I said, “No, he’s not. He said he’d buy fifty. His word’s good.” I said, “Let me try another fellow, a fellow called Earl Fugate, who’s a Republican insurance man. In fact, he’s an officer in the Republican Party.”

I called Earl Fugate; I gave him the same pitch that I gave Tom Ryan. He said, “Well, Paul, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll buy twenty-five tickets. I may not buy them myself, but I’ll make sure that I sell twenty-five tickets.” The next call was to a fellow called James Barry, who was a city councilman. He had a little grocery store, and he was sort of a politician, active in the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

MORRISSEY: Republican or Democrat?

CORBIN: Republican. All Republican. He was very active in the Sierra Club. So I called him up and I said, “Jim, this is Corbin.” “What the hell are you calling me up at midnight?” Again, the same spiel. “Hey,” he says, “Corbin, I could really go for that guy.” “All I want you to do, him, is to sell tickets to the Sierra Club because all the reactionary Republicans in town all belong to the Sierra Club.” “Oh, we can’t do that. No politics in the Sierra Club.” “Well, I guess I got the wrong guy.” “Hold it, Corbin: That guy’s coming to town. If La Crosse is bidding and all these other towns, how many tickets do you want me to sell?” I said, “Fifty.” “I’ll sell fifty if I have to dig up the money myself.” This went on till one in the morning. By that time, I’d had 300 tickets sold. We had broken the record. Pat says, “You got him, Corbin.”

Now the next question was: Who was going to sponsor him? I said, “We’ll try the Democratic Party. I’ll get back to you.” I went to Janesville. I had a discussion informally with some of the members of the Democratic Executive Board as to whether they would sponsor a dinner for Jack Kennedy. Three days after I had discussed it with the, a secret meeting was held, and I was expelled from the Democratic Party. They were all Humphrey boys, and they had gotten the word. They had obviously checked with somebody, and they had turned it down.

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MORRISSEY: What was your office in the party?

CORBIN: I was on the Executive Board. I held various offices since I got out of the War [World War II], and they changed from year to year. One year I was vice chairman.

MORRISSEY: I was just curious to know what they were expelling you from.

CORBIN: The Executive Board by removing me. The chairman has the power. He just removed me. Of course, the work got around that Corbin was screwing around with Kennedy; that's the end of him.

So, I discussed it with Pat, and we came up with the idea of having a testimonial dinner for our congressman. The first congressman that ever got elected from our area was a Democrat called Gerald Flynn [Gerald Thomas Flynn]. He was elected because the former congressman, Lawrence Smith [Lawrence Henry Smith], died, and they ran his widow. But they're so conservative in that area the conservatives would rather vote for a Democrat than for a woman. They figured they could always knock Flynn off the next year, which, by the way, they did. He was a one-term congressman.

I called up Flynn, and I said, "We'd like to throw you a testimonial dinner. We'll have, as a guest speaker, Jack Kennedy." "Oh, I can't have him. He's a Catholic. I'm a Catholic myself, and I'm trying to shake that Catholic label off. That's the last guy I want. Now, why don't you get a hold of Humphrey? That'll suit me fine." At that time, I was his home secretary, Gerry Flynn's home secretary. I said, "I'll tell you what, Gerry. We'll give you all the proceeds of that dinner." "Oh, I'll go for that deal. I'll go for that deal." I said, "Okay, we're all set. I'm the chairman." He says, "Fine." "I'm organizing a citizens' committee. A testimonial dinner for you, Gerry, with Jack Kennedy as the guest speaker. In that way, Gerry, if the crowd doesn't show up, you're the fall guy. If they do show up, Jack Kennedy is the hero." He says, "Agreed." "But you get the money."

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Once I had the "go" sign on the format for the dinner, I realized that I had to have a gilt-edged citizens' committee. It just couldn't be political hacks; it couldn't be Democrats. They had to be top-shelf citizens in our community. At that particular period in the political history of Rock County, the only people who associated themselves politically in the open, the respectable people, were Republicans. Some of the wealthier people in the town who were Democrats kept it quiet. You never knew who they were. It just wasn't socially proper to be a Democrat. So I tried to call a meeting at my home to discuss the formation of a citizens' committee and the sale of the tickets. I wasn't very successful.

Can you shut if off for a minute?

MORRISSEY: Sure. [Interruption]

CORBIN: I decided that it took somebody else besides myself with more influence to get these boys together. So I called upon Father Gilbert Carlton, who since



then has become my closest friend, and approached him on the question of Jack Kennedy. He was elated. He thought it would be terrific. He'd do all he could to help. I said, "Father, I intend to call a meeting this Sunday at my home and I want to use your name, saying that you're calling the meeting, that you will be there, and you want to say a few words to the boys." He said, "Go ahead, but tell them that it's in connection with John Kennedy. Tell them that." I said, "I'll do that."

I invited about twenty people to my home, and fifteen showed up—all the wealthy Republicans who were Catholics. We met in the recreation room of my home and discussed the question of Jack Kennedy coming to Janesville and the sale of tickets. I told them what had happened to me in the Democratic Party; I pointed out to them that the labor boys were not buying any tickets and I probably wouldn't sell more than fifteen, if that many. I said we were in difficulty. I said we needed their support. We held the discussion for about three hours. Their main argument was that Paul Corbin was not interested in Jack Kennedy; he was interested in taking the courthouse in Rock County, and he was using Jack Kennedy as a means to build up the Democratic

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Party in Rock County; that he was just another Democratic politician. They regretted that the Father had been drawn in, that he was using the Father. After the Father had listened to their protests, he said, "That is true. Let us assume that Paul Corbin wants the courthouse. Well, let's make a trade. We'll give him the courthouse, and we Catholics will take the White House." That did it. The boys shut up, and they all promised to buy tickets. I called my wife [Gertrude McGowan Corbin] down, who was upstairs, and I said, "Gertrude, bring down blank checks on every bank in Janesville." I passed the checks around, and I said, "All right, boys, let's go." Each Catholic who was present there bought twenty-five tickets. After they bought the tickets, I said, "Well, we got to have a program book." Before it was over, they had bought back pages, half pages, quarter pages of advertisements.

Then came the hardest: the formation of the committee. By that time, they were so deeply involved and had their money involved.... Father Carlton had promised to give the benediction; he'd be present at the head table. We formed a committee, ninety percent of which were Republicans.

Then I started to go out in the street the next morning and sell the tickets. That's where I began to realize the obstacles that faced Jack Kennedy: crank telephone calls, because it had announced that I was the chairman, nasty notes.

But the greatest shock of all was when the leading citizen, the chairman of the National Committee for Christians and Jews, visited my home with a secretary and the leader of the Unitarian Church to point out the danger of bringing a Catholic into the White House. The reason they approached me was because my wife and I were non-Catholics and they felt that they could discuss it with me freely. They pointed out the danger—that the Pope [Pope John XXIII] was coming over; that the priests would take the country—and they appealed to me as a lover of the United States of America that it was my duty to this country to sabotage or stop this nonsense of bringing Jack Kennedy into Janesville. I listened to them. I was very polite. I told them I would think about it and I would let them know. Of course, all it did was

just sort of gave me more reason to go out and work that much harder, realizing the things we had to overcome.

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I approached the labor officials, and they all gave me the same answer. They were for Humphrey; some of them were anti-Catholic; some of them brought up the McCarthy issue. The result was the same: No one was for Jack Kennedy. However, as I would hang around the labor halls, I would talk to the individual workers. They, it seemed, were interested in Jack Kennedy, and some of them were actually buying tickets on their own. The thing, I believe, that worked in our favor—the more that the labor bosses were saying, “Don’t buy tickets for Jack Kennedy,” the more curious these people became.

I used to walk down the street to sell tickets and had a complete blackout from every merchant in town. Nobody would buy a single ticket. One day I was walking down the street. There was a fellow called Martin Kennedy; he owned several drugstores in Janesville. He walked over and said, “Paul, this whole town’s watching you. Nobody’s buying tickets, but I’ll tell you something. We’re all for you. Don’t let them bother you. Come into my store, and I’ll buy some tickets.” I walked into the back room of his drugstore, and he said, “How many should I buy?” I said, “Twenty-five.” He shook his head and said, “I’ll buy them.” Of course, nobody knew, except myself, the way these sales were racking up. Jim Barry went to the Sierra Club and peddled eighty tickets; he had sold eighty tickets in the Sierra Club.

One day through the mail, I got an order of fifty tickets from the city of Burlington, which is roughly sixty miles away from Janesville. A week after that I had an order of 100 tickets from Lake Geneva, 250 from Kenosha, and 300 from Racine, which made me look at it a second time. Then I discovered what was happening. The Humphrey people were buying block tickets. It was cheaper for them to buy the tickets and tear them up and have me stuck with an empty house. I picked up the phone, and I called Pat Lucey. “What the hell do I do? I can’t separate the sheep from the goats. I don’t know who’s legitimate and who isn’t. I know one thing, Pat, the tickets I’m selling are going to show up.” He said, “Well, I’ll tell you what you do, Paul. You just keep selling tickets to your people till you get a full house.”

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By that time, we had got the Parker Pen Company. That’s another story by itself—a terrific battle with Parker Pen. The only way they would agree to rent us the hall was when I threatened to expose them as anti-Catholic, that they wouldn’t rent it to me because they were renting it to everyone else. They couldn’t afford it because they were selling pens, and I actually broke the cafeteria manager. They were using the excuse that the cafeteria manager has the authority to rent it to you, and he wouldn’t rent it to me. Finally, after threats, they gave us the hall.

I went over to Rockford, Illinois, to approach some of my union friends in the C.I.O. [Congress of Industrial Organizations] to see how they felt. I talked to Emmett Poyer, who was the sub-regional director, who said he had seen Jack Kennedy in Chicago in 1956 and he had liked him and he wasn’t fond of Humphrey, although he suspected that the whole U.A.W. [United Automobile Workers] were leaning towards Humphrey. But that didn’t

make any difference to him. However, he said he would check it out with Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther]. He picked up the phone and he called Walter Reuther. Walter Reuther told him that they had not taken any position on the presidency as yet and that if he wanted to go out and hear Jack Kennedy in Janesville, Wisconsin, it was all right with him. So Bud Poyer said, "All right, Paul, I'll guarantee you a hundred." I said, "Now look, Bud, I don't want a group of a hundred U.A.W. boys coming down. Can't you find some citizen to sell the tickets?" He found a Dr. Green who was a surgeon in Rockford. They sold 125 tickets, and they guaranteed to rent a bus and haul them all down.

As the dinner was approaching, some of the members of the committee were weakening. The pressure of the country club was on them, and about half a dozen reneged and scratched their name. Every time they reneged, they'd buy an additional fifty tickets to ease their conscience. By that time, the sale of tickets had gone well over a thousand.

[Interruption]

My wife is becoming concerned because the telephone calls were coming in heavy at the rate of about twenty to twenty-five a day; threatening telephone calls. When they threw rocks through our window my wife got completely scared and was asking me to get out of it. I told her I wouldn't get out if it was for all the tea in China. I said, "This is real democracy." This was a battle. I hadn't met

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Jack Kennedy. I said, "I don't know if I'm even going to support him, but the fellow certainly has a right to be heard. These bastards and these bigots are just not going to whip us. We're going to keep going."

During the course of this dinner, Father Carlton was very helpful. He kept egging me on to keep fighting and pay no attention and tried to keep the rabid Republican Catholics quiet because they were putting pressure on him not to give the benediction. He was building a new church and a new school, which he subsequently built. They were threatening to hold back their financial support. The whole thing was really morbid.

Finally, the day arrived for Jack Kennedy to come to Janesville. I discovered that he was bringing his wife, Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], along. I decided that inasmuch as he was bringing his wife along—we always had the image they were socialites from Massachusetts—we ought to throw a reception for them, a cocktail party prior to the dinner. So we rented the Monterrey hotel, which is the social hotel of the city and more or less local officials—all Republicans. Very few Democrats were invited. I would say ninety-five percent of the people invited were Republicans. I invited a hundred; I hoped maybe seventy-five would show up.

That afternoon Jack Kennedy arrived in Janesville. I met him at the airport. There's the picture on the wall of Jack when I met him in Janesville for the first time. Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith], Jack Kennedy's brother-in-law, asked me to see if I could line up a speaking engagement at the college for him. So I went to the Beloit College, which is twelve miles away from Janesville, and the college agreed to have the students out en masse although it was spring and they were all going home for the spring vacation; he thought there might be a couple hundred. To our surprise, most of the students stayed over an extra two days and waited to hear Jack Kennedy.

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Then he came to Janesville, and we checked him into the hotel. We had a reception. Although I sent out a hundred, about three hundred people showed up at the reception.

Then I had ringing reports that carloads of people were coming in from Kenosha and Racine and I realized what the Humphrey people were doing. When they found out that I had been selling tickets in Rockford and the tickets were going so well in Janesville, they decided they would embarrass us by bringing all their ticket holders to have a sellout and there would be no place to seat them.

Well, we went down to the Hall, Senator Kennedy, myself, and Jackie. We drove down. I looked around, and I said, "Senator, everybody showed up. It looks wonderful."

We got into the Hall and Jack was meeting some of the guests who were seated. Suddenly, I heard a siren. I looked outside. The sheriff's car was there and approximately six hundred to seven hundred people milling outside calling me a crook and a thief. They wanted their money back. But I had anticipated that, so I had made arrangements with a local hotel to feed by shifts the people who had bought tickets. We had hooked up microphones so they could hear outside. But they milled around, and they screamed, and they beat at the door, and they demanded their money back.

I'll never forget that the Senator came out, and I said, "Well, I think I'll solve this very simply. I'll set up a card table, Senator, and—what do we care?—I'll give them their money back." He said, "Where are these people from?" I said, "That whole bunch from Rockford can't get in. I see some people from Madison, Janesville—a lot of people I don't recognize. Most of the local people are in because they came early." He said, "I'll tell you what, Paul. I wouldn't go through all that bother of giving the money back." I said, "I'll tell you what, Senator. I just got an idea. I live here and I've got to face these people. It's going to be kind of rough. I think I'll set up a card table and give them their money back and that'll solve the problem. It will reduce the hard feelings." He says, "Are you for me, Paul?" I said, "Sure, I'm for you, Senator." "How much

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are you for me?" "All the way." "Well, if you're for me all the way, you won't give them the money back." I said, "Are you crazy?" He said, "Now listen, Paul. When these people go back to their hometowns, they're going to say what a crook you are, how you sold them tickets and they couldn't get in. And they'll say, 'What do you mean you couldn't get into a dinner? Who the hell was there?' 'Some guy by the name of Jack Kennedy.'" He said, "This is worth a million dollars of publicity." [Interruption]

So I looked at him and said, "All right, Senator. We'll play it your way." The dinner was a huge success, and I was simply captivated by Jack Kennedy. He had a terrific political insight because the topic that he spoke about was the corruption in the labor movement, and in the audience there were probably fifteen percent of the labor people there; most of them were from Kenosha and Racine—Humphrey people who had come to overflow the crowd—plus four local leaders who had bought single tickets as a courtesy to Congressman Flynn in whose honor this dinner was.

I can truthfully say that the city of Janesville—and I have all the clippings I'll show you—has never been the same. You can go back independently and just spend a day in Janesville, and you will find that that city and the lives of ten percent of those people, those business people—I would say higher than that. Probably, with no exaggeration, I would say that of all the people who served on the dinner committee as Republicans, every one of their lives have changed by participating in this dinner, realizing the bigotry which faced them in the community and the influence of Jack Kennedy on their political thinking.

After the dinner was over, the town was hypnotized and actually mesmerized for Jack Kennedy, as the results proved in the primary. Janesville went twelve to one for Jack Kennedy. That's a matter of record. In fact, the Senator himself mentioned it the night of the election. He just couldn't believe that that city would go twelve to one for Jack Kennedy.

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MORRISSEY: How did he do in Janesville against Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]?

CORBIN: Lost it. That's another story. That's the influence of the Irish Mafia political decisions where they, instead of following the citizens type of approach, reverted to the political machine where the local sheriff and all the worst possible candidates you could possibly get tied up on the same ticket with Jack Kennedy in Rock County. But that's another story.

After the Janesville dinner was held, I was asked by the Senator's office to proceed into Rockford—because he was fascinated by these people buying this bus from the state of Illinois and crossing into Wisconsin—to see if I could set up something for Illinois because he was thinking of making a tour of Illinois. I got a hold of Bud Poyer, the local labor leader who had come to the Janesville dinner and had personally met Jack Kennedy. (By the way, in Janesville, Jack Kennedy and Jackie shook everybody's hand; they had never, never in their lives seen a candidate do that before.) He was impressed, and he had told me regardless of what Walter Reuther did, he was for Jack Kennedy. He was going to run for a delegate, and he'd be elected. He was going down to Los Angeles, and if he was the only U.A.W. man on the floor, he was going to vote for Jack Kennedy. I asked him to set up a breakfast in Rockford and to see if he could possibly get away from this Catholic angle and get the Masonic temple. He got the Masonic temple. I went down there for three weeks. We had 2,500 people in the Masonic temple at a breakfast at 8 o'clock.

Now just to go back to the Janesville dinner, I learned something, which I had forgotten to tell you. At the head of the table, I tried to keep the proportion highly Protestant. As a result, I had made enemies with Catholic politicians to this day, years later, as most of you probably know, the problems I had all stemmed from that first dinner. To this very day my enemies are the Irish-Catholic politicians who felt that I had denied them the honor and the privilege of having sat at the same table with Jack Kennedy. But I felt at the time that I just couldn't have every Irish-Catholic politician at the head table, so I purposely selected Protestants.

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MORRISSEY: Did you get a Protestant minister to say...?

CORBIN: Yes. I got a Lutheran minister called Reverend O. B. Anderson, whose daughter is now in the Peace Corps, and he became a great supporter of Jack Kennedy: A very fine man. He told me of the pressures that he had received for participating. Frankly, I don't think that the Reverend ever thought that Jack Kennedy would ever get the nomination. He thought it was just a shot in the dark, he could afford to be liberal. Nobody ever dreamt at that stage that Jack Kennedy would ever win the Primary.

After the Rockford dinner, I was asked by the Senator to go to the Midwest conferences of the Democratic Party—this was a conference consisting of thirteen Midwest states—and open up hospitality rooms and pass the word along that Jack Kennedy might be thinking of running for president. One of these Midwest conferences was held in Milwaukee. At that time Pat Lucey and myself were discussing the formation of a citizens' committee for Jack Kennedy because it was obvious that the Democratic Party wasn't about to support Jack Kennedy, that they were controlled by the labor and Humphrey forces. Pat Lucey came up with the name of a man called Mayor Ivan Nestingen [Ivan A. Nestingen], who subsequently became Under Secretary of H.E.W. [Health, Education, and Welfare], as a choice for Citizens' chairman. The only difficulty Pat was having is he was not for Jack Kennedy. Pat and I had the first disagreement. I said, "If he does consent to become Citizens' chairman, he'll be no good to us because if he's not for Jack Kennedy, if you have to buy him or promise him or sell him on the idea of political advantage to him..." Pat was saying that Ivan Nestingen wants to run for governor. He's a Lutheran; he's a Norwegian. If he becomes identified with Jack Kennedy, he's more apt to get the Catholic vote when he runs for governor. I told Pat it was no good, that the chairman of the committee for Jack Kennedy would have to be for Jack Kennedy, that if he wasn't for Jack Kennedy there was no use going ahead. Let's find somebody else who's not that well known but make sure he's for Jack Kennedy, otherwise he'll be in trouble.

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At that meeting Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was present, the first time I met Ted Sorensen. By the way, in the Janesville dinner Dave Powers [David F. Powers] came along with them and Steve Smith. That's the first time I met Steve Smith and Dave Powers, when they came along with Jack Kennedy. Ted Sorensen agreed with Pat. He thought that once Nestingen would take it, even though he wasn't for Jack Kennedy, he'd have to live up to be chairman and at least you had him boxed in. Pat Lucey asked Ted Sorensen to call Ivan Nestigen to lend the dignity of a direct Kennedy associate. Ted Sorensen asked Nestigen, and Nestingen turned him down, told him he wasn't for Jack Kennedy. But Ted thought he was weakening and he liked this treatment, getting these long distance calls from Washington from Ted, which he had never received before, and he would probably surrender. I picked up the paper one day, and I discovered that Pat had been successful. Ivan Nestingen then became Citizens' chairman. [Interruption]

At the Rockford breakfast, Senator Kennedy approached me and asked me how the dinner in Marshfield was going. I told him I anticipated some problems because of Nixon

being there. My technique of selling tickets, of course, was always geared to Republicans. I thought there might be difficulty. He said, "Well, drop everything that you're doing, Paul. I want you to help me out and move into Marshfield and sell the tickets any way you can. But make sure that I have a crowd." I said, "I understand that the Citizens' Committee under Ivan Nestigen is handling that affair." He said, "I don't care who's handling it. My latest report is that they sold twelve tickets." So he said, "You go there, Paul," and he put his arm around me, "and duplicate Janesville—only see if you can do better." That's exactly what he said. I said, "Okay, Senator, I'm off and running."

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The next morning I reported to Pat Lucey in Madison and said, "The Senator just asked me yesterday to go to Marshfield." He said, "Well, that's going to create difficulty. We have a citizens' committee operating now." I said, "I don't give a damn about the Citizens' Committee. I got the word from the Senator. I'm going on." He said, "All right, Paul. Lots of luck. I'll cover for you." He notified Ivan Nestigen, who agreed it was all right with him but to take it easy and to clear with the local people there, the local man that they had stationed in Marshfield. I explained to Ivan that my technique of selling was different than the average person. He said, "Well, Paul, if you sell the tickets I'll forgive any methods you use. But keep in touch."

I was driving along the road to Marshfield, and I stopped in Wisconsin Rapids at the Central Wisconsin Motor Transportation Company, a friend of mine called Arthur Clark, who still is president of the corporation. I had been friendly with Arthur Clark and had discussed.... He had given help—sometimes fifty dollars or as high as a hundred dollars—for a gubernatorial candidate, although he himself was a staunch Republican, but being a trucker with a big industry, he always felt he ought to give a hundred bucks to the Democratic governor. I was his contact. He'd always laughed that I had brought him in one winner. (I had been the chairman of the committee to elect Gaylord Nelson for governor). He felt that he had given me a hundred dollars then and Gaylord won, and he sort of felt that I knew something about politics.

I walked into him, and he says, "What are you up to now, Corbin? No election." I said, "I'm pushing Jack Kennedy—a dinner in Marshfield." "Oh, hell," he said. "I'm going to Nixon. I bought a flock of tickets to Nixon." I said, "Art, how would you like to buy into the presidency of the United States?" "What do you mean 'buy into' it?" "How would you like to go on record as a man who had the political foresight to pick the president of the United States?" "Well, I'd love it." I said, "Art, Jack Kennedy is going to be your next president." "Why, Corbin, he'll never make it in Wisconsin." I said, "Art, you, as the chairman of the board, as the president of this corporation, are being derelict in your duty if you are being offered an opportunity to invest five hundred dollars

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in the next president of the United States and you turn him down. How are you going to feel, Art, if the guy wins?" He said, "Well, I'd blow my brains out, Corbin." I said, "Why don't you take a gamble?" "He'll never make it. He's a Catholic. You must be crazy." I said, "Are

you going to take it up with your board of directors? Will you allow me to come in and put it to them?" "Listen, Corbin, if it means that much to you, I'll give you five hundred dollars." And he bought five hundred dollars worth of tickets to the dinner. I said, "Now, Art, don't throw these tickets in the basket." "Oh, I'm not going. I wouldn't be caught in a Jack Kennedy dinner." I said, "Will you give it to your employees?" "I'll do that. The next time they get their paycheck, each one will get two tickets in their payroll. They can go to the dinner." I said, "Fine."

Of course, he never realized what hit him because the moment he gave the five hundred dollars I called Lynn Donnelly, who is now working in the White House for tours, who at that time worked for Jack Kennedy. She sent him a letter signed by Jack Kennedy thanking him for the five hundred and an autographed book of *Profiles in Courage*. Clark called me at my home upon receipt and said that he thought it was very thoughtful of the Senator to do that. That's the first time they had been exposed to that type of a technique in campaigning.

Well, anyway, to make a long story short, before I reached Marshfield at 2:30 that afternoon, I had sold a full house. I had the checks in my pocket. Everything was accounted for and I hadn't even started.

On the way to the dinner I had stopped in Stevens Point—I have to tell you a very interesting story that happened. It was the Webert-Bayton Tackle Company. The only reason I dropped in there is it was right across the street from the hotel that I stayed at—it was the Whiting Hotel—I dropped in there. The bellhop had told me that the owner of the Webert-Bayton Tackle Company was a Polish Catholic. I thought, well, maybe I can make a dent. So I walked up to the girl and told her that I was calling on behalf of Senator Kennedy. The owner of the company—I can't recall his name now—ushered me in. He was a tall,

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distinguished man about sixty-five, white hair. I said, "I'm with Senator Kennedy's office." He says, "I know, I've been dreading this day." I said, "What's the matter?" He says, "You know, I've been dreading it, but the Lord has answered my prayers." I thought I was with some sort of a religious fanatic. I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, I voted against Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith], and I really liked Al Smith. I really did like him, but I voted against him because I'm a Republican, and I've always dreaded the day that I'd be faced with the same decision again. But yet I wanted to be faced with this decision again because I want to redeem myself. But if you've come to see me about this dinner in Marshfield, that's out. I'm chairman of the Distinguished Guests Committee for Nixon. I am on the platform meeting all the distinguished guests. I've been a Republican all my life. I'm district chairman. It's out of the question." I said, "You contradict yourself. In one breath you say you've been waiting for me." He said, "I'll tell you what. I have a mother that really runs the place. I mean she owns it. I'm just the son. She's an old woman, but in our family my mother is the head of the family. I have a son. We'll have a meeting at 3 o'clock. You come to see me at 4, and I'll give you a decision." I said, "I can't wait that long. I've got to keep moving." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Come around at 2."

I came in at 2 o'clock. I walked in, and he had his head in his hands. He says, "I lost." "What do you mean you lost?" "My mother voted aye; my son voted no." "How did you



vote?” He said, “Obviously, I voted aye. But I lost. All that I’ve built up all my life in the Republican Party. You see, Mr. Corbin, I’m the kind of a man who buys tickets to Jack Kennedy’s dinner—I’m going to be there. And I can’t be a traitor to Nixon. I can’t serve as chairman of the Distinguished Guests Committee and at the same time buy tickets to the Jack Kennedy dinner. So I have resigned as chairman of the Distinguished Guests Committee. I will not be at the Nixon dinner. I will not be at the Kennedy dinner, but I won’t be at the Nixon dinner. But every one of my employees will be there. I have 137 employees; I bought 137 tickets.” That’s the story of the Webert-Bayton Tackle Company. It sounds silly. It may be boring to you, but to me it was terrific. Here was a guy who was really honest.

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Anyway, I dropped over to the Hardware Mutual Company. That’s the hotbed of Republicanism. I sold them 150 tickets, a fellow called Frank Thompson. He was a public relations man. I gave him the same approach: how silly he would look when Jack Kennedy became president and the insurance company had the privilege of participating and wouldn’t do it. However, he told me that he would like to have a few officials of the insurance company meet John Kennedy. As a matter of fact, I promised most of my ticket buyers who were interested to attend that I’d have a little conference with them with Jack Kennedy.

The Marshfield dinner showed up. Of course, we had a full house. This is the first time I discovered that Jack Kennedy was sick. I had this group of about eight people. He was in the classroom of the principal; this was held in a school. I said, “Senator, I have eight people that I promised to meet you.” He was sitting behind the desk, and he was white. He says, “I can’t meet them,” I said, “God, I made a commitment, Senator.” “I can’t,” he says. “my back hurts me. I just can’t meet them.” I said, “Senator, I understand that but this is politics.” He says, “I can’t.” I said, “Will you agree to meet one, just one girl that I’ve faithfully promised?” He said, “All right. I’ll meet her.” She came in. I saw him stand up to greet her and I realized the pain. She did. I rushed her right out. She said, “That man is sick. He can’t stand up.” I said, “Well, he’s got a cold. He’s not used to the Wisconsin climate; he’s got a high fever.” I apologized. That’s the first time I realized he had a bad back; he couldn’t get up. [Interruption]

CORBIN: The question has always been asked: what attracted me towards John Kennedy? I became active in the Democratic Party after I came out of the Marine Corps in 1946. We all had our views on what we would like our democracy to be like, and we found that the Republican Party—in Wisconsin, that is—didn’t have the answer for us that it was a closed corporation that didn’t even want people to join or become active. The Democratic Party was open to all. They allowed discussion and free debate.

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However, I discovered that even in the Democratic Party the influence of the labor unions had become so powerful that they dictated the policies, the resolutions, and the platform of the Democratic Party. I’m only speaking about my state of Wisconsin. The

reason they were able to have so much power is that the business people were staying away from the Democratic Party. They wouldn't support the Democratic Party financially. So when a bright, young, attractive candidate would run for office—although he was a liberal, but didn't feel the labor unions should have that much influence—would start out as a clean candidate, hoping to attract support from industry, to his surprise, he didn't get it. As a result as the campaign came to a close, he needed money. The labor unions were always there to give him a couple of thousand—two, three, four, five thousand dollars. It's amazing how cheap the labor unions were able to buy into a Democratic Party. For five thousand dollars in the Midwest they were able to capture whole Democratic parties because the business people wouldn't support them.

Of course, the reason the business people wouldn't support them is because of their feeling against Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt]. They were opposed to the rental and the price restrictions of Truman [Harry S. Truman], of controls. They still resented the fact that the labor unions had been established—the Wagner Act. They actually hated the Democratic Party with a passion. So even though a bright candidate would come along, they wouldn't support them.

As for myself, I realized the Democratic Party always worships at the labor temple. Every time a candidate came in, the first place he went was the labor temple, the labor bosses, the labor business agents. Jack Kennedy, when he came to Janesville, his first speech that he made that I heard, which just fascinated me—here was a man who discussed the question of the influence of the labor union, the corruption of some of these labor leaders, the tie in with organized crime, the graft. And he was going to do something about it. I felt even though he wouldn't be successful, at least he was aware of the danger; he was aware of it and wasn't afraid to discuss it.

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So those of us who attended the Janesville dinner were just amazed. We became his fans the first time he spoke. These are things we believed in. That's actually what attracted me toward Jack Kennedy. He was appealing to the citizens. He didn't believe in political domination by political leaders and political bosses, which in Wisconsin meant the labor leaders. In fact, the mere fact that he was coming into the state with the thought of running in the primary meant he was challenging the whole power structure. He was challenging the Democratic Party, which was controlled by the labor unions, and the labor unions. All the county chairmen were part of this entrenchment. When Jack Kennedy ran in the primaries he had very few county chairmen. You could just count them on your hand. There were four of them, and those who were for him were afraid to come out. So, actually, he fought the labor unions, the Democratic Party, and all the entrenched establishment. That in itself attracted us toward Jack Kennedy.

After the series of dinners, the decision hadn't been made as yet for Jack Kennedy coming into the primary. We were getting worried. They were having family meetings up in Hyannis Port to discuss this thing. We understood that Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]—these were his old supporters from Massachusetts that helped him get elected in Congress and the Senate—were opposed to the

Wisconsin primary because they couldn't do business with the Democratic Party, they didn't have the labor support, and they thought the man didn't have a chance.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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