**Myer Feldman Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 1/23/1966**
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**
Feldman, (1914 - 2007); Legislative assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1958-1961); Deputy Special Counsel to the President (1961-1964); Counsel to the President (1964-1965), discusses Feldman's role in the senate campaign, JFK's senate record and legislation, and JFK's plan to win the presidency, among other issues.

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Myer Feldman – JFK #1

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First Oral History Interview

with

MYER FELDMAN

January 23, 1966
2828 Ellicott Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Well, let's start by my asking when you first came into John Kennedy's orbit.

FELDMAN: I first saw John Kennedy while I was Counsel to the Senate Banking and Currency Committee in 1955 or 1956. I met him briefly. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] introduced us. Then in early 1958 Ted Sorensen called me and asked me what my plans were for the future. I said I was thinking of leaving the Securities and Exchange Commission – I was then Executive Assistant to the Chairman of



the Securities and Exchange Commission – and going into private practice. He suggested that I come over and talk to John F. Kennedy without indicating what it was all about.

I, at his suggestion, made an appointment with the Senator and met with him in his office for about one-half to three-quarters of an hour. Ted told me later that it was the longest interview that John F. Kennedy had given anybody up until that time. It was a very nice discussion, during which the Senator outlined his hopes, the nature of the office, the kind of thing that he'd like me to do and asked me if I'd be interested. Now, he didn't refer, specifically, to the presidential campaign. But I had talked to Ted before that and Ted said

that he was very definitely pointing toward that, and that I ought to be aware of the fact that this office would be a national office rather

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than just a Massachusetts office.

In my conversation with Senator Kennedy I didn't ask questions about his future but he told me that he thought I could be useful in helping Ted with speeches and with statements and running the legislation. He did say that Ted would be traveling a good deal all around the country.

My answer to him, after the discussion was over, was that I wasn't quite sure that I was interested. I had had a lot of government service and I didn't know whether I was ready to continue – to stay with the government, in a sense. So I went home, talked to my wife – oh, I asked for several days within which I might be permitted to make a decision and he said, "Fine." I went home, talked to my wife, and she said that if I didn't take this job, I may regret it the rest of my life. So I went to work for him.

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MORRISSEY: I'm interested to know how John Kennedy could speak about his hopes for the future without being specific about them…

FELDMAN: Oh, no, no, no. What he was talking about was the 1958 campaign when I meant the hopes for the future. Obviously, he was going to run for reelection to the Senate. In fact, he made the point that maybe this would be a short-time job, that he might be defeated for Senator. But nobody really believed that. The only question was what the size of the plurality would be.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any familiarity with Massachusetts politics?

FELDMAN: None whatsoever.

MORRISSEY: Had you known Ted Sorensen before that introduction to Kennedy in 1956?

FELDMAN: Yes, Senator Kennedy had been interested in a couple of things that the SEC was doing, including one

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investigation it was thought might involve some influential people in Massachusetts. I suppose I ought to mention it, Charlie, so long as it's confidential.

MORRISSEY: Yes.

FELDMAN: One of them was Fox [John Fox]. He was interested in finding out whether Fox was involved in manipulation of stock that involved a company – I think the company was United Chemical and Dye. It was subsequently indicted, I think, but Fox was not indicted in that manipulation, although he did have a peripheral connection to it. Now, I will say that the interest was not with a view to influencing the SEC decision. My association with him was in order to give him information about it which he might use in any way he wanted. But he didn't at any point seek to influence the decision. In addition, a little later on, I talked to him about another case,

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again which involved some people in Massachusetts. I've forgotten who it was. Thirdly, I talked to him a third time about some legislation that the SEC had proposed in which he thought it might be useful to become involved in. He apparently – I guess he had talked to his father who was a former SEC Chairman, and they had discussed whether or not he should take the leadership in any SEC proposals. In 1955 and 1956 I was Counsel to the Senate Committee that was investigating the stock market. A lot of proposals had come out of that investigation. One of the things he toyed with was deciding whether or not he should take the leadership in any of those. He decided that none of them were really of such importance that it would be appropriate for him to do since he wasn't on

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the Senate Banking and Currency Committee.

MORRISSEY: Did he mention Bernard Goldfine to you?

FELDMAN: No, he did not – not at that time. Of course I talked to him about it later on.

MORRISSEY: Did that bother him or concern him?

FELDMAN: Well, he thought he was lucky, that's all. [Laughter] He was lucky that he hadn't been one of those people that Goldfine contributed to or that had come around the office. He might very well have been if Goldfine had come to Senator Kennedy's office and offered a contribution. I think he would have accepted.

MORRISSEY: I can't recall if Fox's paper, the Boston Post, was still publishing in 1958.

FELDMAN: Yes, it was.

MORRISSEY: Did this enter into the conversation at all?

FELDMAN: No. Well, yes and no. I didn't know after my first conversation with John F. Kennedy whether he was for or against Fox.

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I discovered later on after talking with Ted Sorensen what their relationship was. But from my conversation with him I didn't know which way it was.

I came to work for him in '58 and my duties were those of a legislative assistant. I assume Ted has already given you his statement as to what he did during that time. He didn't work on Massachusetts matters. I handled Massachusetts as well as various national problems. As we got closer to the campaign, Ted paid a little more attention to the campaign and I paid a lot more attention to the campaign. I moved to Massachusetts in September to stay there until after the election. But even in Boston – Ted and I shared an office on Tremont Street – Ted spent most of his time still working on the national campaign. Of course we helped with the brochures which we put out which were

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called the tabloid and we helped with other publicity devices. We helped do some radio spots. I guess we wrote all the speeches that were used during that campaign. Nobody else did any.

But Ted still concentrated on national things. For instance, Ted did the speech at the National Cornplowing Contest. There was some question as to whether he should leave Massachusetts to go out there for a agriculture speech. There's no state in the Union less interested in agriculture than Massachusetts! But it was finally decided that he should and he did and of course Ted drafted that.

I concentrated mostly on the individual speeches. Our method was to have at least two speeches a day, one for the morning paper and one for the evening paper, which we distributed widely. Then we had a statement

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of some kind which could be only three or four paragraphs perhaps for each stop. And I had to draft those. So that, in the average day, we did – not we, I guess I did almost all of them – six to eight…

MORRISSEY: Did you have any help?

FELDMAN: No. Just Ted and I did all of them. Ted would do a major speech. If it were a major speech, Ted would do it. But all the minor speeches – statements on minimum wage, developments of policy on how Senator Kennedy would do more for Massachusetts, and so on – I would do.

We both shared a small office which couldn't have been more than about 10 feet by 8 feet. In that small space we had two desks right off a large room where carpenters were

working during the entire campaign. They had to go through our office to get to the large room so this was really a hectic

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campaign – carpenters with lumber moving through all the time and so on. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: Did Kennedy stick to the speech drafts that you submitted to him?

FELDMAN: No, but what he did was he followed the same procedure he did during the presidential campaign. He would release them and these were the speeches that made the headlines and made all the papers because they were widely distributed. But then he would say anything he wanted to before the audience. Very often it had no relationship whatsoever to the text of the speech he had released. However, these were released regularly, every morning and every afternoon for the morning and evening papers.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever hear any criticism from newspapermen about the second off-the-cuff version?

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FELDMAN: Yes, I think that this was a pretty good preliminary to the 1960 campaign because we experienced the same kind of comments and we followed the same kind of techniques that we did in 1958. I don't think it was quite as busy because we never had a very high regard for the opposing candidate, Vincent Celeste.

MORRISSEY: Did this bother Kennedy?

FELDMAN: You mean the fact that…

MORRISSEY: That he had a weak opponent.

FELDMAN: Yes. I think that he believed that if he had had a little stronger opponent, he might have won by a greater vote because there would have been more interest in the campaign. He did win by an overwhelming plurality, as you know. But if instead of Celeste – and that was all apparently that Republicans could come up with. Nobody else wanted to run against him.

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If he had had somebody stronger, Kennedy thought he would have won by more than 900,000 votes. So having a weak opponent he didn't regard as a particular advantage.

MORRISSEY: I recall reading, I think in James Burns' [James MacGregor Burns] biography of Kennedy, that Kennedy was concerned by the fact that the newspapers kept raising the expected plurality that he should win by.

FELDMAN: Yes, that's right. That's right. Two things that he always told us on the staff not to do. The first thing was never estimate a crowd. He said that your estimates will be completely different from what other people's are and you'll get stories on that. There's not much profit in it. The second thing was don't try to guess how much you're going to win by because if you have a guess that's high, then, when you actually win – and

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we saw this as a matter of fact later on in Wisconsin – if you don't win by that much, they will regard it as a defeat. On the other hand, if your estimate is low they'll do two things. One, they'll say you're not really being honest but you're trying to build up to a victory. Or two, you may even suffer financially. Contributors come in when they think you're going to win. If it looks close there will be less contributions for you and more for your opponent. So one of his principles was don't estimate your margin of victory. Don't estimate the crowd.

MORRISSEY: I've heard it said that there was a problem in that campaign of giving all the volunteers enough work to do.

FELDMAN: I guess there's a little bit of truth to that but not a lot. In every campaign, I think, you have a problem – every campaign

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I've been associated with – you have a problem of keeping the volunteers busy. Now we did have an awful lot of milling then. We had one of the big rooms that was just full of long tables at which volunteers sat and mailed things out. They stamped envelopes and wrote addresses and wrote invitations and so on. Now that kind of volunteer we always kept busy.

The kind of volunteer we had difficulty with were people who wanted to be "Kennedy girls." You know, who wanted to go with the Senator and wanted to precede him or wanted to build up the crowd and so on. Now those people who weren't performing what I'd call an essential administrative function – were more decorative than anything else – couldn't be kept busy. But I think we had plenty to do for anybody who was willing to come in and just stuff

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envelopes, because we did a lot of that.

MORRISSEY: As I recall he left the state on a few other occasions to speak elsewhere in the country.

FELDMAN: That's correct.

MORRISSEY: Was this discussed?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes. When I first went up there it was questionable as to whether he should, whether he should take any speeches outside Massachusetts. But the decision was made that this would not hurt him in Massachusetts if it did not take too much time from the campaign. It was essential – I told you we didn't want to estimate the plurality but all of us thought in terms of the plurality all the time. Prior to the actual election, I helped with Dave Powers [David F. Powers] and with Ted and with others get together a set of figures which would demonstrate how much of a victory it would be with each of various

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kinds of pluralities. You know we knew that Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall], who had the greatest plurality up until that time, had won by 500 and some odd thousand votes, and we knew that the highest Democrat had won by 400 and some odd thousand votes, and that the number of counties, the most counties that had been taken by the Democrats and so on. But all that was prepared before we actually got the votes in. Then we were ready to pour it out.

MORRISSEY: It's curious to me that so many people who were active in that campaign were not residents of Massachusetts, I'm thinking of not only yourself or Ted Sorensen but of Bob Thompson [Robert E. Thompson], who came in as press representative….

FELDMAN: That's correct.

MORRISSEY: Was this ever discussed as something that

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might become an issue?

FELDMAN: Yes, but this was discussed before I even went to work for Kennedy. That was one of the questions I asked him. I said, "Does it make any difference to you or do you think it would make any difference to your political future if I come in because I've never had any connection with Massachusetts at all?" And he answered then as he did during the campaign, that he wanted the best men and he thought the voters would understand that you just get the best men to represent the state. It doesn't really matter whether or not they're citizens of the state at that time. If they don't do a good job then they can be criticized. Just so long as they're competent – then

Massachusetts was fortunate to get somebody from Nebraska or even Pennsylvania. [Laughter]

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MORRISSEY: Let me leapfrog out of context here and ask a similar question. During the primary battles of 1960, it was customary to send outsiders into a state – say, people like Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith, II] and Bill Walton [William Walton] into Wisconsin.

FELDMAN: And West Virginia.

MORRISSEY: Yes, likewise. Was this ever perceived as a possible source of trouble, becoming an issue?

FELDMAN: Well, it not only was a possible source of trouble, it was a source of trouble.

MORRISSEY: Where?

FELDMAN: I didn't, I wasn't as active in Wisconsin – as a matter of fact I didn't go out there at all. But I did go to West Virginia and I did listen to the political figures in West Virginia who would come into headquarters and complain. They'd complain principally about Ben Smith. And they tried to get him out. They said

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one – that he didn't know West Virginia, two – that West Virginians would resent the fact that he was trying to organize a couple of counties in West Virginia when he really didn't know anything about it, and three – that it would be much better to get the politicians, the people that knew that part of the state, and to get them to organize for Kennedy.

This was not only a potential. It actually resulted. But this never affected President Kennedy a great deal. He felt that although people – we did talk about and I remember talking to him about it – and his general feeling was what I just expressed. Although people might feel a closer relationship to somebody who was from that community, if it was an organizing job that was necessary or if it was an intellectual job

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that was necessary, there was no particular advantage or benefit in having somebody from a little town. In fact it was just the reverse. You just got the best man. If he needed people in the locality to knock on doors to visit the people, he could get them. For instance, Ben Smith used the county leaders from the two counties he was in charge of and they did do a lot of work. But he was in overall charge of that section of West Virginia. I think we got the same

criticism of Eddie Boland [Edward P. Boland].

MORRISSEY: In West Virginia?

FELDMAN: Well, Eddie was not active in West Virginia. He came down briefly but we got the same criticism of Eddie Boland when he organized Ohio, I think it was.

MORRISSEY: Going back to the ’58 campaign in Massachusetts, were you with the Senator the night the

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returns came in?

FELDMAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: What was his attitude towards the results?

FELDMAN: Well, he’s not a highly emotional person. Of course he expected that he would win. Nobody had any serious question about that. He was obviously very gratified. I don’t remember what he said but I know he was gratified by the size of the plurality. I remember he asked for the figures which I think Dave Powers had down at headquarters. Dave gave him all the statistics. He had them at his fingertips to show what a great victory it was. Of course he went down and congratulated everybody that helped him. I don’t believe there was any particular elation. It’s just a sense of satisfaction that he had gotten through this and seen that this step had been taken.

To me it was obvious at that point

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that he was running for the presidency. He wasn’t running for Senator for Massachusetts. I think everybody at headquarters thought that. But I don’t believe that he really made that decision at that time. He knew this was necessary if he was going to run for the presidency, but he had not yet made the decision that he was going to run for the presidency because he was always aware of the many handicaps that he would face. The feeling was one, well, we’ve gotten this preliminary out of the way, now we have the tough job ahead.

MORRISSEY: Well, let’s move on chronologically. What next?

FELDMAN: Well, after the ’58 campaign, we, as I say, Senator Kennedy has a feeling that this hurdle has been successfully overcome. He came back to the Senate with new status, new standing and the problem was developing

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a legislative record on the basis of which he could run for the presidency if he decided to do so.

There were a number of things, apart from everything you know about his activity on the Labor Committee. But one thing I remember he told me that was my specific job was that he didn't want to avoid votes. He wanted to be recorded on every vote. Whether he was out speaking or whether he was at home or wherever he was, I was to make sure that he was recorded on every note. He didn't want to be accused of being wishy-washy or not expressing his opinion. Of course if there were a critical note, he wanted to be there and actually cast his ballot.

He didn't have a very good percentage of voting record. In other words, his participation in the Senate was not a very high one. But he had the best – he had

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just about 100 percent on being recorded for or against a proposition so you could always tell where he stood. Some of this haunted him in the primaries later on because Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] used his voting record very affectively. Kennedy could have ducked a number of issues but didn't.

In addition to that, I guess it was Ted's job to organize the country pretty well. I think at that point we increased our staff a little bit. We hired Jean Lewis. I think she came to work for us around that time. Jean and Ted had the job of national organization. After the '58 campaign I also dropped most of my connection with Massachusetts. Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] ran Massachusetts for the office from then on, even things that had to do with legislation. We didn't ignore Massachusetts. I think we still served them well.

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But at this time in the office, the only men were Reardon, Sorensen, Holborn [Frederick L. Holborn], and myself. Now Holborn was just correspondence basically and that was pretty routine. Ted Reardon handled all the requests that we got from Massachusetts people. Where we got into a legislative problem affecting Massachusetts, I would get into that.

MORRISSEY: Such as?

FELDMAN: Well, the fishing industry. The fishing industry wanted particular relief. The textile industry wanted the Senator to testify for them on a tariff committee hearing. We had a problem with the pier of the Port of Boston. We had a problem with – as I remember – on whether or not there was discrimination against the Port of Boston in grain rates.

Well, now on all of these things I had

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become involved, but these were relative, recently major statewide issues. On most other things, Ted Reardon took care. He took care of seeing the people of Massachusetts. He took care of satisfying their basic needs – if they wanted to get some soldier transferred from one post to another and so on.

My job was these major items of interest in Massachusetts and even more important, to work on the national campaign which was getting rolling at that point.

MORRISSEY: I would assume that some of these issues posed difficulties for the Senator – to continue to represent Massachusetts and at the same time trying to become a national figure.

FELDMAN: Well, he had that problem all through his career, I would think. But, I agree, they were particularly critical at that time.

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For instance, there isn't a single rural electrification unit in the state of Massachusetts. And yet, the REAs are an influential political force. So, on votes dealing with REA or atomic energy or anything the REAs were interested in, he had a number of representatives. If he were merely representing Massachusetts, he would probably oppose a subsidized interest rate of 2 per cent, and he would probably oppose an increase in the appropriation from 150 million to 250 million dollars for them. But, as somebody who was interested in what's good for the nation, he would favor both of those things.

When we were asked – and he did in fact have a pretty good voting record from the national point of view on these issues – and when the people from Massachusetts and when the electric utilities of Massachusetts

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would challenge him on these votes, it was our job to answer that he was not just a Senator from Massachusetts, he was a United States Senator and that he felt that these things were in the best interest of the nation. In fact we developed a theory under which they were even in the best interest of the private utilities. [Laughter]

But, it's correct. There were clashes of local interest versus national interest. In every instance the national interest point of view won out. Also, I think there were a great many liberal pressures on him. I think up until 1958, his coloration was a pretty conservative coloration. Beginning around the time I came to work from him, he became more and more liberal. He spoke to liberal groups. He spoke at the Eleanor Roosevelt dinner given by ADA – and I remember Billy Green [William Joseph Green, Jr.], the Congressman from

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Pennsylvania, dead now, never did forgive him for that. Billy Green was being opposed by ADA Democrats in Philadelphia and when Kennedy came down to Philadelphia to speak to an ADA group, he regarded it as a personal affront. For a while we thought this might even

cost him the Pennsylvania delegation at the Convention. But as it worked out, Billy Green became one of his best supporters, I think.

In addition, he saw ADA people. Similarly, he solicited the advice of liberal academicians. So, - and I think he became deeply interested in such liberal things as anti-wire tapping and other distinctly liberal crusades.

MORRISSEY: Was there any particular person who was persuasive to him about wire tapping legislation?

FELDMAN: No, he discussed this with both Ted and me. He discussed it with Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy]. I don't believe he discussed it very generally

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with others but he would mention it when he had a discussion with a liberal. But he didn't solicit their advice as to what he should. I was going to say he came out from the national crime commission but I guess I'm ahead of myself. That was later.

MORRISSEY: How much of this new attention to the American liberals was rooted in the fact that a lot of these people looked either to Adlai Stevenson or Hubert Humphrey as their candidate in 1960?

FELDMAN: Well, I think in an analysis of what would happen in 1960, he became convinced that he had to have the support of the liberals because first of all, Lyndon Johnson wasn't actively campaigning. Secondly, although he always regarded Lyndon as his most dangerous opponent in the Democratic party, he thought his chances were good because Lyndon couldn't enlist the support of the North. Lyndon

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would have a very local regional appeal. Now, if he couldn't get the South which was the center of conservatism, he had to get the North in order to get the votes to be nominated. The North, and even the West, is basically liberal insofar as the Democratic Party is concerned. The West is not a liberal part of the country, but the Democratic Party in the West is liberal. So, taking one step at a time, in the effort to get the nomination, he had to have a liberal image. So, cultivation of liberals was definitely in his interest as a political matter. And, I think, it was – I think he learned a lot as time went on and I think his views gradually shifted so that by the time he became President, I'd have no hesitancy in classifying him as a liberal.

MORRISSEY: At the 1956 Convention, if you recall, when his name was offered for the vice

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presidential nomination he got lots of support from the southerners. Did many of these southerners look with interest upon his presidential candidacy in 1960?

FELDMAN: No. I think the support he got in 1956 was not support for Kennedy it was opposition to Kefauver [Estes Kefauver]. This was apparent immediately afterwards.

MORRISSEY: The second part of that question is, was that support from southerners a liability in trying to win support from northern liberals?

FELDMAN: Yes, it was. This was something he had to overcome because people kept pointing to the fact that he was a conservative and this was proved by the support he had received in 1956 from the southern states. It was a handicap in his effort.

We had prepared all kinds of documents which would demonstrate that his voting

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record had always been on the liberal side. In fact, I think his point of view gradually changed. As a Congressman, I think he was a pretty conservative Congressman. In the early part of his Senate career, it was kind of mixed. Then as his Senate career advances, you find his voting record becomes more and more liberal.

MORRISSEY: I recall that some civil rights groups were distressed by his vote against the jury trial amendment?

FELDMAN: That's correct.

MORRISSEY: Did this cause problems?

FELDMAN: Oh, sure, sure. We had a very full explanation of why he voted against that amendment which I think Ted has in his book. He explains it in some detail.

MORRISSEY: Had he made any effort to court the eggheads, the academic liberals, prior to that 1958

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election in Massachusetts?

FELDMAN: No, I don't think so. No, I think this was the beginning of that effort.

MORRISSEY: Was it an effort to honestly get their advice or an effort, perhaps, to swing their support to him as a candidate in 1960?

FELDMAN: I don't think it was a calculated move to get their support. He always felt that the number of votes the liberals controlled at a convention was miniscule. They really didn't have much political power. However, their advice and their being associated with him did have some important political effect. Those people who are in the middle of the road who would resent a right-wing conservative would start to have second thoughts. That they said, "Well, he can't be that conservative if he has people like Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] with him."

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So, I think it was for that reason and because they were bright. Kennedy liked to have smart, brilliant people around him all the time. These were generally that type. He couldn't stand a liberal that wasn't smart. If they were bright, then he enjoyed them. He enjoyed their advice, he listened to them, and also took their advice.

There's another element to that, also. The base of support for President Kennedy was labor. In order to have solid labor support, he had to have the liberal community support him.

The third prop of this effort to cultivate liberals was the opposition he ultimately received. He knew that Humphrey would run against him. There just was no question about that. He didn't think Humphrey would ever make it but he knew

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that he had to defeat Humphrey whether in – later on it became obvious he had to defeat him in the primaries – but he knew he'd have to beat him at some point. He didn't know how many states or under what conditions. Knowing that, he had to preempt as much of the middle of the road plus the Humphrey support as he could get. So for that reason he was anxious to have political scientists and authentic members of the liberal community on his side.

MORRISSEY: Didn't his activities on the Labor Committee cause troubles with organized labor?

FELDMAN: Sure they did, but the only labor leader that maintained any animosity toward Kennedy, I thought, was Al Hayes [Albert J. Hayes]. And Al Hayes is not really a liberal, or wasn't. He's no longer President of the Machinists Union.

On the other hand, on the Labor Committee – on the McClellan [John L. McClellan] Committee rather than

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the Labor Committee for it wasn't the Labor Committee that I was talking about. I was talking about the McClellan Committee. I assume that's what you were referring to, too. The Labor Committee was quite different. We could discuss that in a minute.

On the McClellan Committee he was helpful in counterbalancing what labor regarded as anti-labor moves by McClellan and others so they did not resent the fact so much that he was on that Committee. The only labor leader I thought that resented the fact that he was on that Committee was Al Hayes.

As far as the Labor Committee was concerned, he was in close touch with them throughout the whole Kennedy – first the Kennedy-Ives [Irving McNeil Ives] Bill debates and Kennedy-Ives Bill consideration and later on what became the Landrum-Griffin Bill. They knew that he

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was fighting all the anti-labor amendments. Although they disliked the bill that came out, and although Senator Morse [Wayne L. Morse] campaigned against Kennedy on the basis of the bill – in fact, I think Morse made a film which was shown at various conventions in which he attacked Kennedy for his actions in getting the Landrum-Griffin Bill approved. In spite of all that, the labor leaders recognized that they were going to get some legislation if Kennedy had fought against all the very restrictive amendments to the bill and that therefore this should not be held against him. The very title of the bill indicated that it was an effort to – the final bill should be disassociated from President Kennedy. It was a Kennedy bill up until it was finally passed and then when we put out our releases, we deliberately changed it from the Kennedy-Landrum Bill

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which would have been its normal title, to the Landrum-Griffin Bill because we didn't want Senator Kennedy associated with it.

MORRISSEY: In his dealings with people from the liberal community, was Kennedy somewhat worried about the emphasis some people would put on his relationship with McCarthyism?

FELDMAN: Oh, sure sure.

MORRISSEY: Did he ever speak about it?

FELDMAN: Yes. He was annoyed mostly. Every time somebody would raise – he'd never talk about it in detail because every time somebody would raise the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] question there would be a tone of annoyance that would creep into his voice. Now I remember attending a meeting with a group of liberals and we knew that one of the first questions would be, "Why didn't you vote unsure for Senator McCarthy?" His answer was pretty typical.

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He answered, of course, in the way which you're familiar; it's been written up so many times. I think the only thing I could add to that is that he doesn't answer in a cool, calm way. It's with a tone of annoyance in each instance because the question is asked so often. He doesn't attempt to persuade his listeners that he's a liberal. What he tries to persuade his listeners of is that they should be more thoughtful. I think this is probably best illustrated by the charge that Eleanor Roosevelt leveled against him in her book. When he heard that, his first reaction was to send a telegram off to her. He quickly dictated a telegram to her which, as he often did, he

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then tore it up. [Laughter] What happens, usually, in a situation like this is he reads it and then he'll call his secretary into the office and he says, "Take this telegram." And he dictates a telegram off to the person who either writes to him, or writes an editorial, or writes a book as in the case of Eleanor Roosevelt. Then the secretary goes out. In the Eleanor Roosevelt case, as I remember, it was Helen Lampart, not Evelyn Lincoln. She goes out and she types up the telegram. Then I, who happened to be in the office, asked Helen to give the telegram to me rather than to the Senator. I took the telegram and went in to see him and I said, "Well, I don't think we ought to send this out. Let's instead get in touch with her in some other way to indicate that she's all wrong."

Sometimes he'll take a telegram and put

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it in his desk and it gets lost or destroyed, or sometimes he'll just tear it up. So, this was his reaction to that too.

As I say he's annoyed, and the constant repetition of it didn't salve his feelings at all. But you're right. These liberals used it up until, I think, up until the day he was assassinated.

MORRISSEY: As Kennedy moved on towards the nomination, I recall that Hubert Humphrey had a long interview with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] which was well publicized. Was Kennedy concerned about his lack of standing as a figure knowledgeable about international affairs?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact, we prepared a very elaborate brochure which we also included in the tabloid in 1958. Beginning in 1958 we were concerned with this problem. You may remember that in the tabloid there was a picture – I'm not sure whether it

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was in it. It was in it originally. I think maybe it was cut out when the tabloid was finally

printed. But we did prepare a picture for the tabloid which showed all the countries that Kennedy had visited. I think when the tabloid was finally printed, it was cut out. From that, we then prepared for 1960 a full documentation of the number of countries he had visited, the number of heads of states he had talked to, the fact that he was on the Foreign Relations Committee, and so on. I think we were well armed in this field.

Another thing occurs to me, though, from the question you asked. That is the later comparison between Kennedy and Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] on this score. It wasn't Humphrey so much as it was Nixon. Nixon was making a big point on the "kitchen debate" with Khrushchev and publicized widely the figure of Nixon

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pointing at Khrushchev with his finger as if he was lecturing to him.

We wondered, for a while, as to how we would meet that and ultimately decided we wouldn't. Before we made that decision, I was asked to collect all the pictures I could find of Nixon pointing and there must have been 25 or 30 pictures. This, apparently, was a typical Nixon pose in which he always points at somebody and acts as if he dominates the photograph. I think he did it deliberately. Kennedy said that right after the first debate – I wasn't there but he told me – right after the first debate – photographers came around to take a picture of him with Nixon. He, very innocently, stood there and started talking to him. The minute the photographers started to flash their bulbs and take their pictures, Nixon's finger came out and he

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started pointing at Kennedy. A somewhat amusing outgrowth of that was one picture I found of one of the Washington lobbyists here named Charley Clark [Charles Patrick Clark] pointing at Nixon. It was a picture of the two of them together with Charley pointing his finger at Nixon. [Laughter]

We were going to put them all together into a kind of a funny little booklet with titles. We even dreamed up titles for each one of the pictures, but we never carried that out. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: How did Kennedy look upon Nixon in those years in the late '50's?

FELDMAN: Well, as you probably know, Nixon was an office neighbor of ours. His office was right across the hall from ours. In fact, at one of Kennedy's birthday parties, in 1960, I think – I think it was just before he went out to California for the Convention

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at the end of May – we had an office party and we didn't have enough ice cubes. So he sent me across the hall to borrow them from Nixon. I went in there – Nixon had done this before – and he gave me the ice cubes which I took back to President Kennedy. We put them in the

bucket and I said, "Well, shall we keep this here or shall we return it?" And he said, "No, we'd better return it because he'd never forget the fact that we had his ice cube tray." [Laughter] The personal relationship was on that basis, I would say. There was no animosity between them.

Intellectually Kennedy didn't have much regard for Nixon. He thought Nixon was not as bright as he might be. Politically, he thought Nixon was a very smart politician. He thought he knew how to handle himself. He knew just what points to make. He

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thought that Nixon's acceptance speech was a remarkable political demonstration. He recognized that at the beginning of the 1960 campaign we were starting from behind and we needed something to pull us up.

MORRISSEY: In retrospect it's fairly unanimous that Kennedy beat Nixon because of the debates. But before the subject of the debates came up, and when it was clear that Kennedy was going to run against Nixon, how did Kennedy think he was going to beat him?

FELDMAN: Well, the plan for the campaign initially was the same plan we used in 1958. He was going to make 16 to 18 speeches a day, he was going to visit every state in the Union, he was going to make sure everybody knew him. Nixon was much better known than he was. So the first problem was to make sure everybody knew him as well as they

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knew Nixon.

The second principle was that we had intended to use a lot of television. We knew that newspapers were against us. And we felt that, one, television was a more accurate reflection of the Kennedy personality and that therefore if people knew the Kennedy personality, they'd be more likely to vote for him; and, two, that television gets a wider audience than any single paper can get, or even any group of papers. So that it would be useful to use a lot of television. We had planned on principle to use the radio and television. Kennedy didn't believe much in newspaper advertisements and the newspapers editorially were mostly against him.

To overcome the handicap of being better known that favored Nixon – that essentially

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was our greatest deficiency in the beginning and that is what the debates overcame – we proposed to use a lot of television and also a lot of personal appearances. There was no substitute, he felt, for actually getting out there. It's not so much the number of people he met, President Kennedy said. I asked him once, I remember, how many people he thought he would meet during the course of the campaign. Well, he said that wasn't so important. Even

if you totaled the number of people that lined the streets for a motorcade – and your effect on them is very small – but even if you totaled all of them and all of the people he talked to, it wouldn't be more than a minor fraction of the elaborate. It's not that. But when you come into a community, you immediately dominate the news of that community. So making visits

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to a lot of communities, he felt, was a key to political success.

MORRISSEY: How did he feel about his religion, either as an asset or a liability?

FELDMAN: Oh, well of course we felt it was a definite liability. We tried to convert into an asset insofar as the nomination was concerned. You, of course, are familiar with the famous Bailey Memorandum which was allegedly prepared by Sorensen, showing why in 1956 it would have been useful to have Kennedy on the ticket because he was a Catholic. In 1960 we also made a lot of those same calculations and we saw to it that a lot of people got them. We were told by many, and this included most Catholics – it included Governor Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] of Pennsylvania – that Kennedy could never win because Kennedy was a Catholic. Governor Lawrence pointed to his own small margin of victory and said he would have won overwhelmingly if he had been a Protestant. In spite of all the memoranda we wrote

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and all the documents we prepared and the statements I made to many people at the instruction of the Senator, we knew that religion was a major deficiency. Religion, youth, and the fact that he wasn't well known were the three major handicaps.

Now, I suppose the next question is how did he plan to overcome the handicap to religion? Well, I guess there were two ways anyhow. Number one was the technique. We decided early that we would have to have for this campaign a unit at headquarters that would be devoted solely to this religious issue. I hope you get the story of Wine [James W. Wine] who we put in charge of that.

He, and I guess he had a staff of two or three, devoted full time to trying to get most of the Protestant leaders interested

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in President Kennedy's candidacy as the candidacy of a person who would not be influenced by the Catholic hierarchy. That seemed to be the major charge. I think it was of doubtful success.

The second problem was a question of judgment as to whether you play it down or play it up in your speeches. In the beginning we took the first ground. We said almost nothing about religion. We quietly would tell people the story of why religion was no handicap in the case of somebody with as liberal views as Kennedy. You see, the opposition of religion was based on the fact that he would take orders from the hierarchy and also based

on the fact that people think of Catholics as being very conservative. So we would privately counter those arguments. But publicly he didn't say

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until that famous Houston ministers speech. Then it was decided that the only way to – we were suffering we knew from our polls – the only way to overcome it was by a head-on collision. It took a good deal of courage to decide on that because people in that auditorium were mostly anti-Catholics. There weren't very many people friendly to him.

I was in Washington at the time when he was down there, but I got reports before and after and in the middle of the night and so on. Ted used to call me regularly in the middle of the night. I don't believe I slept a single night during the entire campaign straight through. I think that every single night I was interrupted at least once with a telephone call, most nights several times and some nights I didn't even bother to go to sleep.

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That was, I think, one of the critical points. If I were to select the two crises of the campaign, I'd say number one was the decision on the debates and number two was the Houston minister's speech.

MORRISSEY: You call them crises. Do you mean turning points?

FELDMAN: No, I mean crises. The decision as to whether or not we should debate Nixon and that was a critical – I mean critical decisions really, rather than crises. And that was the critical decision at that time. The second was the decision as to whether or not we should make the speech down in Houston.

MORRISSEY: I didn't realize that the first of those was a critical decision. I always had the impression that you wanted Nixon very much to agree to the debates.

FELDMAN: Well, the suggestion for the debate did not originate with us. The suggestion for the

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debate, I think originated first with one of the broadcasting company systems. Then Nixon picked it up and then we accepted immediately. I don't mean there was any reluctance in the decision in that case on our part as to whether or not we should accept, but I think the decision was critical. If we had decided not to do it, it would have affected the campaign. And we recognized at that time this was a critical decision. We did consider arguments against it but the arguments were overwhelmingly in favor of the debate. I don't mean to give the impression that it was a close decision.

MORRISSEY: Two questions: one, what were the arguments against going into the debates and, two, who was making them?

FELDMAN: It was the job of both Ted and me to set forth arguments for and against any major action. Now I'm sure that Bobby talked to – I know

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he did, in fact I was present – I'm sure that Bobby talked to Senator Kennedy about his concern. I'm not really aware of all discussions that went on there. But I am aware of the discussions we had. We wrote memoranda on almost every major point which would set forth the arguments for and against.

Now, what were the arguments against having the debates? Well, number one that Nixon was a very experienced debater. He was a good lawyer. And although we were behind, we weren't that far behind. This could, if Nixon made the kind of impression that he obviously thought he was going to make, then this would be to his benefit.

Number two, Nixon would come to the debates with a great deal more information than Kennedy. He had the whole weight of

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the government supporting him. Who did Kennedy have? He had Sorensen and me, basically. He had Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] to some extent, although Goodwin didn't really participate in this. So, you know, it's the government against a very small staff.

Number three, Nixon would come to the debate as Vice President – somebody already in office with a certain amount of prestige – and could be counted on to take full advantage of that. Kennedy comes just as a United States Senator but, of course, a candidate for the presidency.

Number four, in answers to questions Nixon could avoid them very easily on the grounds of national security. Kennedy would be faced with tough questions.

Now I give you these arguments that occur to me now as arguments that we had at that time. There were others but I

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don't remember them right now.

MORRISSEY: Why don't we stop there rather than run out of tape half way through the next question.

FELDMAN: All right.

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Name List