

Anthony J. Celebrezze Oral History Interview—JFK #1
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Celebrezze, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (1962-1965), discusses his appointment as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), federal aid to private schools, and HEW's legislative program during the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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By Anthony J. Celebrezze

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Anthony J. Celebrezze—JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Anthony J. Celebrezze

By William A. Geoghegan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GEOGHEGAN: I'm William Geoghegan, Assistant Deputy Attorney General at the Department of Justice, and I am about to interview the Honorable Anthony Celebrezze, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare during the Administration of President Kennedy for the Oral History Project of the John F. Kennedy Library. Mr. Secretary, when do you recall you first met President Kennedy?

CELEBREZZE: I met President Kennedy, who was then Senator Kennedy, in about the year 1956 in Cleveland, Ohio, and then later on, I think it was 1957 or, '58, he came back to speak at the Books and Authors Luncheon because he had written his book *Profiles in Courage*, and I had an opportunity to spend some time with him.

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He was there in 1958 again when I was a candidate for Governor of Ohio, and Mike DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] was the other Democratic candidate. There were actually seven candidates. And he asked me at that time if I was desirous of him making any statement on my behalf, and I told him that this was strictly a state question, that I didn't think it was advisable for someone from outside the state coming in on the campaign, and the result was that he acceded to my wishes and didn't enter the campaign at that time.

I then had the opportunity of later on arranging for him to speak at the American Municipal Association's Conference in Denver, Colorado, but by that time he was a candidate, or had announced as a candidate, in 1959. I had quite a session with him at that

time trying to brief him as to the thinking of the mayors and public officials on the local level of basic problems. He delivered an address along that, particularly for housing and urban renewal.

GEOGHEGAN: In 1956 when you first met him, what was the purpose of his visit at that time? Was that a political visit as you recall?

CELEBREZZE: I don't recall. My mind is a little hazy on it. I went out to meet him as mayor of the City of Cleveland. That was my first contact with the Senator.

GEOGHEGAN: Did it occur to you at that time that he might someday be president of the United States?

CELEBREZZE: It didn't occur to me at that time, but I really saw a great deal in the young man that I was talking to. You could tell that there was great depth in his thinking, and you could also tell by talking to him, by the subject matters that were discussed, that he was a great humanitarian. He was deeply conscious that the country just wasn't moving in the right direction insofar as the masses of people were concerned and so far as opportunities for minorities were concerned and, while at that time I did not know that he would be a candidate for president, nevertheless, there was indication that here was

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a man who was deeply concerned with national problems.

GEOGHEGAN: Do you think this concern arose in part because of the fact that he was in politics, or do you think that whether he had been in political life or not, he would have had this same concern?

CELEBREZZE: I think, basically, your basic concerns, deep concerns, for people are Built-in whether you're in public life or whether you're not in public life.

You use every avenue available to you to foster and promote the uplifting of mankind, and I think, regardless of whether he was president or wasn't president, regardless of whether he was a senator or not, from what I saw, that he had a feeling for his fellow man, and if it hadn't been expressed in a political arena, it would have been expressed otherwise.

GEOGHEGAN: In these pre-presidential years was he easy to meet, was he approachable?

CELEBREZZE: I think not immediately. I think that there had to be a short warming-up period. He was pleasant at all times, but I think you had to sit and talk

with him for five or ten minutes before he really impressed you with his warmth. I think the first impression of him was that here was a fine gentlemen, but that he took a little time to warm up to you. Of course, later on when he got to know you, that disappeared completely.

GEOGHEGAN: When did you first start thinking in terms of young Senator Kennedy as a presidential possibility? Was this before he announced?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, this was in our second meeting when he came to Cleveland to address the Books and Authors Luncheon. There was an indication then that he was thinking along national lines for the presidency.

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GEOGHEGAN: Did he discuss this with you directly, or did you just interpret this?

CELEBREZZE: No, I merely, as a politician, interpreted this in my conversations with him.

GEOGHEGAN: Going back to the latter part of 1959 and the early part of 1960, would you discuss whatever involvement that you had in the presidential nomination primary at that time?

CELEBREZZE: Well, I was a very early supporter of John F. Kennedy, as you know, and the minute that there was a public expression on his part that he was going to seek the presidency, I announced for him. We did have some difficulty in Cuyahoga County, in which the city of Cleveland is located, between myself and the political organization there. There had been a breach between us, but on this one issue of Kennedy for President we just joined forces, we just wiped the slate clean and concentrated our efforts on the nomination and election of John F. Kennedy. I was a delegate and at the Convention, of course, cast my vote for him.

GEOGHEGAN: Did the President or anyone representing the President specifically seek your support in the latter part of 1959 or the early part of 1960?

CELEBREZZE: No, no one sought my support actively. It was only in my communication and friendship with John F. Kennedy, so it wasn't necessary to seek my support. I was for him, and that was it. I had been approached by other candidates. I had been approached by the Symington [Stuart Symington II] forces and some of the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] people at that time. I made it known to them at that time that I was supporting John F. Kennedy.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you discuss this with Governor DiSalle at that time?

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CELEBREZZE: No, I never had any communications with Governor DiSalle about John Kennedy because the word had got back to me—whether it was true or not, I don't know (as things developed, it probably was)—that Governor DiSalle was for a different candidate, and I thought there was no sense in my discussing it with Mr. DiSalle. I always feel in those instances when you are dealing with the Governor of the state, it is best that the candidate himself talks to the Governor, and, of course, Mr. Kennedy did then talk to Governor DiSalle, as you recall. He did have a meeting with him.

GEOGHEGAN: And as a result of that, Governor DiSalle...

CELEBREZZE: As a result of that meeting, we were all pledged to vote for John F. Kennedy on the first ballot. After the first ballot, I am sure there would have been some people who would have drifted away from that position. As you recall, fortunately, John F. Kennedy was nominated on the first ballot.

GEOGHEGAN: You attended the Convention in 1960 in Los Angeles?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, I was a delegate to the Convention.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you have any contact then with President Kennedy or anybody on his staff that you recall?

CELEBREZZE: I had contact with Ted [Edward M. Kennedy], and Ted came over and met with the Ohio delegation—that is, his brother Ted. And that was my contact with him. Sometime before that when I had seen the President, I told him that it just wasn't necessary to contact me unless he wanted me to do a specific thing but to devote his energies towards people that he wasn't quite sure about and forget about me because I was for him all the way, and I didn't have to be told what to do and what not to do, that on my basic experience I thought I knew what to do.

GEOGHEGAN: Was the Ohio delegation solidly behind President Kennedy?

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CELEBREZZE: On the first ballot. Past the first ballot you would have found that some would have voted for Johnson and some would have voted for Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] and some would have voted for Symington.

GEOGHEGAN: About what percentage of the Ohio delegation do you think would have stayed with President Kennedy on a second ballot?

CELEBREZZE: My guess on the second ballot that perhaps 80 percent of the delegation would have stayed with Kennedy. And, while 20 percent doesn't sound like much, it's enough in a close race to defeat.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you participate in the campaign at all in 1960?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, I limited my activities to Ohio. I just spent my time in Ohio, particularly in and around the city of Cleveland. As you know, he carried the city of Cleveland by 141,000 votes, which was just about the best majority he got outside of Boston, his own home community.

GEOGHEGAN: Were you surprised at the election results at all in Ohio?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, the night of the election, while I was at Democratic headquarters, I had talked with Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] early in the evening. John Kennedy at that time was about 175,000 votes in the lead, and it was my opinion that if he could maintain that lead and increase a little out of Cuyahoga County with about a 200,000 majority that that would offset the downstate vote. However, sometime later on in the evening something happened, and the downstate went pretty strong for Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], and we lost Ohio.

GEOGHEGAN: Following President Kennedy's election and Inauguration, did you have any contact with him up until the time you were appointed

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Secretary of HEW?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, I have a letter from him hanging on the wall there that he wrote to me.

GEOGHEGAN: What was the subject of that letter?

CELEBREZZE: Merely thanking me for my early support of him. This was while he was at Palm Beach right after the election.

GEOGHEGAN: Mr. Secretary, when did you first learn you were under consideration for appointment to the President's Cabinet?

CELEBREZZE: Well, actually, from my conversation with the President after he was elected and after the Inauguration, he expressed a desire to have me come to Washington at that time, but I told him...

GEOGHEGAN: Was he specific in what he wanted you to do?

CELEBREZZE: No, he said, "I want you to come down and join me." And I don't know in what area he was referring to, and I told him at that time that I just

couldn't leave the city of Cleveland, I had just been elected for—I was just finishing my fourth term—that I was in the midst of a tremendous urban renewal program which wasn't quite off the ground so that I just couldn't leave. I saw him, of course, four or five times after that when he would come to Ohio to speak and when I would happen to be in Washington.

The first inkling I had that I was being considered was when my friends notified me that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was investigating me, and I recall saying that it's awful nice to have a clear conscience—you don't have to worry about these things.

GEOGHEGAN: What did you think about that at the time? It must have called to your attention...

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CELEBREZZE: Well, I checked it out and found out that they were checking me out for a judicial appointment. And I thought this was rather mysterious because there were no judicial appointments vacant in Ohio at that time. There was one in the Court of Appeals, but the vacancy was created by the death of a Tennessean and, logically, I thought, the vacancy would have to go to Tennessee because we already had two Ohioans on the Court of Appeals, so I told my wife [Anne Celebrezze] I didn't know what it was all about and I didn't, but I did know they were checking me out for a judicial appointment because many friends of mine who were judges called me and said that they were interviewed on the matter.

I hadn't had a vacation as Mayor of Cleveland for a good many years, so I decided near the end of June to go to Canada for a week just to relax. It was the first day I was in Canada when I got the phone call. It took three hours to reach me because I was not within the reach of a phone. One of the guides had to come in through one of the many hundreds of lakes they have in Canada to search me out, and the message was to call the White House. I finally went into Sans Souci and tried to make communications there from a phone booth, but the connections were so bad, I said, "Well, I'll go to Parry Sound and call you back." I told that to the operator.

GEOGHEGAN: What were you thinking about at that time?

CELEBREZZE: I didn't know what. I was interested in legislation which had been introduced, and I thought perhaps since I had been president of the American Municipal Association and also had been president of the U.S. Council of Mayors, I thought perhaps the White House wanted some advice or wanted me to take the initiative.

GEOGHEGAN: Had the thought entered your mind that the President had you under consideration for this particular Cabinet position?

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CELEBREZZE: No, that was the farthest thing from my mind. I want to take you back just a little before that, if I may. Shortly before that, as you recall, President Kennedy had committed himself to make the European tour to visit Europe, and I received a call from the Democratic National Headquarters asking if I wouldn't form or get an expression of goodwill from the mayors of America wishing the President well on this trip. As you know, at that time things were pretty hot with Russia. They gave me one week, and in one week I organized fifteen hundred mayors of America, both Democrats and Republicans.

We then at the White House presented to the President a scroll from these fifteen hundred mayors expressing their complete unity and support in problems of foreign policy and wishing him well on his trip and assuring him that regardless of being Democrats or Republicans we were solidly behind him. As I recall, no mayor that we requested turned us down. We came to the White House and presented it to the President to express our feeling—to let the world know that in America, whether Democrats or Republicans, on foreign policy we're behind the President of the United States. And that gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

Now I'll take you back again to find out if I had any idea as to.... At that particular time I had an hour and half boat ride to get to another phone, and while I was going back on the phone, I turned to Mr. Ventura [Joseph J. Ventura], who was my secretary in Cleveland and who was with me, and I said, "I have a feeling that the White House...." (While I didn't know what they wanted, I thought it was he had some program at that particular time). I said, "I have a feeling that the White House and the President may offer me a job that I don't want." With this Ventura said, "What's that?" And I said, "That's Abe Ribicoff's [Abraham Ribicoff] job, which is the last job I'd want."

GEOGHEGAN: Had Ribicoff's resignation been announced at that time?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, Ribicoff's resignation had been announced. And finally I talked to the President, and his exact words were, "I'd like to

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have you come down and take Abe's place." And I said to him—I kind of hesitated awhile—I said, "Well Mr. President, I need at least a week to think about it." And he said, "I can't give you a week. If I give you a week, it will leak out, and I don't want it to leak out." "Well," I said, "at least you would have to give me a day because I want to go home and discuss it with Anne." Anne is my wife. This was on a Friday, and he said, "All right, call me back 8 o'clock Saturday morning." So I chartered a plane and flew back to Cleveland and discussed it with my wife.

GEOGHEGAN: What thoughts were going through your mind on your way back to Cleveland?

CELEBREZZE: Well, first of all the thoughts that were going back through my mind: I was so attached to my city, I had lived in the city practically all my life;

I was desirous of cleaning out the slums; I was desirous of getting the city moving; I was desirous of doing downtown development; and I had devoted all my energies to the city, and I wasn't quite sure that I wanted to turn my back at that particular time and come to Washington. But, I think the controlling element why I finally accepted it the following morning was that in discussing it with Anne, we came to the same conclusion that so many others come to, that when a President of the United States says I need you down here, you just can't say no.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you discuss this with anybody other than your wife prior to calling President Kennedy back?

CELEBREZZE: No. I merely discussed it with Anne. And then when I did come down, I said, "Well, Mr. President, I'll come down for one year, and at the end of the year, we'll take another look at this." And he agreed to it. At the end of the year I went in to see the President, and I said, "The year is up." And he said, "Not according to my book." And that's how this thing happened.

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GEOGHEGAN: At the time of or either just before or just after the time of your appointment, did the President discuss with you any specific projects or policies he wanted you to undertake in your new position?

CELEBREZZE: No. As a matter of fact, I was neither briefed by Mr. Ribicoff or by the President. I was appointed, and the President said to me at that time, he said, "Tony, you have been mayor of a large city, you know what the problems are in the field of Health, Education, and Welfare, and now its your job." And that was the extent of our conversation with him.

One of the issues of the day at that time was in the area of education. I knew that he had announced previously that he was opposed to general aid to parochial or private schools on a primary and secondary level, so I knew his policy there. I was for the hospital insurance program before I came down here, so that presented no difficulty. We did have a report at that time, as you will recall. The birth control report was ready, but Abe Ribicoff hadn't released it yet, and the President turned to me and said, "Use your judgment on the report," which I did, and released the report.

GEOGHEGAN: He said nothing more about that but to use your own judgment?

CELEBREZZE: No, whenever I talked to the President about any basic problem, invariably he would say, "You were a mayor of a large city. You know how to handle these problems. Now handle them." And that would be the extent of our conversation.

GEOGHEGAN: Would you care to comment on this issue that was so important in that particular year of 1962-1963, and that is the question of federal aid to

parochial schools and whatever involvement you had on this subject?

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CELEBREZZE: The President's position was that the Supreme Court, through a series of decisions, had stated that aid to private or religious schools was contrary to the Constitution. He didn't take the position that all aid was. He was careful in saying that general aid or across-the-board aid was. Now on the lunch program, on bussing, the Supreme Court had spoken on that, and he certainly didn't oppose that. But on general aid to parochial schools he was in opposition—not as an individual, but because of the Constitution prohibition of it. There was a great deal of debate as to whether the Constitution does prohibit it, and in reading the decisions of the court he had come to that conclusion, and his advisors had come to that conclusion, and I certainly came to that conclusion.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you consider this one of your more difficult issues to cope with?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, I think that the problem of aid to education.... As you know, we had higher education and primary and secondary education. And in my testimony before committees, I would always run against the barrier of either the religious question or the racial question. In many instances, as we did have the problem of segregation of schools in the South even though the Supreme Court had ruled in 1954 that they were unconstitutional, nevertheless the problem did exist so that whenever we attempted to pass legislation we were blocked either by people saying that this would open schools to all and would be a vehicle of integration or the religious question would come up, and as a result we would not get very much accomplished.

I recall at one Cabinet meeting when I had tried everything I knew on these legislative matters.... It was not only holding up our education program it was holding up our hospital programs, too. Speaking up at the Cabinet meeting one day, I said I thought it was unfair to put the whole burden of the religious question and the civil rights question on the back of education. I thought the thing that we had to do was get introduced into the Congress of the United States a civil rights bill which would cover this so when we appeared before

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a committee and they raised the question, we could then honestly say there has been legislation introduced which handles that specific problem which was the civil rights bill.

GEOGHEGAN: This was the problem created by the so-called Powell Amendments in the area of civil rights?

CELEBREZZE: That's right. And I think shortly after that, the Administration began moving on the civil rights bill, as you recall.

GEOGHEGAN: Mr. Secretary, I would like you to comment if you would on President

Kennedy's attitude toward and relations with the Cabinet, as such, and his attitude toward Cabinet meetings.

CELEBREZZE: Well, as chief executive of the City of Cleveland, all chief executives don't follow the same pattern. Many like to have many Cabinet meetings; others feel that when they appoint an individual to a Cabinet job and give him authority of running a department, they don't want all their problems dropped into the chief executive's lap; some believe that too frequent Cabinet meetings just cause a great deal of difficulty on minor problems which should be handled on the Department level and, therefore, that the vehicle of the Cabinet is only to be used on great national issues or where the President himself has made a determination as to policies to make sure that the cabinet members understand his policy. And, I think even I, as mayor of Cleveland, while I had regular cabinet meetings, basic problems affecting the department I would call the department heads in and sit down with them and spend more time with them as individuals than rather at a cabinet meeting to determine what the solution to that particular problem ought to be. President Kennedy followed that policy. I don't think he believed in just regularly set times for Cabinet meetings as some of his predecessors. I think he spent more individual time with individual Cabinet members than other presidents.

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GEOGHEGAN: That's the next question I would like to get to. That is, how did you communicate your views to the President and how did he communicate his views to you? I presume at times there was direct contact and at other times contact through the staff. Would you comment on this?

CELEBREZZE: In the administrative set-up of the White House, the President had designated certain executive assistants to cover certain areas, and we would communicate with those assistants. And where there was a difference of opinion, we would go in in the presence of his assistants to see the President and discuss the matter with him.

GEOGHEGAN: With which members of the President's staff did you work mostly?

CELEBREZZE: I worked more closely with Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorenson], Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], Lee White [Lee C. White] on civil rights matters, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman]. They handled the heavy part of it.

GEOGHEGAN: What was your impression of the President's staff?

CELEBREZZE: I think the President was extremely fortunate in having a very capable staff. These young men were very capable individuals. I think the President also, if I can exclude myself from this statement, was exceedingly fortunate in having a very capable Cabinet. I can't think of any Cabinet that

worked as smoothly and as cooperatively with one another as the Cabinet under President Kennedy. I think if you think back in the almost three years he was President, there were no violent public differences of opinion between Cabinet members. I think he had a tremendous knack of appointing qualified people to surround himself with. Of course, you know the old saying that you are only as good as your staff.

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GEOGHEGAN: Do you feel that President Kennedy's staff—I'm speaking now of his White House staff—respected the Cabinet officers? Did they look to them as their superiors or co-equals? What was their attitude towards the other members of the Cabinet?

CELEBREZZE: I can't speak for the other members of the Cabinet. I can only speak for myself. I was always treated with courtesy, and I don't think there was any attitude of superiority on either the Cabinet members or the executive assistants. For example, when you talked to Ted Sorensen, you knew that Ted Sorensen was a right arm of the President whose job was to coordinate all programs and that you talked to him on an equal level with no superior tone. At least I never got the impression from Ted that he thought he was superior to the Cabinet.

GEOGHEGAN: You felt that you were part of a team?

CELEBREZZE: That's right. I think that was the great benefit which was part of the Kennedy philosophy that you worked as a great team. He didn't want any prima donnas around.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you ever feel any frustrations because of inability to get your point of view across to the President?

CELEBREZZE: Well, they weren't frustrations. I'd rather call it impatience. Sometimes when we had a critical problem facing us which required a policy decision on the presidential level, the time lapse between the time you requested what the policy was to be and when you received an answer was too great. Now that's understandable because a president has many things on his mind. As you know, he had the Cuban crisis, and at that time, none of us wanted to bother him on anything which didn't deal with the Cuban crisis, so that sometimes there was a time lapse which made you become a little impatient, and there are times when you waited so long and then took your own action because you couldn't wait any longer.

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GEOGHEGAN: Did you feel that President Kennedy was accessible to you?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, I could reach the President when I had to reach him, but there again

it's the basic philosophy of the individual Cabinet member. And then, being a chief executive myself, I didn't want my cabinet members calling me every time they had a little problem. Therefore, I tried to restrict myself in calling the President with my problems. I felt that my responsibility was to do the best job that I possibly could do in carrying forward the programs of the President without getting him in any difficulty, and I felt that if the only time I could move was when I called the President and said I'm going to move, then he didn't need a Cabinet member. So, I tried to limit myself as to how many times I would request to speak to the President on any problem.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you have any particular guideline that you yourself followed as to when you would bring a problem directly to the President, when you would ask for his viewpoint before you acted?

CELEBREZZE: Well, generally what happened, you would only do it when there was a difference of opinion between you and his staff man who was charged with that responsibility, and that was very infrequent because if there was a difference of opinion, you worked it out with the staff person assigned to that particular responsibility. There were times when the President himself wanted to talk with you on a basic question, and he would call you in, and he would discuss that particular problem with you. We did that with regard to the influx of the Cuban refugees. I had a long session with the President on that as to what we could do and what we couldn't do in helping these people out, and once the decision was made that we were going to help them to the maximum extent possible under law, why, that was it. My responsibility was to carry that program out. But most of the time when you contacted the President was at the beginning of the legislative session when we were working on our legislative programs.

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GEOGHEGAN: I'm glad you mentioned that because I want you to comment on this subject. How did you develop a legislative program at HEW and coordinate it with the White House staff and with the President and have the President present it as part of his Administration's program?

CELEBREZZE: Well, at the beginning of the year we would be requested to submit to the White House our legislative program affecting our particular Department. After that was done, then you had a series of meetings with the Budget Bureau. But before coming to the final conclusion, you had a meeting with the White House staff, normally it would be Ted Sorensen on these overall legislative programs. Of course, once that was jelled, it would then go over to Larry O'Brien to have the bills introduced, and then you worked with Larry O'Brien while it was pending in the legislative body.

GEOGHEGAN: To what extent did you discuss with the staff the political overtones of your legislative program—to what extent did that play a part in the decisions that you made with respect to legislation?

CELEBREZZE: Well, basically, I didn't have too much of that problem because in the areas of Health, Education, and Welfare you can't pay too much attention to politics. We dealt with human inadequacies. The Department is not a political department. These are all highly trained technical people here. They are doctors; they are lawyers; there are psychologists; there are teachers; so that I think that at least the decision we try to make is not one of a political consideration but based on a need.

GEOGHEGAN: Perhaps I didn't state the question very well. What I had in mind was simply this: To what extent were you influenced by the political realities on the Hill in what you were planning to do?

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CELEBREZZE: I think in many instances because of being faced with realities we didn't ask for as much in the legislation as we thought were necessary, and we would project a one or two or three step program, get the initial legislation passed and amending it in future years.

GEOGHEGAN: Well, was your object to tailor your legislation to something that would pass or would the decision be made to seek the legislation regardless of whether there was much chance of enactment?

CELEBREZZE: Well, we would follow two schools of thought on that. Much of the legislation we introduced, we knew that the legislation would not pass as we introduced it, but we put it in anyway and later compromised on it to an individual group or members on the Hill who were opposed to certain parts of it, and we said all right, we'd pull that part out so we could get the rest of the legislation passed at that particular time. Other times we tried to tailor our legislation after analyzing it in our own mind as to what the thinking on the Hill was. After talking to the committee chairman on that particular thing and getting his views on it, we would attempt to tailor our legislation as to what we felt we could get through Congress at that particular time. We used both methods.

GEOGHEGAN: As I recall your incumbency, you had some of the...

CELEBREZZE: Let me give you an example of that. I think a classic example on that was in the field of education. We had been going in in the past on too many separate bills affecting the area of education, and shortly after I took office, in a meeting with the staff said I thought that was the wrong approach, that what we ought to do is determine what the needs were in the area of education and introduce an omnibus bill saying as far as the Administration is concerned these are the problems education faces today and we think that this program is the solution to these problems. You will recall we hadn't been too successful in getting such legislation through

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in the area of education. We went in then with the omnibus approach with a twenty-four-section bill dealing with education.

But, as you recall, the Republicans on the Labor and Education Committee were very displeased that we went in with an omnibus approach, and I know I had many long hours of cross examination on it. My attitude at that time was this is the feeling of the Administration; we're presenting this bill now; what Congress wants to do with it—they want to divide it into five bills or six bills or seven bills—is a congressional prerogative. But as of today we have passed fifteen parts of that twenty-four-part bill, so that the omnibus approach did work.

GEOGHEGAN: What year was that first introduced?

CELEBREZZE: That was introduced in the beginning of 1963.

GEOGHEGAN: The first session of the 88th Congress?

CELEBREZZE: Yes, that's right.

GEOGHEGAN: Would you like to comment on the problems of medical care and the President's view with respect to this legislation?

CELEBREZZE: Well, President Kennedy was vitally interested, as I told you at the beginning of this conversation, in human problems and human welfare, and he was a strong supporter of hospital insurance, commonly referred to as Medicare, by incorporating it into the Social Security program, so that the individual could protect himself against the high cost of hospitalization in his retiring years when his income is the lowest. It was a sound program. I was for it, as I said, before I came into the Cabinet. The American Medical Association, of course, is the main organization opposed to it, and so far they have been rather successful in that we haven't been able to get our legislation through, though I had high hopes that we might have done something during this session and we are still trying. But I think there is a great need for that, and the President realized that.

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GEOGHEGAN: Did you discuss it directly with him?

CELEBREZZE: I discussed Medicare with the President on many occasions, so I knew exactly where his position was in the field.

GEOGHEGAN: Would you say he was very firmly committed to this?

CELEBREZZE: Yes. Yes, he was very firmly committed. I think eventually we both thought it would pass. It was just a question of time.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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