

Peter B. Edelman Oral History Interview – RFK #6, 2/21/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Peter B. Edelman

Interviewer: Larry Hackman

Date of Interview: February 21, 1970

Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.

Length: 117 pages [**Please note:** the page numbering in this interview is not continuous with Edelman's previous interviews]

Biographical Note

Edelman, legislative assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) (1964-1968), discusses RFK's 1966 trip to Mississippi, New York politics, social legislation including medicaid, social security, and welfare, and Frank O'Connor's 1966 New York gubernatorial campaign, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed April 27, 1989, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Peter B. Edelman, recorded interview by Larry Hackman, February 21, 1970, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of
Peter B. Edelman

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Peter B. Edelman of Washington, D.C., do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the transcript and tape recording of personal interviews conducted on July 15, 1969, July 29, 1969, August 5, 1969, December 12, 1969, January 3, 1970, February 21, 1970, February 13, 1973 and March 13, 1974 at Washington, D.C. and Newton, Massachusetts and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript; however, access to the tape recording shall be for background use only, and researchers may not cite, paraphrase, or quote therefrom.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.


(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.



Donor

3/9/89

Date



Archivist of the United States

4/27/89

Date

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
204	1965 duty-free tourist exemption
205, 213	Robert F. Kennedy's (RFK) 1966 trip to Alabama and Mississippi
206	RFK's 1966 University of Mississippi speech
209	Richard N. Goodwin and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s input on RFK's speeches
212	RFK's relationship with Schlesinger
215	RFK's 1966 Ellenville, New York speech
223, 232, 253	1966 creation of New York State's Medicaid program
223	RFK's relationship with New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller
245, 250	New York physician Dr. Eugene G. McCarthy
249, 310	1966 New York nursing homes bill
252	RFK's relationship with New York state assemblyman Anthony J. Travia
256	1967 amendment to the Social Security welfare bill
259	1966 Abraham A. Ribicoff hearings on the urban poverty crisis
275	1967 legislation passed as result of Ribicoff hearings
277	RFK's relationship with Ribicoff
278	Importance of the 1966 Ribicoff hearings
280	1966 RFK-Arthur Levitt task force on revenue sharing
286	RFK's 1966 revenue sharing bill
289	RFK's role in the 1965 second circuit court judgeship appointment
292	Edelman's role in the judgeship appointment hearings
293	1966 civil rights procedure act
295, 303	1966 Frank O'Connor New York gubernatorial campaign
299	RFK's feelings about O'Connor's gubernatorial run
302	O'Connor's weaknesses
308	1966 poverty bill
312	1966 social security legislation
313	1967 economists' task force
314	Review of RFK's 1966 senatorial work
315	RFK's 1966 emphasis change from education to jobs
317	RFK's meeting with Cesar Chavez: March 1966
320	RFK's relationship with his staff

Sixth of Eight Oral History Interviews

with

Peter B. Edelman

February 21, 1970
Washington D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

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

HACKMAN: We just about finished with '65. I just came up with one thing in going through a file of your memos that might at least be worth commenting on. It's a very minor thing, but can you remember his response to that?

This is a memo about the changes that were going to be made in late June '65 in the duty-free tourist exemption. I didn't see a statement on it in the speech file or anything so I wondered how he responded.

EDELMAN: I just don't remember. You'd have to look in the *Congressional Record* to see whether there were record votes on these things. I remember thinking that it was silly; it was part of a balance of payments

[-204-]

program of Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. It was a thing that had little pizzazz because everybody that travels to Europe knows about the duty free exemptions. In fact, made no material difference in the balance of payments, the amount that was involved was so small. My recollection is that Smathers [George A. Smathers]—let's see, the law still is a hundred dollars a person, isn't it?

HACKMAN: I don't know what that law is. I can't remember.

EDELMAN: My impression is that the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] certainly made no statement about this and in terms of how he voted, you'd just really have to look back at the *Congressional Record* and see. I just have a vague recollection that somehow he either wasn't there for some reason or other, or just didn't do anything about it.

HACKMAN: Okay. One of the things that comes up in early '66 is a trip to Alabama and Mississippi and speeches. Did you get involved in either writing those or deciding whether he should go or not, or anything?

EDELMAN: I was involved in deciding whether he should go. I

[-205-]

believe the way it came up was an invitation from the University of Mississippi, I think, first. The Alabama thing, I believe was put on second, I guess it was just an invitation from some of the law students, or spear headed by some of the law students at the University of Mississippi.

The Senator had me talk to H.M. Ray who he regarded as his friend. H.M. Ray was the U.S. Attorney General for the northern district of Mississippi, and he's not a bad guy, I guess. Then I remember having a number of conversations with Josh Morse who was then the Dean of the Law School at the University of Mississippi. Since that time he's basically been driven out of the state and he's over in Florida now. My recollection is simply that based on those conversations.... and I may have talked to Aaron Henry [Aaron E. Henry]. I don't remember talking to anyone else, possibly to Frank Smith [Frank E. Smith], the former Congressman who was associated with the TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority].

It was like many things; we went back and forth over what seemed like an excruciatingly long time, having the same

[-206-]

conversation and not finishing it. Or the Senator would say, "What do they say down there? Am I just going to be booted? Is there anything I can say? Is there anything that we'd be able to... Will there be any common ground at all?" Of course, the answer would always be, "I think it's okay, they think it's okay, but obviously no one can give any assurances. They tell us that it's changing at the University. Despite the fact that it is only three and a half years after Meredith [James Howard Meredith] was admitted there are people who really want to see you down there. He would profess some disbelief about that, profess some uncertainty because no one could promise that the whole thing would go off well. Then he finally decided to go, I suppose perhaps, three weeks or a month before the thing was supposed to happen. At that point, Dolan [Joseph P. Dolan] really got into it much more heavily because

there were serious security questions. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] reported there were threats that came

[-207-]

in after he had agreed to go. It really was a very complicated matter which I had no experience in dealing; with, so I sort of pulled away from it.

Then I was also involved in the drafting of the speech. I remember that Adam [Adam Walinsky] had done a draft but he and I had sort of talked it over and walked through it together and so on. The two of us took the draft to Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] who were having lunch with Jacqueline Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] and some other people at, I think, the Pierre, the Hotel Pierre on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

That was the second time I had met Jacqueline Kennedy; I'd met her once when the Senator had taken me up with him when he stopped by to see her in '65. On the earlier occasion, I was very impressed with how kind of nice she was and seemingly unpretentious and very interested in everything. One had heard all these things how much of a kind of, "lady" almost the English sense she was, which somehow implied that she'd be terribly reserved and

[-208-]

withdrawn and convey a sense of being, somehow, superior or snobbish, none of which was true.

In any event, we went over the speech draft with Schlesinger and Goodwin and they contributed some things. So those were my, really, two connections with it. Then, when he finally went down, I did not go. But I do remember that that evening, Josh Morse came up to Washington for something or other, and was so jubilant about it, and didn't have anybody else to tell up here, so he had to call me up and tell me which I thought was very nice.

It went off very, very well; there were no incidents. He was very pleasantly surprised. He was received very hospitably at both places and, of course, as you know, when he was asked about, Governor Barnett [Ross R. Barnett], he just waded into it at Mississippi [University] and told them his side of it, and was applauded. That was one thing about him that people liked; he was honest.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Let me just ask you on going to talk to Goodwin and Schlesinger, was that at his suggestion or was that something....

[-209-]

EDELMAN: Yes, I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was. In general, on major speeches where he really thought it had to be just right Goodwin would have a hand in it. The way in which that would generally go is that Adam would do a draft, the Senator would look at it, would make some suggestions, would send it up to Goodwin,

perhaps, and, usually, Adam would go up to see Goodwin for a day and they would hammer something, out together. Goodwin seldom did a draft of his own, he was usually working over something that Adam had done. Sometimes Goodwin did a draft, but mostly it was the way I've said.

Schlesinger was involved less often, but, sometimes, as with one of the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action]—you know, every sort of late January the ADA had its round of speeches, and one of the years, on the ADA, Schlesinger did a draft. Schlesinger did drafts for various Vietnam speeches but they never got used the way they were written. I can remember the Senator saying a number of times that Schlesinger simply couldn't write for him, which I thought interesting because he seldom would say anything to

[-210-]

one of us at least, about somebody who was his friend. I mean, he never would have said, for instance, that he had some doubt about Maxwell Taylor's [Maxwell D. Taylor] or Robert McNamara's [Robert S. McNamara] views on Vietnam. He just wouldn't either give us the satisfaction, or was much too smart for that. But somehow, perhaps because it was something, what difference did it make; it wasn't a policy thing. I can just remember, oh gosh, four or five times over the years that I knew him, him telling me that Schlesinger wrote in a different style, was kind of Stevensonian.

Now, sometimes, it was apropos of discussion that we had from time to time about my writing style because I am not, and certainly was not, a natural speechwriter. So, he either liked me well enough or figured he was stuck with me, so that he had to bring me along a little bit and used to kid me about the big words and the long sentences. In the course of those discussions, where we would talk about how he thought I was doing and what it was that needed improvement, the Schlesinger thing often came up.

But, then also,

[-211-]

when Schlesinger's book [*A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*] came out, and Sorensen's [Theodore C. Sorensen] book [*Kennedy*], he said that he liked Schlesinger's book much better of the two. He went on to say that perhaps one reason for that was that Schlesinger had never really been that close to the making of policy in the White House and that, therefore, he had a somewhat more intellectual or dispassionate or objective view of what was going on. It was a kind of an interesting, double-edged statement, because he was making it quite clear that Schlesinger had not been a major policy advisor at the same time that he was saying that he liked the book better.

In any event, the sum and substance is that he would ask Schlesinger's view regularly about things. Schlesinger was his very good friend, very good friend, liked him a lot, perhaps an interesting fact, given here's this very, very athletic, kind of robust man, and rather non-intellectual man in the sense that he was not given to using a lot of words and turning things over in a kind of speculative or conceptual or abstract way. And here was Schlesinger who kind of embodied all of the

[-212-]

opposite qualities, although he would certainly get out on the tennis court and have a game with the Kennedys. But there was something about him, I suppose, a certain wit, which was congenial. And perhaps in conversation enough of an ability to get to the point of things that the Senator would accept whatever extra words were involved or whatever presumed softness of mind—Stevensonian softness of mind—was involved. But they were very good friends and yet it was clear that whatever writing he ever asked Schlesinger to do for him was just not used.

HACKMAN: In that trip, can you remember whether there was any checking with the senators from Alabama and Mississippi? How was that done, whether any of them were...

EDELMAN: Well, the only one he would have checked with would have been Lister Hill. He might have told Eastland [James O. Eastland] that he was going. He had no particular relationship with Stennis [John C. Stennis] at all, very little with Sparkman [John J. Sparkman]. Lister Hill was his chairman, he was on Lister Hill's committee and

[-213-]

he liked Lister Hill a lot, had good reason to. Lister was a gentleman, was a liberal in a strange sort of way because he didn't vote liberal. Unless there were things that were quite out of the fringe, but certainly in the mainstream of Democratic Party thinking, Lister Hill never blocked it happening in his committee. But more than that, he was a gentleman, he was somebody that you really, honestly, enjoyed working with. So he may very well have told Lister Hill; I can't say for sure. He had a certain relationship with Eastland, but not with Stennis. He seldom even spoke to Stennis, but he had dealt with Eastland when he was Attorney General and they had a kind of a back-slapping, cigar-smoking relationship. I don't think he liked Eastland, but he had a certain admiration for Eastland's toughness and ability.

HACKMAN: Okay. Without going into detail on the '67 hearings, what impact does that '66 trip have on his willingness to go down in '67 and hold those hearings in Mississippi, or is there any tie-in at all?

[-214-]

EDELMAN: I don't see any tie-in. I don't know of any. Whatever there was was simply in his own mind, he never said it to me. It's only logical to say that when the

thing came up in '67 he had to have in his mind that he'd been received reasonably well in '66, but beyond that I don't think there's anything to say. It's a different part of the state, too, of course.

HACKMAN: Okay. Yeah. One of the other things in '66 that you had a hand in is that speech at Ellenville [New York] where you go into the budget. You might just talk about what you know about, or what you can remember about discussions, discussions of what to say, whether you'd been looking for a forum to say some of these things, or how that really came about.

EDELMAN: No, my recollection is that he simply said, for whatever reason, I was working on the speech. Adam, perhaps was working on something else. My recollection would be that Adam was probably deeply immersed in trying to finish the Latin American speech, the speech on the Latin American trip that the Senator was nagging him about. So, I ended up working on the

[-215-]

speech. He just said that he was very upset about—upset is not a word that characterizes him very well. He was irritated about the fact that Johnson was cutting back on some of the programs that he had worked very hard on. He thought that Johnson ought to be called on that, that Congress had, with some struggle, authorized these large amounts, particularly in the education field, and Johnson was not going to seek full funding for them. A particular problem he'd been thinking about was what was going to happen as a result of Watts, as well, which tied into it. He felt that the government just had to do much, much more. Also, he'd read the Sylvia Porter [Sylvia F. Porter] column about what would happen to gross national product if you got equal employment levels in the black community as in the white community. He just said that he'd like to work that in. He recalled for me President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] quote in 1963 about the negro baby having half the chance of completing high school as the white baby born the same day, and so on and so forth.

This is, I suppose, typical.

[-216-]

He would have three or four thoughts that had kind of been on his mind, wanting to make a speech about sort of what was happening in the government vis-a-vis black America. Having these immediate thoughts about the budget and about having seen the Sylvia Porter column and remembering what President Kennedy had said, and he would just kind of mention these things in a scattered, young way in an initial conversation about the speech draft. Then I went off and drafted something that tried to pull all that in.

HACKMAN: The main thrust of this seems to be education and I was wondering whether that was in any way tailored to the group he's addressing. I see a lot of

correspondence, in one of your files at least, about agriculture budget cuts at that same time, and I don't think he really raises that. Can you remember?

EDELMAN: No. The agriculture budget cut thing was just that we had a relationship with the Cornell University School of Agriculture and they would always inundate us every year when the agriculture budget

[-217-]

cuts were going on, but that didn't mean we cared a whole lot about it. We would do the thing that was supposed to be done, right—the appropriate letters to the Appropriations Committee Sub-Committee chairman and so on and so forth. Although I do notice in this speech a reference to the twenty percent cut in special milk program, which I must have gotten out of that other sphere of things.

No, the education thing was there because that was the place where Johnson was cutting the budget and, I suppose, also... Well, it also talks about the poverty program which Johnson was cutting, the Community Action programs. I remember, by the way, that Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel] wrote that part of the speech on poverty program, and it wasn't bad, it wasn't bad. The other thing that was pure Kennedy that was in here, he talked about the special responsibility based on the war in Vietnam, the fact that the black and the poor were dying in greater measures, and then, this is typical Kennedy, "In the end, however, we have the responsibility

[-218-]

to act, not because the law says we must and not because it is economically advantageous for us to do so, but because it is right." A speech like this would have been just really typical in that it was a pulling together by my hand of what he said to put it in. There's very little in here that I brought to it.

Then, I would go back with a draft and he would say "it's too long and it's left out this point," and we would shape it. I remember this one very well because neither one of us thought it was a speech of particularly great importance. Ellenville is a sort of a rural place; we didn't know that they'd be particularly interested in it. It, perhaps, wasn't the right speech for that audience and I think maybe that's why you asked about "Why this and not the agriculture?" We were still finishing it as he was walking out the door to go and deliver it, and he bawled me out a little bit; I remember that. But it got done and it got a front-page story the next day which astonished both of us, and pleased us, of course.

[-219-]

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything that you wanted to put in the speech at that point that he wouldn't say? There's one statement on Vietnam in there and it reads,

“We must do what needs to be done in Vietnam and what needs to be done at home.” It’s on page four. Can you remember any discussion about what you put in on Vietnam in a speech like this?

EDELMAN: No, it just shows that despite that speech that he had made in February, he wasn’t very far along yet, and that I wasn’t, perhaps, much further because I don’t remember being particularly upset about that. But, I’ve gone through before with you the fact that I firmly maintain that I wasn’t growing any faster than he was.

The other thing that I remember about it is that we had some much meaner stuff in here. We had some direct references to Lyndon Johnson that he took out, which he was quite adamant about taking out, and which I had wanted to leave in there. He just softened that to say “the Administration,” and talked about the Administration was asking for less money. That I remember.

HACKMAN: I didn’t go back and check previous speeches, but

[-220-]

he’s clearly making a “We can afford guns and butter,” argument in this. Is this anything that is new about this time, do you remember?

EDELMAN: No, I think that was the conventional wisdom at that point. You were either a person who said, “guns only,” or you said, “guns and butter.” It was only Wayne Morse [Wayne L. Morse] and Ernest Gruening and Gaylord Nelson, perhaps, who were saying, “no guns and let’s have the butter.” There was a certain trap that you had to be careful about, which was the reason why some people who... I guess I give him too little credit; I think he was less philosophically saying, “guns and butter,” than tactically. If you said, “butter only,” somebody could come along and say, “Then no butter, because we need the guns and it’s guns only.” You were implying that it was a choice between guns and butter and that you were going to choose “butter.” Whereas if you said, “We can afford both,” you didn’t give anybody the opportunity to cut you off because we couldn’t afford—because you were forcing a choice and they would choose the other way. So, I would say that at that point, probably, his adumbration of “guns and

[-221-]

butter” was more tactical than any real belief in that war—I mean we know that he didn’t believe in the war—but any real sort of acceptance of spending money there.

HACKMAN: One of the other things that is protested in his speech is aid to impacted areas— the education program. Can you ever remember getting into any discussion with him?

EDELMAN: Can I see his speech again?

HACKMAN: Yeah. Was that something that had been....

EDELMAN: What did we say about it here?

HACKMAN: It's just in criticizing the cutbacks of the Administration.

EDELMAN: Oh, yeah. "The long existing program of educational aid for communities effected by the presence of large federal installations will be cut hourly in half by the proposed budget." Well, that's either demagogic or we didn't know any better.

HACKMAN: You don't remember that ever being focused on really within the office or anything?

EDELMAN: No. I guess we knew. I think that by '66 the Administration was saying that was a lousy program and they wanted to cut back on that so that it could increase others.

[-222-]

So, I guess we sort of made a choice that, since everything was being cut or not being fully funded, we would attack all the cuts. I think that was probably right. It gets rather complicated to get into it, "Now, in this area, the President was right." If you're going to criticize, I guess, you probably have to be a little bit more simple-minded about it.

HACKMAN: Okay, maybe we can talk about Medicaid, which is the Title XIX thing in '66 which is pretty complicated. I guess the first thing is just how did you get involved in it? Is it Blumenthal [Albert H. Blumenthal] that first brings it to your attention?

EDELMAN: No, it's really McCarthy [Eugene G. McCarthy]. Doctor Eugene McCarthy.

HACKMAN: Brought along some memos that you might just want to refer to as you go through.

EDELMAN: Okay. He was on the, sort of faculty of the Columbia School of Public Health. In 1965 Adam had been going through some of the mail on Medicare and had found a letter, some letters, from some physicians in New York criticizing Medicare because it wasn't

[-223-]

good enough, not because it was too good. Dr. Standard [Samuel Standard] is the name that sticks in my mind who's an older physician and had been involved in Public Health stuff in New York for a long time, and Dr. Martin Schicasky of Montefiore [Hospital and Medical Center] who, of course, is a very well known, the administrator of the hospital and then a health liberal, well known health maverick liberal since the thirties. So, Adam called these fellows up on the phone and said, "We got your letters and we'd like to do something about it. We'd like to introduce some amendments." They in turn said, "Well, there's this young doctor named Gene McCarthy whose appointment gives him some times to participate in public affairs, that's the way it's structured."

So that began our relationship with Gene McCarthy. I never could quite figure out, with all the problems that there were with Medicare, we ended up getting, I think, one little amendment that allowed New York to keep higher standards in hospitals than the American Hospital Association standards. The bill was going to cut down everything to the American Hospital Association level,

[-224-]

and, at the time we saw that as rather absurd because it seemed like if the state had higher standards you shouldn't cut it down. I don't know; I think we were right. I've just been going through some stuff in the day care area where one finds that states having higher standards, sometimes, is wrong. But, in any event, we got that little amendment and Gene McCarthy had helped us, so Gene McCarthy was now kind of our health advisor. Somehow it evolved that I became the health person; I don't remember just how.

McCarthy, I guess, just came back at us in early '66 when the Medicaid legislation was going to go through in New York. He just came back to us and said that Rockefeller's [Nelson A. Rockefeller] proposal was inadequate and that it was wrong in a couple of major respects. One was and, of course, this became rather a joke later on in view of what the Congress did in placing ceilings on Medicaid income levels, but he thought that the level of \$5700 for a family of four that

[-225-]

Rockefeller was proposing was outrageously small, and wanted \$6700. Of course, I didn't have the knowledge or the prospective to realize that \$5700 was outrageously high in comparison to what anybody else in the country was doing. So that was one piece of it.

The other piece of it was that Rockefeller was going to assign the administration of the law completely to the State Welfare Department. McCarthy felt—and he was not just speaking for himself—that this was a great opportunity. If we were really going to use Medicaid to be a great contribution to public medicine, it ought to be administered by the health department; that was the way you'd get quality health standards enforced and in operation. So on those two points he wanted us to make some effort.

I guess it kind of started in about March. They kind of came to us and said that it was important that we get Travia [Anthony J. Travia] to understand what the issues were. Al Blumenthal was, by that time, the chairman of the Health Committee in the

[-226-]

Assembly, but did not have very good relations with Travia.

HACKMAN: What about with Senator Kennedy? Let's say you came to him and said Blumenthal was upset about this. What would that have meant? Would he have wanted to identify with that kind of effort or not, because of that?

EDELMAN: Yeah, he would have been. We didn't ever really hear from Blumenthal about it that I remember. Yeah, it would have. Sure, he liked Al very much. This earliest one, March 19, 1966, wanting us to call Travia and get him to hold hearings in the Assembly instead of just merely in the House—in the Assembly instead of just merely in the State Senate where Rockefeller was having them held. I don't think we did anything about that. But I was talking to the Senator on and off. Finally, in late April, I think, the bill did come up in the State Assembly, or in the Legislature. We'd been following it, but I don't think we'd done too much about it. I think he'd talked to Travia a couple of times to indicate his great interest in it. I don't think he had made any particular public statement.

[-227-]

HACKMAN: Had he been at all reluctant to get involved in this on the state level?

EDELMAN: Yes, I think so. He felt that based on what we knew about Eugene McCarthy, and I'll come back to him later on—and the various doctors that we thought McCarthy was speaking for, if McCarthy said something was important then he would sort of go along with that. McCarthy was persistent, if he was nothing else, he certainly was persistent. So, he would be impressed on the merits, but, sure, it was very unusual for him to get involved on a state legislative issue and particularly an area that by was not very comfortable with. He didn't know much about health personally, so he had to be kind of taking it on faith that was important.

As I look back on it it must have seemed like awful gabble digook, I mean to him, in saying, "It makes a difference whether the hearing is held in the Assembly or in the Senate," and that "This is the different"—as this memo sort of says "As to whether this will be good or bad legislation." Well, he must have looked at that a little bit and thought I was a little bit strange.

[-228-]

Indeed, I was just saying what somebody had kind of told me to say and, as I look back on it, I don't think that I would write the same memo today.

But that happens. You get involved and you have such a range of issues at you cover that you have to rely on people. You get involved and sometimes you're dealing with trees

instead of forests on a day to day basis. So, yes, I think he was probably reluctant to get involved and that's why he never made a public statement about it until very late on in the game, and why he confined himself to just talking to Travia and trying to keep him shored up.

Well, then somebody called him, or maybe me, and said it would be a good idea—that he really needed somebody up in Albany to be a go-between between him and Travia, and to sort of help them draft things, somebody who was a lawyer and so on. So he said why didn't I go up.

HACKMAN: Between who and Travia?

EDELMAN: Between Kennedy and Travia, kind of an on-the-spot extension of Kennedy to keep Travia's back strong, to keep him from caving in to this terrible

[-229-]

bill of Rockefeller's that would only give \$5700 for a family of four.

HACKMAN: Is it keeping back strong or understanding issues? Later there is, in some of those—maybe not these memos—criticism, I think from McCarthy, that Travia didn't pay enough attention to the professionals and was making deal without understanding what the issues were.

EDELMAN: Some of that, too. Sure, they thought that I would be able to speak to Travia in ways that McCarthy and his associates could not. By the way, one of his associates is an authentically respected fellow named Frank Van Dyke, who's a professor at the Columbia University School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine, who's been involved in state legislative stuff for a long time. It was really Frank, rather than Gene McCarthy, who was the key person up there on behalf of the professionals. They were all tied into the Citizen's Committee for Children [Citizen's Committee for Children of New York City], and to the New York Academy of Medicine, and the Community Council of New York [Community Council of Greater New York] and so on. So it was good politics for Kennedy to be identified

[-230-]

with it, and I'm sure that he sort of understood that there was some utility in his listening to those groups on their agenda and identifying on the issues that they thought were important.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Okay, so it's politics in terms of those groups. What, if any, factor is there, vis-a-vis Rockefeller in that very early period?

EDELMAN: Well, he'd already been involved in a struggle with Rockefeller over the schools for the mentally retarded in '65, which just had finally sort of ended

around the beginning of '66. He'd been involved in sort of a struggle with Rockefeller over the New Haven Railroad, although not very..... They hadn't disagreed very much. Did I talk about that last time?

HACKMAN: No, we didn't.

EDELMAN: Well, we should because we went up to Rockefeller's apartment one Sunday and Rockefeller was trying very hard to be conciliatory about it, which he seldom bothered to do. At that time, after the Willowbrook [Willbrook State School for Mental Defectives] thing was sort of closed, and Rockefeller kind of, I think,

[-231-]

backed down on it, basically, and certainly went and got the Federal aid that we had said he wasn't getting, the Senator kind of felt like Rockefeller was alright. So I don't think he regarded this particularly as an opportunity to get into a struggle with Rockefeller; I don't think he particularly saw that that was something he wanted to do. It was more just on the merits of the issue.

HACKMAN: What do you remember about those four days when you were up there then, and back and forth with the Senator from that end?

EDELMAN: Well, just that there was this compromise bill of the Governor's which came during the four days. Again, the two issues that I mentioned were the things that we were working on. The doctors were saying to me, "Okay, it's good on this and not good enough on that," and "If he tells Travia to hold out for more on such and such, Travia may do it." So I would just call down and say, "All right, here's what you're supposed to say to Travia," and he would call up Travia and tell him. It kind of went like that. Sy Thaler [Seymour R. Thaler] is mentioned

[-232-]

here who's a state senator from Queens who's bright, a little crazy, but bright, and was very interested in this.

One memo here, dated April 27th, talks about the Governor's compromise bill. What he did was to give some health functions to the health department, but did it in such a way that he left everything else in the welfare department, and if you took out the one paragraph on the health department. So they suspected the Governor was up to no good.

I just don't remember how it came out, honestly. I know that the memorandum calls for a super agency; I know that didn't happen; and I know that it came out basically that way the Governor's compromise was. That is that the eligibility for Medicaid was determined by the welfare people, which, in fact, was required by the federal law.

That was another thing, sometimes understanding emerges two steps behind where it should be. There wasn't a heck of lot you could really do about that, so, in fact, what

[-233-]

the Governor finally compromised on was about the most federal law would permit, in terms of the health aspects being run by the health department. In my mind, what I understood was that if you had eligibility determinations determined by somebody other than welfare, it wouldn't be a welfare program. But that had really already been taken care of by the Congress of the United States unbeknownst to me. So I think what came out was really helped by the fact that we got the best we could. And the fact that we were involved in it did make a difference.

HACKMAN: There's one memo in there which looks like a draft of a release, after the compromise was worked out, in which there're a lot of statements about Rockefeller stating how he was forced to compromise by the Democrats, the outraged Democrats, and particularly strongly praising Travia. I can't find that that was ever released. Can you remember if that's a draft that he probably didn't want to give because he didn't want to criticize Rockefeller?

EDELMAN: Yeah. I think that's about right. He thought it was okay for him to be involved behind the scenes

[-234-]

trying to help, that it would be viewed as perhaps gratuitous for him. And you noted that the second sentence tried to say why he was interested; that it involved implementation in the state of a federal program enacted last year. But he just didn't think it would help all that much.

The other thing, which I think he knew, was that by the time that release, that draft came out there was already people in the state who were crying bloody murder about what a damn expensive program this was going to be and who were talking about cutting it back in various ways. I think he knew damn well that it was not so smart for him to be so identified. He had made his points with the Citizens Committee for Children and all of those by trying very hard. And they knew that he had tried very hard to get what they wanted in the time of the enactment. They weren't going to remember whether he put out the statement or didn't put out the statement because they might not even know that somebody was trying to get him to put it out. So why get so identified so far out?

[-235-]

HACKMAN: Do you remember advice coming from John Burns [John J. Burns] or other people, speaking to that point at that time, or is strictly that something that he realizes on his own? Burns is somehow involved in this, I see his name there every once in a while.

EDELMAN: Yeah, we talked to John Burns for his advice from time to time on this. I would think that, yes, that John Burns was probably was saying that the upstate fellows were feeling the hot breath of their constituents on it and that it wouldn't help them for him to be so identified. That may have been one of the considerations. Maybe, now that I look at this draft statement, it's so strong on what a wonderful fellow Travia was that that might have been what was on his mind, too.

Also, if you look through it, there's no particular point to it, looking back. It was sort of claiming credit for the Democrats, but it wasn't perspective. It was all saying "Here's what we did," and "Here's how Travia helped it," and so on and so forth, so I don't know that it really would have accomplished anything. He probably saw that as well, that it was, by that

[-236-]

point, just beating a dead horse, that we'd gotten what we could get out of it.

These materials point out that Rockefeller's own health people were unhappy about the extent to which he was putting the thing in the hands of the welfare people. The point that I made about the importance of the health administration of it, I note here that I gave the Senator a short memo which pointed out that we didn't know whether Travia understood how important it was that there be contracting out to the health department. In any event, what finally came out is as I say, the best that could have been gotten under the circumstances and, of course, ironically, the increase to \$6000 and the eligibility of the family of four may have been the straw that broke the back of the entire Medicaid program, nationally, which is a fact that I remember with no particular pleasure; increasing that \$5700 to \$6000 really, in retrospect, was just inviting trouble and should not have been done. Now, I will say that we spent practically all of our time on the health-welfare issue and very little on the question of raising the eligibility levels. So that part of the compromise was probably related

[-237-]

less to what we had done and more to what the Democrats in the Legislature were pushing on. The Democrats, of course, were the majority in the Assembly so they had some leverage.

HACKMAN: Can you remember from your dealings with John Gardner [John W. Gardner], Wilbur Cohen [Wilbur J. Cohen], and I guess, Mrs. Winston [Ellen Winston] was welfare lady at that time, what kind of help, reaction you got from those people?

EDELMAN: Yeah. Gardner was very nice; Cohen was, as always, shifty. I mean, Cohen would be shifty even if he had no reason to be shifty, because he's a shifty fellow down to the very shifty core of his shifty being. I'm not a great admirer of Wilbur Cohen. Ellen Winston's people, were simply bureaucratic about it. Joe Cohen [Wilbur] and, what's his name, Alan Willcox [Alanson W. Willcox], who was the general

counsel of the Department and Joe Meyers [Joseph H. Meyers], who's a nice fellow but sort of rooted in the bureaucracy.

Basically, as I say, I think they didn't have a lot of leeway under the law. I mean, the law did say that the welfare departments had to determine eligibility. And, as this memo to the Senator about

[-238-]

Secretary Gardner indicates, we were trying to argue that the language about there being "one state agency," that was in the law, that the possibility of that being the health department meant that the total responsibility, including who certifies people as eligible, could be delegated to the health departments. My recollection is that that's really contrary to the way the law reads, and that if a state legislature designated the health department as the sole state agency to administer Medicaid, it would still have to leave the eligibility determination in the welfare departments. One of the reasons why that had been done was to make sure that very few health departments would be designated as the sole state agency. That was a political decision that the Congress made—policy decision that the Congress made—in 1965. As I look at this, it's incredible that I was trying to get Kennedy to go through all of this detail with Gardner. Again, he must have thought that I was a little bit strange.

[-239-]

HACKMAN: You don't remember getting a either very bored or very impatient reaction from him at the time?

EDELMAN: No, I do remember, alternately, not being able to turn him on to it, not being able to get him to focus on it. He was never impatient about it that I remember, except in the sense you just couldn't get him to focus. But he certainly did call Gardner and he had Gardner out to his house for dinner, and had good old Gene McCarthy out to his house for dinner, and he sent Gardner and McCarthy into a room together—poor John Gardner to be subjected to all that.

I think the HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] essentially went about as far as they could. Phil Lee [Philip R. Lee] was on our side, who was the Assistant Secretary for Health, and we had found that Paul Douglas [Paul H. Douglas] and Clinton Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] interpreted it the way we did.

HACKMAN: There was finally an amendment on June 1st—with Douglas—to amend Title XIX of the Social Security Act. Do you remember whose draft that was? Did you put that together or did that come from Douglas or someone?

[-240-]

EDELMAN: No., no, no. I put that together with Eugene McCarthy. Once it became clear that the interpretation was the other way.... Essentially we had mobilized the

people who had lost the fight the year before to try to convince the HEW to read the law as though the other side had won; this is what it came down to. It's all highly technical business and yet it is of the same importance for policy. So, when we finally realized that we couldn't prevail, we thought we'd put in an amendment and just see whether that could possibly go through. It never did; very shortly, Medicaid was in far deeper trouble in other respects.

HACKMAN: Yeah. One of the things I saw in one of those files was a memo, or a letter and a memo, from Sorensen to you.

EDELMAN: About the nursing homes?

HACKMAN: No, this is still on the Medicaid thing when Sorensen is acting on behalf of the New York State physicians and dentists [Association of Physicians and Dentists of New York State] and Travelers Insurance Companies. He asks—I think his statement is, one, “You don't have to be right-wing to oppose Rockefeller's plan,” and two, “Can I see the Senator about it sometime?” Do you remember?

[-241-]

EDELMAN: Yeah. Well, he just essentially didn't do anything in reaction to it. I must say, it was about that time that Sorensen was also representing General Motors. I wasn't too impressed with all of his new clients and with him partaking of all the new clients. No, he just basically did nothing in response to that, and I say, to his credit, that he didn't push it.

HACKMAN: Well, did the Senator see that?

EDELMAN: I don't know. I doubt that he ever looked at a piece of paper. Sorensen may have spoken to him about it, but he certainly didn't do anything about it at all. The other thing that perhaps that Medicaid thing illustrates, or just something about my role: number one, I was involved in the state legislature in that. Number two, I was the go-between for the Senator with the private health community, the people who were on the outside pushing for good legislation. I went and negotiated in the Senator's name, and on behalf of these constituents with HEW repeatedly. We

[-242-]

had a number of meetings with HEW. When I think about that, in retrospect—and I don't mean to be self-congratulatory, although it's going to sound that way. I think I've already said the ways in which I was somewhat naïve in pushing for things there I didn't have adequate perspective, which may suggest that there's some danger in being this activist a legislative assistant.

On the other hand, as I look around the staffs of the Senate and the House now in retrospect, there are very few staff or senators who will get this involved in an issue on the social actions side, that is on the good guys side. You'll find plenty of times where senators and staff will push very, very hard on an agency on behalf of some constituency or some special interest constituent, or where they'll push to get something funded, where it's a rather simpler matter, just pushing on it as a political matter. But you very seldom see people who bother to get so immersed in an issue that they can go and negotiate on the substances

[-243-]

and particularly on the public interest side, because I have no doubt that in an abstract, conceptual way, our position was absolutely right, as far as a good health policy.

I think that just says something about the way our office operated, that we did have a certain class about us that other offices seldom have, in terms of the level of intellectual content of our participation in these issues. Also, as I say, the Senator's willingness to, over a fairly broad scope, have the competence to get fairly deeply into these issues.

HACKMAN: At the time this happened and immediately after, did this have an impact on whether you did something like this again at the state level? Can you see it?

EDELMAN: No, we never did. There we s never really an occasion to, except there was the similar thing in the fight over the power plants, which was, I guess, in '67. Wasn't it? Maybe you haven't come to that yet in your looking through the stuff. He got into quite a fight with Rockefeller over the atomic power issue and, more broadly, over the public versus private power issue in '67. So there was no

[-244-]

unwillingness to get involved in state issues, but it didn't happen too often.

HACKMAN: Maybe you can carry, then, the Gene McCarthy thing a little further. Apparently, there's something else there.

EDELMAN: Well, McCarthy, of course, became quite close to us as a result of this Medicaid fight, even closer than he'd been in '65. It sort of turned out, I found out about the end of '66, that he was billing himself around New York as our health advisor. He was quite a young fellow in his early thirties with no particular renown, not a celebrated figure in the health field, not even really a child prodigy. And we had always assumed that he was speaking for this group of doctors that sent him to us in the first place. Well, then there was an argument about Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx and the relocation of Lincoln Hospital—it's a public hospital—in late '66, where McCarthy surfaced with the Senator at a press conference. That made a lot of people mad because he was just basically giving us bum advice. McCarthy was very, very

[-245-]

tied to the Catholic medical interests; he was the advisor to the bishop of Brooklyn and that made a number of people kind of upset in the health community.

I happened to call Martin Schicasky. In late '66 and early '67 I was trying to organize the health component of the Bedford-Stuyvesant program. To get some ideas about that and also about health legislation, which I'd gotten interested in, I called Martin Schicasky one day, I sort of said, "Hi. How are you? Glad to talk to you." In any event, the conversation wore on and somehow I said something about Gene McCarthy and he said, "I've been out of touch with you for a long time." I said, "Well, I thought we were in touch through Gene McCarthy." He said, "Gene McCarthy doesn't represent me. If you want to be in touch with me, you've got to be in direct touch with me."

Then McCarthy got into some trouble at Columbia, and just all these indications. It became clear that he'd overstated his position with regard to us and also that he was just not the person to rely on, that if

[-246-]

we wanted to get any points, politically, within New York City and around, about health matters, we'd have to deal directly with some of the key figures.

Then, also, McCarthy was angling to run whatever would be done in the health deal in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and clearly, the black community wasn't going to have that. There developed a controversy about which OEO [Office of Equal Opportunity] neighborhood medical centers would be funded in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The one that McCarthy wanted, which was one that used—I can't remember, St. Somebody Hospital; St. John's, maybe it is, except I think St. John's was the other one—a Catholic hospital as back-up. St. Luke's, maybe. The black community wanted another one, which I think was the one that used St. John's as a back-up, where Dr. Cave [Vernal G. Cave] and the medical society—I can't remember the name of it, but the society of black doctors in Brooklyn.... So I just, essentially, came to the point where I cut McCarthy off for all those reasons.

HACKMAN: Did the Senator ever inquire into that, or would you explain something like that to him?

[-247-]

EDELMAN: I did, yes. He accepted my judgment about it. He thought it was too bad. He liked McCarthy and he thought McCarthy had really tried very hard on our behalf, which he had. It may have been wrong, but I just thought that the best thing to do was not to rely that heavily on him and, for the moment, that meant sort of cutting him off.

HACKMAN: That's primarily, though, because you can't hold the support or communicate with the older doctors or the more established doctors by going through him?

EDELMAN: Yeah. It turns out that they don't let him speak for them. They don't regard him as their spokesman so that there's no.... And he wasn't that on-the-mark in terms of the things that he was advising us to do. I spent a lot of time in '66 on this nursing home bill, which we finally introduced in the fall.

Well, the fact is, as a result of the massive infusion of money into the health care field that Medicare and Medicaid produced, even though there was a tremendous nursing home shortage in the country, the one thing you didn't need, at least the one thing that was not of a very high

[-248-]

priority, was a bill for massive construction of nursing homes. People, seeing the money that was available to operate nursing homes, responded anyway and started building them. There's been a tremendous proliferation of nursing homes in this country since Medicaid and Medicare went into effect—more Medicare than Medicaid.

So he had advised us that that was a major health need where we should be pushing things. I spent a lot of time on it and had this bill and so on and so forth, and put it in. And it was something that didn't have a chance of being enacted and that really we shouldn't have wasted so much time on. That was McCarthy who'd gotten us into that.

HACKMAN: Yeah. When was that brought home to you? Is this something that the other doctors then began to tell you?

EDELMAN: Not on that issue, specifically, no. I didn't sort of really realize how peripheral the nursing home thing was until much later, probably until within the last year or so, year and a half.

HACKMAN: And this is the kind of thing where, if you brought

[-249-]

case to the Senator, he would basically have enough confidence in you to tell you to go ahead with it.

HACKMAN: Yeah, and it wasn't a stupid bill. We had sent it out to an awful lot of doctors and to the American Public Health Association and they all told us that it was worthwhile. The only people who told us that they didn't think it was necessary were Phil Lee and George Silver [George A. Silver]. And I suspected that the reason they were telling us that was because they were under wraps not to spend any more money in the health field, which may have been part of the reason. So it certainly wasn't something that was bum advice on the face, the face of it.

Then me and McCarthy did some other things that were helpful; they never panned out. He set up a meeting for Kennedy with a bunch of medical school deans to talk about how

you could get more money into medical education. Again, that wasn't bad, and if I had had the time to follow up on it more aggressively myself that might have resulted in some legislation. In fact, in early '68 I had enough pieces together so that if

[-250-]

the Senator hadn't run, I would have been able to get a bill together.

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

EDELMAN: I certainly learned a lot from him, I think he was, on the whole, a help to us. But there were just too many things where he had his own personal agenda and his own ambitions, and where he was not discrete about his relationship with us, and where he was not totally straight with us about who he was representing.

HACKMAN: This reliance on one individual over a fairly long period it just seems to me, from looking at the file, that that's not very typical of the way you operated in some other areas.

EDELMAN: Well, you seldom could find somebody on the outside who was willing to spend much time, people tend to be very busy. So in a way it was too bad. The Senator felt it was too bad that we had this fellow who had worked so hard and was trying so

[-251-]

hard. McCarthy is rather diffuse to talk with; it's rather hard to get to what he's actually saying in a conversation, too, which was another reason why I wasn't too unhappy to sort of cut him adrift. For all the kernels of good stuff that you would get, you would get a lot of things that just took a long time. He would call up almost every day with something or other that he wanted us to do.

HACKMAN: You mentioned Sorensen in regard to the nursing home legislation. Is there something?

EDELMAN: No, I thought he represented the private nursing home people. He had no particular connection toward the development of that legislation.

HACKMAN: Did you frequently have contact with Travia on other things because of your relationship with him at this time? Or do you remember other things?

EDELMAN: No, not very frequently.

HACKMAN: Did Robert Kennedy's opinion of him change much from, I guess, what he

thought of him, maybe, in that early '65 fight?

[-252-]

EDELMAN: Yes, and favorably, favorably. He sort of liked Tony Travia, didn't think he was terribly smart, but liked him and, of course, got him that federal judgeship.

HACKMAN: You want to take time just to go through the rest of those and see if there's anything?

EDELMAN: Well, yeah. There's a lot in this memo. This is this memo of June 15th, which we can go through thing by thing if you want to.

HACKMAN: I was thinking. Anything else on the Medicaid thing?

EDELMAN: Oh. Okay. Well, one thing that's in here is, I point out that I'd had two long conversations with Wilbur Cohen and one with Marion Folsom [Marion B. Folsom]. Cohen was trying to get us to be the agent of a compromise to, in effect, cut back the New York program before it ever went into operation, which is typical Wilbur Cohen stuff. We wouldn't do it. And Travia's people, of course, wouldn't have anything to do with it. They finally did approve the New York plan.

Folsom was rather friendly and nice, very oriented to private insurance. I could never

[-253-]

really completely understand what the hell was talking about, he's kind of an old gent and stuff.

This memo points out.... We talked earlier about Kennedy making a statement that Travia couldn't understand why Kennedy would never make a statement supporting the program. And it goes into the upstate Democratic thing which I imagine... I point out in this memo, that if he comes out to try to put something in there that would help the upstate Democrats who were getting pressured by it, he'd be helping Rockefeller as well. Anyway, there's a long analysis in here about just what he ought to do in terms of what the politics are and so on, urging him to make a statement supporting the program, I don't know that he ever did. He may have but if he did, it wasn't of any great significance.

HACKMAN: I didn't see a statement where he just came out in support.

EDELMAN: Yeah. June 23rd, recent New York State medical care legislation.

[-254-]

Maybe this speech wasn't in our file. I think he did, but I just didn't think it

would make much difference. It was another one of those things where I'm afraid I was more in the...

HACKMAN: But that's May 23, and you're referring there to a memo June 15th?

EDELMAN: No, June 23rd.

HACKMAN: Oh, June 23rd.

EDELMAN: Yeah.

HACKMAN: Okay. So, it's just after that.

EDELMAN: That's right, in response to this memo, I think he did, finally, agree to make a statement. Then, the other thing this goes through about the Medicaid is that I had gone to a meeting while he'd been in South Africa where Javits [Jacob K. Javits] and Rockefeller and so on had been present. Rockefeller kept telling all these Congressmen that I'd been up in Albany. He was implying that these Congressmen who were criticizing the program as being too extensive... He was trying to tie Kennedy into it through me. I said that my only concern in the thing had been trying to make sure that the Governor's program would conform

[-255-]

to federal law, which was a twisting of the facts but not a total twisting.

The other thing that we did about Medicaid was that we did put through an amendment in the 1967 Social Security welfare bill, which was drafted by the Administration and supported by them. It allowed that differences in eligibility levels within the state be based on differences in cost of living around the state, basically on differences in housing costs because that's the main thing that does differ in cost of living. So that we kept our interests through '67.

We tried to help Tom Kuchel [Thomas H. Kuchel] who proposed an amendment on the floor of the Senate in late '67 to that same Social Security welfare bill, which would liberalize the ceiling that they were putting on at that point. Wilbur Cohen was right in June '66, when he was telling us that there was some worry that the Congress would react to all of this by putting a ceiling on it. But his timing was wrong because they fussed all through '66 and never did put the ceiling on. I remember talking to Keogh [Eugene James Keogh] every day, who obviously hadn't been very

[-256-]

friendly with Robert Kennedy since Robert Kennedy had put his brother in jail. But Gene Keogh was very, very good on this issue and understood it and worked very hard on the Ways and Means Committee to keep any ceiling from being put on. So that the ceiling, in fact,

didn't come around until the Social Security welfare bill of '67. Of course, by that time the passage of time is such that the connection is rather diluted and, again, it suggests that Cohen was premature in his willingness to compromise way back in '66, which is, again, typical of Wilbur Cohen. We tried to help liberalize that ceiling—and Keogh—and that amendment got only twenty-five votes on the floor of the Senate.

HACKMAN: You said, in the '67 amendment that the Administration drafted it and supported it. How did that work out?

EDELMAN: Well, it was one of the few times we ever got anything out of them.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

EDELMAN: Cohen was always willing to talk to me when I would call him on the phone. He figured—

[-257-]

when we talk about the welfare fight, perhaps in another conversation we'll get into this in more detail—if there was some small bone that he could figure to drop in anybody's lap, it would rebound to his benefit. And that was one that was clearly inoffensive. So he drafted it and sent it up to us and helped us get it attached.

HACKMAN: Whose name did it go up in?

EDELMAN: Ours. Kennedy's.

HACKMAN: Yours. Unless you've got something else on that, we could start talking about the Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] hearings.

EDELMAN: No, I don't think I have anything else on Medicaid except to say that now the conversation has gone through '66 Albany, my staying on the issue through the summer, the Senator issuing that statement June 23rd, my conversations with Gene Keogh in later '66, everyday his reporting to me from the Ways and Means Committee, my telling the people in New York, my working on the issue through '67, and the shelter costs thing. The Senator made a statement when he proposed the shelter costs thing that

[-258-]

got some press attention around New York and, indeed, some editorial criticism which we hadn't calculated on because the upstate people said, "That's fine but why should we subsidize the people down in New York City."

Finally, on through our getting the amendment enacted, it just demonstrates that there was some continuity in our efforts. One of the things that he was criticized for from time to time was the lack of follow-through on things, that he would make some proposal and not stick to it. In fact, we did remain interested in the Medicaid issue. It certainly was not one of our primary interests, but we stayed on it and kept doing what was relevant all the way through.

HACKMAN: Yeah.

EDELMAN: Have I been unclear about any part of it?

HACKMAN: No, it doesn't seem that way to me now, maybe it will when I read back over it, if I ever read back over it.

On the Ribicoff hearings it seems to me that your files are really very completed, in terms of what questions to ask what witnesses. There are

[-259-]

list there for almost every witness and you can see what you and he were trying to get at, I guess. So I guess we need to go behind the scenes, and I'm not sure really what that means in terms of hearings. So maybe you can just start off by; Were there discussions with him about whether these hearings should be held at all? Then how did the two of you really get into that?

EDELMAN: Well, my recollection is that Jerry Sinosky who was Ribicoff's staff man on the Subcommittee on Government Re-Organization at the time—it's a Subcommittee of Government Operations, just said to me one day that Ribicoff wanted to hold these hearings. Very obviously, in retrospect, one of the things that Ribicoff had in mind was to try and involve Kennedy very heavily, because he knew damn well that that would get more television coverage for the hearings and would be good for Abe Ribicoff. He was rather clearly using Kennedy to get himself a free ride. On the other hand, it was a good idea, good from Kennedy's point of view, and would also get some attention for Kennedy. So, Kennedy never let on that he knew Ribicoff was using him and never had any

[-260-]

reaction other than one of enthusiasm about it.

So, Sinosky came to me and said "We want to hold hearings on the cities. Could you help us pull together our witness lists?" I told the Senator about it and he said, "Sure, that's fine, that's good." I spent long hours with Sinosky going through the various plans for the hearings and suggesting names of witnesses of all various kinds. Indeed I think that probably a quarter to a third of the witnesses were people that we had suggested.

HACKMAN: What about other people on the subcommittee or the committee? Can you

remember whether there was any resistance to these hearings?

EDELMAN: I don't recall any. Ribicoff has a way of finding an issue which he can get into uncontroversially, a motherhood type issue, and getting quite a bit of public attention for himself and for the issue. He did that on pesticides; did that on auto safety, did it on the cities; and has since done it on health care. So that, being that he's an inherently cautious individual, I don't know that anyone resisted these hearings. The only other subcommittee

[-261-]

member who took a continuing and active interest in the hearings was Javits. The rest only showed up irregularly.

HACKMAN: Was Javits and his staff as closely consulted on putting together the things as you were?

EDELMAN: Just mostly us and Ribicoff.

HACKMAN: No real reservations about how actively Robert Kennedy should participate?

EDELMAN: No, he was very interested in the hearings and, cynically, I suppose, saw it as a way to make sure that held be on television regularly, but that was secondary. He was very interested, he felt—after Watts, as that Ellenville speech and many other things that he said reflected—felt that the government was not paying enough attention to the problems of the cities.

Now, in his mind, the problems of the cities meant the problems of black people and poor people in the cities. To other people, to Senator Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] it might have meant air and water pollution, or housing or something else, but to him, as those speeches in early '66 reflect—I guess we talked about those last time,

[-262-]

didn't we—the urban crisis meant, really, the crisis of the black and the poor in the cities. And, indeed what we contributed, I suppose, to those hearings was insuring that they were skewed in the direction of talking about the urban crisis from the perspective.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any particular problems in putting together.... Let's say the first hearings, I guess, were in August when the Administration witnesses testified? Any problem in getting those people to cooperate or I guess, to testify really?

EDELMAN: I didn't have anything to do with that. I think there was some problem, particularly in getting them to respond in detail to questions that were raised

at the hearings. And, of course, Kennedy, because he was concerned that the government was not doing enough in these areas, tried very hard to put the Administration witnesses on the spot, and I would say, made the Administration very, very unhappy. Weaver [Robert C. Weaver] particularly reacted in a way that was inadequate and Johnson was reportedly very upset with how weak Weaver had been in the hearings.

[-263-]

The Model Cities legislation was going through at the same time and, I think, the focus on the urban problems that came from the hearings helped defeat the Republican effort to gut the Model Cities program of all but the planning money. So I think there was a concrete relationship for which the Administration should have been grateful, I don't know if they were.

HACKMAN: Yeah. I can remember reading somewhere that there was some difference over whether Robert Kennedy was going to, I guess not testify but read an opening statement when this thing started. Can you remember that at all?

EDELMAN: Well, we talked... There was a question in the office about whether he should do that. Being as he was a member of the subcommittee there was no necessary reason that he should also testify before it. But he felt that because he had been working on Bedford-Stuyvesant all that year trying to pull it together and because he had an overall interest in the subject, he wanted to define his own participation, in a sense, in the beginning and get out on the table his proposals, his ideas of what

[-264-]

ought to be done. So, Adam and Dick Goodwin worked up this very, very long testimony. The guts of it was the reiteration of Kennedy's Bedford-Stuyvesant idea, without referring to Bedford-Stuyvesant but the idea of the total-impact program. Of course, at that same time Kennedy had just been pushing through the special impact amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act, what ultimately emerged as Title I-D.

Then, the other part of it. There was a long thing at the end which Goodwin drafted, which went through, sort of, in a much more general way what the urban problems were. That was quite an interesting and good statement, but which had no very concrete proposals in it. It was just a statement of all the different problems that are involved—that were involved—in American cities. So I don't think it was a major controversy, it was resolved very early in favor of his giving this testimony and the testimony got quite a bit of coverage.

HACKMAN: You mean resolved within the office. You can't remember any big problem with Ribicoff? Or with

[-265-]

other people?

EDELMAN: No, no I don't think so. I think he just said that he wanted to testify and they put him on.

HACKMAN: Can you remember discussing how you should deal in these hearings with Katzenbach [Nicolas deB. Katzenbach] and with Lindsay [John V. Lindsay], I guess, where you've got some other factors here?

EDELMAN: Yes, I don't remember any very specific discussion about it. I think he just kind of resolved it in his own mind. Certainly, the materials that I gave him and that Adam gave him on Katzenbach were much tougher than his ultimate questioning of Katzenbach, but we just gave him what we thought he should have and made the arguments. Then he went in and did what he thought he should do, which was less.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Is that an exception, though, in these hearings? Is he usually as tough as you want him to be with other people?

EDELMAN: Well, he certainly was as tough as you want him to be with Sam Yorty [Samuel W. Yorty].

HACKMAN: Yeah.

EDELMAN: He was tough with Lindsay in the sense that he

[-266-]

thought Lindsay was impractical in such a heavy emphasis on government money. He was already kind of into groping for his private enterprise sort of idea which emerged in a more full blown way the following year. I think if you look back at the record of those hearings, he gets into kind of an argument which he shouldn't have gotten into with Lindsay about Lindsay's statement that it would cost fifty billion dollars and his asking Lindsay where the money was going to come from. I don't know that he should have done that. But he did it because he thought that Lindsay was being rather cavalier.

HACKMAN: Well, he was criticized at the time, wasn't he, for supposedly forcing Lindsay to come up with a figure when Lindsay kept saying, "It's just guesswork," or something like that. You remember that at all?

EDELMAN: Only vaguely. I think that's right. He had a way of asking people to put figures on things when sometimes it wouldn't be very easy to do it.

HACKMAN: Anything else about that first round of testimony that stands out? Richard Lee [Richard C. Lee] or Cavanagh [Jerome Patrick Cavanagh]

[-267-]

or Claude Brown and the fellow from Harlem, Eugene Hill from the Mexican-Americans?

EDELMAN: No, Eugene Hill was a witness that we had suggested, that we had found. I had gone and spent the evening before the Cavanagh testimony with him, going over what he was going to say, and got some questions for the Senator based on that, which was typical of my role in these things.

HACKMAN: You mean you'd gone over with Cavanagh?

EDELMAN: Yes, I'd gone over with Sinosky to meet with Cavanagh and had therefore gotten perhaps somewhat more background for what the Senator ought to ask him. Cavanagh's testimony I referred to many times in speeches later on because he talked vividly about the experience Detroit had in trying to get some neighborhood center money and how many different agencies of the government they'd had to go to just to get a relatively small grant for some neighborhood centers in Detroit. I thought that was a rather vivid example of how bureaucratic the government had become and how poorly coordinated.

The Dr. Robert Coles testimony I think is very

[-268-]

important for anyone who wants to look back at these hearings. Coles was, I believe, another witness that we had suggested. Kennedy got into a really very beautiful conversation with Coles about what happens to black children and how they get beaten down and how when they are small they show vibrancy and a life to them that children who have everything don't show. Then how the black children's—when they develop some consciousness about how cruel the world is to them—faces shut off and they become kind of blank and impassive.

HACKMAN: Were there people other than Cavanagh that you spent time with before the hearings, talking about what was coming up?

EDELMAN: I'm sure there were, I don't remember. If you name some more witnesses I would.

HACKMAN: Richard Lee. The mayor of Omaha [Alexander V. Sorensen].

EDELMAN: Oh yes. What we did on these mayors, particularly Omaha and...

HACKMAN: Atlanta, what's his name, comes up for....

EDELMAN: Ivan Allen [Ivan Allen, Jr.]. Yes, but more on Omaha and on Cleveland.

[-269-]

Certainly, on Los Angeles we didn't talk to the mayor. I did talk to Bob Goldy [Robert Goldy], Yorty's man, not because I sought him out, only because he was interested in seeing me...

HACKMAN: There's a funny memo from you to the Senator about that—I think this is the fellow—in which you say, “If Yorty makes as outrageous statements as this guy, you won't have to say a thing.” Is that the guy?

EDELMAN: Yes, that's right. I tried to get material about these cities and about what was going on in them that he could use. Of course, you always had time pressures, you never could go through as many things in the hearing as you wanted to.

I remember particularly about the Cleveland thing, this mayor Ralph Locher [Ralph S. Locher] was so stupid that we had.... The Civil Rights Commission had held extensive hearings in Cleveland before that which had just shown that the whole city structure was racist from top to bottom; the police were terrible and really harassed the black community. And we just had documented stuff from the Civil Rights Commission

[-270-]

hearings and from other sources. And he really didn't use it, and I was very upset at him. I thought he let this fellow get away with too much. But the fellow was so stupid that he said afterwards that he couldn't even figure how to take the guy down because it wouldn't be any fun, the guy was so dumb. Obviously, in the great scheme of things it didn't matter but I had thought that he should take Ralph Locher on to a much greater extent. Of course, Yorty; he was perfectly delighted and willing to take Yorty on and did very well. But, again, he didn't have to use a lot of the stuff we had prepared for him because he just had his own line of questioning that was very obviously suggested by what Yorty was saying at the time.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Did he talk about what he thought of the work the Civil Rights Commission did in the post-John Kennedy years? I know during the Administration and on some occasions he would just as soon not have done certain investigations at certain times.

EDELMAN: No, no. If there was some material to use he was

[-271-]

happy to use it, but we never had specific conversations about that that I recall.

Those hearings were a great education for him and for me, about what was going on around the country. He was very assiduous about going and sitting and listening. It was very clear that whatever cynicism there might be about his getting himself on television, he clearly did not go there and sit only when the television cameras were on. He set aside, and spent a lot of time at the hearings, heard most of the witnesses, got into a conversation with Roy Wilkins, as I recall, that was interesting in which he said that Roy Wilkins would not be able to go and walk in Harlem, that Roy Wilkins would be in as much trouble as any white politician, and got Roy Wilkins very angry in response to that.

Then in '67 when the wrap-up, the rest of the hearings took place—there were a few more weeks in '67—he took on the Building Trades [Building Traders Employers' Association] people a little bit. I remember that quite vividly because, again, I'd gotten together some material for him to

[-272-]

use, as I always did, and he looked at it and he said, "Well, of course, if I go down there to these hearings today, I'm just going to get into a fight with these fellows. Do I really want to get into still another fight?" I'd say, "Well, that's up to you. Obviously these fellows need to be taken on and need to have their real, discriminatory behavior exposed wherever and whenever that can be done." He said, "Oh, well, okay." So he went down. I think he said before he went that he was going to try not to get into a fight, but as I say, he had said, "If I go, I'll get into a fight," and he did.

We were sitting there and these guys were testifying in a very smug and self-satisfied way about everything that they were doing, and he leaned over to me and he said, "There are three guys at that table that I put in jail," which I thought was very funny. There was the guy from the carpenters [United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America] I guess, and maybe the plumbers, and another one who he had, indeed, put in jail for labor racketeering.

HACKMAN: How did the relationship with Ribicoff work out through out the hearings?
Was he resentful of the

[-273-]

attention finally?

EDELMAN: No, I think he was perfectly well aware that it was a good deal for him. One thing that was interesting about it was that Ribicoff... Ribicoff is not a smart man, first of all. He's not a creative man, and he's not a substantive man, as indeed the recent really horrible Pandora's box that he's opened on the segregation issue has shown. What would happen is that Kennedy would get into a tussle with a witness or would make some point and Ribicoff would be inspired to jump in. So the result was that Ribicoff was much tougher and much more substantive and ideological, in you will, in those hearings than he would otherwise have been. That was clear time after time. In fact, in the Yorty exchange, if you look back at it, the nastiest stuff was said by Ribicoff who didn't quite have

Kennedy's tactical sense. I don't remember the exact statement, but the statement that brought down the house was one that Ribicoff made and not one that Kennedy made. It was Kennedy who obviously, Yorty went back and attacked afterwards. He didn't care about attacking Ribicoff.

[-274-]

HACKMAN: Can you recall whether there was any pullback between, let's say, the first round of hearings in August and the next one, I guess, in December because of the too ruthless, too tough....

EDELMAN: No, I don't think so, except that one of the reasons he didn't attack Locher was because he had just gotten done doing a good job on Yorty. And the same thing with the mayor of Omaha who was a really stupid guy. The Senator just felt he'd been in one fight too many, too recently.

HACKMAN: Ribicoff then proposed some kind of legislation in January '67, right after the conclusion of the first two rounds of hearings. Can you remember working with him on that at all?

EDELMAN: No, we didn't work with him on that and a lot of the legislation was pretty dumb, it was pulled together very quickly and I don't think it was very salient. What did happen was that Kennedy was after me constantly that he should not have merely sat through those hearings, that he wanted something to come out of it. The one thing that had piqued my curiosity was a recommendation which Ed Logue [Edward J. Logue] had

[-275-]

made, and maybe one or two other witnesses but particularly Ed Logue, about the use of the Internal Revenue Code as the basis for getting private enterprise involved in urban problems. I told him that I thought that was the best sort of original and unused idea in the hearings. So we put Mike Curzan [Michael Curzan], who had come to work for us, on that subject.

By the middle of '67 Curzan, after much discussion with many people, came up with the two bills which Kennedy introduced. Those bills, therefore, were the direct outgrowth of the Ribicoff hearings, and would not have been thought of or introduced if those hearings had not taken place and Kennedy hadn't participated heavily in them. Kennedy was the first political figure of any importance to make that kind of proposal.

HACKMAN: Yeah. This is just something I came across in looking through the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, and I can't find anything in the files on it. In September of '66 that subcommittee issued a report on the surveys of negroes in urban ghettos, Can you remember that? It's a study that John Kraft [John F. Kraft] did.

[-276-]

EDELMAN: Oh, yes.

HACKMAN: And I'd wondered, since he'd worked for Senator Kennedy on some things before, whether you can remember that he was particularly responsible for that or suggesting that?

EDELMAN: No, no, he was not. They did that on their own. Let me say one thing about Ribicoff and Kennedy: Kennedy was a little sentimental about Ribicoff. He said more than once to me—which was not true that he thought Ribicoff was his only friend in the Senate.

HACKMAN: Going back primarily to '60?

EDELMAN: Well, because Ribicoff had clearly afforded him such an opportunity in those urban hearings, had also given him the subcommittee to use as acting chairman for hearings on LSD [Lysergic Acid Diethylamide] and on the handicapped, and just, in general, was willing to help him out. Clearly Joe Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings] was his friend and Claiborne Pell was his friend. Joe Clark [Joseph S. Clark] was his friend and perhaps some others. But, as I say, he was sentimental enough about these continuing ways in which Ribicoff had, he thought, helped him—as I say, in the

[-277-]

urban thing, it was definitely a two-way street—that he made that kind of statement about Ribicoff.

HACKMAN: I don't have anything else on those hearings unless, something stands out in your mind?

EDELMAN: No, the thing for anybody who's interested in those hearings to do is simply to plough through them. I would just say in summary that they're a very, very important aspect of Kennedy's education, they were very important hearings for the country. A tremendous number of people in urban type courses in universities around the country used those hearings for study purposes, read them, looked at them very carefully, talked about them and so on. They were one of the direct antecedents of what became a major element of Kennedy's urban program, that is the tax incentives. So they were important in his Senate career in that way. They have to be regarded as a very, very important element of Kennedy's activity because he spent a tremendous amount of time, invested a lot of time, in going, and I think participating in them.

Finally, the fact that they had a direct connection to the enactment of the Model Cities legislation. So they

[-278-]

were important and they, I think, illustrate an important aspect of the way in which Senate business is carried on, which is to say that one way in which you can try to develop Senatorial-Congressional interest in an issue is to hold an extensive series—you have access to a subcommittee—of hearings about an issue and get a lot of publicity for it. It gets a lot of people talking around the country and that creates pressure, which is precisely what happened with the auto safety hearings, as well and that was a more specific issue.

So the auto safety legislation which emerged is more clearly tied to the fact that Ribicoff held those hearings. Now, remember that the auto safety legislation came out of the Commerce Committee; it was not out of the Executive Reorganization subcommittee. It's absolutely clear that that legislation would not have taken place if Ribicoff had not held those hearings. Ralph Nader was, of course, very important to the fact of that legislation as well, but Ribicoff made a major contribution with that. And, as I say, the

[-279-]

more general point that I would make is that it's a technique, which is a tried and true and proven technique for trying to lay the ground work, lay the basis, the foundation, for getting legislative action later on.

HACKMAN: What's his opinion of Nader? Do you do much talking to Nader personally through this period?

EDELMAN: No, I didn't because Wendell Pigman dealt with the auto safety legislation. So, Wendell really dealt more with Nader.

HACKMAN: Did Robert Kennedy ever talk to him?

EDELMAN: I don't remember Kennedy ever spending any time with Nader. Now, he may have, but I don't remember. And I don't remember his ever saying one way or the other what he thought of Nader.

HACKMAN: Well, the next thing really is the Levitt [Arthur Levitt] task force, what you call the Levitt task force—what I see on paper as the Kennedy-Levitt task force. How did that get started?

EDELMAN: Well, I came back from my vacation in the fall of, Christmas '65—I'd gone to Europe for a couple of weeks—to discover that Bill vanden Heuvel had gotten

[-280-]

Kennedy into this thing. It was a brainstorm of vanden Heuvel's. Kennedy was himself off on the ski slopes somewhere and vanden Heuvel had gotten him on the phone, just before he left, in a weak moment, and said to him, "Arthur Levitt is very interested in ways to get more federal money into New York and also very interested in revenue sharing and would like it if you and he could put together something jointly which would lay the basis for revenue sharing." That was the way in which it was put. There was a press release on the appointment of these eight men. I don't know if I can name all eight, but there was Adolf Berle [Adolf A. Berle, Jr.], the old Curmudgeon.

HACKMAN: Is that how Peter Berle comes in, because he's Adolf Berle's son?

EDELMAN: Yes, that's right. There was Richard Netzer from NYU [New York University]; there was Clark Ahlberg from Syracuse, the Vice President of the University; there was a man named Tolles [N. Arnold Tolles] from Cornell, there was LeKachman [Robert LeKachman] from Stony Brook [State University of New York] who wrote that book about Keynesian

[-281-]

economics; there was John Davis [John A. Davis] from New City University who was a black, political scientist, I guess. That's six, who were the other two? Marion Folsom, seven. I don't know who the eighth one was.

I was appalled because I was opposed to revenue sharing. The specific handle was the Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller]-Peckman [Joseph A. Peckman] plan which was an idea to just give federal money away to the states and not the cities and to give it away without federal standards. My instinctive reaction was that that was wrong, that you needed more federal standards and not less, and that you needed money to give to the cities and not to the states, but the thing had been done; it existed. I came back to find it as a fait accompli.

HACKMAN: The eight people had been selected already by vanden Heuvel?

EDELMAN: The eight people had been selected by, I suppose, Levitt and vanden Heuvel and just cleared with the Senator, not selected for any particular bias toward the Heller-Peckman plan, luckily. So, in any event, we commenced to have meetings. We had, through '66, probably four or five or six meetings of

[-282-]

this group to talk about what should be done and had people come in. We had Joe Peckman one time come, and had the fellow from the Advisory Commission on Inter-Governmental Relations come one time, and had Leonard Lesser who was at that time on the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] come one time, and, I guess, probably some others.

Kennedy himself, I think, came to only two meetings all together, just to show his interest in the thing. Levitt was very faithful about coming and he had a guy named Hank Paley who worked on it. Then Peter Fishbein, who had worked with us on many things and was practicing law in New York, and Peter Berle really took on the major staff work.

What I essentially started out to do was to try in every way that I could to torpedo the thing. If it was going to be biased toward coming out for the Heller-Peckman plan, I wanted it never to happen. So I made sure that the people who came, apart from Joe Peckman, were people who pointed out the pitfalls of this and talked about

[-283-]

how you needed to have federal standards and you needed to aid the cities.

HACKMAN: Could you control it to that extent?

EDELMAN: Well, yeah. I did a pretty good job, yeah. I did a pretty good job, at least, of dragging my heels and skewing the arguments. I frankly couldn't tell you what the breakdown was among the eight.

HACKMAN: At least LeKachman was very sympathetic to your point of view, at least from the one important thing I've seen.

EDELMAN: Yes, I know that he was, now that you remind me. I don't remember who else was and certainly I don't remember anybody among the eight as being an unbridled ally of the Heller-Peckman idea. Well, we talked and indeed it was constructive because as time passed we did begin to evolve a certain agreement. Fewer and fewer people came to the meetings as time passed, so it would end up being just Levitt, his guys, Fishbein, and I, and Berle, and perhaps, at the most, two or three of the others. But we finally got to the point where in '67 we had a draft bill which I evolved. Dr. Leonard Dual, who's my friend and

[-284-]

who was special assistant to Weaver, was very helpful in getting some of the ideas for the draft bill. I went and saw some people at the Bureau of the Census to get some statistics about what the consequences of just the numbers involved in doing it would be. I talked to Gene Nickerson [Eugene H. Nickerson] about it as I remember because one of the questions was, when we did determine that you had to pass some money through the large cities, what would you do with counties that had the same kinds of characteristics as a city in terms of their population make-up and so on.

So we evolved this bill which was revenue sharing, but with a difference. It involved the pass through of a large part of the money to cities of over fifty thousand and counties with similar characteristics. It involved federal standards so that the state could get its chunk of money, but only if it showed that it was going to make certain efforts in terms of improved

planning and using the money in ways that would improve its utilization of other federal money as well. The cities within the states could get the money, but only if they showed that they were working on

[-285-]

metropolitan development and planning in a much more cogent way than they had been.

Then I got involved with Seymour Sachs of Syracuse on it. He was supposed to write up some of one substantive aspects of the report that would go along with the bill. So, we had the bill and no report and we were waiting for the report to be written.

Time passed and time passed and the report never did get written and essentially everybody just forgot about the thing. But the final result was I had the completed bill sitting around for a year and the Senator was never interested enough in it to go ahead and introduce it without the report of the Commission. I kept telling him that if he had the report of the Commission it would be more helpful, and so he never pushed me on it. But we did make the proposal in the campaign and that was where the proposal in the campaign camp from. So, I think if the campaign hadn't intervened, we probably in '68 would finally have gotten some kind of report together and would have put together the bill and introduced it.

[-286-]

HACKMAN: Before the task force started to operate, had you ever talked to Robert Kennedy about this idea?

EDELMAN: No, no, it hit me like an absolute bombshell. When I came back from my vacation and discovered that Bill vanden Heuvel had gotten him into this thing, I was just appalled.

HACKMAN: Does he know enough about it or does he really have an initial gut reaction on his own, just about the idea?

EDELMAN: No, his only reaction that I remember.... After one of the meetings that he attended I remember talking to him. I remember him saying that he thought the whole thing was rather impractical because such small amounts of money would be involved that it was really being overstated and over sold. That was the only reaction that I remember.

HACKMAN: As time passed then, did he ever really come to grips with the ideas enough to....

EDELMAN: Well, enough to agree to put out the proposal in his campaign, but relying on my advice—and Adam agreed with me also, really the two of us. So, it was just something that I was ending up going

[-287-]

up to New York throughout '66 about once a month for meetings of the Association of the Bar [of the City of New York] in New York. As I say, initially I regarded it as a holding action, and, it was only as it evolved that I began to see some positive possibilities in the thing.

HACKMAN: In early '67, I think, there's a letter from Tydings asking Robert Kennedy to co-sponsor a Tydings piece of legislation, a Tydings bill on this same subject. There's also one Gaylord Nelson, Bayh [Birch Bayh], Clark and a couple of other people are co-sponsoring. Then also one by Howard Baker [Howard H. Baker, Jr.] everybody asks him to co-sponsor. Can you remembering considering what to do on those?

EDELMAN: Yes, I told him not to.

HACKMAN: ON all of them. Because he was coming out with something on his own?

EDELMAN: Yes. It's interesting in this long memo that I wrote on June 15th, 1966, which goes through at least a dozen different issues, I don't mention the Levitt task force. You can see that, at that point, it wasn't very much on my mind.

HACKMAN: Okay. This is very hasty and not complete. I had someone put it together for me yesterday. Did you get involved in discussing any of those with him?

[-288-]

EDELMAN: Well, the first one, 1965, Wilfred Feinberg appointed to Second Circuit [Court]; I was intimately involved in that, but that's the only one. The others were all Joe Dolan's responsibility and activity and he would have to talk about them. But the Feinberg thing; Thurgood Marshall was appointed to be Solicitor General and so there was a vacancy in the Second Circuit. Whereas with the District Court the tradition is that the Senator from a particular state if he's a member of the majority party has the absolute right to pick district judges; that's one right unchallenged by the traditional patronage.

It's not true of the Courts of Appeals, the Courts of Appeals are multi-state in nature. The Second Circuit, which includes New York, also includes Vermont, Connecticut and either Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands. No, I'm sorry, that's wrong, just Vermont, Connecticut, and New York, just those three states. So the President listens to people who are from his own party who are in the Senate, but does not necessarily do what they want. This was regarded as a New York seat so that the

[-289-]

senators from Connecticut—Vermont, of course, were both Republican—would not have been involved in this.

Well, in any event, the day that Marshall was appointed, Judge Friendly [Henry J. Friendly], for whom I clerked, called me up and said, “What about Edward Weinfeld?” who was a very distinguished district judge in New York City, regarded as the best district judge, the brightest, soundest. He said “Would Kennedy push him as his candidate?” So, I went in to Kennedy and I said, “Look, Henry Friendly called me, I worked for him as you know, he wants to push Weinfeld, I don’t know whether you know Weinfeld, but I know him because I worked up there, and I think this would be good.” He said that he remembered when he was Attorney General, when he had put Irving Kaufman on the Court of Appeals that the other possibility had been Weinfeld. And he had regretted ever since not putting Weinfeld on because he did not like Irving Kaufman [Irving R. Kaufman] and “yes,” he would push Weinfeld. So I called back Friendly, a little bit astonished that I had been able to produce so quickly, and said, “Yes, indeed, Weinfeld

[-290-]

will be his man.

Well, what then ensued was that the Senator did what he could, talked to the President [Johnson] about it, talked to other people about it, and really tried, but because of the tradition that I’ve described was not in a position to put it over. Feinberg’s brother, Abe Feinberg [Abraham Feinberg] is one of the major fundraisers in New York for Democratic candidates all over the country and had been for Lyndon Johnson, and so had major clout at the White House. Kennedy kept telling me—I was in phone contact with Friendly once a week, twice a week—and that he didn’t think he was going to be able to put it over. I kept telling Friendly that I didn’t think Kennedy was going to be able to put it over. And if Weinfeld had independent support of any kind, well, Kennedy had told me to tell Friendly that he should get him to exercise it. If David Dubinsky or Jack Potofsky [Jacob Samuel Potofsky], particularly, were in favor of him, as Friendly had told me that they were, that they better push very hard on the White House.

Well, finally, Feinberg was appointed

[-291-]

and I felt that Kennedy had done everything that he could. Friendly wouldn’t believe it; he thought Kennedy had sold him out and that he had been part and parcel of that. Friendly literally, I mean, he told many people that he thought that we had sold him out and didn’t speak to me, didn’t have anything to do with me for well over a year, and was just very bitter about it. I guess I saw him once at something or other and he started in on me about it. I was very angry; I was very upset that he felt that I was that kind of a person. Well, finally, after over a year, I went and saw Friendly and he had cooled down enough that the thing was no longer an issue between us. But that’s the only judgeship that I was very directly involved in.

The only other things were that on some of these other things, if Joe Dolan wasn’t around when the judge would come down for his hearing, I would be the one in the office

who would take the Judge up to his hearing and make sure that the Senator would get there and would make a statement

[-292-]

introducing the judge, or the appointee, to the committee and that sort of thing. My role in the office was, in many ways, like sort of an assistant administrative assistant as well as legislative assistant just because somehow Adam was someone who would never allow himself to get into that kind of detail. Also, Joe and I had a very good end very close relationship. So, out of the list that you have there, I can remember both Mansfield [Walter R. Mansfield] and on Weinstein [Jack B. Weinstein], whom I had worked with on some things, and perhaps on Pollak [Louis H. Pollak] as well, that I ended up drafting the statements for the Senator to give before the committee and making sure that the logistics were carried out.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Okay. What can you remember about this?

EDELMAN: This is something called the civil rights procedure act which related to the ability of civil rights attorney to remove civil rights from state to federal courts. A committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York chaired by a negro judge named Francis Rivers [Francis E. Rivers] had come out with both a

[-293-]

report and a draft bill. They had brought it to our attention. I knew enough about civil rights law to know that it was worthwhile. I simply got the Senator to introduce it April, 1966, and got Javits to co-sponsor it.

HACKMAN: They came to you first?

EDELMAN: Yea, they came to us first and we just put it in as an accommodation to them. But it was a good bill and periodically, from time to time, when there was other civil rights legislation coming up, I would suggest to him that he might try to attach this amendment to it, but it was never high enough on our priorities list that we made the effort. At the time, there were some Fifth Circuit decisions called *Rachel* [*Georgia v. Rachel*] and *Peacock* [*City of Greenwood v. Peacock*] which really gave an interpretation of the existing law that was broad enough so that this bill was not terribly necessary. Then the Supreme Court decided those cases in a way which I've always thought was wrong and made this bill considerably more relevant, after, I think, sometime in 1967. As I say, it just was always one

[-294-]

of those things that was on my list and never of high enough priority for us to push it. Again—well not again—we were not on the Judiciary Committee so we had no independent

leverage on it. The only way we really could have pushed it would have been to—and the Judiciary Committee would not have been about to go ahead and hold hearings on a bill of that kind, because it was particularly important in the South to protect defendants from arbitrary State Court action, when they would be arrested by Southern police and so on. So Eastland would clearly have been uninterested in a bill of this kind. So, the only possibility would have been to attach it on on the floor and, as I say, it just never seemed to be the appropriate time to do it.

HACKMAN: Yeah. In the fall of '66 did you get involved in the O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] campaign at all?

EDELMAN: Oh, I sure did.

HACKMAN: I thought you'd said Beame [Abraham D. Beame] but not O'Connor.

EDELMAN: Oh no, no. Gosh, I was up in New York for two months, from the middle of September until election. The

[-295-]

Beame campaign, I was in and out of New York over a period of three weeks, but not even up there full time during those three weeks. Perhaps I was up there half or two-thirds of three weeks. But in the O'Connor campaign I moved my body and my soul up to New York for two whole, unpleasant, unfortunate, sad months.

HACKMAN: Doing mostly what?

EDELMAN: Kind of being the person who worked on more than routine program for O'Connor. In other words, anything where there was kind of extra work needed where it needed an especially good speech to cover the proposal. I don't remember all the things but I worked, I guess, on narcotics issues and I worked on.... O'Connor went out and visited a mental hospital in Brooklyn one day and I helped set all that up and write the press release which covered that visit. So, I worked on a number of statements and program. Then I worked with the people who were doing the advertising and I worked with the people who were developing the leaflets and the other kinds of literature. I worked with the people who were

[-296-]

doing the few television commercials that O'Connor was able to afford and essentially went to the meetings every day with Stephen Smith [Stephen E. Smith] and Milton Gwirtzman [Milton S. Gwirtzman]. The three of us were kind of the Kennedy presence there. And we did a lot, Steve and I and Milton, just holding each other's hand about how awful the whole thing was. Then, when the Senator came in and campaigned for O'Connor toward the very end, I

wrote a speech and went around with him and just generally was sort of his liaison to the campaign, although, of course, Steve Smith was also.

HACKMAN: Were there many discussions among the three of you and then with the Senator about what kind of role he should play and how much he should get involved?

EDELMAN: Well, he kind of determined that for himself because he made a long swing around the West on behalf of candidates all over the country, then a number of smaller swings to a lot of other different places. He essentially just told Frank O'Connor that he wouldn't have time to come in on his behalf until the last week. What he was going to do for him was to have Steve and Milton

[-297-]

and me there. So he just about, I would say, set his own involvement in that on his own. Then at one point in that fall, you remember, Ethel's [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] brother [George Skakel, Jr.] was killed in a plane crash with Dean Markham [Dean F. Markham], so he stopped everything that he was doing about a week early in October.

There was a discussion in the Senator's apartment in the United Nations Plaza a few days before the election when it looked like there was some chance that O'Connor was going to win and where, jokingly, Steve Smith said that he had witnessed Stanley Steingut, I guess, and Larry—I don't remember his name, who was from Queens, who was Frank O'Connor's sort of closest friend—go to a meeting in a restaurant with Marty Tannanbaum [Martin Tannanbaum] who was this figure from the Yonkers Raceway.

[Interruption]

HACKMAN: You were talking about Smith's comment about Marty Tannanbaum.

EDELMAN: Yeah, he said he'd seen they go into a restaurant—and there'd been some accusations in the press about

[-298-]

Marty Tannanbaum's money being involved in the campaign—Steve was just jokingly saying that he could blow O'Connor out of the water if we decided that that was necessary to do. It was as much as half serious I will say.

Then the other thing was that the Senator felt that if O'Connor was elected he wanted to have somebody in there pretty close to O'Connor. So, he suggested to me fairly seriously that I should consider taking a job as Counsel to the governor if O'Connor were elected. Bill vanden Heuvel was pushing that very strongly, too. I kept saying, "Why? Bill, you're suggesting it so strongly, why don't you take the job?" [Laughter] Anyway it all worked out.

HACKMAN: Yeah, it worked out.

EDELMAN: We were clear by that time, I think, and that's why I say that Steve's comment was a much as half serious. It would be really disastrous to have O'Connor elected, not merely that he was substantively close to a cipher, but that there was a very real worry that the more corrupt element in the party would run him and that is really

[-299-]

would be very bad.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Well, how did that feeling develop? I mean, had there been much of that feeling, or let's say, suspicion, when the three of you first went to work for him in the campaign? Or did you start to come off of the campaign as things developed?

EDELMAN: Well, we knew he was an old-line Democrat, but the Senator had struggled throughout the summer of '66 to find another candidate and had practically handed the nomination to Sol Linowitz [Sol M. Linowitz]. He had offered to Linowitz that he would take him around and introduce him to all the county chairman and all of the key people. Linowitz, stupidly, said that he felt that was somehow demeaning to go around like that and wouldn't do it. So Kennedy tried everything that he could think of, Tom Watson [Thomas J. Watson, Jr.] who turned out to live in Connecticut, and James Perkins [James Alfred Perkins] who turned out—from Cornell—to not have been in the state for five years, and somebody else turned out to be a Republican, and so on and so forth.

The thing that Kennedy should have done,

[-300-]

he should have embraced Eugene Nickerson.

BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I

HACKMAN: "Embrace Nickerson." Is that a point you and others in the office had made to him earlier during the year, or hadn't you gotten involved in it any earlier than that?

EDELMAN: I hadn't really been involved in it. He didn't particularly care what I had to say about state politics, that wasn't what I was hired to do. I think Joe Dolan had probably urged him to do that, although Joe will have to speak for himself on that. What he said, and it was true, was that Nickerson was simply not known around the state. Some polls had been taken, I think by John Kraft, and it showed that Nickerson,

upstate, ran two percent, literally two percent. He just thought that that was too big a hurdle to overcome.

But the mistake that he made was that

[-301-]

he thought, based on what he had seen of Frank O'Connor, that Frank O'Connor was rather one of the better of the old politicians and was a good campaigner, seemed to have been a good campaigner as the DA [District Attorney] and running for president of the City Council. It was a mistake. He just thought that O'Connor had more than he had and so he let the nomination go to O'Connor—that was the way it was going anyway—figuring that O'Connor really was not a bad candidate, and indeed the best campaigner of all the people who had made themselves available. If certainly he was not the brightest or the best substantively, perhaps considerably more conservative than Gene Nickerson.

But it turned out that O'Connor was a crummy campaigner as well, just a lousy campaigner. He was incapable of mastering the issues, his stump speeches were extremely weak, didn't fire anybody up. And whereas when the polls were Democratic without a name against Rockefeller would beat him. The minute the candidate had a name

[-302-]

and a face, Rockefeller steadily gained ground and O'Connor steadily lost ground. O'Connor, as time passed, could be perceived not only as a lousy campaigner, but as a weak human being—which Kennedy also did not really know about him—as someone who could be controlled by other people and by some not-so-savory people.

So, by the time the last few weeks of the campaign came around, it was fairly clear that it wouldn't be a very good thing for the State of New York if O'Connor were elected. That's why Steve Smith made that joking, half-serious statement about being able to blow O'Connor out of the water if that's what ought to be done.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Well, when the three of you went up there, what kind of understanding did you have, both with the Senator and with O'Connor and his people on what kind of role you'd play, how much direction you'd have of the campaign?

EDELMAN: That it would be a very heavy role. O'Connor very much wanted our help and was very nice.

[-303-]

We were intimately involved in all the policy discussions and so on. There was sort of a troika [three of a kind]. There was Steve Smith, there was this Larry guy whose last name I don't remember, and somebody else—I don't remember who the third person was. Maybe it was John Burns—who were sort of the troika in charge of the campaign.

Everything we wanted him, on a specific issue, to say, he would say. But, for example, we worked out this narcotics thing, which was a heavy attack on Rockefeller's program which was a serious infringement of civil liberties. When went to the press conference, instead of saying, "Now I'm all upset and angry about this," he said, "Well, here boys, I've got a statement for you on narcotics; I'll take any questions." And, of course, it went over with a big thud.

Then I was all involved in what position he would take on the Blaine Amendment and I can't fault him particularly on that because we floundered around ourselves trying to find the best position for him. But you just—

[-304-]

no matter what you put out in his name, he simply was never the master of it.

I went up there. I wrote a memo at the beginning to him which he was very enthusiastic about, saying that his campaign should sort of be based on "beyond liberalism" theme and how he had to try to get to some issues on some new bases that would cut across old lines and so on and so forth, sort of the precursor of the new politics, if you will. He thought that was fine but he didn't have the remotest ounce of capacity to make any use of that. You could put out all the releases and pursue all the themes you wanted but it would never get across because the candidate had no concept of that.

HACKMAN: So he wasn't saying, as things went along, "This isn't me. I can't do this kind of thing."

EDELMAN: Well, he would to some extent, but basically the frustration was not in his being unwilling to let things go out over his name—or under his name. The frustration was that when he was out on the stump, he just had no concept of how to

[-305-]

make use of this stuff. You know, you just can't make a silk purse out of somebody who is something else.

HACKMAN: What was Gwartzman doing?

EDELMAN: The same thing I was doing. The two of us were just trying to give some tone, some substance to the campaign.

HACKMAN: Did the two of you then, basically, deal directly with O'Connor or with O'Connor through Smith? Of were there a lot of fights with his people or other guys?

EDELMAN: Well, there were a lot... They weren't really sure that we were putting out our

utmost. And, of course, they, I'm sure, were upset that Kennedy wasn't coming into the state until the end. But nobody would ever say anything overtly. They were very angry when Dick Reeves [Richard Reeves] interviewed me—how did it go? I guess, off the record—and I said some things... Or no, I was talking to somebody else when he came into the room that Reeves reported. He came into the room and I said, "Now what I've said is off the record," and so on. Then he told some other reporter what I had said and the other

[-306-]

reporter printed it, either using me by name or mentioning it in a way so it was clear that it had to be either me or Gwartzman. It was something about what a disaster the campaign was. That didn't help in terms of compatibility. So there was this kind of inherent mistrust. We dealt sometimes through Smith, sometimes directly.

HACKMAN: I can't think of anything else on the campaign.

EDELMAN: There's certainly not much to say about it except that I was just an utter disaster and I think we put out; we tried very hard. I know we did not torpedo him in any way. I would think that Smith maybe did not pull out all the stops in getting all the money that was available, but that never would have been explicitly known. We certainly tried hard.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any discussions—again, this is probably something you wouldn't have gotten involved in—of who he should campaign for in '66?

EDELMAN: No, I was completely out of that.

[-307-]

HACKMAN: When were you starting to talk about those Mississippi hearing for the spring of '67?

EDELMAN: Very shortly before they happened. Just March of '67.

HACKMAN: I guess one of the things we haven't talked about in '66 is the poverty bill in the fall. How much energy did you put in on that, really? There's been, I guess, some criticism that he could have done more on trying to hold that appropriation if he would have made more of an effort in the Senate or something?

EDELMAN: Really? Who says that?

HACKMAN: I'm ashamed to tell you. Victor Lasky, which doesn't mean anything, of course.

EDELMAN: Oh. I think that's untrue. Now, I didn't work on the poverty bill in '66. At the time that it was going through the committee, I was working on minimum wage. And Adam, in any event, had this special impact concept which he wanted to push through. But Kennedy was really responsible for the committee increasing the appropriation

[-308-]

in all the ways that it did. On the floor he made this speech that you're holding in which he talked eloquently about all the reasons why they had added all the various money. He was on the floor, participated heavily, tried. It was just basically that the Administration cut out the ground from under him.

HACKMAN: You know Lasky usually turns to someone like *U.S. News and World Report* or something and just takes something, probably a remark, and passes it off.

EDELMAN: No, in some ways a Kennedy-Johnson fight and Johnson just had more influence with the news.

HACKMAN: I don't have anything prepared on the minimum wage. I'd just as soon wait and talk about that next time. Maybe I can go through a file or something.

EDELMAN: Okay. What happened to that long memo? What you have in here, which we can talk about next time if you want to, are a lot of

[-309-]

little things: what was known as Margo's [Margo Cohn] bill mentally retarded and physically handicapped dependents of servicemen the minimum wage thing.

HACKMAN: How much work did you put in on that dental program for service....

EDELMAN: No, that was later on. The dental program bill was in one of the follow-ups to this. We found this little guy in the Defense Department, Malcolm Warno, who use to give us the greatest stuff. Margo found him.

Then these hearings on the handicapped, D.C. housing hearings, home rule, which we talked about last time in relation to '65, I see that comes up again in '66.

HACKMAN: More of an effort in '66 than there was in '65? Wasn't it in '65 that you said you never really had the time to give to that issue?

EDELMAN: Well, what I said was, after the disaster in the House, when they had the successful petition to get it out on the floor— the discharge petition—and then

got it on the floor and passed

[-310-]

the Sisk [Bernice Frederic Sisk] bill, after that, through '66, he didn't really spend any time on it. But I think it's interesting that I spent two pages in this memorandum on it. It was obviously in my mind, but he didn't do much with it.

I might comment, just by the way of wrapping up on the nursing home bill, since we have covered that, in June I was telling him that we had a second draft of the bill, based on Gene McCarthy's—Doctor McCarthy's—criticisms of the first draft. And I said he was going to show it to the various people in New York. You see, that was where I was having him do the stuff and thought that he wasn't talking to all these people, who he either was talking to, or didn't regard it as advising us when they were advising him. Then I'm saying that the bill will be technically ready, introduced by June. It was October by the time he introduced it which was typical of how long these things would take.

But I'm going through here all this stuff about we could get hearings on it, if we were to get Senator

[-311-]

Hill and Congressman Fogarty [John E. Fogarty] and Secretary Gardner involved, which was really a pipe dream.

HACKMAN: He never made calls to those people then?

EDELMAN: I don't think so. I said that he should talk to Hill, Fogarty, and Gardner before he went to Idaho—whatever he was going to Idaho for; I guess he was going to go down the river that summer—and I don't think he ever did it.

Then there's another little bill on persons acquitted by the reason of insanity and the federal courts, in which he can talk about Social Security legislation, which we can talk about—well we did talk about that last time, so maybe I'll just add. You remember that he made the speech in '65, and then I was working on the legislation in '66. I tell him here that I finally got figures from the Social Security Administration on June 6th, '66. I say, "Now that President Johnson's spoken twice about increasing the Social Security benefits, I strongly suspect that the two and a half months

[-312-]

that it took to get the figures from the Social Security Agency was no coincidence." That's true, because I've since gotten some materials which somebody bootlegged out to me, some memos that they were saying internally that they had to hold us off. So, we did finally put the bill in, I guess, that summer.

Then there's this long thing on Title XIX, Medicaid, which we've gone through. Then there's this task force of economists that we could talk about.

HACKMAN: Yeah. We talked a little bit about that. That he never would go to the meeting, you mean, of the Ed Kuh [Edwin Kuh] group. Is that the one you're talking about.

EDELMAN: No, he went to some meetings of that.

HACKMAN: You said he made the remark one time that...

EDELMAN: "Help, I got a D in economics at Harvard."

HACKMAN: Yeah.

EDELMAN: No, we did finally. In '67 we got the group going and he went to some meetings, but they were always so damn diffuse, these academics, that it never was very helpful. Then I'd give

[-313-]

him a report about the crime speech which I was working on, which he finally gave early in '67. So, we could talk about all these things in more detail.

Then maybe we could just look through the speeches and releases for '66, as we did for '65, and see what that strikes. '66 was a kind of transitional year for him. I guess I've said that before. He made that Vietnam speech which was really, in effect, ahead of his time—ahead of its time for him—in February of '66, and came back to the issue only in kind of peripheral ways until that March 2nd, '67 speech. So, he wasn't doing too much on foreign policy; he gave his Latin America speech in June of that year, wasn't doing much about nuclear proliferation. There was, I believe it was in '66, a resolution passed in the Senate by Pastore [John O. Pastore] which he supported and which probably his interest in the issue in '65 had helped to bring about. On the domestic side he was working very hard on

[-314-]

getting Bedford-Stuyvesant together, spent a lot of time on the Ribicoff hearings, was out of the country in South Africa. That, of course, took a lot of energy getting ready for that trip. Then in the fall was campaigning.

So I would say that he was having certain experience which led into some things later on. I think, through all the work in Bedford-Stuyvesant and the Ribicoff hearings, he was beginning to change his emphasis from education to jobs, in terms of what he thought was important, but that was all in gestation.

It was a year, I would say, of kind of groping domestically, except that, I guess, he merge din 1966. The major domestic thing is that he really emerged as the leading figure in the Senate on the kind of urban questions that I mentioned earlier, the racial kind of urban questions.

HACKMAN: How was the education to jobs thing developing in your own mind in that period? Does that development have to take place, before it takes place in his mind?

EDELMAN: Not for me. Maybe I don't give myself

[-315-]

enough credit, but I mark '67 as a very turning point year for me on a lot of things, and not '66.

HACKMAN: What, moving into '67, then next time? We've got the poverty hearings in Mississippi.

EDELMAN: The development of the tax incentive bills, the poverty hearings, the hunger issue which develops out of those, cigarettes which comes back in. I don't remember what all I was working on sort of January through March, '67. One thing I was working on at that time was getting the Social Security bill ready to reintroduce. Oh, did we talk about the transit strike last time?

HACKMAN: No, just barely mentioned that.

EDELMAN: That's in the beginning of '66. We should talk about that.

HACKMAN: Did you put in a lot of work on the tax incentives bill with Curzan?

EDELMAN: A fair amount, a fair amount. He did the really hard, long hour work. But I had quite a lot to do with it. Of course, another

[-316-]

thing in '66 is Cesar Chavez, who we met in March of '66, which we should talk about if we haven't.

HACKMAN: We talked one time much earlier about that. That's the first meeting between the two of them, isn't it?

EDELMAN: Yeah. I'd just say for now, since we've talked on this tape about it, since I brought up what kind of year '66 was; that would have been a key formative experience for him, in reaching out to new kinds of powerless groups and becoming a spokesman and being identified with groups that were off the beaten track.

HACKMAN: What is there to talk about on that though, other than just the personal

relationship between the two of them? I mean, you talked about, “Hello Senator,” “Hello Cesar.”

EDELMAN: Oh, the press releases, the work that we did in trying to help create leverage on getting the—what was the second contract after Schenley [Industries Inc.]? Those guys that made S & W Foods. What’s the name of that firm—well, it was the second contract where they had to

[-317-]

finally agree to arbitration. And the state, Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown], got involved in it and we were somewhat helpful on that.

Then I was working on some of that rural agricultural stuff through ’66, as well, that I talked about last time. But the first couple of months of ’67, I don’t see from this what I must have been speeding most of my time on.

HACKMAN: Probably just sitting around doing nothing, huh?

EDELMAN: Well, the Social Security legislation was introduced February 16, so I’m sure that’s what I was doing through January and the first half of February. Then we were working on the Vietnam speech, first the ADA [American for Democratic Action] speech in February 24, ’67, where I had some input, and the Vietnam speech where I had some input, and then the national Farmers’ Union, the middle of March where I had some input. March 20 is the first statement on the public-private power dispute in New York where I had some involvement. You see three releases on that between March 20 and April 4. Oh, and the

[-318-]

Constitutional Convention I was doing some work on, too. There was a lot of little stuff. Oh, D.C. General Hospital I did some work on; I see a release December 18, ’66. St. Francis Hospital December 222, that was that controversy around Lincoln Hospital.

Let’s see, in September and October ’66 on into November I was up in New York. The major thing that I did for the office during that period of time was to just finish up on that nursing home bill.

Then I had some personal problems after that election. I finally decided to separate from my first wife in the end of November ’66 and I’m sure that I spent an awful lot of time just involved in that. Then through late December and on into the first part of January I took a whole month off. I must have come back and worked on the Social Security bill.

HACKMAN: Did you talk to him about things like that? Did he give advice? Or did he leave you along, if you wanted to be left alone on it?

[-319-]

EDELMAN: Oh, he certainly was never one to pry into anybody's personal affairs, but he was always very understanding. I went to him and said that I'd decided to do this. His reaction was one of being very understanding; he said he wasn't particularly surprised, he thought that she seemed to him like she was difficult to get along with. He was very understanding about it. I think that was helpful.

HACKMAN: That's all I guess, huh?

EDELMAN: Yeah, we can come back to these things later.

[END OF INTERVIEW #6]

[-320-]

Peter B. Edelman Oral History Transcript – RFK #6
Name List

A

Ahlberg, Clark, 281
Allen, Ivan, Jr., 269
Anderson, Clinton P., 240

B

Baker, Howard H., Jr., 288
Barnett, Ross R., 209
Bayh, Birch, 288
Beame, Abraham D., 295, 296
Berle, Adolf A., Jr., 281
Berle, Peter, 281, 283, 284
Blumenthal, Albert H., 223, 226, 227
Brown, Claude, 268
Brown, Edmund G., 318
Burns, John J., 236, 304

C

Cavanagh, Jerome Patrick, 267, 268, 269
Cave, Vernal G., 247
Chavez, Cesar, 317
Clark, Joseph S., 277, 288
Cohen, Wilbur J., 238, 253, 256, 257
Cohn, Margo, 310
Coles, Robert, 268, 269
Curzan, Michael, 276, 316

D

Davis, John A., 283
Dolan, Joseph F., 207, 289, 292, 293, 301
Douglas, Paul H., 240
Dual, Leonard, 284
Dubinsky, David, 291

E

Eastland, James O., 213, 214, 295

F

Feinberg, Abraham, 291
Feinberg, Wilfred, 289, 291
Fishbein, Peter, 283, 284
Fogarty, John E., 312

Folsom, Marion B., 253, 282
Friendly, Henry J., 290, 291, 292

G

Gardner, John W., 238, 239, 240, 312
Goldy, Robert, 270
Goodwin, Richard N., 208, 209, 210, 265
Gruening, Ernest, 221
Gwirtzman, Milton S., 297, 306, 307

H

Heller, Walter Wolfgang, 282, 283, 284
Henry, Aaron E., 206
Hill, Eugene, 268
Hill, Lister, 213, 214, 311

J

Javits, Jacob K., 255, 262, 294
Johnson, Lyndon B., 205, 216, 218, 220, 223, 263,
291, 309, 312

K

Katzenbach, Nicholas deB., 266
Kaufman, Irving R., 290
Kennedy, Ethel Skakel, 298
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 208
Kennedy, John F., 216, 217, 271
Kennedy, Robert F., 205, 206, 207, 208, 210, 213,
218, 227, 229, 230, 232, 237, 239, 241, 242,
244, 245, 247, 250, 251, 252, 254, 255, 257,
258, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 268, 269,
270, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 280, 281, 282,
283, 286, 287, 288, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294,
297, 298, 299, 300, 303, 306, 308, 309, 317
Keogh, Eugene James, 256, 257, 258
Kraft, John F., 276, 301
Kuchel, Thomas H., 256
Kuh, Edwin, 313

L

Larry, 304
Lasky, Victor, 308, 309
Lee, Phillip R., 240

Lee, Richard C., 250, 267, 269
LeKachman, Robert, 281, 284
Lesser, Leonard, 283
Levitt, Arthur, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 288
Lindsay, John V., 266, 267
Linowitz, Sol M., 300
Locher, Ralph S., 270, 271, 275
Logue, Edward J., 275, 276

M

Mansfield, Walter R., 293
Markham, Dean F., 298
Marshall, Thurgood, 289, 290
McCarthy, Eugene G., 223, 224, 225, 226, 228,
230, 240, 241, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250,
252, 311
McNamara, Robert S., 211
Meredith, James Howard, 207
Meyers, Joseph H., 238
Morse, Josh, 206, 209
Morse, Wayne L., 221
Muskie, Edmund S., 262

N

Nader, Ralph, 279, 280
Nelson, Gaylord, 221, 288
Netzer, Richard, 281
Nickerson, Eugene H., 285, 301

O

O'Connor, Frank D., 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 302,
303, 306

P

Paley, Hank, 283
Pastore, John O., 314
Peckman, Joseph A., 282, 283, 284
Pell, Claiborne, 277
Perkins, James Alfred, 300
Pigman, Wendell, 280
Pollak, Louis H., 293
Porter, Sylvia F., 216, 217
Potofsky, Jacob Samuel, 291

R

Ray, H.M., 206
Reeves, Richard, 306

Ribicoff, Abraham A., 258, 259, 260, 262, 265,
273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 315
Rivers, Francis E., 293
Rockefeller, Nelson A., 225, 226, 227, 230, 231,
232, 233, 234, 237, 241, 244, 254, 255, 261,
302, 303, 304

S

Sachs, Seymour, 286
Schicasky, Martin, 224, 246
Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., 208, 209, 210, 211,
212, 213
Silver, George A., 250
Sisk, Bernice Frederic, 311
Skakel, George, Jr., 298
Smathers, George A., 205
Smith, Frank E., 206
Smith, Stephen E., 297, 298, 299, 303, 304, 307
Sonosky, Jerome N., 260, 261, 268
Sorensen, Alexander V., 269, 275
Sorensen, Theodore C., 212, 241, 242, 252
Sparkman, John J., 213
Standard, Samuel, 224
Steingut, Stanley, 298
Stennis, John C., 213, 214

T

Tannanbaum, Martin, 298, 299
Taylor, Maxwell D., 211
Thaler, Seymour R., 232
Tolles, N. Arnold, 281
Travia, Anthony J., 226, 227, 229, 230, 232, 234,
236, 237, 252, 253, 254
Tydings, Joseph D., 277, 288

V

Van Dyke, Frank, 230
vanden Heuvel, William J., 218, 280, 281, 282,
287, 299

W

Walinsky, Adam, 208, 210, 215, 223, 224, 265,
266, 287, 293, 308
Warno, Malcolm, 310
Watson, Thomas J., Jr., 300
Weaver, Robert C., 263, 285
Weinfeld, Edward, 290
Weinstein, Jack B., 293

Wilkins, Roy, 272
Willcox, Alanson W., 238
Winston, Ellen, 238

Y

Yorty, Samuel W., 266, 270, 271, 274, 275