

Peter B. Edelman Oral History Interview – RFK #4, 12/12/1969
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Biographical Note

Edelman, legislative assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) (1964-1968), discusses RFK's 1964 senatorial campaign, RFK's 1965 narcotics legislation, and his thesis on what RFK tried to accomplish during the 1965 senate, among other issues.

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Fourth of Eight Oral History Interviews

with

Peter B. Edelman

December 12, 1969
Washington D.C.

By Larry Hackman

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

HACKMAN: Did you take specific notes, in going over what we've done so far on '68, that you want to comment on on the campaign?

EDELMAN: I thought that I would like to go briefly into the question of the campaign themes, some of the things that the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] talked about during the campaign. Was there anything else we were going to go into on the campaign?

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HACKMAN: At one time you said you were going to look through your speeches again and see if anything—just the dates or anything—jog you on anecdotes. You also said, at one time, you were going to put in something about the Indians; I wasn't sure what you meant by that.

EDELMAN: Why don't we make a note? Indians is a subject that goes back a little bit.

HACKMAN: Right, and we probably should come at it, maybe from the other direction.

EDELMAN: Yes, I think so, but I would say that we shouldn't do Indians in the campaign context. Let me mention—that does job a couple of things—number one, simply an anecdote, which is nothing more than that, which I don't think that we discussed. That is some of his campaign

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humor.

He was at a whistle stop in Oregon speaking. All of a sudden a little face—I think it was a little girl; it may have been a boy—appeared over the end of the train platform. The Senator said, “Hello. What's this?” The child didn't say anything and reached out and handed him a box; it was chocolate covered cherries. The Senator just thanked him, opened it up, and asked the child if he'd like to have one. The child didn't say a word, just shook his head up and down, took it in his mouth all in one gulp. The Senator ate one. The Senator asked the child if he'd like to have another one. The child again just shook his head up and down, didn't say a word—of course, the whole crowd

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was watching this—and took it in one bite down. Then he said, “Maybe you'd like to give one to that little child in the crowd over there? He looks awfully cross.” The child shook his head “no.” Then he said, “Well, would you like to have another one yourself?” The child shook his head “no;” and by this time he was very sorry he'd done the whole thing.

It was just one of those marvelous little exchanges that I hope is recorded on film somewhere because there was captured, in a way that's impossible except in that kind of way, the real sense of the love that Robert Kennedy had for children and the spontaneity that he had that was special when children were involved. Just all of those qualities kind of wrapped up into the one little,

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two-minute exchange with that child, with tenderness, and so on.

HACKMAN: Did that come out for any reason in '68 more than ever before? I mean, in that campaign, or was it always like that?

EDELMAN: Well, it was always there. He said many, many times over the years that I knew him that he much preferred to be with children. We would be travelling somewhere and he'd often stop and play football with some kids. Or in classrooms: he'd love to go into schools and talk to kids in classrooms, and so on. So that was always there, but I think under the pressure of a campaign it was there even more, because it was such a very special thing to be able to just retreat into a special, private world like the world

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of the child. That was a special kind of release for him during a campaign. So I think that you saw it in a public way in these little vignettes, where there was more opportunity for them, because that's what he was doing all day long. Also, it was so especially satisfying I think.

There's another thing that was a column, by David Murray I believe, in the *Chicago Sun-Times* [*Chicago Daily Sun-Times*] which relates to his stopping and talking to some children in a playground in Indianapolis, which has that same kind of quality of going through some kind of time barrier into another world, very misty, nostalgic, sentimental and lovely. Anyway, that's just one anecdote that I'm sure you'd get from many of those you interviewed.

It should be recorded he would always

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get a rise out of people. There would be one of those billboards that would say, "Nixon's [Richard M. Nixon] the One," and it would show Nixon looking into that briefcase. He would say, "Nixon's the One What?" Everybody would sort of chuckle. He'd say, "What's he got in that briefcase? What's he selling?" They would always get a kick out of that.

The Indians raises the question about a couple of things that are worth pointing out that we don't have to have the chronology to get to. One is that in Oregon—we did talk about Oregon at some length, but I don't remember this coming up—Wayne Morse [Wayne L. Morse] had very much wanted him to bring the Indian subcommittee [Indian Affairs subcommittee] to Oregon and have some hearings there with Morse. This had been agreed upon long before

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Robert Kennedy ever decided to run for President; probably not at a time when either he or Morse was focusing on the politics of Morse's reelection in '68. Edith Green, who of course hated Morse, was adamant that it not happen.

The interesting thing about it was that you would have expected that in those circumstances his reaction would have been Edith Green [Edith S. Green] was for him, Wayne Morse hadn't taken a position; he would just automatically do what she wanted. With all of the other things that were on his mind, we must have gone around for maybe three weeks. The few times that I would talk to him by phone when I was somewhere else, or else through Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton], he would keep saying that he wanted to

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do that. It was a combination of just because he knew it was right, partly, partly because it was sort of a way of showing his independence, in a minor way, from Edith Green, who he must have felt uncomfortable about.

My God, what a terrible person she is. She voted yesterday for the Nixon voting rights bill. I never could understand how he allowed himself to become associated with her; I just never could understand that. But, in any event, I suppose the end of the story is too bad because we didn't end up holding the Indian hearings. She called everybody she could think of to keep it from happening. She didn't know me, she would call me up; she could call up Herb Schmertz; she would call up Bill

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vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel], she would call everybody she could get in touch with and say, "Now if he comes and does that Indian hearing!" Then we would go to him with it, and he'd say, "Well, what's wrong with doing the Indian hearing?" Finally, he said, "Alright, alright, we won't do it." I think he must have been entertaining himself perhaps.

HACKMAN: It was strictly anti-Morse on her part as far as...

EDELMAN: Sure. The other thing was that he did have a commitment sometime in April. I think it was to go to the Navajo reservation and speak to was it the National Congress of American Indians was meeting there, or was it just an all Navajo meeting? I don't remember, but in any event he had this commitment.

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There was clearly no political value in it at all; his political advisers were just tearing their hair out, "Senator, you've only got so much time. What are you doing running off? They've got to get six private planes because the airport's so small." He just insisted on doing it. Perhaps that cancels out the Morse story, since the Morse story didn't come out right.

There was a refreshing retention of substance even in the middle of that kind of campaign. I think campaigns are terribly dehumanizing experiences; you just end up being rather zombie-like. You go to bed at 4 o'clock in the morning, get up at 8 o'clock in the morning, and how you get around you don't know.

Going through the previous

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tapes, I did tell the story about in eastern Oregon when I was glum one day, and he cheered me up. There was that equanimity that was just so inspiring, really. He really evoked one's admiration. But those are isolated things. Does that raise any questions?

HACKMAN: No, not really.

EDELMAN: Let me go on just talking about the campaign themes, the basic themes that you'd find him talking about over and over again. If you look at the prepared

text, by the way, you'll find that any given prepared text appears anywhere from three to five times in the course of the—May, June, let's see what is it? April, so it's less than three months—85 days, so that gives you some idea of the way in which we would use

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speech subjects. The “No more Vietnam” speech—which is important, and I'll get to that in a moment—was given three or perhaps four times. There were three statements on hunger; there were two statements on health; there were four, five, maybe even six—depending on whether you measure it by the ones that he supposedly actually gave, or whether they were the ones just given out to local newspapers—four, five, or six statements on old people; about a half a dozen statements on agriculture. What I'm saying is that these were not, in most instances, different statements, although they'd have different facts in them for the locality. The “No more

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Vietnam” would be exactly the same text from beginning to end since that wasn't locally related. The others would simply be adapted to the locality. So that give you a little idea of the way we would organize the substance.

Now, as the year would have gone on, and the campaign would have become national instead of being one primary after another, we clearly would have been just, as I think I said before, really eaten alive by the voracious demand for new subjects, because you simply couldn't get away with national releases and repeating them. If one didn't go you might take a piece of it and try to stick it into something else.

In any event, the major theme was reconciliation, bringing the country together. One

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sees that again and again in his prepared texts, and of course he came back to it again and again in his extemporaneous stump speeches. The deep divisions in the country, talking about leadership and the kind of leadership that was necessary, and you find again in the prepared texts that he talked about bringing the government back to the people, by which he meant physically that he was going to come back and hold town meetings. And it is just a year and half later and so inconceivable to think about Richard Nixon, as it had been about Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], to go out and hold those kind of public town meetings.

HACKMAN: What out of his experience had led him to feel that kind of thing worked? Is there anything in the Senate years,

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where he goes and meets an upstate New Yorker, wherever it might be, that he thinks this kind of thing really accomplishes something?

EDELMAN: Well, I suppose it goes back a long time to John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and campaigning with him, but certainly the town meetings that he had in upstate New York when he was elected in '64—which I'm sure we'll talk about in more detail later on—were a beginning of that.

The time when I explicitly remember it was in 1966. He came back from the western swing—it was maybe an eighteen-day swing; was it that long?—for all those congressional candidates. I hadn't been on that trip; I'd been up working with Frank O'Connor [Frank D. O'Connor] in New York. He knew that I didn't like doing that much and he felt a little guilty, so he kind of

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let me spend a day with him. We went around and had lunch with some fancy people at some fancy restaurant and all that stuff, and in the course of that conversation I said, "How did it go? What do you think you accomplished?" He said, "Well, it's really very different from 1960. All of these people that looked like they were having a tough time in 1960 now have cars, they can get to the rallies, you can schedule the rally in the parking lot of a shopping center, and they're all very comfortable. You get the sense talking to them that the major thing they're worried about is any threat to that comfort. They see the rising black aspiration as a threat to that comfort, they see inflation as a threat to that comfort." I said,

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"Well, that's rather disgusting; that's rather frightening. What do you think can be done about it?" He said, "I think if you could work with them, if you could stay there and really talk to them—of the ones that I did talk to—you could really turn them around." So there was that sense—it was a personal messianic, somewhat egotistical, but I think highly justified sense—that he personally could, if he could reach people on a more or less individual level, or at least a person-to-person, as opposed to through a television set, level, he really could have come effect on them.

He always carried that; he would take on a hostile audience with the idea that he was really going to try to convert them. He might get mad; he might scold

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them, but the idea was, really, that it was not an idle exercise, that he was not wasting his time. Even in a campaign if somebody took him on, as they did at the Indiana Medical School, he would really tell them what was right. So, yes, I think that he did have a very deep sense that if you could reach people personally....

Another example of that is in the late summer of 1967 after Newark and Detroit. We had lunch with the editors of *Newsweek* one day—the Washington bureau of *Newsweek*, one

day—and they said, “Alright Senator, you’ve made all of these speeches about urban plan and what ought to be done. Suppose you were in there in the White House, what would you really do, particularly if you’d have trouble getting appropriations out of

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Congress? What would you really do?” Now that’s a question that’s not easy to answer, and he was not only ready to answer it but clearly had thought about that subject. So he launched into a long explanation of how he would call in people from each community, city by city—he would call in business leaders, the labor leaders, church leaders, civic leaders, public officials—and he would explain to them what had to be done, he would tell them what the crisis was, he would sit with them for an evening or whatever period of time it took to just tell them that if they didn’t do something that the country was really going to fall apart. Then he said not only would he try to convince them that they had to do something, but he would put it on terms

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of their having to come up with a plan, local initiative and so on. Finally he would move heaven and earth to reorient the available federal money, also trying to get more, so that there would be federal money available to respond to that along with what business put in and so on.

He obviously felt Lyndon Johnson had been deficient on all of these scores. He used to point with some pride—I don’t mean to say repeatedly, but when we went to Kentucky in early 1968—to the fact that in the fall of 1963 President Kennedy, having read Homer Bigart’s [Homer William Bigart] piece, scrounged together money, that was just a little vocational education, a little of something else, and a little something else, made up a jerrybuilt but effective program for men of eastern

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Kentucky. So it was clear that it could be done, and it was clear that that was part of his plan. Well, I go through all that just to.... Again, the part of it that’s important is the fact that he really had this belief that if he could just talk to people that he could convince them.

HACKMAN: Do you think that he felt that other people could do the same? For instance, did the *Newsweek* people ever come back with a question, “What would you think if Lyndon Johnson brought these people to the White House to reason together?” which...

EDELMAN: Yes. I was reminding myself of “reasoning together” as I was describing that. No, I think he just had a sense of.... He certainly didn’t think Lyndon Johnson

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would do it, could do it. He was not talking about arm-twisting in the Johnson sense, or at least didn't conceive of himself as doing that. He conceived himself more as sort of setting a moral tone; and by the force of his logic—rather than his other kinds of coercion—he would convince people that they ought to do different for the sake of the country, appealing to their better instincts.

So I suppose he thought maybe some of the people had those qualities, but he didn't think Lyndon Johnson did. As I say, it was a combination of ego and a certain sense of somewhat messianic feeling. He didn't think he was anointed or anything like that, but he did think that he had something

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to offer the country.

HACKMAN: Did he ever go back to any early experience which would have explained him, which would led him to have this feeling that he could really turn people around?

EDELMAN: Yes.

HACKMAN: I've heard people say, for instance, that he went on an Asian trip in '62 that he just felt in Indonesia that the crowd response to him and his personality just led him to believe that he really could move people.

EDELMAN: I never heard him talk about the origin of it. As you know he was seldom given to saying anything about the past, seldom given to telling anecdotes, seldom given to really talking about himself, and seldom given to engaging in any explicit, articulated self-analysis, so you'd find

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it very hard. When he'd had, say, a drink at the end of the day, he might tell you a story even that would be only if it were something that was kind of directly germane to some point that he wanted to make. But his humor was by way of individual lines, cracks—that Kennedy humor. I wasn't close enough to him to have ever had that kind of statement. Should I go on with the...

HACKMAN: Yes, with the themes of the campaign.

EDELMAN: So you had this reconciliation, bringing the country together, bringing government back to the people, participation—people participating in government and the decisions that would be made. I'll come back to that in a moment.

First, foreign policy. It's interesting, when you look at the speeches in the campaign,

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the prepared texts, there was only the one major foreign policy speech: the "No More Vietnam" speech. There was another one that he gave in Charleston, which was really a very banal speech that didn't say much at all. Also, he did give a foreign aid speech a couple of times, which was a fairly straightforward advocacy of foreign aid and our responsibilities and what good things it did. He did, I think, give one—if I'm not mistaken—nuclear speech.

But in terms of breaking new ground in foreign policy this "No More Vietnam" speech was it. That speech talked about how you would set up a set of criteria so that you didn't get involved in propping up a government that didn't have the support of its own people, again.

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But I just reread that last night, and there was very little in there about the about race. There was some stuff in there about the fact that military aid didn't make a lot of sense and very general language about it said advocated limiting arms and so on. There was some rather hawkish stuff about the relations with Russia and with China, which I was disappointed to find on rereading it in terms of "let's not discount Russia. She's still a problem." No, maybe that's O.K., maybe I've just.... If you're a presidential candidate you're something that's different from what I am these days. But the saber rattling about China that's too strong, the strong language about China I thought was not very good. The thing that is disturbing

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in retrospect is there's nothing about the A.B.M. [Antiballistic Missile System]. Well that was only, after all, a year before the A.B.M. fight. It had been proposed in the Senate, in Congress; nothing about that. Nothing about other new weapon systems; nothing about beginning to think about whether the Pentagon needs all the new tanks and aircraft carriers and other armaments; nothing about cost overruns and so on. Part of that was undoubtedly our fault, that we weren't attuned to those issues either, that the issue of 1968 was the war. But in retrospect I would have difficulty defending him against the charge that he really didn't have any new departure in foreign policy as a campaign matter. The best I could say is, "I knew that he was really

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such a smart and visionary fellow that he clearly would have had a new foreign policy when he got in there." That was interesting to look back on.

HACKMAN: Anything in the works, clearly, by the time of the assassination, that any of the outside groups were working on, where you could see that that kind of thing

would have been fed in?

EDELMAN: Yes, oh yes. You had people like Jim Thomson [James C. Thomson, Jr.], who's the best, I think, but also Carl Kaysen, Jerry Weisner [Jerome Weisner], and Roger Hilsman [Roger Hilsman, Jr.], and other who were working on position papers who we'd definitely commissioned to take a look at some of these things.

HACKMAN: Okay, let me ask you: You said you didn't think those people were that useful in the early part of the campaign,

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but in the conversations you did have with them can you remember them pushing any of these things. It seems to me it wasn't that much on their minds at that point either when they were looking at the campaign.

EDELMAN: I think that's true, I think it was not that much on their minds either. It is true that a campaign situation doesn't lend itself—except if you're Gene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy]—to asking those kinds of questions, and when Gene McCarthy asked them they seemed to be rather flip because he was talking about fundamental institutional changes in American policy without ever talking about process. But in retrospect I must say I accept McCarthy more than I did then because there is a sense in which you're not entirely

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obligated—yes, it would be better if he talked process—in which it's useful just to be somebody who stands up and says, “Now, look! The way it works is just no good.”

That's, in fact, was Robert Kennedy's approach about domestic matters, so there's really no reason why he couldn't have been more original and more imaginative about foreign policy. The major excuse is that the major issue was to end the war, and that took all of one's energy, all of one's focus, and all of one's attention. Indeed, if there had been no Eugene McCarthy that would be a sufficient excuse, but McCarthy was going on into asking some of these other questions. It's kind of interesting in retrospect.

Those fellows, I don't know what they

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would have come up, the outside professors and so on, whether indeed the policy papers that they would have come up with in later June or early July would have had all that much that was new. I don't remember certainly being pushed by them, having them calling up anguished and saying “why isn't he talking about the A.B.M.?” That's true, so it may just be that I'm grafting the priorities of 1969 onto 1968 a little in making the criticism. Turning to

the domestic side he had, I would say, a more developed program—far more developed than any other candidate; more developed than he had on the foreign policy side—which is interesting since he stared out as a senator being more interested in foreign than domestic policy,

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apart from education. The first thing you always said about him on the domestic side was that he was in favor of jobs, in favor of a “national impact program”—he called it sometimes, other times an “emergency employment program.” Sometimes he would specifically endorse the Clark [Joseph S. Clark] bill, which he had had something to do with the drafting of. This would be, in effect, talking about the government as employer-of-last-resort, talking about all the homes and schools and clinics that need to be built, talking about all of the jobs that can be done on a sub professional basis in the public service area—teacher aids, welfare aids, and so on. He would always go through that.

Then he would talk about the need for harnessing the great engine of private

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enterprise as Dick Nixon did as well. In retrospect that seems rather demagogic, although, I think he would have made a greater effort to make that come true than Nixon has. Then, he would go on to talk about community corporations, and here we’d come back to participation—new institutions at the local level, at the level below the city at the neighborhood level.

Interestingly enough, just as I looked for indication of new foreign policy, I was looking at some of the speeches for indications that he was on to questions about community control and decentralization, not recalling that he had been. It was there; it was in the speeches. He used the phrase “community control;” he used the phrase

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“decentralization.” He used it both in the context of controlling economic development, which is easy; and in education speeches he talked specifically about beginning to have the federal government support efforts monetarily, efforts at decentralization of local education policy.

HACKMAN: Do you know where that came from in '68?

EDELMAN: You mean, whose idea it was?

HACKMAN: Yes.

EDELMAN: Oh, I suppose Adam [Adam Walinsky] just wrote it into the speech.

HACKMAN: I just wondered if it came out of.... I'm trying to remember, in the spring of '68 when the New York thing was going on.

EDELMAN: Oh, the Ford [Ford Foundation] report had come out. Yes,

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it was out by that time, and Adam was clearly aware of it. I don't recall that we had any particular outside input into the development of those little education speeches. We had some; we would talk to....

HACKMAN: I just wonder if Doar [John M. Doar] is on the school board up there, yet, by that time? Haddad [William F. Haddad] is on the school board, but they probably don't....

EDELMAN: I think that comes a little bit later, but I may be wrong. In any event, we weren't certainly, getting it from there. The process undoubtedly was that Adam put it in on his own, but that the Senator cleared it, because he did all this—read those things, or Fred [Dutton] read them—and a question like that would undoubtedly have gone directly in front of him; he would have focused on it.

So you had a strong theme of community

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cooperations. Then two or three times Adam did a reprise of earlier speeches, when the Senator wasn't a presidential candidate, describing how you would run what was essentially the Bedford-Stuyvesant model in a city. It had about ten points of how you would give young people the opportunity to drop out of school and get their education through this and then go back into school, how you would key the health services into it, and just show what a total impact program it was.

Then he would talk about the need for the restructuring of government, sometimes in the same speech, sometimes in different speeches. The revenue sharing proposal, which we discussed in some of our earlier conversations, he must have adverted to a dozen times in prepared texts; and there

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were at least four releases that were totally concerned with that. He would always mention the special impact program, Title I [Part] D of the economic opportunity act, as well, which he had, as I've said before, succeeded in putting into law in 1966. You did, really, have a vision of the restructuring of governmental institutions, channeling federal aid out in different ways—more simply, less bureaucracy, less red tape, more directly to the neighborhood, more directly to the city—and the building of new institutions at the local level and making

existing institutions more accountable, plus the jobs, plus when we did put out the guaranteed annual income—which was not a guaranteed annual income—the welfare paper that

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he said he was against, but ended up really being for.

You really had a comprehensive domestic program that involved a full agenda for action. I should say, in a sense, poverty-oriented, a full strategy against poverty. I suppose that, in retrospect, is what I'm proudest of about that campaign, and that, in retrospect, is not surprising since things that we were really kind of close to fully developed before the campaign, anyway.

There are a number of other subjects that he got into. He talked often about the reach of government programs, that Head Start only reached give percent or whatever of those for whom it was intended, and that other federal aid had only begun to scratch

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the need. As I say, he talked about education, elementary and secondary; he even got to decentralization. There were releases about higher education, college education for everyone, continuing education for workers who needed the stimulation and the opportunity of beginning again. The statements on hunger—he was the first presidential candidate to ever make hunger an issue, except for John Kennedy's single reference to it in 1960—conventional statements about inflation and what it does to people, social security very conventional, a few statements on the environment and on recreation, particularly in California, conventional stuff on agriculture, an effort to appeal to the space workers in California by talking

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about the civilian uses of space technology, a couple of health care speeches, very little on the quality of life.

Again, it's interesting to think about the change in a year and a half in this country. We were groping for it; we kept saying to each other "we've got to get a speech on the quality of life." Adam did have some marvelous paragraphs, that he would stick into every general speech, about the gross national product counts the carnage on our highways and the locks on our doors, but not the beauty of our poetry or the so on and so forth. So, we had some rhetoric that in a way was almost too good; we couldn't get ourselves out of it. We had that rhetoric, and every time we put that paragraph in

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there, you didn't know what else to say about it.

We had some people looking at destruction of the environment and so on; in fact, he'd been talking as a Senator since 1965 about the destruction of Lake Erie and the

destruction of the Hudson River, and made a lot of statements about the polluted air in New York City. But somehow we could not mold that into a comprehensive kind of speech theme. Partly, I think, it was that we were not attuned or not ready, or maybe he wasn't ready, to start talking—as you really have to if you're going to be honest about it—about corporate power and responsibility in this country, about who's to blame, what institutions are to blame for the incredible self-destruction of our resources, for the way in which we're

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driving ourselves, really, into a state of disease and ruination. I suppose if you don't face those questions your statement about, "isn't it too bad that all this has happened," is rather empty. It's an area where you simply must call for stronger government regulation, for a sense of responsibility on the part of industry and perhaps for some federal money.

It is interesting in retrospect that that major theme of things that are on peoples' minds today was not a major part of our campaign. I think those are the themes and the subjects that I remember. I could go into any of them in a little bit more detail if you thought it was helpful.

HACKMAN: Yes. It's interesting; here you are looking

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at it in retrospect a year and a half away. It will be funny when these things are opened on down the road, people are going to be looking at them in a whole different set of terms. Some of the things you've just said they probably won't be considering at all; I'm not sure if things will come around.

EDELMAN: I have to say that I think it stacks up pretty well. I think that even if he wasn't into the danger of the arms race, as he should have been, his thinking about Vietnam was high level for a campaign situation, high level by any measure. The domestic stuff—the jobs, some of the things that he said about welfare, hunger, his stuff on

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tax incentives—even if it wasn't the best conceived program, just the idea of it.... He did a lot on tax incentives to encourage private industry to go into ghettos and housing and, particularly, the beginning to grope for dealing with the real atrophy of government in this country. I think that if one looks back those things will stack up quite well.

HACKMAN: It seems to me it makes more sense now for us to go to '64, and sort of come up at all of it in another direction, see what we wind up with at the end, and if we want to go back and deal with any inconsistencies or anything that doesn't seem to be fit.

EDELMAN: Fine.

HACKMAN: So, I guess, where we go first.... No, we were going to talk about your

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attitude and some of the other Robert Kennedy attitudes towards...

EDELMAN: About McCarthy.

HACKMAN: ...McCarthy after.

EDELMAN: Yes, I think that's a footnote that's worth putting in there. I guess at the time we were very hostile to McCarthy. Number one, I talked in an earlier session about what a lousy Senator McCarthy was. We felt we knew that and nobody else knew it, and the frustration of not being able to get that point across to the public. That was the beginning of it; we just thought that he didn't deserve to be there in the first place based on the record that existed consistently up to the day he announced for president—that's something in the dim and distant past.

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Both his record on the Finance Committee, which involved supporting a number of special interest kind of amendments, and his record on the floor, which was basically one of not showing up for key votes and just being lazy, not having more than a couple of legislative propositions that he was identified with, and certainly never showing up to debate on the major and important things....

Then there was the bitterness, which was undoubtedly not, certainly not, wholly justified, and maybe not even partly, that we were clearly the candidate who could win, could be nominated, and that he was just a spoiler. We were quite convinced of that, so that caused bitterness, really, and irritation would develop over a period

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of time. As I say, not much justification for that, because he was as entitled to be in it as we were, but that had been building up.

Then, the next thing that happened was that we had a series of little things, like his making fun of Freckles, which we always thought was unpleasant. He started in an advertising tack in Oregon and California, partly a speech tack, which was rather grossly inconsistent with the tack he'd been taking in New Hampshire. In New Hampshire he used pictures of John Kennedy, "something went out of our life in 1963 and we've got to recapture that again"—invoking all of that. By the time he got to Oregon, he was saying that Robert Kennedy was implicated in the discredited

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policies of the entire decade, had gotten us into Vietnam. Even in one newspaper ad he accused him of getting us into the Dominican Republic—wasn't that the thing that McCarthy apologized for on the televised debate?—so we were kind of bitter about all that.

He had said in New Hampshire in his laconic style that he hadn't been the first to speak out about Vietnam, didn't care to have credit for that, indeed had felt through '65 and part of '66 that the thing was going.... He believed what the President said, and thought some of those other boys, maybe, had started too early in their criticism. By the time we got to Oregon he had big newspaper ads saying Gene McCarthy was the first man to speak out on Vietnam, which apparently was supposed to mean

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that he was the first presidential candidate to base his campaign on it. So all of that stuff was kind of simmering along.

We thought he was snotty with the confrontation or non-confrontation in the park. We didn't like what he said about us when we didn't show up to debate—even though we were very chagrined about not showing up to debate in Portland.

Then the Senator was shot. McCarthy was said to have asked about the safety of his own family first, instead of about how the Senator was. That was reported, and it made people very angry. McCarthy's man, Tom Finney [Thomas D. Finney, Jr.], is said to have called Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] and said to him about Kennedy, "Can he talk?" which was taken to mean that the only concern

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was what would happen to the campaign, and not his health or survival, which may not have been that at all. McCarthy himself held that little press conference, or appearance before the television in front of his room, in which he appeared unduly interested in discussing his own plans while the Senator was lying in bed. He showed up at the hospital with a police escort with siren going. It's claimed in the Godfrey Hodgson book he was very sorry about it later on, and it happened through a misunderstanding.

All these little things were added up, and we, of course, were terribly, terribly emotional, bitter, as well as we could be understood, or expected, to have been under those circumstances. Given

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all of those things, given the fact that they came on top of the irritations of....

Oh, another thing I didn't mention is that McCarthy had circulated a little record in Watts with the voice of Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] on it, in which Martin Luther King had said something nice about Gene McCarthy somewhere. He circulated that as

saying that Martin Luther King had endorsed him. That is pretty cheap politics; that's pretty cheap.

So when you add all that up the most immediate, after the Senator was shot, the somewhat less immediate events of the two weeks proceeding that, the general feelings about McCarthy, all of that, you had a lot of hostility towards him, and nobody very eager to back him.

Then, I suppose, you have to add in one other factor, which

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is that on the merits.... This maybe was to the most objective of those involved the most important, or was as important as the conclusion, based on all the rest, that he wasn't qualified to be president, which is different from not liking him. What if Gene McCarthy should just happen to be asleep when the bomb fell, and didn't feel like getting up—that kind of thing.

The other thing was that he didn't really have any program on all of these issues that we cared most about, what I just went through a few minutes ago about jobs, income, changing government structure, getting money off differently, and on and on and on

He made one speech in Boston where he announced the six new rights: the right of everybody to an

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education and the right of everybody to health care. One other speech in California, that I never even knew about until I read about it in Hodgson's book, he talked a little bit more basically about institutions, which indeed was quite a good speech that either Larner [Jeremy Larner] or Gorman [Paul Gorman] had written for him. But basically, there was no program on domestic matters. Also, we didn't think that a program to get rid of Dean Rusk, General Hershey [Lewis B. Hershey], and J. Edgar Hoover was a program on how you changed in the national security area.

So for all those reasons, some petty and some substantive, the Kennedy people tended not to want to have anything to do with him. I got that question time after time

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as we travelled around the world last year, sometimes from Americans who were just watching the election from over there and couldn't quite figure it out, sometimes from people from other countries.

Golda Meir, for example, we saw in Israel—a lovely, wonderful two hours; I really will always treasure it—that was the first question she asked. In that case, it didn't happen to be, "Why can't the Kennedy people support Gene McCarthy?" It was an even, to us, simpler one: "McCarthy-Kennedy, what's all this? Why can't you all support Hubert Humphrey?" But, as I say, everywhere we got the question, "Why don't you Kennedy people come out for McCarthy now?"

HACKMAN: How did McCarthy and his people go about

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seeking the support of some of you people, or did they go to any great...

EDELMAN: Well, of course, I left the country on July 15, so I can't really answer that question. Nobody ever came to me explicitly and asked me to come out for Gene McCarthy, nor would they have because I think anybody who knew me knew that I just was livid every time Gene McCarthy's name was mentioned. It really was hard to talk to me on the subject. I don't know how they went after others.

HACKMAN: Were you back at the Convention [Democratic National Convention]?

EDELMAN: No, no. I was gone from July 15 until December 1.

HACKMAN: You were out of the country at a good time.

EDELMAN: That was a good time.

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HACKMAN: Okay. Then I guess we should go back, and should find out how you came to the '64 Senate campaign, whether you had any contact with him at all at Justice, before you went up there?

EDELMAN: I had laid eyes on him, other than just seeing him walk by, twice. Once when I was a clerk at the Supreme Court, clerking for Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg], he had come to lunch. Cabinet members, Senators, other people came to lunch from time to time with the Supreme Court law clerks. At that time Arthur Goldberg had been very high on him and said that we really ought to go and pay attention, that this was a young man who was getting a bum rap, that he really had a great deal more to him than anybody supposed, which I was not

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particularly prepared to believe, but went.

Here was this tough guy who came into the room. The first thing that I thought was strange was that he shook everybody's hand. That's something that I just didn't know about how politicians were. He came right out and shook everybody's hand, and that struck me as very strange because what did we care whether he shook our hand or not? Then he sat down—and I was sitting either next to him or two places away—and all the time that this tough guy was answering questions, and so on, his hands were shaking under the table and

were knotted up with one another and wringing back and forth, and his knees were going up and down a mile a minute. I found that rather charming that indeed he was not

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all that cool a cookie.

In addition to that, his mastery of the kinds of questions that were asked him—and you can imagine the Supreme Court law clerks were a very snotty crew—was quite, quite impressive. There were a lot of hostile questions thrown at him about Hoffa [Jimmy Hoffa], about his methods and so on, and some rather technical legal questions thrown at him—and very impressive. I didn't see him again. Then, of course, the President was killed two months after I went to work at Justice in September of 1963.

He used to have things for new attorneys, but he didn't have one for new attorneys again until about April or May of 1964, and that was the next time I saw him for any length of time.

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HACKMAN: Let me just ask you: Why did you go to work at Justice? What kind of reputation did Justice have among the people you knew up there at that point?

EDELMAN: Well, it had come to be an accepted pattern for Supreme Court law clerks, just in the early '60s, to spend another year as special assistants to somebody at the Assistant Attorney General or Deputy Attorney General level in the Justice Department. So far as I know, this hadn't been the case, the Eisenhower Administration [Dwight D. Eisenhower] hadn't done this; the Assistant AGs hadn't had special assistants. Whoever thought of it, it was a terrific idea: a bright, young staff guy for very cheap for the Assistant AG; give him some independence

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of judgment; not have to rely on his bureaucratic people under him, and so on. Law clerks, since '61, had been going and spending that extra year working for Lou Oberdorfer [Louis F. Oberdorfer] in the tax division, or Bill Orrick [William H. Orrick], first in the civil and then the antitrust division, and for Jack Miller [Herbert J. Miller, Jr.] in the criminal division, and so on. So I had heard about that.

In addition to that Goldberg felt very strongly that one should spend some more time, that this was a good time to be in the government, an exciting time and so on, and that there was no reason to hurry off to private practice; and he convinced me of that.

I hadn't taken a job because I had to go into the

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service that summer and I didn't know how long I'd be gone. John Douglas [John W. Douglas] had just been appointed Assistant Attorney General and he was looking for a special assistant, and willing to suffer with my uncertainties; so we were able to make a deal. I guess that's really all there is to say about it.

HACKMAN: Yes. There wasn't anything that you worked directly with him on while you were at Justice—with Robert Kennedy?

EDELMAN: No, I think not.

HACKMAN: How do you come then out of Justice and into the... Well, let me just ask one other question. Any feeling for what other young lawyers in Justice felt about Kennedy and Douglas, at that point in Justice?

EDELMAN: Oh, tremendous respect for Robert Kennedy.

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I think people even appreciated it at the time; they certainly do in retrospect. That was the golden age of the Justice Department. That's not to say anything against Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] or Ramsey Clark because they were fine, too. Indeed, I think Ramsey in particular is one of the great Attorney Generals that this country has ever had in terms of overall sophistication, overall compassion, and sense of human qualities. He just is an extraordinary person.

HACKMAN: Did you read the series in the *New Yorker* recently?

EDELMAN: Yes, yes. Ramsey is just an extraordinary person. In any event, Robert Kennedy brought in people or quality that hadn't been in the Justice Department, at least within memory; perhaps there'd been,

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back in Robert Jackson's [Robert H. Jackson] time, or something like that. But you think about J. Howard McGrath and Brownell [Herbert Brownell, Jr.]. Rogers [William P. Rogers] was a pretty good fellow, but in general it had been sort of, in some cases, during the Truman [Harry S. Truman] years, a rather political place, and during the Eisenhower years just sort of a dull place.

Kennedy went out and recruited these very, very impressive individuals to be the Assistant Attorney General; they in turn recruited very impressive individual to be the first assistants, and so on. And he began to get a new, bright, young quality of young men coming out of law school into the honors program, which they started.

They started

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being much more active in civil rights, the prosecution of organized crime, tax enforcement. They didn't do too much with antitrust, but in general it was the heyday and there was a sense that Robert Kennedy really cared.

He had these meetings for the new lawyers. It would be not at all surprising to have him walk into your office and ask you what you were doing. This never happened after I was there because of the President's being killed, but I've heard many stories of this. People really had a sense of camaraderie and caring and esprit de corps. It was a great place to work; it was great institution.

John Douglas is a very hard man to get to know, and is a person

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for whom I had great, great respect. I really just dearly love him, and I enjoyed working for him. I don't know so much how he was thought of in the civil division. I suspect he was respected, but he is a hard person to get to. He's one of those people you'll say something to and you don't know whether he was listening. He's just so bad on small talk that you ask him how he is and he might pass you by in the hall because he can't think of what he should say in reply. So it may be that he was not the most beloved figure. He was very good—he's an extremely bright man—and I suspect probably was respected, certainly by anybody that was any good. He had a way of finding those lawyers in the

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civil division—and there were some who had been there awhile—who were good, and really getting them involved in an exciting way, and stuff, and giving them their head much more than they'd ever had before. So, I think he was probably well-regarded; certainly a good administrator, and certainly kept on top of things.

HACKMAN: Is that basically your route into the '64 campaign?

EDELMAN: Yes. I agreed with John Douglas—first we said two years, and then he had a fit of guilt about that so he released me down to one year. It was very amusing because at the start of it he confessed to me later, he had no idea what he was going to do with me because he never had a special assistant before—just really old enough to not have been a partner

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himself at Covington & Burling for very long. At some point there, when he was feeling so guilty about that, was when he released me down to one year because he couldn't think of what he was going to do with me for two years. Later on, when he figured out some things to do and we got going, I think he was sorry about that.

So I only planned to stay a year, and then I'd taken a job in New York with a Wall Street law firm. I was going to travel abroad for a couple of months and as I mentioned the other time I wasn't all that keen on traveling with my wife [Marian Wright Edelman] in those years.

I thought it would be interesting to be in a political campaign. I couldn't get on with

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Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]—they wanted me to be an advance man and so on—even though I come from Minnesota and my father knows him and all that stuff. Then at about that time it became clear that Kennedy was going to run. It made complete sense for me to try to get involved in his campaign because of the fact that I was going to practice in New York anyway, and it would be nice to learn something and make some contacts.

It was very, very hard to get involved. John went personally to bat for me; in fact, for Adam too—John was also Adam's entrée into the campaign. They didn't want any more Justice Department people. Milt Gwirtzman [Milton S. Gwirtzman] and Bill vanden Heuvel didn't know who we were and didn't particularly know that we would be any good, so they were mistrusting of bringing in another

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body, which always happens because it's a pain in the behind to have somebody working for you that turns out to be a bust in a campaign—you don't have time to deal with it. After about three weeks of John keeping after them every day they said, "Okay, Okay, come on up to New York." They were running into trouble in their research operation; Speeches were not getting out on time. Milton was very harassed, and the research material wasn't being put together in sufficient depth, or fast enough... Finally they said, "Okay, Okay." I went up, and the following week Adam went up.

HACKMAN: What basis did you leave the Justice Department on? Resignation? Or can you come back?

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EDELMAN: Well, I resigned because, as I say, I was going to leave anyway. They gave me a nice plaque and a luncheon—a plaque, "From Prison Industries to Peter Edelman from his friends at the Department of Justice." No, I was going to resign anyway so it was for me no problem.

HACKMAN: What are the things you go to work on?

EDELMAN: It started out I was sitting across the desk from Bill vanden Heuvel; he and I and his secretary in a room that was maybe six feet by nine feet. I just sort of

would sit there and he would say, "Here, do something with this or that." It was either answering a letter, calling up some lady who had an interest in some minor issue. I think the first substantive

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thing I did was to develop his program on milk price supports because, as you know, dairying is the biggest farm industry in New York, and indeed New York is the second or third largest dairy state in the country, so it was not an idle thing to have to have a milk position. On the other hand, it was certainly not important in the great scheme of things, either. So that became my first issue. I think the first day I was up there I went to a meeting with the candidate and the dairymen's league representatives and so on.

Then I just gradually got into other issues. I got involved in developing a position on maritime stuff, a similar small but necessary issue if you're going to have the support of the maritime unions. I

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suppose I'd been up there about two weeks just doing this miscellaneous stuff, working on these kind of side issues, because they had people out around the city who were working on developing his positions on the major issues.

So I was really just Bill vanden Heuvel's assistant in the office rather than having any independent position; I was just doing what he told me to do, and what I was doing was the overflow from his desk. But I certainly was keeping busy from nine in the morning until one o'clock in the morning. You're constantly on the phone, people call up with inquiries and so on.

Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] came up full time along about the last week in September, as I say, after I'd been there about two weeks. I didn't know

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Joe. We met; somebody from over at 42nd Street—we were up at the Chatham Hotel on 48th Street—called me, maybe it was John Douglas, in fact. What John used to do was come up every week and reconnoiter for a day, and then report what was going badly. I think it was he who got Joe and me together. We sat down, and there wasn't any literature that existed at all that had any attack on Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] in it. There were a few very general kinds of flyers on behalf of Kennedy, which just sort of spoke about his record as Attorney General.

HACKMAN: That's how far into the campaign?

EDELMAN: Well, the campaign's been going for months now. He got the nomination the

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first week in September. Now it's the end of September, and the whole campaign has been run on the basis of, "You should vote for me because I was a good Attorney General." Well, it just wasn't washing; it wasn't selling in the polls and people weren't buying it. As far as, they were concerned, Kenneth Keating had been a fine senator, and there was no reason to turn him out unless there was something that could be pointed to that people hadn't known about.

So Joe and I sat down—I'd already done some work on Keating's record; I'd done it so clandestinely in the Justice Department, in fact—and on the back of an envelope we wrote the first piece of anti-Keating literature.

This is the kind of stuff that you had: I'm pointing to a piece

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of literature that says, "Six reasons for making Robert Kennedy the U.S. Senator: Experience, Know how, Creative Liberalism, and so on." Those are the kinds of early flyers that they had. In fact, the earliest one was one that says, "Let's put Bob Kennedy to work for New York;" that had very little in it. It was a very slick piece with a lot of pictures of him saying, "Remember how he did this and that?" That's what just wasn't washing.

Well, that thing we put out very quickly, and there was a tremendous demand for it, talking about Keating's record. "Keating voted against," it said, "against, against, against." So they started to call on me, and I started being the guy who would go by

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and approve the copy for ads about Keating. Then they asked me to develop a thing called "the umbrella," which took a Keating response to one of our ads and pasted a bunch of stuff on it so the Senator could have it all on one piece of paper to respond back to Keating.

HACKMAN: This thing, you called it "accordion" earlier, and now you're saying "umbrella."

EDELMAN: I'm sorry, "accordion." I was being not all here. Yes, "the accordion" we called it. So I was asked to do that, and then whenever Kennedy would be being briefed for a debate or a television appearance, or whatever, I would show up for an hour. I don't know if he even knew who I was. I would go over the things that were on that with him, and he would sort of look at it and study it, and so on, and not say very much.

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He'd ask me some questions, take it, and I would retrieve it at the end of the appearance and have it for the next time.

HACKMAN: But basically going over the same things, the background, every time he'd face a question of some kind.

EDELMAN: That's right. So that became my major function, really. The identifiable thing that I was doing that was unique from what anybody else was doing was to be the kind of in-house Keating expert.

HACKMAN: Were there continuing things like that milk subsidies position and the...

EDELMAN: And the maritime thing?

HACKMAN: Yes, the maritime thing.

EDELMAN: Oh, some, yes. I don't remember what all I was working on because the main thing

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was the Keating stuff. I would spend a fair amount of time at the ad agency.

HACKMAN: That's Papert, Fred Papert [Frederic S. Papert]?

EDELMAN: Yes, Bernie Endelman [Bernard Endelman] and Louis Hexter were the two people that I worked with.

HACKMAN: We're just about out.

BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II

HACKMAN: What exactly was vanden Heuvel's role? How did he come into the campaign, do you know?

EDELMAN: Well, he was director of research. He was head research guy, and Gwartzman was head speech writer. How he came into it was that he had been a friend of the Kennedy family for some time; he had run

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the Prince Edward County [Virginia] schools as an appointee, really, of the Justice Department. How he knew the Kennedy family I don't know, except that he had been a friend of Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy] for much longer than he'd been a friend of anybody else. Now, whether they had been at school together at some point, which I don't think, somehow they knew each other, in any event. So it was natural that as someone who had run for office

in New York and was knowledgeable about New York politics, he would get involved in the campaign.

HACKMAN: You mentioned John Douglas coming up every week. What about other people in Justice? How much, for instance, did a Burke Marshall or Oberdorfer or these people do on the campaign?

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EDELMAN: Well, I remember one time sitting down with Burke, who apparently was doing a similar kind of thing, coming up every now and then. We put together an ad that was called the “box score ad” that compared to Keating’s votes on key issues with the way Javits [Jacob K. Javits] had voted and the way other, liberals had voted; it was quite an effective ad. I forget whose idea it was, but Burke and I sat down and kind of designed it together, and then we took it to the ad agency, and so on. It said at the top, “The Congressional Record provides eleven good reasons to vote for Robert Kennedy.” Then it compared Humphrey, Javits, Keating and Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater]. Humphrey and Javits were together almost every time and Keating and Goldwater were together on the opposite side

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almost every time. So it really was quite an effective ad. That was one time that I dealt with Burke—as I say, we had sort of worked out the format of it together. Lou Oberdorfer I don’t think I saw very much during that time; I think that whatever he did he did very quietly in Washington. I think he was doing some things, but they were just within Washington.

HACKMAN: Ever any complaints from others, or any great concern on the part of these kinds of people, of activity on Justice Department time on the Robert Kennedy campaign? Any of Johnson’s people complain? Ed Weisl [Edwin L. Weis, Sr.] or any of those people?

EDELMAN: I never heard about it. One of the reasons why they didn’t want me and

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Adam to come up was they felt they had too many Justice Department people up there already, but that was a carpet bag problem. The stuff that I had done in the Justice Department before I left, I was always careful to say that I was doing it at night and on my own time. I don’t think there was any concern. If the concern was that they would be charged, that somebody would go through and see how many people in the campaign were alumni, there was very little, or no concern about the fact that some people still there were checking in from time to time. You know, it’s always done, really.

HACKMAN: What kinds of people were put in, sort of, visibility positions from New York, who

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really didn't do anything substantive? Can you remember people like that?

EDELMAN: Let me say in addition, those people in the Justice Department were not "hatched." You're not "hatched" if you're a presidential appointee. What was the question?

HACKMAN: Now, I'm trying to think whether people, say, any of Wagner's [Robert Ferdinand Wagner, Jr.] people or other New York people were put in sort of high visibility positions, but really didn't do anything substantive in the campaign?

EDELMAN: Well, Peter Straus [R. Peter Straus] was made the campaign manager. He wasn't one of Wagner's people, but he sure didn't do much in the campaign. He's a friend of mine, but I guess he's not that good a friend of mine. Indeed, I think

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that engendered some bitterness on his part. So he was in it at the highest level.

Then you had Julius Edelstein [Julius C.C. Edelstein] who would weigh in with advice from time to time—I don't believe he was there on a full-time basis—and Bernie Ruggieri [Bernard J. Ruggieri], who was a big pal of Wagner's—I don't know what's ever happened to him. He was there full-time; he was travelling with the Senator. I never could figure him out; he always struck me like he must be a Mafia guy or something. He was sort of a "des", "dems", and "dos" guy that somehow people thought was smart, and I didn't. I couldn't figure out what people saw in him. But Bernie was a guy from Wagner's office who was quite visible.

Paul Screvane [Paul R. Screvane] was around for quite awhile.

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You would see these guys at meetings; There used to be meetings.... In the O'Connor campaign in 1966 Milt Gwirtzman and I used to call them "elephant fucks" because you'd just have a huge number of people there and you couldn't possibly get anything done. In '66 Milton and I were sleeping in the suite, for part of the time, where these meetings would take place. In the morning we'd sort of get up and say, "Hey, Are you doing to the "elephant fuck" this morning?"[Laughter] So I attended.

My status in the campaign in '64 was such that it had to be a rather big one before I got to it, because I was the thirty-fifth closest person to the candidate, or something like that.

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I was only at two or three of those. Of course, I really didn't know who anybody was since I'd just shown up, but I suppose Paul Screvane and Bernie Ruggieri would be typical people who would be there.

HACKMAN: These would be things that that candidate would attend though? General meetings?

EDELMAN: Yes, sometimes, or he'd walk in and out of them. He found that extremely distasteful. Fred Papert would be there and make a presentation, and everybody would know that it was absurd. In addition to that, you couldn't say it to him in front of all those people, so it all would be kind of a charade.

HACKMAN: Out of your conversation with Dolan, and then the kind of ads that started to come

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out, is this how basically there is a shift in the campaign towards an attack on Keating? Or is there a point when Robert Kennedy really gets into a discussion like this, and there's a conscious shift on his part in the campaign?

EDELMAN: The answer is both of those. You couldn't have had the shift in the non-candidate part of it, in the ads and the literature, without his approving it. I would suppose the order of it was that they had a meeting, at some point a day or two before Dolan and I met, where they were saying to him, "Look, you just have to start attacking this guy, otherwise you're going to lose," and that he said, "Okay," and that we were able to move into the literature

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and the ad stuff, and that it took him some time after that—a week, which is a long time in a campaign—to work himself up into doing it. Then he would only do it with the greatest reluctance. He would stick it into his stump speech very, kind of cautiously—"Did you know that Keating had had some votes on this stuff," and so on and so forth. But as it began to get around through the ads, and as he began to get more confident about it, he used it himself more, too.

HACKMAN: What is the origin, and then the importance, of the thing that, I guess, Bill Haddad's operation does some work on, the thing that's entitled "The Myth of Keating's Liberalism"?

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EDELMAN: There isn't too much importance to the big book that was entitled that. It got around in some reform circles where there was some hostility to Kennedy and some inclination to vote for Keating. Haddad had done a lot of research and was ready to put it out in various ways. He also did some very nice one page "positives" things, leaflets with nice pictures that were bled off the edges—if that's the past tense of bleed off the edges. He had done that stuff.

He had all of his research that he'd done. One piece that they did, that I remember, was the one Sheeter that was called "The Myth of Keating's of Liberalism." It was pretty effective; it was a more sophisticated piece than our little "Keating's

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voting record: Keating against, against." "Keating against, against" wasn't very subtle, and was kind of a bludgeon. "The Myth of Keating's Liberalism" was designed a little bit more jazzily. I don't know which was more convincing; I sort of liked hits, for an afternoon sitting in a bar, on the back of an envelope. But the origin is, putting it another way, they knew they had to have Haddad in the campaign: they knew he was a pain; they knew that he's very hard to work with; so they set him up in his own headquarters and his operation on 57th and 5th Avenue and told him to research Keating's record. At the time they did that they thought they'd never hear from him again

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because they thought they were never going to attack Keating. Then when it turned out that they were going to have to, a month later, they didn't really want to use Haddad.

There was this very peculiar thing; Haddad would come in and he would say, "Who okayed that ad about Keating's record? Nobody in my shop did; Who gave the candidate those facts about Keating's record? Nobody in my shop did." Finally I admitted, or somebody admitted, one day, after he'd been asking, very puzzled, those questions for about two weeks, that I was this little fellow over in the other shop who was doing the whole thing. So he and I did not like each other at all at that time. The short

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answer, though, is that they did have that research and that it did result in two or three pieces of literature. Also, it resulted in—they had a very nice street corner speaker kit, and they would send people out with that. So they weren't wasting their time.

HACKMAN: You said that a lot of the things that Papert was proposing were obviously not that useful. Is that so all the way through? I mean, is that typical of him? Did his operation ever really prove useful?

EDELMAN: Well, I think that's typical of all advertising people in campaigns. You see some of the stuff that was done for Gene McCarthy last spring by the Doyle Dane [Bernbach, Inc.] volunteer people volunteering to help; it was beautiful, but somehow

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that's always the other guy's stuff. I have never heard an advertising man who really understood political nuances; they all seem to come in with stuff that just isn't what you want.

So, yes, Papert was always irrelevant, but I don't think that was typical only of Papert. That's why we would end up kind of... Particularly if you left them to do anything that involved substance, the texts that would come back would always be terribly distorted, the kind of thing that if you let it go you'd be before the Fair Campaign Practices Committee in a minute. So we just ended up kind of, really, almost designing our own ads about Keating's record, and then letting them put it into an attractive format.

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HACKMAN: Do you continue to use them a lot in the Senate period for different kinds of things?

EDELMAN: Papert?

HACKMAN: Yes.

EDELMAN: No, the only time we ever saw Fred Papert was during a campaign.

HACKMAN: I guess the most controversial thing to come out of "The Myth of Keating's Liberalism" is the nuclear test ban thing.

EDELMAN: I don't believe that was in that. I think that was in a speech the Senator gave.

HACKMAN: Yeah. Okay, where does that come from? Do you know?

EDELMAN: Somebody said that Keating had—what was the charge?—been privately against the nuclear test ban, or at least had not come out for it until the very last day. Milton, either himself or had

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somebody research it, and that appeared to be true. So that accusation, however it went, either that he was silent or that he was actively pushing it against behind the scenes, was put into a speech. Keating complained that that wasn't the case, that he'd been an early supporter of

that, going back into the '50s, and he was right. I think that's about all there was to it. We tried to fudge it somehow; it was not very exact.

HACKMAN: Did you ever get the Senator's reaction on that?

EDELMAN: I was not involved in it so I never heard; I'm sure that it wouldn't have been printable.

HACKMAN: How did you find him in those early experiences in briefing him, and in preparation

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for things he was going to do? So many people have talked about him being very detached in this period.

EDELMAN: Well, first, I have to tell you some anecdotes to say how I found him. The first day I was there—I was sitting in that little cramped office with Bill vanden Heuvel—I'd just called my wife. I'd just come back from this meeting the Senator had been at with the milk guys. I was calling her to say I'd arrived safely and I'd already been in this meeting. I was talking to her, and I sort of, out of the corner of my eyes, saw this presence. Of course, it was Kennedy, and I was very flustered because I was caught on the phone. He didn't know that it wasn't a business conversation, but obviously I thought I was caught wasting

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my time on my first day on the job. So I was flustered, but he said, "Just came by to tell you how glad I am to have you here and on board." That was very nice and made me feel very good.

The next time I remember seeing him—there may have been other times—or at least the next time that I remember talking with him, was that I took a speech to him one night, to meet him at a rally someplace across town. I got into the car, and there was some cute little byplay about.... A couple of his kids were there—he was standing on the roof of the car—and one kid said to the other, "Is Daddy going to break through the roof of the car like he always did in Poland?"

The other thing

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was that little Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.] was there, and he said, "Daddy, why are you asking that people call you Bob now?," you know, instead of Bobby. The Senator said, "Well, because I don't want to be known as the same as you all my life."

I got into the car and handed him whatever it was; I think it was the maritime speech that he was supposed to deliver later that night. We rode from there, which might have been around 29th and 8th Avenue or 9th Avenue, over to the Carlyle. He was extremely cordial, asked me how I thought things were going, asked my advice about some things that I couldn't believe that he could care what I had to say. He carried the conversation and was very, very warm, and very generous;

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I was extremely impressed with that.

The times that I saw him where we were doing business—that is to say where I brought “the accordion” up—he would read the thing and he would study it; he would tap his front tooth, as he had a habit of doing; and he would walk around. I remember he would sit on the floor on the knees; he would kneel down just on his knees and spread the thing out on the bed. He would look at it, he would take his glasses on and off, and he was very intent. But that wasn't necessarily a detachment because his mind wasn't on that subject; indeed, that was more of a not communicating because he was really trying to master the thing, not focusing on the fact that it was Peter Edelman as opposed to Joe

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Blow there, because it didn't matter. The point was to master the piece of paper that had been brought towards him, and the questions would be asked in that kind of, “it's an information machine that's there to give him the answers,” not mean, just detached in the sense of intent concentration. Those are my impressions of him during the campaign; I had really no impression, at that time I wasn't thinking in terms of his being detached in the other sense of still not being himself from the year before.

HACKMAN: I don't really have that much on the '64 campaign.

EDELMAN: No, I don't have that much more to say, because I obviously was not a very key figure in it. My only recollection of it, and as these files show, the only

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thing that I took away from it was my involvement on Keating's record, and I sort of used to get a kick of that.

I was extremely defensive about it because it was quite clear in my own mind that everything we were saying about poor old Senator Keating was absolutely the truth, and that he was this devil who had been allowed to parade himself around as a liberal, and that's what the whole thing boiled down to for me.

The night before the election Adam and I went on the Barry Gray show, and we debated Pat Connell [Patricia Connell] and Steve Kurzman [Stephen Kurzman]. Pat used to

be Keating's legislative assistant, and Steve was from Javits' staff. Of course, I was just filled up to the top with all

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these facts and figures, and Adam and I really did demolish them in the debate because we just had all this stuff that we'd been feeding to other people to say, that we were masters of; so that was fun.

The other thing I did in the campaign, which was a great event, was that I was one of the Senator's seconds for the radio debate on the Barry Gray show. If you look at the newspaper pictures the day after you'll see the top of my head—we were sitting on the floor behind him—or my legs crossed underneath the table, or whatever it happened to be. That was the other high event for me.

I was around at the time of the empty chair thing that took place at the CBS studio, and that kind of stuff.

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HACKMAN: What do you remember about any discussion of that beforehand, whether to do it or whether not to do it?

EDELMAN: I was around the Carlyle during that discussion because of having to brief the Senator on the facts about Keating's record. My recollection was that it simply went back and forth, and back and forth as to whether he had to go. As I recall, Keating had bought the first half-hour and the Senator had bought the second half-hour of time right afterwards. Yes, that's right. The question was should he just show up for his own half-hour and let Keating have the empty chair thing, or should he show up for Keating's as well. Now, I think what they decided

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was that he would show up for the Keating thing, but he would make sure that he would show up as late as possible to fluster Keating as much as possible. I think that he had in mind that he would show up and be let in. I think he was surprised and absolutely delighted when he blocked the door of the studio—just absolutely delighted him, and loved beating on the door and making a great thing out of the fact that they wouldn't let him in. But the decision had really been that he would get there at 7:28, in time that they had to let him in but enough to try to fluster Keating.

Debs Myers, you remember, was the press man; along with Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman], who traveled with him, Debs was the resident

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press man.

I was involved in discussions about—the following Friday Keating bought a full hour of time; the empty chair thing had been on about a Tuesday or so—the question of whether the Senator had to show up for that. The Senator, meanwhile, was scheduled on the Barry Gray show for later that same evening, and we were sitting around, “What should we do; what should we do?”—the Senator was out at Glen Cove. He had rented that house out there. I remember that Harry Golden was sitting there in his suspenders, looking Jewish and funny and fat, not saying much. Averell Harriman was there, with his hearing aid in his pocket. They both had their coats off—Harry Golden and Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman]. Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.]

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was there. Of course, I was very peripheral; I was just sort of watching the show.

The phone would ring about every fifteen minutes or so; it was the Senator asking them what he ought to do, and they, or course, had no answer for him. After this had gone on—which really was a ridiculous, ridiculous thing to watch all these grown men sitting there and not knowing what to do, and calling each other up on the phone and not having anything to say—all of a sudden somebody called us. There was a great stir, like Captain Marvel had walked in or something. Keating had heard that we were on the Barry Gray show and had demanded that he should be on, too, that he should have equal time.

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Of course, everybody in the room saw it the same way, that here was the debate, that Keating had boxed himself in, that he had, in effect, accepted a debate without even knowing it, and that we could have the debate, have it late at night, not have the problem of the television with the young whippersnapper against the white-haired Senator-looking fellow; it would murder his hour on television earlier, which nobody would watch because they were going to listen to the debate. It would get no coverage in the press the next day because all the coverage would be the debate itself. So it was just marvelous all the way around. That’s how the Barry Gary debate came about.

Of course,

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the other thing that’s marvelous about a radio debate is that he could take in anything he wanted; we could hand him anything he wanted; he didn’t have to have an elaborate set of preparations, and so on, because he was allowed to have two seconds there. We would each submit questions to Barry Gray to be asked to the other fellow, so we dreamed up some—I don’t even remember what they were—questions of various kinds: Why did he vote against so and so? What was his position on busing or something? You know, this kind of thing.

We met the Senator a few minutes before the telecast, and he said, “I want to ask him what his policy is towards Saba.” We said, “What’s Saba?” He said with great superiority,

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“Saba is an island in Indonesia which the Indonesians have been fighting with the Malaysians about.” So we put that on the list, and, of course, Keating had no idea what Saba was and gave an answer about, in general encouraging independence and sovereignty around the world. So those are the main things that I remember.

HACKMAN: Okay. What happens, really, after the election, in terms of putting a staff together? At what point do you come in?

EDELMAN: My wife and I—my wife of those days—went to Acapulco. We stayed around about two or three days after the election. I guess I had told Milton Gwartzman and Bill vanden Heuvel that I’d be interested in working for Kennedy afterwards, even though, as I said in a previous interview, John Douglas had told

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me I absolutely should not, because of anything against Kennedy, but thinking that working on a Senate staff didn’t led you anywhere.

We were sitting at the 42nd Street headquarters—we had moved out of the Chatham two or three days after the election—and the Senator came in; he was very nice, and so on, and said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m just about to go off for two weeks.” He said, “Well, I’d like to talk to you when you get back. Be sure and let Ed Guthman know.” I guess I knew what he was talking about.

So we went off, and came back and called Ed Guthman. We had pretty much doped out, me and Adam talking to each other, that they were likely to offer us coequal jobs, but probably working for somebody. Probably

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there would be a senior legislative man, like Bill vanden Heuvel or Dick Goodwin or somebody like that. We didn’t know whether we would take that sort of a job. We were very astonished to discover that he was offering us jobs to be *the* legislative assistants. I had very little question in my mind about whether I would take it, but I went around and talked to John Douglas and to Burke Marshall and to Joe Dolan and Justice Goldberg and my father, perhaps one or two other people, and I ended up taking the job.

HACKMAN: At the time you came on who else had already been taken on his staff? Who was it clear was going to be there?

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EDELMAN: Adam, Phil Ryan [Philip J. Ryan, Jr.] and Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston] in New York, Joe....

HACKMAN: Guthman?

EDELMAN: Ed Guthman, yes. Guthman was clearly going to be a transitional figure. Yes, I think that's all. I accepted the job around the last week in November, give or take a few days.

HACKMAN: Do you go through any kind of interview process? Is it just, "You want to work? You're hired," or what happens really?

EDELMAN: The interview process should be recorded for posterity. I called up Ed Guthman, and he says, "Come to town such and such a day. We'll meet you at such and such a place." So I did, and he says, "Now, let's go

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see the Senator." "Okay." The Senator, it turns out, is at the White House having his knee looked to—he had hurt his knee in a touch football game, maybe, who knows. He still had sufficient relationships with the White House medical staff that he could go there to have his knee looked to. I don't remember whether we drove in together; I guess he was already there. Ed and I came together; we met him inside and didn't say much to one another. He had his knee looked to, and we went outside. He perched himself on the hood of a car in the alley between the White House and the Executive Office Building. He said, "I guess Ed's talked to you. Are you going to come aboard? Are you going to come work with us?" That was all he said.

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I thought he was going to say to me, "How many A's did you get in school?" or "What do you think about the nuclear test ban?" or "Write something for me, and I'll see if I liked your writing." It was just that straightforward statement.

Well, of course, there'd been a lot that had gone into that. They'd had consultations around and around and around about who should be offered jobs, but I wasn't aware that that was how they did things, at that point, and I was astonished. So I said, "Well, Senator, there's some questions." I said, "First, how much would you pay me? I've got a wife, and so on." He said, "Oh, you can work that out with Ed," so I was disarmed from that. I said, "I have this other problem. I'm

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going to be out of law school four years come this June. It's three and a half years now, and I still haven't worked in a law office or practiced law. Listen, I think that's a problem." He says, "Well, I had that problem, too, and I managed to work it out." So that was my interview with Robert Kennedy.

HACKMAN: What happens in terms of financial relations, getting that all straightened then?

EDELMAN: I guess I did work it out with Ed. I talked to Ed, and they were going to offer something on the order of—I don't remember whether it was \$12,500 or \$13,000 to start with—I think it was \$12,500, and there wasn't a thing you could do about it. That's what they were offering; you took or you left it. In the Justice Department I'd been making around ten

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and by that time I would have been up to about the same amount, but I couldn't really gripe. So I took the job at that rate.

HACKMAN: What happens from that point until he actually gets an office in the Senate and everything? Is there much activity through that winter?

EDELMAN: Yes. Well, it's just one month, just, the month of December.

HACKMAN: Right, December.

EDELMAN: Yes, I went back out to Chicago, where my wife's—that wife's family lived. About week after that I called in, or they called up, and they said, "You should come to New York. We're arranging these meetings all over the state, and we want you to work on that." So I showed up in New York and started. They had a little piece of

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the campaign headquarters from the Statler Hilton left—on the second floor of the Statler Hilton—that we were working out of. I guess right away I got sent up to advance a trip to Plattsburgh—not Massena—some other town up there, and Watertown. I didn't know what the hell I was doing, but I went up and I talked to everybody. What were the issues they were concerned about, back and forth on the phone with whoever else was involved in it—God knows, Dolan or somebody—working it out with the Senator's plane, and would he need a private plane because his plane, the *Caroline*, wouldn't get into the airport at the second stop, and all of that stuff. It seemed to work.

We had meetings in the three places, and the purpose of the meetings was to just

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listen to people about what they wanted him to do for them in the Senate. I think it was a nice gesture; I don't think he learned much; I don't think anybody learned much. Maybe he did; I

didn't. I was so uptight about making sure that everything was going. Okay that my brain wouldn't function to listen.

Then we also went to Buffalo—I went with him to that meeting—and Syracuse, although I didn't help set those up. I was kind of taking notes and stuff. We did that for—I suppose a couple of weeks was all that took. Then we took another week off and came and got moved in and stuff, and went to work.

HACKMAN: Whose idea were those meetings, do you know?

EDELMAN: No, I think they were probably his idea.

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HACKMAN: Can you remember anything about his attitude, in that period, about going to the Senate? Did he have anything clearly in mind that he wanted to do?

EDELMAN: Yes. For one thing, he was very interested in education, extremely interested in education. He asked for the Labor and Public Welfare Committee and for the Education subcommittee, was assigned to Government Operations Committee, and asked for the D.C. Committee as well. He was quite clear in his own mind that the thing that you really needed to do was get everybody in school, and that was going to solve the problem. He learned a little bit about that later on, but that was the one thing that he had in mind for sure.

The other thing that I remember quite distinctly

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in this going around to these meetings around the state was that he always asked them if they had yet organized a community action agency under the "war on poverty;" he asked at every stop. Of course, it was only late 1964 so many of them hadn't. He said to everyone, "This is a pile of money that's come along. You ought to be taking advantage of it." Apart from that I don't remember what else was in his message to them at those local meetings, but that was the point he made at every stop. In retrospect, it's incredible how unsophisticated we all were, or at least I count myself as having been.

HACKMAN: Can you remember just some of the almost logistic problems of settling into the Senate and knowing what the hell to do

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the first few days, on your part, but really his, too?

EDELMAN: We were ensconced in Keating's old office, which was clearly going to be temporary, which was in the old Senate Office Building. Adam and I had

blocked out our substantive responsibilities between use; he would handle certain things, I would handle certain things.

The first thing that I was given to handle was the New Haven Railroad. So I went around and saw Senator Pell [Claiborne Pell], who was the big mover on the New Haven Railroad for some reason, saw his legislative assistant and got to know him, and worked out a statement for the Senator to give, and worked it out with the Senator's schedule that he would go to a meeting

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with other Senators about it, and got the statement drafted. Ed Guthman was an enormous help because he looked at it and said, "Now, this thing—you don't say this. That's not the way you do that." Then we got it released to the press, sent over to the Senate gallery.

So that was a learning experience; I learned about the Senate press gallery; I learned that you put this in there and you don't put that in there; I learned about how people call together meetings of Senators in order to dramatize an issue. That was the way it went; you were just thrust into it and you had to learn. I remember going and having lunch with some legislative assistants in some other

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offices—now that I think about it I don't remember which ones they were. I talked to, probably, somebody in Javits' office and some other Democratic staffers just to ask them how did they organize their office—Joe Dolan did the same thing—and how did they handle their mail? What did they say in their form letters in response to people? How did they deal with constituents? I had three or four of those conversations with people that were somewhat enlightening.

Then there started to be a steady stream of people who would show up, "Is the legislative assistant in? I'd like to see him; I'm the lobbyist for such and such," or "I'm from Bath, New York, and I'm a constituent." At the

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beginning you see most of them; some of them were talking about things that I'd never heard about. By the end of the day I would just be groggy. In the middle of a conversation my eyes would just glaze; I would be unable to assimilate what the fellow was saying to me because there was just too much being thrown at me. But you survive. Gradually you come to know what people are talking about, or you fake it. You develop a list of people to call up in agencies to ask about things, and so on.

I remember quite vividly one day. We were still in that office of Keating's, so we couldn't have been in the Senate for more than perhaps six weeks, at that point. My desk was just strewn. I

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always have a disorganized desk anyway, but this was quite unbelievable. The top of the piles of papers was easily a foot off the surface of the desk, and not one bit of wood in sight. He came in at the end of the day; he looked at it and he looked at me, and he said, "Is your mind like that" which I was very chagrined about but came to like later.

Then another time—talking about how the office would be organized—I just happened to be standing there—it was none of my business—just talking to Ed and Joe. He said, "For God sake, don't tell Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] that we're free to buy furniture." He said, "Tell her it's all government issue." Maybe you read that in the *New York Times* article

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about Ethel. I was the one that mentioned that to Susan Sheehan. So those are the kinds of things that happened.

Then you start having roll calls; you learn what it is to go onto the Senate floor; you watch other staff guys on how they operate. Hearings begin starting in the committees that you're on for the year, and you go and you see how those operate. It's going to be the first time that he's going to testify on something, and you draft the testimony. That seems to go alright, and you read the way other people have testified.

He begins giving speeches at various places. Of course, Adam was a much more experienced speechwriter than I because he worked on speeches in the campaign with Milton. So I didn't do very much

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speechwriting in the beginning, but I gradually began doing some of that as well.

I suppose that the things that I worked on most effectively over those first six months or so, were things that drew on experience that I had had. So I felt like I'd come back home; I was on home base when we were working on reapportionment because I understood that. That was based on a Supreme Court decision; in fact I had worked on one of the relevant decisions when I'd been working at the Supreme Court. So that was my kind of thing, my language.

The constitutional amendment on presidential inability was going through there in the first half of 1965; I could see my way through that. It was rather

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complicated and analytical stuff, but it was my kind of thing. So those things perhaps helped me keep my sanity; I knew that there was something at least that I could master and deal with.

Then the Veterans' Hospital fight came along, too, very, very early in there along about February, and that was really quite a baptism. In historical retrospect not important at all, but I learned some things. I remember, it was that Johnson was going to close down

eleven veterans' facilities around the country, probably with total justification. But if you looked at it from the point of view that you were the Senator from the State of New York, and you looked at those anguished cries from those people....

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HACKMAN: Three of them were from New York.

EDELMAN: That's right. Bath was from New York, Castle Point was from New York, and Sunmount. Bath was a domiciliary facility—sort of an old folks home for veterans—and the other two were former tuberculosis hospitals that had been turned into general care hospitals because nobody had tuberculosis anymore. The residents of those communities, which depended totally on those facilities for their livelihood, began to come in with their questioning of the decision. I remember Ed Guthman said to me one day.... After the initial decision, I had said, "Well, what are we going to do about this? Obviously, if they want to do this they've got good reasons for doing it." Then these fellows from the

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state had come in and said the other side of the argument. Ed said to me, "It's your first lesson: Never trust anything a government agency tells you," which he was right about. So Kennedy really got into that.

That's part of my thesis with a little detachment one could see that that was rather a ridiculous fight to be involved in, and yet if you were the Senator from the state you were supposed to do it. He got very involved in it.

HACKMAN: You got no resistance on his part to jump in?

EDELMAN: No, no, no. I went to him and I said, "Look, this is what it is. There's a hearing tomorrow." Of course, in those days I was considerably more diligent

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than perhaps I was later on because I was being tested, I thought. So I came into the hearing the next day with eleven pages of questions for him to ask and with all the documentation. I'd been up all night talking to the people from the places in the state. He was marvelous; he was in his best investigatory form taking on these people from the Veterans Administration, saying, "Now, you said that you had to close this hospital because it is too expensive to modernize it. I have your list of all the modernizations that have taken place since 1949, and I have the statement of the engineer who says that this hospital is as good as the facility built fifteen years ago.

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What do you say to that?" "I don't know, Senator, what to say to that." "You say that you had to close the facility because you don't have a radiologist. The fact is you do have a radiologist. He's there on a part-time basis, and that's all you need isn't it?" "Well, bbl, bbbl," and pinned them to the wall. The basic point of it was, of course, that these were outmoded facilities because of the way they were laid out, because the kind of care that could be given there couldn't be given efficiently, which has nothing to do with fifteen years old. It's just that fifteen years ago you wouldn't have built that kind of facility, even though this is physically equivalent to it in its quality.

So the basic point

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we managed to obscure, and we succeeded after three months of fighting them through hearings. I was a tiger; I would call these Veterans Administration people over to meetings, and we would have these confrontations. I would accuse them of lying and shake my finger at them—the marvelous thing you can do when you don't really have an idea of what the hell it is you're up to. In the end two out of the three facilities were kept open, and the third one the state took over as a school for the mentally retarded. I went up there for the ceremony when they did that, and I was made an honorary citizen of Tupper Lake, New York.

HACKMAN: Was there every any feeling—from what

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you've said I assume there wasn't—that the Johnson Administration was trying to get at Robert Kennedy by closing three in his state, or anything, or that Driver [William J. Driver] had any kind of....

EDELMAN: Driver was a dear, nice man. He was as pleasant as you could be and still be a bureaucrat, because he sure was a bureaucrat. No, you couldn't really even get mad at Driver because he would come in there and look so, sort of, sad when you would get after him. They closed one in Montana. They had really picked on places where it didn't make any sense if they were trying to get after people politically. So I don't think they.... It was too early, really, for them to be getting after us. I don't think they were

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punishing Kennedy, particularly.

So that was the thing that went on for about four months, and we had hearings on it. He went and testified before the Appropriations subcommittee; and he took to the floor and so on. It was marvelous.

HACKMAN: The way it worked out, if you remember, Johnson set up this committee headed by, I guess, Judge Prettyman [E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr.], and they

recommended that some of them not be closed. Where does the idea for the committee come from? Is that Driver and Johnson, or is Robert Kennedy at all involved in making that suggestion?

EDELMAN: I just don't remember. My recollection

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is that it was something that came out of the White House, but it came because.... It was Yarborough [Ralph W. Yarborough]; it was Mansfield [Mike Mansfield]; it was Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen] even, who were complaining. All the political big guns had hopped on this issue, and Johnson just had to retreat. Even though it was a relatively unimportant issue it was kind of fun to see us participate in something from the first, and see other Senators come around and hop on.

It was nice to be able to start out with some things like that because by the time that was over I knew something about the hearings process and I knew something about how an executive branch agency

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behaves, how the bureaucracy behaves. It was a good learning experience.

HACKMAN: Was he very interested, or did you stay very interested then, in that subcommittee, the Veterans' subcommittee.

EDELMAN: No. We were active. He went to the meetings about the Cold War G.I. bill. He always had an interest; he gave a floor speech about that; that was passed.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem in the early days did you have in getting him to go to meetings, either of any of the subcommittees or other kinds of meetings, that you wanted to set up that you thought he should be at?

EDELMAN: Well, he was very in and out always about hearings that you don't have to attend. He was very diligent about—during the first year—going to the hearings

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on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [of 1965], extremely interested in that. He went every day, asked a lot of good questions. Extremely diligent about the Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] urban hearings in 1966 and 1967. So it depended on his interest. He wouldn't go to a hearing that was just some perfunctory hearing about a bill that would give a surplus tent-making facility over to somebody. He wouldn't go to hearings on a lot of stuff

that was more significant than that, too, just because he didn't think it was the best use of his time.

HACKMAN: How would that usually be handled? Would you usually follow it, or are there certain subcommittees where you primarily follow someone else that he has confidence

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in, I mean, whether it be Yarborough on the veterans things....

EDELMAN: Well, it's a little of everything. In other words, the first things that would happen is you'd get these notices in from the committee that says there's going to be a hearing, and Angie [Angela M. Novello] would mark it in the book. He would come in the night before or in the morning, and he would say, "What hearing on such and such? What's that?" Of course, we were supposed to know what it was, and so we would say what it was. He would say, "Well, I don't think I'll go to that." You'd just have to judge for yourself at that point; he would very seldom dispatch one of us. If it was something he wasn't going to go to

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himself, in general it wasn't something he'd dispatch somebody to. But sometimes we would go and cover it, and sometimes we would simply go and pick up the prepared testimony for the day or have a secretary go up and look at that sometimes we wouldn't do anything. It just varied with what we thought the importance of it was.

The next category of committee meeting is the executive session, when there are going to be votes, and you have to have a quorum. That's a little fuzzy in my mind as to whether he was better in the early days than he was later on. Essentially, he was never too bad about that stuff. He liked to be the last Senator for the

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quorum, but then every senator likes to be the last senator for the quorum. The only ones who don't play that game were essentially Wayne Morse and Lister Hill. Wayne Morse would just show up at the time the thing was called for, and he would sit there in his chair reading something. He was very, very impressive and diligent. Kennedy was pretty good about making a quorum if he was in town, and he was pretty good about being in town for executive sessions, unless it was something he really just didn't care about.

HACKMAN: What are the kinds of things, just the Senate routine or the way the Senate does business or whatever, that really turn him off? Are there things that

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stick out in your mind?

EDELMAN: Hearings do turn him off if they're not about a subject that he's really interested in; and they still turn him off if they're a boring witness on that subject, so he might show up and then leave. But he might show up, and like as not it's some bureaucrat testifying, and he just gets exasperated and lays into the guy, or asks the guy some questions that seem pretty sensible. That's one thing he doesn't like.

The second thing he doesn't like is all the wrangling in executive committee about stuff that essentially seems rather straightforward. Just asking a lot of foolish questions, and Senators making points just for the sake of making points.

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This isn't "doesn't like" in a total way; it's an aspect of the thing that he doesn't like, that's all. At the same time he could be participating. If the discussion in the executive committee was something that he thought was important he'd swallow all the petty stuff and he'd wade right in, so it wasn't as though it totally turned him off.

And, of course, on the Senate floor all the posturing, and the fact that you would never insult anybody directly. Not that he would love to go around insulting everybody, but the fact that somebody would knife you while smiling at you and the long-windedness of people. As I remarked on one of the other tapes that comment about Morse when he would deliver those two

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hours of speeches.

But now I've been talking detail; I've been talking trees and not forests. What he didn't like about the Senate is what's been written many times, which is that it was too deliberate of a body. He was used to being able to act, and it simply made him impatient that people dilly-dallied and went through a whole process of hearings and this and that, when it was clear what ought to be done.

The thing that's wrong with what other people have said about that is they say that therefore, blanketly, he didn't like the Senate, or therefore, even worse, he never tried to be a Senator in the sense that one is supposed to be. Well, that part of it's not true. There were many things about the

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Senate that he did enjoy, and he certainly worked very hard at it. He introduced legislation, would fight for amendments in committee, would get his own amendments drafted and go into committee and try for them, try for them on the floor, and really wade into this parliamentary stuff. So the impatience with it didn't prevent him from making an effort.

HACKMAN: As time goes by are there committees or subcommittees that he tries to leave to get new ones?

EDELMAN: He shuffled around within Labor and Public Welfare. I believe he went off Veterans' Affairs at one point, was not on Employment and Manpower, and Poverty at the beginning, which, of course, turned out to be the major subcommittee of his interest, at the end, on that committee.

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He was on Education from the beginning, was on Migratory Labor from the beginning. I don't know if he was ever on Labor—yes, he was on the Labor subcommittee. He may have gone off that when he went on Employment and Manpower, and Poverty, but he was on the Labor subcommittee because that's the one that had the minimum wage before it. So the only switching within that committee is that he clearly went off Veterans' Affairs, and I think he went off the Labor committee at one point.

Now in 1967 he had the chance to go off of Government Operations and go onto Banking and Currency. He considered that rather seriously, and decided not to do it. Number one, even though Government Operations is an

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awful committee, it had the Ribicoff subcommittee on it, which was a terrific vehicle for dramatizing issues. Number two, the one subcommittee that he was interested in on Banking and Currency was Housing, and that was the one that he couldn't get onto. So he would have had to wait probably two years to get onto that, maybe longer.

HACKMAN: Can you remember making efforts on any of the committees to get special subcommittees or new subcommittees set up to do the kind of things that he wanted to do?

EDELMAN: Yes, he was always very reticent about that. We wanted him to get a special subcommittee of Labor and Public Welfare to look into.... Well, at one point, I guess, it was to look into mental retardation,

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maybe. At another point it was to look into the spiraling cost of health care. He never would go to Lister Hill and say to him, "I really would like to do this." He just always felt Lister Hill was Mister Health, and that, it was presumptuous of him.

Then sometimes he would try to use somebody's subcommittee. He used Ribicoff's subcommittee for hearings on LSD and for hearings on the handicapped that got started, and then he lost interest in them because they weren't too good. That worked out okay. Joe Clark

let him use the Poverty subcommittee in early '68 for those hunger hearings on eastern Kentucky.

But what it comes to is: No, he never did go and actually ask anybody

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if they would set up a special subcommittee for him. Of course, it's done all the time. It was a curious side of his personality; I suppose he didn't like to ask for favors, too.

HACKMAN: Let me just ask you one thing, and maybe I'm contradicting you. I don't know whether this was ever sent, but in going through one file of yours I just happened to come across this thing. It's addressed to McClellan [John L. McClellan] on Government Operations, but I don't know whether it's sent. There's no signature on it.

EDELMAN: No, it was not sent. Now tell me what that says because that's important.

HACKMAN: "Calling for a special subcommittee of the Government Operations committee to

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begin hearings next session"—this is October, '65—"in a limited number of fields to try to get an overlap among people working on Education, Transportation, Job Training, Aging to come up with suggestions to streamline federal programs in these areas."

EDELMAN: No, we never did. It's a long letter?

HACKMAN: Yes.

EDELMAN: We never sent that. I was trying to think of that; that's an example of the fact that he just would never, when it came down to it.... I mean, that was a lousy idea in retrospect, because when you get down to it there's no since in having a hearing about overlap, but it was basically that he didn't want to go to John McClellan and ask him.

Something curious happened in his relation

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with John McClellan over the narcotics legislation in June of '65. They'd had a very good relationship up until then, and something very strange happened. He just did not want to ask John McClellan for any favors. So that the only special subcommittee he ever got was the Indian thing, and that's because it dropped in his lap. Fannin [Paul Jones Fannin] had been

pushing for it; they decided they were going to do it; and he was the only Senator on Labor and Public Welfare who wasn't chairman of anything, the only Democrat.

HACKMAN: What's the thing that happens between he and McClellan?

EDELMAN: I don't know. I'd been working on this legislation throughout the spring with a guy named Paul Laskin [Paul L. Laskin], who had been

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the executive director or the staff director, or something, of the President's Commission on Drug Abuse along with Dean Markham [Dean F. Markham], and Dean Markham had recommended him. Kennedy thought it would be terrific if he could get McClellan to cosponsor these bills.

Now, there were a number of things that happened which, in fact, Kennedy didn't let me forget for a long time, which I learned some lessons out of. He told me to work with Javits' people, and I would report from time to time. Now Javits' guy, Steve Kurzman, was impossible. He was a chronic complainer, always accusing me of trying to elbow his guy out of the limelight and all of that. We finally came down to the fact that we would split it into four bills, two of which would be introduced by

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Javits and two by us. Well, I swear to this day that I had told the Senator that, that I told him that, really, more than once. In any event, it came down to sort of the day before we were going to do it—he was getting very itchy—or a few days before, and kept asking about it. I said, “Now, Javits will do two of these bills and you'll do two bills.” He said, “What? But you've done all the work. Aren't they your bills?” I said, “Well, Senator I thought I told you Javits has had bills in this area in the past, and you wanted me to work with him—stammer. It's just impossible to work with him without making this kind of concession.”

Well, he just absolutely blew up. “Well,

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if I'd known that that's what was going to happen I never would have allowed this happen. “This is mine. Didn't you do all the work on it? Aren't they all your ideas?” “Well, yes, to some extent,” and so on and so forth, because we had really drawn up the legislation. Even though Javits had introduced bills in the past these were much more sophisticated than the bills he had introduced.

The reason I say all of that is because Kennedy had independently gone to McClellan, and at least one reason why McClellan got mad at him was that he hadn't told McClellan that Javits was in on the goods, and McClellan hates Javits. So that may be one reason why McClellan in the end didn't cosponsor

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the [narcotics] bills.

Also, McClellan sent him a crime bill at some point that he wanted Kennedy to cosponsor—either sent or gave him—and Kennedy lost it. I really think McClellan was very offended at that. I had to call up, and since had had given it to him personally I had to call him up and ask him if I could have another copy, saying that the Senator had given it to me and I had lost it. But somehow it sounded phoney because I didn't know what the hell bill he was even talking about, and that might have been part of it. But whatever it was—the Senator once said to me that he had a father-son relationship with McClellan; he used that phrase—after that time he just was not friends with John

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McClellan anymore. I asked him once or twice and he never would really say exactly what had happened. It was something to do with either the introduction of the narcotics bills, or that messed-up thing on McClellan's bill, or both.

HACKMAN: How does he come to the whole area of narcotics legislation? Now, I know he says some things in the '64 campaign. Did you write any of those things in the '64 campaign?

EDELMAN: No. Dean Markham had worked on them, and maybe this fellow Paul Laskin as well, and possibly some people who were working on a diction up in New York. He came to it in thinking in his own mind about things that he might do.
He

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had been chairman of the White House Conference on Narcotic and Drug Abuse. Dean Markham was his friend and was out at his house many times a week; so Dean probably had suggested it to him. My recollection is that he just said to me one day that he'd like to do something in the narcotics field to follow up on the White House Conference, because he thought it was a shame that the White House Conference had never been implemented, which I'm sure Dean had said to him. I should call Dean, and we should work something up. Then, at some later point, I guess he said to me that Javits had asked him about it, or something like that, and I should work with Javits on that.

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HACKMAN: Does he look at something like this at all as something that he's made any kind of commitment on in the campaign that he will do? Maybe you can just carry this: Are there campaign commitments? Is there ever a list?

EDELMAN: Adam wrote a—which is vintage Adam—thirty-page memo of all the campaign promises, and what the Senator should do to fulfill them. Adam, really, from the beginning wanted him to go in there with like a White House program—although he didn't say that. Adam had very, very ambitious ideas. To Adam's credit I will say that he had it very well worked out in his mind that Kennedy should work primarily by trying to amend Administration bills that were going through, rather than by introducing

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bills of his own, which was absolutely right. He engaged in quite an articulate analysis of that issue. He did list all these issues, and then what could be done to follow up on the campaign promises.

The one campaign promise that was explicitly followed up on, in the context of the following up on campaign promises, was putting thirteen counties into the Appalachian region thing. The thing was going through, and Adam said to me one afternoon, "Hey. Didn't we make a promise in the campaign about that?" I said, "Yes." Adam made about three phone calls, discovered what the situation was, caught the Senator on his way out the door, and said, "I got this idea. Remember we made this

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promise?" The Senator said, "Fine, go ahead," and that was the origin of the coup. Adam really just sort of did it.

Beyond that it's hard to remember what campaign promises were kept. I suppose that getting directly on to the New Haven Railroad as an issue that was keeping a campaign promise in a way; in a way it was just that it was there and you had to do something about it. The narcotics was not a major issues in the campaign. It was something where he made a proposal to have a press release for a day. Campaign promises—well, to be in favor of repealing 14B, to be in favor of stronger civil rights legislation, but those are all things he would have done anyway.

HACKMAN: Sure, yes. Okay, on the narcotics

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thing is it just going to Markham then, or did Kennedy have....

BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I

HACKMAN: Okay, we're talking about the narcotics thing, and you were just saying he didn't have things clearly in his own mind.

EDELMAN: No, he didn't. He just knew that he wanted to do something about narcotics.

I'm sure, as I say, it was partly because Markham was his friend. It was obvious a worthwhile thing to do on the merits. But I was going to say that I think that was one of the reasons for the communications gap about it.

I would come in and start to explain all these complicated things about civil commitment, just how broad was our bill going to be, were we

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going to have it for all federal crimes that you could be charged with, or just for certain federal crimes? Were we going to limit it to first offenders or would we allow you to get it if you were a repeat offender? There were all these kinds of questions. Then there was a second proposition about what would we do about post-conviction remedies? Under what circumstances could a federal judge sentence somebody to treatment instead of to prison? What sort of program would we have for federal aid, for services and for construction facilities? I would always have kind of a long list of questions, and you could just see that he would sort of turn off in the middle of it because I

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think he just really wasn't that interested in the details of it.

He testified a number of times through the next year, and I could always tell that he didn't really trust me as being an expert.

There was a guy named George Belk [George M. Belk], who was the chief federal agent in New York, and he would always have George Belk come up and see him before the testimony and, so on. Of course, when you got down on it, George Belk was really telling him the wrong stuff because he was giving him a "narco fuzz" viewpoint. It was an issue that I suppose he made a calculation in his own mind that it wasn't worth mastering, beyond knowing enough at the particular time to answer the questions of those

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who were hearing the testimony.

HACKMAN: Did he have any clear ideas in his own mind from his previous government experience, or his participation in the White House thing, of the kind of job that the Treasury side and the Justice side were doing? Any serious mistrust of....

EDELMAN: No, not enough. That was a part of him that was still.... He loved what he had done about organized crime, which I have no objection to, but it all fit into that, that the "narco fuzz" guys were not prosecuting kids for smoking pot. They were the fellows who had helped in a very tough way to bring in some very, very tough and mean organized crime fellows. He was grateful for that and had worked very closely with them on that.

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Maybe I just don't think, at that point in his own mind, he was willing or able to separate the fact that they were good law enforcement officials, and the fact that they had these crazy myths about "marijuana hooks you on heroin," that they were still perpetrating around the country. He just, I think, didn't want to understand that there was that inconsistency, or that failure, in their positions. [Interruption]

He basically understood that narcotic addiction was an illness to be treated rather than something that you should be punished for, that was in his head. It was in his head—the simple propositions—that therefore a man who's arrested for a crime who turns out to be an addict

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ought to be treated, or if he's convicted and it turns out he's an addict he ought to be treated. Those were easy propositions for him.

But when you got into questions, like the answer to the question about the British system, that he sort of had to ask about every time, "Why is the British system bad?" Maybe he had one up on me; maybe he thought it wasn't bad and I kept telling him it as, but I don't think so.

The Kennedys are a very anti-drug family. They just think any of that's unnatural; you're not supposed to do that. So that was question that he'd have trouble with. He didn't know from the methadone system, and the Synanon [Foundation] guys and the Daytop Village; he never paid any

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attention to all of those details. So you always just kind of held your breath that he would get through the question and answer period, and he did.

HACKMAN: How helpful was Markham and the other fellow from the President's...

EDELMAN: Markham was not at all helpful. Markham was a lovely human being, but dumb, just dumb. He was a former football player and he was Kennedy's college roommate, so that's how they were friends Laskin was very helpful.

Laskin was really the guy who did the basic drafting of the legislation. Again, if we count in my own development, the Veterans' Hospital thing as teaching me about the hearing process and about challenging the executive branch on a decision, Laskin was really my savior in terms of being

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able to put together a complicated piece of legislation, which I'd never done before. It really enabled me to do that on other stuff in the future because of having him there the first time. So Laskin was very good.

HACKMAN: This is basically our thing to put together, yet he looks in some cases to George Belk, or whatever his name. Is that unique, or does he frequently do that on other subjects on through? Does he feel needs someone else a lot of the time to balance things?

EDELMAN: As he came to trust us more and more, he would feel that need to call in somebody himself less and less. George Belk had no input into the legislation. We did show the legislation to some people

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in the narco [Narcotics] Bureau, and they were appalled because we were trying to decrease minimum—get rid of minimum sentences. That appalled them, and they called up and they said.... There was some guy there—I can't remember his name—in Washington, who was our great friend. Maybe you have it down there somewhere, or maybe it was in the file.

HACKMAN: One guy's name is—I think he's the head—Giordano [Henry L. Giordano].

EDELMAN: Yes, Giordano is the head after that awful fellow left. But there was a guy who was like the deputy in Washington—Belk was the New York regional agent—who was our great friend, and how I'm sure was one of those people who just

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saw Bob Kennedy going to the dogs over the years, and couldn't understand what had happened to good old prosecutor Kennedy, good old tough guy. So I used to talk to that guy, and would tell Kennedy that I had talked to him, but on the bills themselves he basically took my word for things. It was in preparing for testimony that he would have Belk show up.

Yes, on the New Haven Railroad he would always ask Barrett Prettyman what he thought, or would tell me to call Barrett Prettyman. Barrett Prettyman didn't know anything—he'd worked for a little while in the Justice Department and all that stuff—and he'd say, "Well, I'm glad you called, but I don't know."

So, generally speaking, more

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often the pattern was that he would say who to call on a subject, and in general that would be helpful rather than some kind of checkpoint on us. When Adam was going to do a nuclear

proliferation speech the Senator would say, “Now you should talk to Roswell Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric], Bill Foster [William C. Foster], and Averell Harriman,” or whoever.

HACKMAN: How did the introduction of his narcotics bills tie in with the timing, particularly at the time the Administration was getting ready to offer the Administration bill on that.

EDELMAN: That was why we were in such a hurry; we wanted to beat them. I don’t know.

HACKMAN: He was telling you that, to beat the Administration?

EDELMAN: Oh, no. I was telling him; I was in touch.

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There was a flap, also, that the Justice Department had let us see their bill because, after all, he was just a former Attorney General and all his pals were still in there. They claimed that I had stolen part of their bill, which wasn’t the case. What had happened was that part of their bill and part of our bill were both modeled on part of an old Javits’ bill—part of one of our four bills. So I was telling him that he ought to get the thing in before the Justice Department got theirs in, or he would lost some of his impact.

I don’t know, in retrospect, whether that’s really true, whether you have to beat the Administration in order to get attention for something. Sometimes if the Administration’s thing is already

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in and you say, “I waited around, and theirs came in. It’s lousy, and mine’s better,” you get more attention. But, in any event, yes, we were very much under the gun to beat the Administration.

HACKMAN: Any of the outside groups that are particularly influential on shaping your ideas in this area, and on writing the legislation?

EDELMAN: Not in writing the legislation. I talked at great length with the Synanon people, to Bill Crawford [William Crawford] from Synanon. I don’t think I ever met Chuck Dederich, but Bill Crawford was the New York end of Synanon. He was very nice, and it was just very helpful. Of course, it was helpful to him to know us because every now and

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then they would ask for a letter from the Senator, or something like that. I spoke to Nathan Straus [Nathan Straus, III], who’s Peter Straus’ brother, who’s sort of a lightweight fellow,

but he's with the national council against Narcotics Addiction [National Association for the Prevention of Narcotics Addiction], or something like that. I don't remember who else I'd spoken to; I think I spoke to some doctors and stuff. I never did speak to Dr. Nyswander [Marie Nyswander] or Dr. Dole [Vincent P. Dole], who were the methadone people, although I corresponded with them. I don't remember who else. Then there's this terrible man, Dr. Baird [Richard W. Baird], who runs the Haven Clinic; I guess I probably spoke to him. He's a weirdo.

HACKMAN: He testified, didn't he?

EDELMAN: He testified recently against decreasing marijuana penalties. He's a hard line

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“narco fuzz” guy; I think he's a little bit sick, what he is is a sensationalist. He's the kind of guy that brings glue into Senate hearings and says, “This is what they're doing. They're sniffing this. I found five thousand empty glue bottles in the alley.”

HACKMAN: In April of '65 Senator Kennedy went up and he got involved in hearings on the New York State Senate Commission on Mental Hygiene, I guess.

EDELMAN: Was that April? Was that when it was? Yes, I guess so.

HACKMAN: At least that's when the *Herald Tribune* story is. Now maybe the hearings were a little earlier than that.

EDELMAN: No, no, that would be right. That was our first surfacing on the narcotics

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issue. I was already working on the bills at that point. It's a question how we got into that; I think Fred Ohrenstein [Manfred Ohrenstein] probably invited him—if I remember correctly—who's a state senator of New York.

The procedure on those things generally was—and probably had already shaken down by that time to be—that the letter would come in, that it would go to the one of us who worked on the subject, that we would take the letter in or send it in to him with a note on it, and say, “Would you want to do this?” Now, I can remember, without any difficulty, dozens and dozens of times where the date passed without our ever seeing the letter because of the piles of mail, but sometimes that worked.

I think

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that's how it happened on that occasion; I don't think that Ohrenstein called him. I think I said, "Now I'm working on this stuff. Here's this invitation. Don't you think it would be worthwhile for you to get on the record?" Of course, he went up there and said that the present law wasn't working. Essentially it was a precursor of what he said when he introduced his legislation.

HACKMAN: You can't remember there being any reluctance to take on, or in effect criticize strongly, the program that the State of New York was running?

EDELMAN: No. Sometimes when we got to talking about Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] he would say—a lot of these things depended on his mood of the day—

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sometimes that "old Nelson" wasn't such a bad fellow after all. But you remember he had gotten into the—either just before or just after that—fight with Rockefeller about Willbrook [School for Mental Defectives] and the Rome State School [for Mental Defectives], so he wasn't reluctant to take that on. It would vary; if it were sometime when we were trying to get something out of Rockefeller, then Kennedy would understandably be reluctant. I don't remember what all we said in that June '65 testimony, but I assume that it was critical of what the state was doing in the field of narcotics.

HACKMAN: There was also a big mail-out in April of '65, I believe, asking everyone around the state and a lot of people

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around the country, really, what they thought of Robert Kennedy's testimony. I guess the testimony, or his speech before the New York committee, was sent out to a lot of people. Do you remember that?

EDELMAN: Yes, we sent it out to a lot of law enforcement officials, police chiefs, district attorneys, judges, and so on.

HACKMAN: His idea or yours, or do you remember? Because I think that was that.

EDELMAN: The idea of getting it out was probably his idea, and the specific people that it went to was probably partly his and partly mine. That's just good politics; every senator does that. As I recall—and if you look through my files on it—as I recall we got some

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pretty good reaction to that.

HACKMAN: Yes, it seemed like it.

EDELMAN: People wrote back and said, “You’re on the right track,” and so on. So it wasn’t as though it was totally arbitrary that Kennedy had chosen the narcotics thing. You could flip up some pretty good interest in that, and it was an area where it was known that the Administration was going to make a push for new legislation so it wasn’t idle to make a proposal.

HACKMAN: You said that the family was very conservative on drugs. Does his attitude change at all over time on marijuana or any of the others?

EDELMAN: Don’t know. In some ways it does, just because he was somewhat more into the

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vernacular.

One time Javits wanted to introduce a resolution maybe repealing Tonkin [Gulf Resolution], doing something or other that didn’t make a lot of sense, and he wanted Kennedy to cosponsor it. He sent it back to Adam, wrote on the top, “He must be on pot.” But I don’t think that he knew what effect pot really had on people. There was always rumors that he had turned on, and so on; I doubt that he ever did.

HACKMAN: I have a note here that there was one letter written complaining that to Giordano. I think—if I remember now—there were several that you’d send over, questions for him to answer, and he wouldn’t answer them adequately or he’d evade the issue or something.

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Do you remember Robert Kennedy ever becoming upset, or was this basically you writing the letters for his...

EDELMAN: Basically me.

HACKMAN: Would he always read through things like that, do you think, before he signed them?

EDELMAN: If he signed it, yes, he would have read it, sure, definitely. If it was a letter that was just a form letter his name would be signed to it without his ever seeing it. But if it was a letter to a government official berating him about something, he saw it before it went out.

HACKMAN: Let me go back again to early Senate days. How much help were Edward Kennedy and his staff? Any?

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EDELMAN: As I said in a previous conversation, Edward Kennedy's staff was terrible. Yes, Win Turner [E. Win Turner] was helpful for about a week and then we had caught up—maybe ten days. Beyond that, all there was was Dave Burke [David W. Burke], who came after we did, so we were leading him along. Milt Gwartzman was helpful—Milt had worked on the Hill—Milt was quite helpful.

HACKMAN: I think before we go any further maybe you can put down what you told me over the phone this morning as far as your thesis about what he was really trying to do in '65? Can you spell that out? Then maybe after we go through more of '65 we can come back to it and test it?

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EDELMAN: The thesis is that he was building his base as a Senator from the State of New York, the way a Senator from the State of Wyoming would do with reference to Wyoming, and so on. He was perhaps conscious of his carpet bagging problem and wanted to make it quite clear that he was doing things for New York State. That's certainly part of it. He was not yet possessed of a direction to go in—of national significance. That also was certainly part of it. Even if he was having doubts about the war he wasn't ready to express them, at least not until May, and even that was very brief. He didn't start out with any professed interest in foreign affairs at all, even though

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he'd been so involved in it during President Kennedy's Administration. So, the thesis is with some exceptions 1965 was the year of servicing the state and a year of doing the kind of vast range of piddly stuff that ordinary senators do. He begins to drop off some of that piddly stuff as time goes on and does less of it, and begins to do more fundamental and basic stuff. Certainly that's true as to matters of foreign policy and national security policy. It also becomes true as a matter of domestic policy. He gradually evolves from being willing to put in a bill on narcotics, a bill on preserving the Hudson River, part of the voting rights amendment, an amendment to the housing bill, an

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amendment to the Medicare, and so on and so forth. He evolves into having a very, very real focus on the poor. This develops through 1966, really, and it begins to be a national

representation of the poor as he gets on out and meets Cesar Chavez, and then in '67 goes down to Mississippi and sees for himself, and so on.

There are other things happening at the same time. He's becoming a national figure not just because he's been traveling, but because people are madder and madder at Lyndon Johnson, and they're raising him as the obvious alternative within the Democratic Party. He changes from being a Senator just from New York to being the Senator, really, of all the people, in the course of that.

The '65 stuff is partly conscious, on

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his part, wanting to service the state. That's why we developed a newsletter; that's why we developed a list of things Robert Kennedy has done for New York State that we would send out, and all of that kind of stuff. It was partly that and partly the fact that all of these other things had not yet evolved. He just hadn't found his identity.

HACKMAN: Did he ever have the feeling that he should just go slow the first year in the Senate because that's what people did?

EDELMAN: Yes. He was quite clear that he was going to be slow about standing up to make a major maiden speech. He stood up and spoke on the floor of the Senate in the first month to get the Appalachian

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amendment through. My recollection is that the next time he stood up and spoke on the floor of the Senate wasn't until he gave that little speech on May sixth about the Dominican Republic and Vietnam. I think that's the second time his voice was actually heard on the floor of the Senate. So, yes, he was slow about starting with that, conscious of the fact that people were watching him and that he shouldn't be tagged as unduly brash, all of that.

Traditions have changed a lot just in the last four years, too. Nobody even talks about the freshman Senator tradition anymore, and they still talked about it in 1965. Nobody said that Senator Cook [Marlow W. Cook] or Senator

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Saxbe [William B. Saxbe] ought to keep his mouth shut, or Schweiker [Richard S. Schweiker], and so on.

HACKMAN: Does he talk at all about needing to get legislation passed in his name? Is that a preoccupation at all in the early period, or as time goes by?

EDELMAN: We never talked about it very much, but we did from time to time. I think he was satisfied that the various amendments that he was getting were really

enough of a record—the Kennedy-Javits program on the poverty law, the Puerto Rican amendment, the Appalachian amendment, and so on—but I think, in a sense, that kind of concern got truncated, got cut off by the fact that he decided to run for President. If he hadn't run for President then

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through '68 and '69 we would have heard a lot more of that as the reelection time in '70 approached. We didn't hear very much about that in the early times. I mean, it wasn't that he had to do something because he had to make a record; it was that he had to do something because he wanted to be a useful Senator.

HACKMAN: Do you remember ever any feeling on his part of his staff's that if he would have tried to do something, in terms of a piece of legislation with his name on it, that forces in the Senate would probably have tried to prevent it?

EDELMAN: I'm sure we said that to one another from time to time.

HACKMAN: Can you remember looking back at the end

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of '65 both staff and the Senator, and realizing that there are a lot of things you probably got involved in that were mistakes or that you wasted motion on? Are there many regrets at the end of '65 of what had gone?

EDELMAN: I never discussed it with him. I didn't have any particular regrets. I thought that the Veterans' Hospital fight was, in the national scheme of things, a little silly, but it was good representation of our constituents and they deserved it. The Senator's supposed to be an advocate for his state, and sometimes you be's an advocate even though the merits are the other way; that's for the Congress as a whole to determine, or the executive branch, or somebody else who's the

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judge. No, I didn't have any real hang ups in retrospect. I thought we'd had a pretty good year; I was quite pleased about it.

HACKMAN: Speaking in terms of serving constituents, how well did the New York operation go in that sense? What really was their role supposed to be in terms of keeping constituents happy?

EDELMAN: I never understood the New York office very well. It seemed like what their

role was was to find things for him to do in the state, and run a few projects kind of of their own in his name, like the theatre ticket thing; and they had a breakfast thing for awhile, and so on. I guess it's fair to say that that's enough to keep an office

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busy, those two general categories of things. But they didn't do very much with handling constituents about Washington problems. If a constituent wrote in or called in about a legislative problem he was referred to Washington; if he called in about a problem with the city or the state or something else they tried to handle it, if it was appropriate for the Senator to get into. Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] operated a little bit differently because he was so much more political, which is to say that he had all kinds of little games going to keep the Senator's name in front of the people of upstate New York, but he was even less substantive than the New York office. So in terms of

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servicing constituents in the way that I'm talking about that really fell to us to do.

HACKMAN: Did the Senator ever express any discontent with the way the New York office was going? Ryan doesn't stay that long before he does.

EDELMAN: No, he didn't like Phil Ryan; he just did not like Phil Ryan. I'm not sure whether that's because Phil Ryan was doing a bad job, or whether it was just a chemical thing. It was the kind of thing where he would say to Phil, "Now, do something or other," and Phil would say, "Well, Senator you shouldn't do that." The Senator would say, "Well, never mind. Just do it." Phil would not have the good judgment to

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stop arguing at that point. That would happen time after time; Phil would give him an argument at just the wrong time. [Interruption] It finally got to the point where Phil would walk out of a room and the Senator would make a face at him, which was not very nice. So he left.

He liked Tom Johnston very much, relied on him a great deal, and respected his judgment. Carter Burden came on and did a very good job; I thought an excellent job. Adam was very nasty about Carter Burden at the beginning—"la-di-da" and son on—but I was impressed with Carter's work.

Earl Graves [Earl G. Graves], as I think I said before, I thought was a nothing, but he was

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there for a reason. The Senator dearly loved, Angie Cabrera [Angelina Cabrera] and Schwani with the long last name, Von Heinegg Von Heintschel [Schwanhild H. Von Heinegg]. He loved them very dearly; he just enjoyed being around them—and Jackie [Jacqueline Greenidge] the receptionist, and so on. It was a kind of a one big happy family thing.

HACKMAN: Angie Cabrera, incidentally is on our payroll right now. She's typing for Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings].

EDELMAN: Jerry always felt insecure, but of course the Senator had great affection for Jerry. I think, in general out state operation was not bad at all.

HACKMAN: How did you handle something like when he said, "Do this," and you basically felt, "Well, Senator, you can't do that

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because...." or "You shouldn't do that because...." Do you take it then and handle it the way you...

EDELMAN: Yes. Now, "Do this" to Phil Ryan was like "take my coat to the cleaners," I mean, it wasn't, "Do a major policy thing" that's wrong. I've got to be clear about that. I mean, Phil would literally argue with him about that, "Your coat isn't dirty, Senator. That's the wrong cleaners to take it to."

Essentially, what one would do in those circumstances.... I mean, the Kennedys in general—I've heard this about President Kennedy, and I know it was true of Robert Kennedy—would always tell their press men to call up some newspaper reporter and

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tell him that he was written a lousy article. That would happen time after time, and if you had any sense you just wouldn't do it. By the time it came back and he asked you if you'd done it, he would have cooled off and would have said, "Well, that's alright." I didn't get into that so much. Every now and then he would tell me to call somebody who he thought was trying to screw us, and sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't. You just had to kind of use your own judgment as to whether to let his temper cool a little bit. He never got very angry about that, though.

There were only two or three things that he ever stayed angry at me about. One of them

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was the experience about the narcotics legislation, where he really thought that I simply hadn't been straight with him about what I was up to. A second was—maybe it was with

reference to that May 6 speech—sometime or another he made a statement on the floor about either the Dominican Republic or Vietnam, or something comparable. Ted Knap of the Scripps-Howard Newspaper [Alliance] wrote a story, a big headline in the *New York World-Telegram* [and *Sun*] and elsewhere: “JFK would have done it differently: RFK.” It turned out that what that was based on was that Ted Knap had called me up about this speech, which I hadn’t written—I think

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it was that May sixth ’65 speech—and said, “Is the Senator saying that President Kennedy would have done it differently?” I said something like, “Gee, I don’t know, Ted. If you read that in there then I suppose it’s in there,” I mean, really quite a mealy-mouthed answer. Then he said in the article, “A top aide to the Senator said so-and-so.” The Senator was just livid, and I owned up to it. I said, “I have tell you. I don’t think it’s fair because this is what I said.” So I don’t know if he believed that that’s what I’d actually said or not. He rolled his eyes heavenward, and he said, “How do we know what he would have

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done? He isn’t with us anymore,” and proceeded to kind of bawl me out that I should never take it on myself to do something like that, and so on. I thought he had forgotten about it—he never mentioned it again—but a full year later we had this guy Frank Moore [Frank C. Moore], who was going to do the handicapped hearings. He was talking to him about when Moore should clear things with him and when he shouldn’t, what he could say in the Senator’s name and what he couldn’t. He turned to me—and the context made it very clear where this wasn’t my turn—and he said, “We know about that, don’t we Peter?”

HACKMAN: He remembered.

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EDELMAN: But in general it wasn’t hard to work for him.

HACKMAN: Do you want to talk about the Appalachian amendment?

EDELMAN: I think we probably better quit.

[END OF INTERVIEW #4]

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