

**Charles Bartlett Oral History Interview – JFK #1, 1/6/1965**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Bartlett, Washington correspondent for the *Chattanooga Times* from 1948 to 1962, columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*, and personal friend of John F. Kennedy (JFK), discusses his role in introducing Jacqueline Bouvier to JFK, JFK's relationship with Lyndon Baines Johnson, and JFK's Cabinet appointments, among other issues.

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Charles Bartlett – JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

With

Charles Bartlett

January 6, 1965  
Washington, D.C.

By Fred Holborn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLBORN: I think as we move in on this interview, Charlie, I think probably the easiest is to start in the most general way. Perhaps you can recollect first when was it, what moment that you first were conscious of Jack Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. Was it through a personal meeting or had you known about him before you ever met?

BARTLETT: Well, I hadn't really known him at all or known much about him. The Kennedy clan was rather famous down in Florida. My family lived in this little place called Hobe Sound, thirty miles north of Palm Beach. It was a rather rowdy fame that the clan

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enjoyed at this point. But the children were known generally. But I really didn't meet any of them until after the War, and then I did meet John Kennedy in Palm Beach.

HOLBORN: This was before he was a congressman or after?

BARTLETT: He just had committed himself to run for Congress, and he was about to go up to Boston and begin the campaign. It was the winter of 1956.

HOLBORN: No, '46.

BARTLETT: Excuse me, '46.

HOLBORN: Just before he began the primary against....

BARTLETT: The night I met him we were sitting in a night club called The Patio. And some of the Palm Beach figures would come up and pat him on the back and say, "Jack, I'm so glad you're running for Congress." I remember him saying, "In only a year or so they'll be saying I'm the worst son of a bitch that ever lived." But he was very clear about his decision to go into Congress. He said that he was giving up the newspaper business; that he felt that

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it was slightly frustrating; that you didn't really get much done in the newspaper business; that if you really wanted to accomplish anything you had to become a politician; and that while he had enjoyed his days in the Hearst stable, why he thought that perhaps this wasn't the answer for him. It was a very interesting discussion because I was just at that point going into the newspaper business myself.

HOLBORN: So you think it was not an accidental decision? I mean that, if that opportunity hadn't arisen in 1946 that he still probably would have ended up in politics?

BARTLETT: Well, it seemed to me that if he.... Sometimes you read that he was a reluctant figure being dragooned into politics by his father [Joseph P. Kennedy]. I really didn't get that impression at all. I gathered that it was a wholesome, full-blown wish on his own part.

HOLBORN: At that time did he feel a sense of organization,

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of absorption in this? Did he expect to win...

BARTLETT: He wasn't really--he hadn't faced up to it yet. I don't think he...

HOLBORN: Or did he look at it as sort of a gamble that was worth trying?

BARTLETT: At this point--this was very early winter--he was just gathering his resources, and he was getting ready, talking about it. Then I went to Chattanooga, so I really didn't see him again until I came to Washington in January of 1948, which was the beginning of his second term. I think at that

point Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] had moved down and was keeping house for him, and we had some very pleasant evenings. He was very relaxed as a congressman. I remember him in his office; he took a rather, almost a diffident approach to it. He had that wonderful secretary--was it Mary Gallagher [Mary Barelli Gallagher]?

HOLBORN: Mary Gallagher, yes.

BARTLETT: And Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]. He always had a golf club in the corner of his office, and he'd stand and sort of swing the club and discuss the affairs of the day.

HOLBORN: He always kept that golf club at his office, in the

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Senate, too.

BARTLETT: Oh, did he? In the Senate too? I didn't remember it in the Senate. I guess he used it less when he got into the Senate because he was busier. But in the House he didn't feel busy. You never felt that he was really enjoying himself. He went off every weekend, usually to Florida or Hyannis Port. You didn't feel that he was really seized by the House.

HOLBORN: Do you recall in 1948 and '49, did he have any sense of the course he might follow? Did he ever talk about running for the Senate at that time?

BARTLETT: He really didn't, not to me. He was obviously looking for a situation—and of course later on he started making those frequent trips to Massachusetts. But at this point he seemed to be just waiting for his chance. He didn't really talk much about it. But it was quite clear that he didn't intend to try for seniority in the House of Representatives.

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HOLBORN: What kind of personal relations did you observe that he had with other congressmen?

BARTLETT: Well, it was rather interesting. He took a sort of an observer's view of the House really. I mean I don't think that he ever felt any enormous—at that stage, I don't think that he felt an enormous affinity. He wasn't a member of the, sort of House team. He didn't have that sort of avuncular regard for Sam Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn]. I think that he was sort of like a young man sort of looking at the seniors. And he did it with a good deal of humor and with some very good insight. But he looked at it more or less as an outsider it always seemed to me.

HOLBORN: Well, I can remember I was an undergraduate at Harvard then, I guess, and the first time I ever heard him was at a fairly small group run by a professor. And he gave sort of a clinical description of the House. He took it apart as a....

BARTLETT: Was that the evening that blew into such a storm?

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HOLBORN: That was one year later. I also was at that. But that was as a graduate student, you know.

BARTLETT: Well, I think he didn't really--he just really wasn't seized by it. I remember he told me that one thing he liked about George Smathers [George Armistead Smathers]—he said he liked George Smathers because he really didn't give a damn. I think he found that rather refreshing. I think that all these sort of hustling freshmen--that just wasn't his temperament.

HOLBORN: Did he ever give you the sense of sort of having any kind of political philosophy at the time?

BARTLETT: I think he was sort of testing it out. I think he used to talk about voting more liberally than he talked. I think that he was more interested really in the technique of survival than he was really in the political philosophy. He didn't feel strongly on issues, but as sort of an overall. He certainly never regarded himself in those days, he wouldn't have identified himself as

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a liberal, I don't think.

HOLBORN: Who around him did he seek advice from in those days?

BARTLETT: It looked like from what I could see, it was rather a casual operation. I really am not aware of any great friendships that he made in the House except George Smathers. Do you know of any?

HOLBORN: No. I guess in those days he knew Henry Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] moderately well.

BARTLETT: Yes, yes. There was something to that one too. No, it wasn't a..... He was very much a loner in the House, I would say. Of course, he usually had his lunch in his office; George Thomas would bring it over from Georgetown. As I say, he went away every weekend. I remember he was very amusing

about..... Langdon Marvin was around; he used to joke about having Langdon Marvin in the basement chained to a desk writing bills for him. And Langdon had a lot of aviation bills which he would bring to....

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HOLBORN:            These were the subsidy bills.

BARTLETT:            On the airplane subsidy. Langdon was very much involved with that. And looking back on it, that and there was some business about how you pick your candidates for Annapolis and West Point. But I don't identify him with any great issues at that time. He was on the Labor Committee, but he didn't really talk about it to me very much. He obviously was part of the Taft [Robert Alphonso Taft]-Hartley [Fred Allan Hartley, Jr.] deliberations, but I don't think he was enormously challenged by very much that he found over there.

HOLBORN:            At what point do you think, in his mind, plans began to accelerate? At what time did he first even mention running for the Senate?

BARTLETT:            Well, I think when he moved into the Senate then I...

HOLBORN:            At what point, do you think, was it? Did he decide only on the brink of the campaign in the winter or fall of the previous year, or had he talked about

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the Senate at all a year and a half or two years previous?

BARTLETT:            I think he got to the point where he just decided that he was going to..... As I remember, the way he expressed it to me was that he was either going to run for the Senate or get out of politics. He'd really had the House.

HOLBORN:            Well, there was a slight possibility for governor at one time, too, wasn't there?

BARTLETT:            He never discussed the governor thing with me at all. But when this thing came along, why, he seemed completely ready. And with him it was an uphill effort, but he was ready to risk it.

HOLBORN:            Did you see him much during that campaign?

BARTLETT:            Well, I did. It was sort of an intermittent thing. I went up there a couple of times. I came in once with the [Adlai E. Stevenson] train.

There was a great rhubarb because there was a question of which of the girls would be allowed to go to Pittsfield and meet Adlai's train. And Mr.

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Kennedy selected Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] as the most decorous and restrained of the girls, and Eunice was furious because she had to stay in Boston.

HOLBORN: And did you see him as a possible winner or as a probable winner?

BARTLETT: I remember we arrived and that night fifteen minutes of very good television time had been laid out with Doris Fleeson, who came in on the train. And Mr. Kennedy, I guess, always had a very good relationship with Doris Fleeson, which I don't think was ever quite emulated by his son. So he had arranged for his old friend Doris to interview Jack on television. Doris was quite wound up. And Jack in those days was not an aggressive personality. He had sort of a politeness and a sort of hang-backishness, even on television. And Doris came out, and he asked her about the Stevenson campaign. She talked for six of the fifteen minutes about Stevenson and his campaign and then turned to him and said, "Now, Jack, we

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think we have two pretty good senators from Massachusetts. Why are you running?" And when he'd gotten over that hump, she asked him where he stood on McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]. And I've sort of forgotten his answer. But this was a great program.

HOLBORN: But when you observed the campaign, such as you did, did you see him as a likely, possible winner or as a probable winner, in your own mind?

BARTLETT: It was a funny thing about him. As long as I knew him, you always had a feeling that he never really thought much about whether he was going to win. It was a funny thing. I can remember going up when he was just starting that campaign and taking a trip with him when he was going around the state talking about his travels to the Far East. And he had the pointer and the..... And really, when you think of what emerged only nine years later, it really is fantastic because, I mean, he talked very rapidly, and he was rather shy, and very unemphatic about the

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thing; he was extremely pertinent and extremely bright and extremely capable and everything. But it's a remarkable thing that this very forceful national leader really developed in nine short years from that point. You just had that feeling. He didn't talk much about whether he was going to win or not, you know. He didn't seem gripped by it. He always

seemed to me to have an amazing confidence in his own political races--up to the presidency, of course, which was a sweater. Were you in that campaign? Do you remember that?

HOLBORN: No, I wasn't really in it. No. That was my hardest year of graduate school.

BARTLETT: You just never thought--I thought of that during Bobby's [Robert F. Kennedy] race last year when there was some question, you know, how it was going to come out. I must say with Jack it never occurred to me whether he was going to win or not. You just sort of assumed it.

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HOLBORN: Did he have any feeling about Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge]? Did he have any grudges or was it just something...

BARTLETT: No, I never..... The only complaint I remember his making in that race was something about John Lodge's [John Davis Lodge] wife, the Italian lady [Francesca Braggiotti], came up and made a rather bitter speech in Italian which annoyed him. That was the only complaint that he voiced to me about that campaign. I remember all the excitement. Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]--I used to laugh--Frank Morrissey was all over the picture. I remember Frank telling about how the Italians were going to decorate Henry Cabot Lodge with some kind of a special thing, so they decided they'd better have one for Jack. The man bringing Cabot Lodge's decoration was coming down on the train from Montreal, and they hijacked him off of the train so that Jack would get his decoration first. But he used to sit in that car--I must say, he always had a sort of stoic, sociable quality

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about it. He'd drive all over that damn state. With that back it must have hurt like hell, and he'd sit there with that coat collar up and drive through those cold Massachusetts evenings.

HOLBORN: You think you have a sense of this being well organized? Was it really that organized?

BARTLETT: Well, I think it was. Particularly towards the end you got an enormous sense of the organization. The headquarters was a very lively place. Bobby was all over, and you could hear Bobby in the background saying, "But, now, Dad." And it was very effective, you know. But I wasn't that close, I came in as an itinerant newspaper man, and I'd stay for a day or two and then leave. I took a trip with him down to Fall River. But he didn't seem very sweaty about it. Particularly at the end he didn't seem too gripped by the possibility that he might be defeated.

HOLBORN: Now, did you find him at all changed as a senator from a

congressman?

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BARTLETT: Yes, I did. It was a rather interesting change because one of the things that he used to enjoy in the House days was he used to enjoy kidding about the personalities on the scene, and there used to be a lot of jokes about different personalities from Sam Rayburn down, and even some sort of gossiping about the foibles of some of the senior statesmen in Congress. But I must say that after he got into the Senate, then he seemed to me to be much more totally involved. I mean sort of the attitude of a slightly passive viewer of the scene had completely gone, and he was involved. And I think he immediately stopped--I think at some point along in there he must have decided that it was not constant with his interest to really talk about anybody because I never really heard him say anything critically of anyone again after he got in the Senate. I mean, when he was mad at somebody, he'd express it, but

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he never really just engaged in idle sort of knocks against people after that time. He became a much more engaged figure.

HOLBORN: I know, for example, from the very beginning he seemed to take his relationship to Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] very seriously. I mean he was genuinely deferential, really did work in harness.

BARTLETT: I think that a very deep sense of humility.... I think that his acceptance by the Harvard community meant a lot to him at that point, I think the fact that he had finally made some sort of inroads into the intellectual group; I think that all of these things sort of made him feel more valid in his own judgment. I think that he got much more sense of his own part in the thing. I think he was humbled. Many people when they go from the House to the Senate, as you know, react with an enormously swelled head. You get that very often

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with people. It's always very dismaying when it happens to be a friend. But I think that with Jack Kennedy there was none of that. He never changed, even when he moved into the White House really, in that respect. But he became a much more serious fellow right away.

HOLBORN: He didn't feel any restlessness there at the beginning?

BARTLETT: I don't think so. He really didn't. I think he was very flattered by the Senate. I think that the only unpleasant thing was losing Mary Gallagher when she said she just didn't want to go and be part of a large staff. No, he didn't show any restlessness.

HOLBORN: Well, now, it was the first year also that of course he got married. Whether historical fact or myth, you were credited very often with having been the architect

BARTLETT: That may not be the word, but I think the fact is....

HOLBORN: What is the real story here?

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BARTLETT: The fact is that back in..... I first knew Jackie Bouvier [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]--I used to see her up in Southampton, Easthampton, actually. She used to go up and visit with her father in the summer, and then I knew her down here. She always had these sort of English beaux and I must say they were not up to her. She was an enormously attractive girl. And I don't know why--I guess he'd never met her. She was much younger than I was, but I did conceive the idea of introducing them really very early. It's rather amazing. My brother got married in 1948, and I can really remember at that wedding in Long Island trying to get Jackie Bouvier across this great crowd over to meet John Kennedy. Actually, it was rather funny because I got her about half way across and she got involved in--I introduced her to Gene Tunney who was a friend of my father [Valentine C. Bartlett] who was there--she got involved in a conversation with him. And by the time I got her across, why, he'd left. So

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it didn't work then and it really wasn't until after I was married, it was two years later, in 1950, before we introduced them. But it was always in my mind and I think it was a very good concept.

HOLBORN: You mean you introduced them here in Washington?

BARTLETT: Well, then finally, yes. We introduced them at a dinner in the spring. We had a tiny little house in Georgetown and they both came, and a couple of other people. I remember Jeff and Pat Roche from New York, about six people. Jackie was, I guess, leaving for Europe very shortly, and after the dinner, why, I walked her out to the car, and Jack Kennedy came sort of tailing after, and he was muttering shyly about, "Shall we go someplace and have a drink?" And Jackie at that stage noticed in the back seat that some man had--a young friend, had been walking along the street and he'd gotten in her car, and crawled into the back seat and was

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waiting there. So she was forced to tell the Senator that she couldn't join him for a drink.

HOLBORN: So at what point do you think they really decided to get married?

BARTLETT: Well, this was an awkward time actually because, as I said, she was going to Europe and he was just getting involved in the campaign. He really wasn't a Senator then, that's right, he was just getting involved in his campaign. And he was really absent from Washington for most of the next year and she was absent for part of it, so there really wasn't much hope. The credit for the next phase really belongs to Martha [Josephine Martha Buck Bartlett] because Jackie was engaged to a fellow whom we didn't think much of. He was a nice fellow, but he didn't seem to be worthy of her hand. So Martha urged Jackie to invite--she needed an extra man for some party she was having I guess her fiancé couldn't come down for this party, she needed an extra man--so Martha urged

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her to invite the Senator-elect, which she did. So I think it was fortunate that Martha applied that pressure. This was the beginning of really the serious courtship which went on to the priest. This was in December when finally they, yes, in December he came down and I guess from that point on, the next thing her engagement was broken some time during the winter. And by the spring we were happy to feel that this thing was pretty well moving along. And of course they got married in September.

HOLBORN: And then you were an usher in the wedding?

BARTLETT: Yes, a very famous wedding, front page of the *New York Times*.

HOLBORN: It is interesting that among the ushers only one of them was really a political friendship.

BARTLETT: Yes, which was...

HOLBORN: George Smathers.

BARTLETT: George Smathers, yes. It was a curious group. I must say that I think the President's circle

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of friends, it's really an amazing story in itself when you think of the variety of the personalities and the fact that very few of them really had much in common with each other. It was really a reflection of the fact that he was a many faceted man. The friends why, you know, only four or five of them were close friends of mine. They've become friends over the years, but there was a very diverse....

HOLBORN: And fairly compartmentalized, though.

BARTLETT: And he kept them pretty well compartmentalized. There was very little sort of cross.... Yes, that's right. That's right.

HOLBORN: And he lost relatively few friends considering he was a politician.

BARTLETT: Yes, I don't think he--I really don't know of any friend that he had that I considered a close friend who really was his friend that... I mean it was a constant thing. It was an unusual relationship. A friend's relationship

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with John Kennedy was an unusual thing, particularly in the years when he was moving around so much as a congressman. You didn't see that much of him. It wasn't as if--he'd be gone for long periods. He wasn't a cozy friend in the sense that he wasn't somebody that you'd sort of slop around with on Sunday. It was always a sort of a--you know, you'd arrange to take a walk, you'd arrange to do something. You'd go to his house for dinner. It was always something that had been laid down, you know. He divided his time in his own way.

HOLBORN: He never really broke with people in the way most politicians do.

BARTLETT: Yes, he didn't break with them. He never even really--I mean I think later in the years when he became President there were times when he would get annoyed at me, I felt, for some comment that I was making about his operation. But I must say that he never really, or at least he rarely showed it. Sometimes he would,

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once or twice he did. But he rarely showed it; he kept his reactions pretty well to himself. The only reaction that he would inevitably show to a friend was if a friend was really boring him.

HOLBORN: That's boredom. Boredom was the worst sin.

BARTLETT: Yes, that was the one thing that he would not take much of.

HOLBORN: Was he still in those years a practical joker at all?

BARTLETT: No, I didn't see much of practical jokes, but a wonderful sense of humor. And I must say that when he and Eunice had that house in Georgetown, we really had some very funny evenings. Eunice had sort of her own varied assortment of friends, but there were really some....

HOLBORN: Did you see him at all when he was in Florida while he was recovering from his operation and then in the...

BARTLETT: Well, after he had the operation, I saw him up

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in New York. And then I saw a lot of him when he came down and was recuperating at the Auchincloss' house here, and when he was writing his book. And it made me a very vehement figure when the charge was later made that he had not written this book because I can remember him lying in that room. And I used to go up there, and that board on his.... And writing almost upside down. It seemed to me that was one of the weirdest charges that's been made.

HOLBORN: As you recall, how did he come to the decision to write this book?

BARTLETT: Well I think he was very impressed by the.... As you remember, just that spring it looked like he was going to have to vote on the McCarthy thing and he did have two speeches ready, I remember. I guess you were there then.

HOLBORN: No. I hadn't come yet.

BARTLETT: In other words, he had to wrestle with himself. He never committed himself to me as to how he would have

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voted. I always suspected that he would have voted to censure Joe McCarthy, but he certainly was pleased I think that he didn't have to take that burden. I always thought that the criticism that was leveled against him for being happy that he didn't have to take a vote which would cost him a lot of skin in Massachusetts was rather ludicrous. And I think at this point he was impressed by the fact that there are moments in a senator's life, and I suppose as he lay there.... I mean his mind was always pertinent. I think this was one of his great qualities was never irrelevant. And I think that the whole concept of what were the really gutty decisions that have been made by men with seats in the Senate sort of fascinated him. So when he had this time, I suppose it was natural that he would turn that way.

HOLBORN: I would think that illustrates, too, that he had a completely different sense of the Senate as

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an institution as opposed to the House. In the Senate he had a feeling of an institutional continuity, of being a part of something.

BARTLETT: That's what he expected, and the Senate impressed him obviously....

HOLBORN: I think it was also one of the things with Harvard in his case. It had some institutional meaning to him.

BARTLETT: Yes, that's right. Deeply. When he lost that race, I think he—that was one election that he did lose, that first election to the...

HOLBORN: Board election, yes.

BARTLETT: Overseers. I mean I had the feeling at the time that this had...

HOLBORN: I know, think it was a real blow. It was just after he had come back in business after the....

BARTLETT: Yes. I think he was very sorry over that and very regretful and very proud when he finally did get on. I think he always enjoyed his role at Harvard. No, that's right.

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HOLBORN: So far as you could observe it, what were his relations or the influence of his father after he was a senator?

BARTLETT: Well, of course he was such an independent fellow that I think anybody that ever tried to claim that anybody dominated him would have a hard time proving it. He was extremely independent and really a fairly elusive fellow in that I don't think that he ever really spent that much time with any individual over a long period. As you say his relations were compartmentalized. But I was never aware really, particularly after he got into the Senate.... He was really on his own course. I remember the first time he went on "Meet the Press." It was rather exciting. He was in the House. And I remember on the Sunday before in the afternoon we sat down and had sort of a skull session, passing the questions which might come up. And at this point, his thoughts were clearly his own. Any

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similarities to his father's came to the fact that he did have a very practical mind, too, and then he had that same quality of judgment that distinguishes his father.

HOLBORN: Now, to take the first half of the Senate. We'll finish up with the first half of the Senate period then.... Did he talk to you much about the

decision to run for the vice presidency?

BARTLETT: Well, we talked about it. He told me that Adlai Stevenson had come down to Hyannis Port at that time and that Adlai was sort of holding out a little bit. He was obviously exhilarated by it. And I suggested that Adlai might want him just because he'd want some dough from his old man. I remember that he was aware of that possibility. I think that he was also aware that it was probably not a very rewarding role in 1956. And I can remember in Chicago I don't think that.... The way Stevenson laid that challenge on the floor I think was what really

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challenged him. I think at that point he decided that this was going to move. And of course everybody was all around ready to move. Sarge [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.] was there. I remember the whole family was milling around ready to go. It was like a competition. As soon as the competition arose, why, then he lost his reluctance he really went for it. I was amazed that he seemed to be extremely disappointed afterwards. I was really amazed because I hadn't been that aware before that he really wanted it that much.

HOLBORN: Did he see pretty quickly how he could use this defeat to his advantage? Do you think he sensed that fairly quickly?

BARTLETT: I think that when those tapes came in and the impact he made became apparent, he realized he had made a breakthrough. But I should recall that it was rather amusing that night. We walked back to his hotel room. I guess I ran into him coming out of the stadium and came

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back with him from the stadium after Stevenson had thrown down the challenge. And the machinery was beginning to accelerate and he was obviously quite excited. I said, "Look, there's Carmine DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio]. You ought to go and see what you can do about him, he might be able to help you." I wish I had the movies of this scene because it's rather ironic as history worked out because he went up--this rather slight figure and DeSapio's a rather big fellow--and the reporters were all sort of around DeSapio, and they completely ignored Kennedy. But he went up and shyly said, "Excuse me, Mr. DeSapio, but my name is John Kennedy from Massachusetts, and I wondered if I could have a few words with you?" That was the beginning. As I remember, he got a pretty good chunk of the New York vote.

HOLBORN: Yes. He got most of it.

BARTLETT: Yes, he got most of it. But that was the beginning.

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Then I rode out the next day with Jackie to the amphitheater. She was, of course, exhausted because she'd been up all night, which turned out to have been a mistake--the loss of the baby. But it was never quite clear to me why he felt so badly that he lost the nomination. I never really understood that. And then he went abroad, and I didn't see him for awhile.

HOLBORN: But you did have a real sense of letdown? That he felt....

BARTLETT: I did after that thing, yes. I did, yes. I think it was just excitement, really, more than anything.

HOLBORN: I was out of the country then, but I met Teddy [Edward Moore Kennedy] about three weeks before the Convention. He called once. He seemed to be looking at it again rather clinically, the pros and the cons. Really, he wasn't emotionally very much involved in it, except somewhat surprised by the amount of interest that it had stirred up. He had gotten on the cover of *Newsweek*, I believe.

BARTLETT: You mean after the thing?

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HOLBORN: No, just before.

BARTLETT: Oh, just before, yes. I suppose as he said later, you know these fellows all.... And then there was some question about whether George Romney [George W. Romney] would run for the presidency in 1964. He was always cited as inexperienced. This thing seizes you at some point. You get....

HOLBORN: To jump in time, do you think, however, that he would have held adamantly to this view that had he lost the nomination in 1960, not run for vice president?

BARTLETT: In 1960?

HOLBORN: Yes. Would he have refused the vice presidency or been able to turn it down?

BARTLETT: Of course that makes it a good question because you don't know. My impression certainly is that he wouldn't, wasn't yours? I would have bet heavily that he wouldn't. But as you say, you don't know. No, I think by 1960--I think he felt he'd gone out far enough so that he wasn't going to do that number two thing, don't you?

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HOLBORN: Yet, he was able to get Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. That's funny. I mean he was able to convince himself that he could get Johnson.

BARTLETT: Yes. Of course my version of that is slightly different than the historic version. Do you want to get into that now?

HOLBORN: Well, no, we better.... Now, subsequent to the election in 1956, in which he was very active as an itinerant speaker, did he immediately talk to you about possibilities in 1960? Was he of mixed mind or did this happen almost immediately?

BARTLETT: No, I think he was excited by it. The he came back and, as you say, got a lot of recognition. And I remember the Convention in Chicago. I don't think anybody failed to recognize that John Kennedy had emerged as a figure at this point. And then I think that his motor was racing, I would say, in 1957. It was particularly evident to me because I was so much against it. I don't

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know how many of us there were, but I was very much opposed to his running for the thing in 1960. I said very often, and it became quite a bone between us, that I thought if he waited eight years that it would be wiser. His position always was, "Well who knows what's going to be there in eight years? And the fact is there is nothing there in 1960. This is really the time." But I must say that he did say that he would not make any final decision until after his Senate race.... But I don't think there was every really any question in his mind through 1957 that he was going to run for the presidency.

HOLBORN: Yes. I came to work for him in 1957, and certainly his motor was racing quite hard then. It was the summer when he went down to Georgia and Arkansas and all over. But then he kept saying, "We have to wait until '58." And then the first week that Congress came back in '59, we went down

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and had one of his oyster stews at the railroad station. And he wiped his brow and he said, "The things that might have happened didn't happen. There wasn't a new governor elected (he thought it might be Dilworth [Richardson Dilworth]), and Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] wasn't elected."

BARTLETT: Oh, that's right. He always claimed that if Dilworth could have been elected governor in 1958, that he could have been the Democratic

nominee and probably the President. He based it on the fact that Dilworth was an extremely good looking fellow with a good personality who had the aristocratic background and a large state. Yes, he regarded Dilworth as a strong prospect.... But I used to try to frighten him off all the way through 1959. I'd tell him that Frank Pace was going to be the nominee. I must say that until about December of '59, I was very much opposed.

HOLBORN: What were your grounds?

BARTLETT: Well, it's just that I thought he was too damned

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young. I must say the fact that he seemed to be the youngest man that ever ran for president along with being the second Catholic was just taking on too much of a handicap, he'd end up being another young man who didn't make it. So I was very dubious. Maybe I was right, as it turns out. He argued that 1964 was no good because he would be up for re-election.

HOLBORN: Yes, his term would have been up this year, '64.

BARTLETT: '64 wasn't a good year. '68 was the one that I was talking about.

HOLBORN: Now that of course, was, one of these accidents of timing that he was able to get re-elected in '58 and not have to face....

BARTLETT: At the same time, yes. He didn't pull back from it, really, did he, those last three years before the race.

HOLBORN: No, and even in the campaign, even in the very last weeks of the campaign of '58 in Massachusetts, he was still taking a couple of days off and going to Iowa

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and to New York, New Jersey.

BARTLETT: I don't think anybody realizes really how much of a job that was--I mean, those weeks that he put in, and that travel was fantastic, and going into these towns where he really didn't know many people and there was no great Kennedy organization. He was traveling most of the time alone or with Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. You probably traveled with him some. It wasn't very lavish. It really wasn't until much later that his father got the *Caroline*. But he traveled a long road. This was, of course, part of his strength.

HOLBORN: The *Caroline* probably really deserves one of the medals for that campaign because it gave him a flexibility which....

BARTLETT: Oh, he loved it. He made no bones about it. He used to say to me, "I could never see anybody running for the presidency without an airplane." I told him about poor Estes Kefauver taking the night coach from Boston to Minnesota when those two primaries

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were going on simultaneously, and he said, "Gosh, I can't see how any man would run for president, if he could get any money at all together, and not have a private plane. To me it's the most important thing in the world." And even then it was no joy. I remember spending weekends traveling with him in that plane and the vibrations when you got through--I was tired for days after it.

HOLBORN: It was a pretty noisy plane really.

BARTLETT: Yes. I think that the human body is tired more by that vibration than you realize. But he never complained, I'll say that. He was very even dispositioned. He'd take those naps, as you say, eat those stews and cream of tomato soup. He was completely intent upon his pursuit of those delegates.

HOLBORN: At what point, in your own mind, did you think that he probably had the nomination?

BARTLETT: Well, I remember he'd said to me.... I said I was going to write a story about the thing for the end of

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year 1959. He said, "Why don't you have some guts and predict that I will be nominated?" I thought about that for a long time and didn't quite have enough guts to predict flatly that he would be nominated. But I did predict that he was the most likely to be nominated. And at that point, I must say, having traveled with him through Illinois and having observed the way the people were reacting to him.... There was a long period in which I didn't go out because I, as I say, I'd been rather opposed to the whole project. But when I did go out in November of 1959 and discovered the way he was going over, and the way that his personality—I mean the way his speaking style had improved. I'd seen him make those tub-thumpers to the crowds in Boston, and I'd seen him, of course, make those rather fast Senate speeches. But he really had developed style as a political campaigner by this point. I mean to me one of the remarkable things through this

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whole period, the very miraculous thing, is not the fact that Jack Kennedy went from the Congress to the White House in those years, but it was this tremendous development of a human being, the way his whole being responded to the challenge. When he had to become a good speaker, he became it. I mean he wasn't a great politician. I can remember a mutual friend of his and mine who was also a senator, complaining to Martha, I think, one night about how diffident Jack was and that he didn't exert himself enough as a politician to really be good. But all these strengths developed because he wanted this thing, and he went after it.

I can remember that December.... He had an old friend, Nancy Coleman, whose name was Tenney and her father, they lived next door to the Kennedys in Hyannis. They had a Kennedy Ball, sort of a charity thing up in New York--I think it was in mid-December. And we went up. I was dancing with Nancy, who is an old friend. And she said hello--we stopped; we saw Jack wasn't dancing--and she sort of

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tickled him. She said, "Now, Jack, you don't want to be president." And he looked at her rather coldly and said, "Nancy. I not only want to be, but I am going to be." And he meant it. This sort of evoked an amazing quality, really. What the situation needed, he summoned.

HOLBORN: Did he talk to you at all about the handling of the religious issue in those early days at all?

BARTLETT: Yes. And then there was the book, and of course all the things you fellows were doing, those studies of Catholics. The study was in 1956.

HOLBORN That started in '56 already.

BARTLETT: Then the study was adapted to new circumstances. There was no obstacle that seemed to really preoccupy him. Didn't you have the feeling he was sort of suddenly just going after something, and the religious problem was part of it. And there were all kinds of problems, but he just didn't....

HOLBORN: No, I think the religious problem always worried people around him more than it worried himself.

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BARTLETT: Yes. It didn't seem to be a real obsession with him.

HOLBORN: The only time I saw him really excited about that was when the birth control issue first came up with Reston [James B. Reston], who had a big column and sort of challenged him.

BARTLETT: Yes. The birth control thing sort of threw him off a little bit because the common sense of it appealed to him so much. That's right. I was

here one night when Cord Meyer [Cord Meyer, Jr.] brought it up as a problem that he would have to face as a candidate. This was I guess sometime in 1959. And he acknowledged it.... But it was obviously something that he didn't have an answer to.

HOLBORN: That and I think the McCarthy issue since it involved his family and it seemed a great obligation.

BARTLETT: The McCarthy issue wasn't very alive in 1959.

HOLBORN: No, this was the early part of the decade. In the sixties it stopped.

BARTLETT: No, no. I don't think he ever was genuinely sheepish about the McCarthy thing. I think he just.... There was some business about Furcolo [John Foster Furcolo] in that 1954 thing. What was that about the thing

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they were objecting to? Did he get mad at Furcolo? Furcolo kept him waiting or something.

HOLBORN: Yes. It was before he had that operation and he was going in the hospital.

BARTLETT: That didn't involve the McCarthy thing.

HOLBORN: As a matter of fact he supported Saltonstall then. No, that didn't involve McCarthy.

BARTLETT: He supported Saltonstall? Yes.

HOLBORN: Well, he didn't come out openly for him, but he failed to support Furcolo, as a result Saltonstall was the beneficiary.

BARTLETT: Actually, I would say that my impression was that of all those politicians in his own party in Massachusetts that he never really took any of them too seriously, did he? I'd say that he had a regard for Salty, but most of them he really didn't....

HOLBORN: He liked several of the Republicans without really.... I mean he got along quite well with Herter [Christian A. Herter] and

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Saltonstall and a couple of others.

BARTLETT: And George Lodge [George Cabot Lodge], of course, was a friend, somewhat.

HOLBORN: Since you've already raised it by allusion before....

BARTLETT: Another thing, I think would be interesting before we get.... I was with him on one rather significant thing which was really--well, perhaps there are two rather interesting things. I remember West Virginia. I remember one rather illuminating story going out to, I think, one of his first trips to Wisconsin for that primary. And I went over there. I was going to fly out with him. The three of us had dinner. I left Martha at home and went over there to have dinner. We were going to go out to the plane from his house. We had a very pleasant dinner. Afterwards it was time to go, and he said, "Shall I wear this blue overcoat (the normal one that he wore) or shall I wear this?" And he held up a sort of brown herringbone, a sporty looking thing. I said "Why don't you wear that herringbone? It looks more like

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Wisconsin." And he said, "Are you trying to change my personality?" I remember trying to get him to wear a hat. It was as cold as the devil up in Wisconsin. I got him one of those fur hats with the flaps on it. I tried to get him to wear that, and he wouldn't. He made no adjustment to the local scene.

HOLBORN: Never in dress at all, never. He had a brief flirtation with a vest when he became president.

BARTLETT: But he really didn't change, I agree. But then West Virginia, of course, to me was a very.... That really was a marvelously dramatic thing. I remember flying with him in the middle of that thing when they had.... And those polls, Lou Harris' [Louis Harris] polls were running so much against him. I still have some notes: his voice was gone, and he could only write those notes. And I have some wonderful notes that he wrote on that plane. I remember one, "I'd give my right testicle to win this one."

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I think that was a campaign that took it all. I mean that took all the qualities that he had and all the fight and everything else. It was a very dramatic thing.

HOLBORN: You brought this up by way of allusion since you do have a personal and perhaps a unique interpretation of his decision on the vice presidency. Why don't you tell a little about that? Any discussions he may have had with you about the vice presidency anytime during that year.

BARTLETT: Well, not for him. But it was very clear to me from my dealings with

the rest of your camp as a newspaperman in the convention period that Stu Symington [W. Stuart Symington] was the choice and that that was it. I even had sent a story to Chattanooga saying that Stu Symington would be the running mate if John Kennedy were nominated. My experience with the thing--I didn't really discuss it with him during that period before his nomination, but I can remember

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I went out with Bobby that night Johnson was picked to the house in Beverly Hills that Mr. Kennedy had rented. And it was quite clear then that this day had not been glorious for him, that he was rather beaten down by it. And just in discussing the whole thing that night and discussing it subsequently, he said, "I hear your editor is mad because you thought that Stu Symington was going to be the nominee." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, you can tell him that I did, too." And I remember one other time he said, "I didn't offer the vice presidency to Lyndon." He said, "I really just held it out to here."

The picture I derived from that evening was that they told him this was a gesture that he had to make and that he went down and made the gesture, thinking he'd get it over with early in the morning. As I understand, Torby Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald] put in the telephone call and called Johnson. And then Jack was going to go

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down and make the offer and then go on about his business. And then Lyndon said yes. And Jack at that point, of course, was completely hooked. He had to go on and really urge it. Of course he got more and more involved. And then he went upstairs. And Bobby came down with the unpleasant job of trying to get Lyndon off the hook. And that's where the rough stuff started. And that's the picture that I have.

HOLBORN: Your feeling is that the famous encounter between Rayburn and Bobby, that Bobby really was the candidate's envoy.

BARTLETT: My feeling is that Bobby said that he would not have done that on his own. I think Bobby was completely--I don't think Bobby had any strong feeling about Stu Symington. I think just that was the way it was in their mutual mind. And I remember that night we were out there, Bobby in the car communicating with Hy Raskin [Hyman B. Raskin], and Jack was reading the paper, sort of stretched out on

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the tonneau of this car that we had arrived in. And Mr. Kennedy was standing in the doorway of this stucco mansion with his smoking jacket on and slippers. And the whole scene was rather downcast, considering this was the day after a great Kennedy triumph. And I

remember old Mr. Kennedy saying, “Don’t worry, Jack, in two weeks, they’ll be saying it’s the smartest thing you ever did.” These were rather prophetic words, actually.

HOLBORN: But, if your story is correct, I think one of the reasons perhaps why people are misled is because he did adjust himself to this decision or happening very quickly. And coming back from Los Angeles to Boston he was already telling newsmen, “Look what states I might be able to carry.”

BARTLETT: I think he made the adjustment very quickly and I think that he never discussed it. He used to discuss it occasionally with me, but I have since understood that there were very few people that really were involved in that thing and perhaps that....

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Anyhow, it’s worked out so well that there’s no reason to regret it.

HOLBORN: How would you...

BARTLETT: The feeling, I think, that permeated that household this night was that Lyndon on this ticket did not represent the sort of message that John Kennedy wanted to bring to America. I mean what he was offering was youth and a sort of idealism, and this sort battle-scarred figure from Texas who was the great manipulator really didn’t fit the picture. I think this was the rough part. And I don’t think he was looking at it as a liberal who was upset about the natural gas vote or anything like that. I think it was just that he’d wanted to bring something a little bit more shiny faced onto the ticket.

HOLBORN: It’s part of the common currency now, there are frequent quotations, real or contrived, that Kennedy is supposed to have told many people that

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were he not to be candidate, Johnson would be the next best candidate. Do you think this was really so? Did he have a conviction about this?

BARTLETT: I would say that it is possible that he might have said that to Joe Alsop [Joseph Alsop] whom he knew was very close to Johnson. I mean that he would say that. He did not ever say that to me.

HOLBORN: What sense did you get about that relationship in the late Senate period and in the period of the campaign?

BARTLETT: Well, my impression in the Senate days was that he was rather pleased

to find that he had a rather enjoyable personal currency with Johnson. He used to tell me stories of their conversations. And he regarded the majority leader as a rather fascinating figure. He was fascinated by all the manipulations. He was rather intrigued by Bobby Baker [Robert G. Baker] bustling around. It was an intriguing thing in those days. I never had any sense of enormous regard for Lyndon Johnson.

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I think all of those sort of southern patriarchs, I think they interested him enormously.

I remember when Harry Byrd [Harry F. Byrd] gave him his little room off the Senate floor after his back operation in 1953--It was a beautiful room--I remember he was rather pleased with it, and he could go there and rest when his back got tired. And I remember him saying that Byrd used to come up to him every few days and say, "Is your back feeling better?" I think he had a sense that this was a rather cold-blooded world, and there wasn't much sentiment in it. And I think that it always interested him. Of course, it was rather useful to him to be part of this leadership. I don't think that he ever thought of Lyndon as a dangerous rival.... It became clear after Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had been dropped that Lyndon was the obstacle. But I don't think he was ever awed by Lyndon as an obstacle because I think

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he recognized the difference between his own relationship with these people that he'd been visiting around the country--the actual delegates--and Lyndon's. He never seemed to me really terrified of Lyndon's competition. He recognized him as someone who had to be dealt with and I think his attitude was very well expressed in that public encounter they had. He was relaxed and rather humorous and Lyndon was.... And of course the Johnson people did get awfully mean at the end. Bobby Baker was in a very emotional state in Los Angeles. India Edwards was going around saying rather mean things about Jack's health and the fact that he had--I've forgotten what she accused him of having. And then there was some business about his father. They used everything. It was a very mean thing. I think that was one reason why it really never occurred to him that Lyndon would accept the thing.

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But I am convinced that when he went down there, he didn't think that there was a reason in the world to believe that Lyndon would accept the thing. So, therefore, since he never really seriously felt that he would accept it, I suppose it's unfair to say whether he really would have wanted him if he thought he had accepted it. He never thought of it in that light, so we don't know if he'd just been sitting down cold-bloodedly working it out in his mind two days before, he would have come up with Lyndon. But I mean I think his own conviction was that Lyndon would never take the vice presidency.

HOLBORN: But there again, despite this rather rough campaign, at least for the last two or three weeks before the Convention, they never really reached

the point of a break. The repair job was not...

BARTLETT: The repair job was very quick. But I think there was quite a strain in there at the end there.

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It had gotten extremely mean at the end, and the whole business about the debate—it wasn't a break because politicians don't break. I'm sure that the late President used to say to you that there are no lasting friendships in politics; there are temporary alliances and temporary hostilities, and the friend yesterday is the enemy today and vice versa. I think this was his philosophy in politics. I never heard him really harbor any grievances, he didn't really nurse his grievances.

HOLBORN: But he was really remarkably lucky in this business not only did he have a repair job to do with Johnson but he then appointed practically every Stevensonian to a job except perhaps Stevenson himself...

BARTLETT: Well, that was rather interesting. That was a point that might be contributed to the thing because I think that coming out of Chicago in early June—this was after he'd won in West Virginia,

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and he was making a sweep through the country--he said, "I never would make Adlai Stevenson really, I don't think I ever would make, if I should become President of the United States, I don't think I'd ever make Adlai Stevenson my Secretary of State because he's handled me so badly in this thing." He said, "I went to him and I said 'Now, Governor, I'd like very much to have you support me. I understood that you would support me after Hubert Humphrey was out, and now I need your support. I'd like very much to have it.'" And he said that Adlai told him that he just couldn't do it because Johnson was running and if he were elected, Adlai said, "If you are elected, you will need somebody to be a liaison between you and Johnson because he's very mad at you, and, therefore, this would be the role that I would take. So, therefore, I think it's important for me to stay in a position of neutrality at this point."

Well, as

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John Kennedy said to me, "I'm turned down ten times a day by people around the country. People do it, and it doesn't really bother me. But this bothered me because it was such a silly idea to think of Adlai Stevenson as a liaison between me and Johnson." And he said, "If he couldn't come up with a better one than that he certainly wouldn't make a very good Secretary of State."

HOLBORN: This was about a month before the Convention?

BARTLETT: This was in early June, yes.

HOLBORN: And they met in Chicago on a stopover?

BARTLETT: There were quite a few appointments that were decided on that trip. I remember we went up to.... Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams] was turning his delegation over. I remember as we left there, John Kennedy was very upset by the sort of rough manner in which the whole thing had been handled. Soapy did a very poor job. Doris Fleeson--there was quite a large press group there. And it was a rather significant thing. Soapy showed very little poise, and I remember that

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Jack Kennedy was very impressed with the fact that here's somebody who had been governor for six terms and he really hadn't learned better how to deal with the press.

HOLBORN: Do you think he thought much during the campaign about how he would put a government together? Did this weigh on him much then?

BARTLETT: I think he was really.... That was I think one of his great qualities, that he had that sense of the job--what is the challenge? He was counting delegates as long as it was necessary to count delegates. He did that superbly, and he followed the details. And then when it was necessary to think in terms of the election, why, he took those steps. I remember right after we all got back here for that weird August session, I remember he came out here for dinner with John Cooper. And at this point he was thinking very practical. I think this was one of his great, great qualities was that he

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had an enormous sense of priorities. He kept his thinking from ever getting very fuzzy or beside the point. I mean he really always had that, even in his youth. I mean anything really that was not pertinent bored him.

HOLBORN: In contrast to '52 did you ever during this campaign in 1960, this close, did you ever think about his winning or his losing?

BARTLETT: No, I really didn't. I don't know why. I remember the only shock I ever really had was going out to some newspapermen's party, and Herb Klein [Herbert G. Klein] and a couple of the Republican team were there, quite a few of them—oh, Bob Merriam [Robert E. Merriam] from Chicago, they were both in the White House--and they were just laughing at me, you know, at what a beating my friend was going to take and, you know, how appalling it was going to be. I

remember being really shocked because it hadn't occurred to me that it really was that uphill. But I had such a moderate regard of Dick Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] and such a high

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regard of Jack Kennedy that I really never had...

HOLBORN: What do you feel...

BARTLETT: And then the last day when Gallup [George H. Gallup, Sr.] started shrinking that margin, he was rather stiffened by that. But he had had those enormous crowds in Philadelphia and those enormous ones all through New York. It was hard to believe that anybody who could elicit that kind of enthusiasm could lose an election.

HOLBORN: Yes. Of course, the campaign ended in sort of the easiest territory.

BARTLETT: Yes, this was where the votes were, there's no question about it. I also had gone through Ohio with Nixon, and you could see that they were doing this great organizational job there. But Nixon was faltering so badly as a personality that I couldn't believe that people really would go for him.

HOLBORN: Did Kennedy ever talk to you about Nixon as a human being?

BARTLETT: I don't think he had much feeling for Nixon.

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Through the years I'd sort of seen them together at different occasions, parties and that kind of thing around Georgetown, and it was always, "Hello, Dick." But I never had the feeling that he ever had any regard for Nixon.

HOLBORN: Though they were in a curious way brought together so often in their careers.

BARTLETT: Well, they were about the same age. They'd been in Congress at the same time. I don't think he ever had anything against Nixon particularly, but I don't think he ever had any particular regard for him. I never heard him express any admiration for Dick Nixon.

HOLBORN: They had offices opposite each other, the same committee in the House. It was one of these odd...

BARTLETT: Yes, it was odd, yes, yes.

HOLBORN: Well, before we move over to the presidential, do you think on the whole that Kennedy used his period in the Senate well? As you were observing it, as a Senator did he exploit it to the best?

BARTLETT: I think he did. As you know there was a period when the thing

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didn't... It seemed to me the climax of his Senate career was that investigation into labor reform. I think one story I ought to tell that would seem to me very characteristic and a very important insight into him was when Bobby and I had gotten together on this Talbott [Harold E. Talbott] thing. And finally Talbott resigned from office after all these revelations. And I remember having lunch with him, I guess a day or so later, and he said, "Listen, I know this is great for you and Bobby, and that's fine. But I really hate to see a guy get it that way." And this was a side of his nature. They always talk of him as being rather tough; he really wasn't; he was really a very gentle fellow; he hated to see anybody hurt; he did not like to see anybody hurt.

HOLBORN: He at least didn't like him to fall hard. In one sense he was indebted to Lyndon Johnson, and that was probably in terms of getting visibility; getting on the Foreign Relations Committee was also a big help, combined with the labor investigative work.

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BARTLETT: I don't think he ever understood why he got on the Foreign Relations Committee. He regarded this as one of the products of that sort of magical system that Lyndon Johnson had. He was amazed, I think, when he ended up on that committee. What year was that?

HOLBORN: January, 1957.

BARTLETT: '57, yes. I guess in those days those committee assignments used to have surprises for everybody. My impression--for some reason, of all the aspects of the Senate, I think his work in that Senate committee seemed to him a more vivid aspect of his Senate life than the Foreign Relations Committee.

HOLBORN: Yes, oh yes. It took a lot more concentrated work, a lot more preparation. It had more continuity; it took many, many months.

BARTLETT: Yes, it's funny because I think at the beginning... He was on that Government Operations Committee at the beginning, wasn't he?

HOLBORN: Yes.

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BARTLETT: And I can remember he was slightly embarrassed.... The reason that Bobby got the job, I guess, was because of his father's friendship with Joe McCarthy. At the beginning I think he was rather embarrassed that Bobby, I think, was going to be a member of the staff on the committee on which he sat. And then I think because it turned out to be very fortuitous it was an enormous....

HOLBORN: But there are these accidents, of course. Not only was there McCarthy, but McClellan [John L. McClellan], had been on the Hoover [Herbert Clark Hoover] Commission, both with Father, with Fathers.

BARTLETT: Yes, with the Father. Yes. And there really was an amazing series of coincidences, wasn't there? I remember Bobby down at the Hoover Commission. That was very interesting work, too.

HOLBORN: Well, I guess election night you were down in Tennessee, weren't you?

BARTLETT: Down in Chattanooga, yes.

HOLBORN: When did you first see the President-elect?

BARTLETT: I called the next day and talked to Mr. Kennedy, and he informed me that from now on to refer to his son as the President or

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Mr. President, and he was obviously in a very good mood. He said that Jack was out playing touch football. I saw him down in Florida about a week or so later, I guess, down in Palm Beach. He was in great form. So I saw him quite a bit down there. For about a week I was down. Stu Symington was around and that fellow from Miami that committed suicide later, Ambassador to Ireland [Edward Grant Stockdale]. George Smathers was around.

HOLBORN: And did he have a sense of leadership?

BARTLETT: I remember he told me a funny story that he was playing golf— Lyndon Johnson had been down, and Sam Rayburn, and they'd all played golf. And Lyndon said to him, "Do you realize that if we both died that little bugger would be president?" I must say I think those were very happy days for him. He was tired. And I remember he said, "From now on I'm really going to take care of myself." He took naps even then right after lunch. He was really on top of the world.

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HOLBORN: Had he shifted gears already and did he....

BARTLETT: He was talking about where he was going to put people. His concentration was completely on his appointments, finding a new Secretary of the Treasury.

HOLBORN: Well, let's take a couple of those appointments he made then. How do you think he finally reached the decision that he did and what kind of advice did you give him?

BARTLETT: We talked about, you know, what Bobby.... I think this was a great concern was what Bobby.... I always had the feeling that the decision on Bobby was not made by the President-elect, but I think by his father. I think that he took his father's position on it. I never had the feeling that Bobby had any great burning desire to be Attorney General, that this was really almost forced upon him.

HOLBORN: Of course, there again there was an accidental feature in that it had been turned down by Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff] who might have had it if he...

BARTLETT: It was offered to Ribicoff--very sure. I really

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don't think--it was just an impression there wasn't anything said--I don't think that the President-elect ever really felt as strongly about Abe Ribicoff again. I think he felt that his reasons for turning it down were wrong. It was a desire to avoid an unpopular rule.

HOLBORN: Well, one that you were particularly close to--was it the Secretary of the Treasury?

BARTLETT: It was interesting to try figure out if there wasn't somebody who could be found. As his father pointed out, there weren't any Democrats who knew much about money. The only one I came up with was this banker called Kennedy [David M. Kennedy] from Chicago who everybody said was extremely good. But the President said we couldn't have any more Kennedys in the show. He said it would be too hard to explain that this wasn't related. But that was the one that I was particularly interested in.

HOLBORN: But it never got anywhere? I mean did he...

BARTLETT: Well, he just kept looking around. And this

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Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] thing emerged. I've forgotten. I think that if Henry Alexander.... The reason I was in was because I had a candidate, that was it. Henry Alexander had been way back my candidate. And through a friend, Hal Korda, I arranged a meeting with Henry Alexander and the Senator up in New York. And they all had breakfast together or something. And Henry Alexander brought some of the big boys from U.S. Steel, some of the big corporate names. And they had a rather long, and I gathered, meeting that went very well. But Henry Alexander never quite signed on. I don't know he must have been under great pressure at the bank, I think, or something. But Kennedy had a sort of a feeling about him, and I think he would have taken Henry Alexander if he'd been a little bit....

But Alexander actually went to the point of ending up on some sort of a team for Nixon. So by the time the election was over, he was pretty dead. In fact, Kennedy, I think said to me--the President-elect said to me that if he hadn't,

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"It wasn't important that he didn't support me. If he hadn't gone to the extreme of putting his name on that list," he said, "I still think I would have taken him" So that was out. So I tried to help through.... Martha's father knew a lot of these major business figures and so on, and he was trying to see what he could pull up, too. It was very hard going, very hard going.

HOLBORN: At the time did you feel it was a political mistake for him to make the decision he did?

BARTLETT: On Dillon?

HOLBORN: Yes.

BARTLETT: I didn't know. At that point I hadn't really enormously admired Dillon as a member of the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration. He always seemed to me rather stiff. I mean I didn't know of his internal workings, which there's no question he's a very able man. But as a personality, he seemed to me rather stiff. So I wasn't enthusiastic about it, but I didn't have any strong feeling against him.

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HOLBORN: And how do you think he came to his decision on Secretary of State? Was this a process of elimination?

BARTLETT: I don't know. You and Rostow [Walt Whitman Rostow] had lunch that day, do you remember? You ate lunch with Rostow. And Rostow

claimed to be more in on it than I guess he really was, didn't he? But there was a lot of talk at that point. That's right. He left that day for Florida with two names, didn't he? Bruce [David K.E. Bruce] and.... He didn't discuss that with me.

HOLBORN: Did he at that time express to you any worry about getting Southern support, people from the South? Was he concerned about that?

BARTLETT: Only one, Hodges [Luther H. Hodges]. I remember he came back from Raleigh during the campaign. He'd been campaigning down there on a Saturday, and he flew back. On Sunday he called up and said he'd like to take a walk. And so he came out here. And he was telling me that he really felt very

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warmly about his visit to North Carolina. And about Hodges, he said that he was very impressed by Hodges and he said, "If I were elected I'd like to have him in my Cabinet." That really was the first one that.... And then Udall [Stewart L. Udall], I pushed Udall at him quite hard because I was afraid they'd get a sinister.... I wasn't very much for Clinton Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] as a Secretary of Interior, and I guess he was being pushed pretty hard. I must say I admired the President for that one. I really thought that was a good choice.

HOLBORN: Had you ever heard or known of McNamara [Robert S. McNamara]?

BARTLETT: No. But I remember one rather funny evening when Sarge brought Dave Bell [David E. Bell] in. And Bell, I must say, had that poise that he has. That rather even manner. Sarge was obviously excited about him, and Dave Bell handled himself very well. Kennedy was joking after dinner about where he was going to put--he wanted to

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put Teno Roncalio on the Canadian Border Commission. He said, "That's a wonderful job. (He was very fond of Teno.) He said, "That's a wonderful job. He gets all that pay, and he doesn't have to do anything." And Bell, I remember, leaned forward and said, "If it's that kind of a job, why don't we abolish it?" I realized then that he'd make a good Budget Director.

You see, the original idea that he talked of first of keeping Tom Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] in the Defense Department and putting Bobby in as Deputy Secretary of Defense, which would have been actually a marvelous job for Bobby. And I was very enthusiastic about that because I thought by exerting some of the President's influence over there he could reel the Pentagon. But then Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence], as I understood it, objected to anything that would build up Tom Gates because he was afraid he'd run for

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governor. And it was at this point that Sarge came up with McNamara. And I remember after that meeting he said, "The Bobby thing is out. This is such a strong man that you just couldn't put him and Bobby together." And that was the end of that. And then the Justice Department thing....

HOLBORN: But the two of them did become terribly close--McNamara and Bobby.

BARTLETT: It was very interesting. I think he was probably right that they would have had a hard time working, Bobby under him.

HOLBORN: But he seemed to get quite a lot of fun out of putting a government together.

BARTLETT: He did. I think he enjoyed it. I think he loved sitting down in Florida with the press.... I would say from this point on, certainly from election day to the Bay of Pigs, was probably the happiest period of life. I think he really loved the whole thing,

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the excitement, the press. The whole thing was just enormous to him and he really.... I think that was the happiest I saw him.

HOLBORN: Did you ever have a feeling that there was anything in the notion of putting Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] in as Secretary of State?

BARTLETT: I did, yes. I think his instinct would have been to take Fullbright as Secretary of State. I think Bobby was obviously against it. I think he rather liked the idea of Fullbright, but he moved away from it.

HOLBORN: So you think that was a close thing?

BARTLETT: I think that that would have--yes. I'm not sure, looking back, that it wouldn't have been a good thing. There was the problem of the race thing--I suppose that was a factor in his decision. But I always had the feeling that that was the one that was his personal choice.

HOLBORN: Did you have the sense that he was under much pressure at

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that time from Johnson to take care of his needs?

BARTLETT: I guess Johnson had a large staff. I remember he did tell me that

Johnson had a million dollars worth of staff that he was bringing down here to find places for in the government. I think he was rather impressed by the size of the staff, the number of people that were on the Johnson payroll. But he really never complained. His attitude, as he expressed it to me, about Johnson was very interesting in this period because I think he was deeply solicitous. I think he wanted Johnson to be happy in his role. Of course, I think he wanted everybody to be happy in his role. He had that wonderful sense of, you know, wanting really to wish the best for everybody. And I think he realized what a miserable job Johnson was heading into. I can remember one time Liz Carpenter [Elizabeth S. Carpenter] called me up and said--this was after, you know, maybe a year--and said, "I wish you'd ask the President to call Lyndon

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once in a while because he's awfully lonely up here. He needs something to stimulate him. And maybe the President could call once in a while and ask for his advice on some of these problems because he really isn't doing so." So I mentioned this to the President. And he said, "Gosh, Charlie, I really mean to do that. It's on my mind. I feel so sorry for Lyndon up there. That's a terrible job for anybody and particularly for a man like that." He said, "But you know, when you get into these problems, you really are not interested, you never even think of talking to anybody about them who hasn't read the cables." And, he said, "Lyndon hasn't read the cables." I think it was on his mind.

HOLBORN: He did open the doors to him as far as attending any meeting he wanted to attend.

BARTLETT: Yes.

HOLBORN: Any social events he wanted to...

BARTLETT: Yes, he seemed to be making every effort to.

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I remember when they had those family dances, Lyndon would and sit next to Mrs. Kennedy. The relationship, it was one of those confusing political relationships. I think the President got an enormous--I think he got a kick out of Lyndon.

They say that President Johnson has no sense of humor, but I must say in the quotations--when he did say a funny thing, very often President Kennedy would mention it to me. And they were quite funny. There's a very good line, as that capsule was about to go off with John Glenn in it, do you remember that? And they were all in the President's office, and this great tension was building up waiting for this thing to get off the ground. Johnson leaned over to Kennedy and said, "If Glenn were only a Negro." [Laughter] He also said that day, I remember the President told me that Johnson said, "Well, if this thing doesn't work, everybody in the world will know that I'm the head of the space program." He said, "If it

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works, nobody will know it.” [Laughter] I never really heard him make a severe criticism of Lyndon Johnson except on two points. I think that he felt that Johnson lacked subtlety, and I think that he didn’t always feel that Johnson told the specific truth.

HOLBORN: But I agree with you in the sort of fascination he had with Johnson. And the humor, Johnson’s best as a mimic. Kennedy liked mimicry.

BARTLETT: There was a sort of a sardonic quality in the Johnson humor which he liked, yes. He enjoyed Lyndon’s quotes. He used to sort of....

HOLBORN: He’d sometimes almost try to elicit a humorous story out of him for the sake of seeing what would come out.

BARTLETT: It was an interesting relationship. I think there was a lot of--there was respect there.

HOLBORN: It’s something that’s never really been written about. There were articles about the Vice President and articles about Kennedy, but nothing

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ever really came out about them.

BARTLETT: I think he was disappointed that Johnson would not get involved in the congressional thing. I’ve since learned that Johnson disapproved heartily of the way he and his people were handling the congressional thing and didn’t want to get mixed up in that. And I think this chafed him that Lyndon was pulling away on that score.

HOLBORN: Yes, I think this bothered him, particularly on a couple of ones the first year, I remember.

BARTLETT: Yes, don’t remember whether Johnson got into the Rules vote or not, but there were a couple that he just absolutely refused to have anything to do with.

HOLBORN: Well, this partly, of course, due perhaps also to Johnson’s bruising at the beginning of that caucus.

BARTLETT: Yes, the caucus and Albert Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.], yes.

HOLBORN: Which he over reacted to.

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BARTLETT: But it certainly was not a bad relationship, I imagine, as relationships go between presidents and vice presidents. You can see all the strains that do creep into the thing--it's a very difficult thing. I think that once in awhile he'd say, "Where's Lyndon? I wonder where Lyndon is anyway. I haven't heard about him for weeks." And this would be one of the periods when the Vice President was laying low down in Texas or something like that.

HOLBORN: Well, what recollections do you have of the very first days of the White House? When did you first see him in the White House?

BARTLETT: I forget, what day was the Inaugural?

HOLBORN: On a Friday I think.

BARTLETT: Oh yes. The first time I saw him in the White House was on a Monday night after the Inauguration. Martha and I went over there for dinner. We had dinner in the downstairs dining room. I remember

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he took off his coat. He was awful hot--those windows were sealed. He couldn't get used to that. I must say that was one of the.... I remember him that night I think happily and in a mood that I don't think I'll ever forget because it was a marvelous thing because he wasn't just happy because, "Here I am, Jack Kennedy sitting in the White House." It was a marvelous thing because, "Here I and I can do all these things and I can really...." He was just burning with the things he could do. It really was exciting. He talked about the thing, and then we took a walk. The White House intrigued him. The whole thing was fascinating. But it wasn't in just a personal sense, it was...

HOLBORN: Was that the night he went and visited the Executive Office Building?

BARTLETT: Yes, we walked over to the Executive Office Building and ran into Walt Rostow. We walked through the Mail Room. I took him up and showed him where

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Eisenhower used to have his press conferences. We talked about his press conferences. I think this was the next challenge that was sort of on his mind then. I think he was going to have one in a few days. He was just talking all the time--you know, this business about

Lafayette Square. And Jackie was alive with this, too. And she'd had some rather famous musician in that day for tea or something. But the whole thing was a complete concentration on what could be done from this post, and just an enormous desire to make the most of the time.

I remember then he showed me Lincoln's [Abraham Lincoln] bedroom. He loved that. I said, "Did you have any strange dreams the first night that you slept in it?" And he said, "No. I just jumped in and hung on." [Laughter] But he was.... There was an enormous amount of zest and really an enormous amount of goodness in his spirit then. He really was challenged by the opportunity to do something for the country, and he wanted

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this whole business of the White House being the best--I mean, was all this sort of forming in his mind.

HOLBORN: How did you stay in touch with him while he was in the White House? I mean apart from visits and so on.

BARTLETT: If I had anything I'd call him through Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]. It was tough. It was a funny position being in my role as a newspaperman who's sort of on the fringe of the government and a friend of the President because people would come with these things, some of them fairly valid. And you'd build up a sort of list of things; people had claimed that they had a right to a job or something like that. So you always seemed to have a sort of a.... I mean it really was quite time consuming. It was very difficult for me to keep up with my work in those days. You'd build up these, you know, these petitions of people--as a conveyor.

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HOLBORN: You mean you'd have callers and visitors of people you just didn't even know?

BARTLETT: They were people that knew me and that had known both of us--some guy from Boston that had gotten mistreated by Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] or something like that. [Laughter] There were quite a few of those. And I remember there was one fellow that had let him down once when Torby MacDonald had struck some man in a night club in New York and on his back swing, why, he'd broken some lady's nose. [Laughter] And the story had gotten into the *Journal American* because he was running for Congress. And I remember this one fellow that was working for the Hearst Paper, Jeff Roche, that Jack knew, Jack called him and asked him to kill the story, and Jeff was rather adamant about the fact that that was an important piece of public information which he was going to write. [Laughter]

When Jeff Roche applied for a job, I remember I

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didn't know quite how to handle that play. I said, "What do you want to do about it?" Jeff wanted to work in the USIA [United States Information Agency] or something, and Jack said, "I'll have to check with Torby to see if he's forgiven him yet." So he called back in about thirty minutes and said, "All right. Torby says it's all right, so go ahead." Jeff never quite made it though. He didn't get part of the examination. He didn't get by the panel over at the USIA. But it was all that kind of thing.

And I used to send him memos. And if I saw something, you know, it was through Mrs. Lincoln. I guess Mrs. Lincoln's collection of memos at the end of every day was rather sizeable. But I think he read them. You always had the feeling that he read them.

HOLBORN: Well, anything out of that box got read somehow. It might sometimes wait till the weekend, but.... That was her good quality, Mrs. Lincoln she didn't withhold things

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from him.

BARTLETT: Yes, he always read them. And he sort of leaned towards that side of the office, you had the feeling. I've been amazed since the thing. I always thought of Kenny O'Donnell as the access to the President, but almost everybody I've ever talked to went through Mrs. Lincoln. I've since come to wonder who went through...

HOLBORN: There were definitely two entries.

BARTLETT: Who went through Kenny. They must have been real strangers.

HOLBORN: Well, there was always a little bit of tension in this situation, but nobody wanted a showdown.

BARTLETT: They must have been furious.

HOLBORN: But it was something on which nobody felt they could have a showdown.

BARTLETT: Mrs. Lincoln even one day got me in there with five Armenian musicians [Laughter] who were over from Russia. She would have gotten anybody in that office.

HOLBORN: They had quite different attitudes. Mrs. Lincoln felt that, within limits, the

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President liked diversion or a change of pace, and Kenny felt his job was largely a protective one.

BARTLETT: And was hovering, grim-faced, yes.

HOLBORN: I think that other doorway is one of the important things in how people saw Kennedy or who saw him.

BARTLETT: Yes, but I've been amazed that Cabinet members--I think Douglas Dillon told me that he used the Evelyn Lincoln entrance. I'm not sure about McNamara, but...

HOLBORN: I don't think he did. But Dillon certainly did. And several congressmen used it.

BARTLETT: Learned about it?

HOLBORN: Yes.

BARTLETT: I think the word was getting around quite a bit.

HOLBORN: In the end she was almost overburdened with it. All the mail was addressed to her. [Laughter]

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But he helped to create this thing. I know to two or three newsmen, he said "If you ever have a problem, you call Mrs. Lincoln."

BARTLETT: Everybody got that. Yes, she was tremendous. I think he rather enjoyed it, too.

HOLBORN: Actually, there was a third problem because there were people who catapulted over Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger], too.

BARTLETT: Oh, direct?

HOLBORN: To Mrs. Lincoln and...

BARTLETT: And Pierre didn't like it, no.

HOLBORN: Pierre felt that he wasn't getting review powers on who came in from the West Lobby.

BARTLETT: Oh, is that right? It was my sense this changed noticeably. I can remember that night that we took the walk--that Monday night after he'd gotten into the White House--and we ran into Walt Rostow. And I remember he said, "Now, Walt want to talk to you and I want you

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to be certain that you see me. And I want you to make an appointment right now for every Thursday afternoon." And I think at this point why he was really anxious not to become the prisoner. This was very much on his mind. A lot of that was cut out I guess after the Bay of Pigs. He decided to see less people and concentrate more.

HOLBORN: The last year was breeding a change again.

BARTLETT: Getting back to the looseness?

HOLBORN: In the last weeks, I mean, there was already a sense of the next campaign, too.

BARTLETT: Yes, yes.

HOLBORN: Loosening up and a lot of public groups started coming in.

BARTLETT: His mind at this point, certainly at the end, his mind was completely on the campaign.

HOLBORN: Just been about a month or five weeks when it had really begun to seize him again.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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