

William B. Benton, Oral History Interview – 7/18/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: William B. Benton
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Biographical Note

Benton was a senator from Connecticut from 1949 to 1953; chairman of the board of Encyclopedia Britannica from 1943 to 1967; and Ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 1963 to 1968. In this interview, Benton discusses his memories of John F. Kennedy (JFK) as a senator, his impressions of JFK's political and intellectual skill, and problems that Benton encountered with U.S. political appointments to UNESCO, among other issues.

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William B. Benton

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1, 19	John F. Kennedy (JFK) in the Senate
3, 18	Benton's efforts for the removal and censure of Joseph R. McCarthy
9	Correspondence with Senator JFK
11	Political ties between JFK and Connecticut
20	Formulating Democratic Party policy
22, 69	JFK's political and international skill
30	Harry S. Truman
33	Benton's monetary contributions to political campaigns
35	Offers of positions in the Kennedy administration
38	Appointment as U.S. ambassador to UNESCO
40	Meeting with JFK about UNESCO
46	Repairing relations between the UNESCO Director General and JFK
56	Problems with the U.S. minister to UNESCO and U.S. appointment structures
71	Kennedy family and the Irish in politics
76	Impact of JFK's assassination on the world

Oral History Interview

With

William B. Benton

July 18, 1964
Chicago, Illinois

By Newton Minow

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MINOW: This is July 18, 1964 in Chicago and it's the interview of Senator William Benton for the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library. This is Newton Minow interviewing Senator Benton. And Senator, I wonder if we could begin by asking you about your relationships with President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] prior to his election. You knew him quite a while. You might tell us something about your early experiences with him.

BENTON: Newt, I'm sorry I can't remember when I met him. He was a marked young congressman when I was serving in the Senate. He was well known to Catherine Flynn, who is a tough Irish girl from Connecticut, who had been working in Connecticut Senators' offices for about 20 years and she used to talk to me about him. I knew of his war record and I would shake hands with him. But he was a full generation younger than I. And I can't remember much about him in the early fifties except his attractiveness and his wit and gaiety and his promise. My interest in him actually didn't begin until he was elected to the Senate—the day he was elected and I was defeated. It happened on the same day.

MINOW: That was in 1952.

BENTON: 1952. Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] made the best run in Connecticut of any presidential candidate in our history and even though I ran 41,000 votes ahead of Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] I was swept

[-1 -]

right out of office. Of course Kennedy's run in Massachusetts in the face of that popularity of Eisenhower's is one of the most extraordinary senatorial races, I think, of the 20th century. Particularly running against Cabot Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.] who was a famous and well-entrenched Senator. I once asked Lodge his explanation for this. I knew him intimately. I served not only in the Senate with him but I worked closely with him when I was Assistant Secretary of State. Cabot said, "What beat me was not Jack Kennedy. What beat me was my support of Eisenhower at the '52 convention against Taft [Robert Taft]." You will remember that Cabot Lodge was really chairman—the key leader from the standpoint of political leaders of the group that put over Eisenhower. There were the shadowy figures in the background—Paul Hoffman, Jack McCloy and many others. But Cabot Lodge was the boy out front, pushing against Taft. And of course he did reap the whirlwind of the Taft followers and supporters in Massachusetts. I've never analyzed Massachusetts to discover the extent to which the Taft animus against Lodge helped to elect Kennedy—in contrast to the extent to which Kennedy's own personality and ability helped elect him. On the record great emphasis must be put on the latter. But I quote Lodge because it shows you the complexities in elections—and I don't doubt but that Lodge was enormously cut by the Republican conservative Taft group, many of whom must have admired Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] and who hoped that his boy would amount to a lot; it must have been a factor.

[-2 -]

At any rate I wrote Jack Kennedy. I knew him well enough to congratulate him—and the first record I have in my files of correspondence with President Kennedy is a letter from him of November 28, 1952 with a handwritten postscript saying how much he regretted that I wouldn't be in the Senate and that we would not serve together. He wrote "I have greatly admired your courageous service."

MINOW: Senator, what do you think he meant by that? Do you think he was thinking about your controversy with Senator McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]?

BENTON: Well of course I like to think I did a lot of things that showed courage in the Senate. Perhaps in part because of my political inexperience. [Laughter] If this interview were about me I could talk about that at great length. But I'm sure that he was referring primarily to the McCarthy question and later there isn't any doubt... I think perhaps we ought to talk about the McCarthy ques...

MINOW: I wish you would.

BENTON: ...tion because President Kennedy was later greatly criticized because he was absent in Florida and did not vote either way on the proposal to censure McCarthy and did not try to arrange a “pair.” I may say that I have always been very lenient in my judgment on this subject. In the first place he had been sick, very sick. He was in Florida. He was recuperating. I just don’t know. I still

[-3-]

feel very hesitant about any criticism because I know of the feeling of his father on this subject. His father was one of the most publicized supporters of McCarthy in the country. And that did put Senator Kennedy in a difficult position on this vote. Then his brother Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] had been for a while Assistant Counsel on the Investigation Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations of which McCarthy was chairman. And this again made it not too easy for Jack Kennedy as Senator Kennedy to vote for the censure of McCarthy. While we’re on that, though, the best record I have of how Kennedy felt on the subject, I had in my files, and I’ve probably got the most complete files on McCarthy of anybody in the country. You may remember he was suing me for \$2 million.

MINOW: I certainly do.

BENTON: When a man starts suing you for \$2 million you seek out the best lawyers you can and you keep the best files. And incidentally, to you as a lawyer, Newt, I might tell you that Brien McMahan got me my lawyer and he gravely assured me that he was the most expensive lawyer in the United States. [Laughter] One of the things my lawyer told me to do was keep the best files. But I have a transcript here of a broadcast of President Kennedy with Martin Agronsky, a very fine radio commentator, and one of the two who were never in any doubt on the McCarthy issue. Agronsky and Elmer Davis [Elmer Holmes Davis] were the only two in the early days when I was after McCarthy, who gave me unequivocal

[-4-]

major support. The press was astonishingly weak and wishy-washy. So was the Senate. So was the Congress. And there were just a handful of people who really stood up on this issue. President Truman [Harry S. Truman] and Herbert Lehman [Herbert Henry Lehman], most notably. And of course Martin Agronsky and Elmer Davis. Agronsky, in a broadcast interviewing President Kennedy—then Senator—on November 24th, 1957—said to Senator Kennedy, “Senator, I wonder if we could talk about a Senator from a neighboring state—Connecticut—Bill Benton, who is certainly standing on the grounds of wishing to censure the late Senator McCarthy. I think this cut his political throat?” I may say that Agronsky’s judgment there, which was widely shared because McCarthy publicized it, was wholly erroneous.

MINOW: You don’t think your stand on McCarthy cost you the Senate?

BENTON: Why, I think it's absurd on the face of it.

MINOW: Really?

BENTON: He came into the state campaigning against me three times in 1950 and only once before, in 1934 at the peak of the New Deal, had any Senator been elected on the Democratic ticket from Connecticut in an off-year since the Civil War. I was elected when all the candidates for state office went down to defeat. I think he helped me.

And as for my next campaign, I was one of only 11 Senators in the country who ran ahead of Governor Stevenson out of 35 running. And in a voting machine state like Connecticut, to run ahead as far as I did, is phenomenal and I ran

[-5 -]

best in the most Catholic county in the state. You know, for any biographer of the President, it's important in my judgment, for him to make clear the distinction between the word "Irish" and the word "Catholic." In Connecticut we have lots of Italians and lots of Poles. When we speak of the "Catholic vote" we don't mean the Italians and the Poles, because we refer to them as the "Polish vote" or the "Italian vote." What we mean is the Irish. It's the Irish that we refer to when we say the Catholic vote. Now Windham County, in which I made my best run, is the most Catholic county in the state, but I've never broken it down to find out how many are Poles, or Italians, or Irish. It may not be the most Irish. I did run less well in certain Irish wards in Waterbury where McCarthy made one of his speeches. He did hurt me, there's no doubt, in some ways. But he also helped me. All kinds of money poured in to me to support my campaign. A lot of it from people I'd never heard of—and very substantial checks. It was my [little laugh] advice to them to help me try to kick McCarthy out of the Senate. These things almost always cut both ways.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: And on balance...

MINOW: Very few people I think understand that.

BENTON: They do not understand it. Believe me, the Kennedys understand the way these things cut both ways, but very few do.

[-6 -]

Kennedy said, in reply to Agronsky's question, "Senator Benton took a number of stands which I think showed a good deal..."—and I'm sure he was going to say "of courage." I am sure, not by correspondence, but it's clear from the copy. And Agronsky interrupted, "You don't care to single out any others?" Meaning any others beside McCarthy.

And Kennedy said, “Well, today it would be an act of courage to pick out...” and of course “courage” is a word that has to be analyzed a great deal applied to President Kennedy because of his famous book, *Profiles in Courage*, in which he wrote up so many Senators across our history whom he regarded as the most courageous, including my distant kinsman, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, to whom I shall refer further in a moment. He said, “Well, it would be an act of courage, Martin,..”—and I’m reading this because I don’t think anybody else has got a transcript of this broadcast—“...to pick out of 95 other Senators those who were courageous and those who were not. It would be an act of courage especially if you expect to be in the Senate.” [Little laugh] And then he goes along and takes some examples and then he said, “I think you can make a judgment about Senator Benton. He was defeated. He did do a number of things which were not politically wise.” (He did not enumerate and I emphatically disagree. The figures at the polls bear me out.)

But Agronsky wouldn’t let him off the hook. And he said, “Well now return to yourself and relate it again to the McCarthy issue—though of course McCarthy is gone—there are many

[-7 -]

people who feel and some who have said as a matter of fact—you’ve heard the crack, I’m sure, around the Senate—that making a play on the words of your title of your book, *Profiles in Courage*, that there are occasions in which you could have shown a little less profile and a little more courage; and many people speak in particular of the censure against McCarthy in that connection. Now I think it’s only fair to point out,” continued Agronsky, “that at the time of the censure vote you were in the hospital and certainly couldn’t have voted.” (As an aside, even that has been questioned. But I’m willing to admit that may be true.) Agronsky continued, “Nevertheless, I wonder if I can ask you this, sir. Would you or would you not have voted to censure McCarthy?” Well, that’s a pretty tough question to pose afterwards, you see. I think it was fair because Agronsky took a pretty tough beating on the McCarthy affair. He lost 15 different local stations—local sponsors—at the peak of the McCarthy affair. Not at the peak later on the censorship vote, but at the peak of my efforts in 1952 to get McCarthy tossed out of the Senate. Agronsky was supporting me on these 15 local radio stations. Well, here’s the way Kennedy answers and he did not duck it. And I think that it’s greatly to his credit. “Martin, as I have said on many occasions, I wasn’t in the Senate at the time of the vote. I was away for nine months. I feel as I was not a member of the jury, while I would have been perfectly

[-8 -]

prepared if it came up in the summer of ‘54, I was prepared to vote on the matter. It did not come up while I was in the Senate. I was not equipped at that particular time. It came up only three or four weeks after I was in the hospital. I said since then, based on the evidence presented, and Senator McCarthy’s transgressions of the rules of the Senate, I thought the censure was a reasonable action. I don’t know what more I can say on it.” I admired him for that statement in view of the well-known attitude of his father on the McCarthy question—and his father was one of McCarthy’s leading supporters—and I forget whether it was on this

broadcast or before we started the tape recording that I mentioned his brother Bobby who was for a time counsel on McCarthy's subcommittee, and that this statement did indeed, as a representative of a prominent Irish family, McCarthy of course having widespread support among the hardcore right-wing Irish, cause me to admire Senator Jack Kennedy.

MINOW: After you—as you were leaving the Senate and he was coming in, didn't you exchange some further correspondence with him? Didn't you write to him?

BENTON: We did. We had a running correspondence. I think of the letter I wrote him on December 5, in response to his handwritten note to me...

MINOW: Is that December 5, 1952?

[-9 -]

BENTON: 1952. Yes, I wrote him, "At your age, coming from a state which ought to continue to return you for many terms to come, you have the chance to become one of the great leaders of our party and our country. I don't know another young man in the country with a more remarkable opportunity than yours. I'm pleased with the word 'courageous' in that postscript of yours. The pressures on you will be constant and unceasing." I saw the McCarthy issue was not going to die and I saw the tough spot he'd be in on it. I wrote, "The pressures on you will be constant and unceasing, as you know from your experience in the Congress—to follow roads and angles that are not courageous. Yet in your position, with your background, at your age, and coming from your state—I know of no young man—indeed, I know of no man in American politics—who may stand to benefit so much by consistently taking the courageous route—as you. In my opinion this will pay off for you in a most practical and hard-headed sense, as well as in highest personal satisfaction."

MINOW: That was a most prophetic letter.

BENTON: He also wrote me about his book—*Profiles in Courage*—a letter that I think maybe is worth quoting, which I felt in a certain sense was an apology to me for his failure to vote on the McCarthy question.

MINOW: When—what was the date of that letter?

[-10 -]

BENTON: This was February 18, 1956. He said, "It might interest you to know that I have thought perhaps I included the wrong Benton in my book. As I remember reading an article by Ernest Lindley [Ernest K. Lindley] about what you tried to do against the tide, and if I am still alive, which I doubt, when you are gone, I will see that you are included in a future book." What an astonishing; quick phrase,

“...if I am still alive, which I doubt, when you are gone...” He was 17 years younger than I with every expectation of outliving me by 17 years at least. He was giving the Bentons credit for plenty of tough Yankee vigor. But that’s another elliptical reference to the McCarthy matter. I have taken a long aside into the McCarthy matter after he was elected to the Senate. Before we get into my relations with him after his election as president, I have something else which may be of interest from my files. I had the privilege of preceding him and then introducing him in 1954 to the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in Hartford. He and I were the two principal speakers; he was of course the feature.

MINOW: What was the date of that, Senator...

BENTON: That was June 25, 1954. Now he’d only been in the Senate for eighteen months. Yet Connecticut was beginning to sense his potential impact as a political leader. We had a very sensitive and astute Irish politician as our state chairman, John Bailey [John Moran Bailey]. But he’s really just as proud of the name “Moran” as he is of those two names. His name

[-11-]

is John Moran Bailey. And of course the Irish completely dominated the Democratic party in Connecticut. The Town Chairman in almost every town was then an Irish leader. I’m told it’s much like Massachusetts in that sense. The two states are said to be very similar in this respect though perhaps in Connecticut the Irish are spread more evenly across the state instead of being so heavily concentrated in one city as in Boston.

Now Bailey sensed the fact that if he could elect a Democratic governor in ‘54 that Connecticut would be in a position to take leadership in promoting Jack Kennedy as a national figure. The small states in New England suffer from a great weakness because we don’t have enough delegates in any one of them to give us...

MINOW: Much of a...

BENTON: ...a wallop at the convention. [Laughter]

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: I once astonished Governor Stevenson’s boy, Borden [Borden Stevenson], by telling him that his father never would have been a nominee for President if he’d come from Connecticut.

MINOW: Quite right.

BENTON: And I think that’s overwhelmingly probable. Bailey saw that weakness and Jack Kennedy and his family saw that. And the problem was to start and build other states around Massachusetts...

[-12-]

MINOW: Right

BENTON: ...to develop a bloc of New England votes so that New England could go in as a unit more powerful than perhaps New York or California. Bailey, incidentally, asked me at that time whether I could be a candidate for governor in '54 in Connecticut. He said, "You'd be a good candidate with the business community." I refused categorically to consider it, which later greatly hurt me in '58 when I was trying to get the senatorial nomination, because the entire political apparatus of the state know that Tom Dodd [Thomas J. Dodd] or Chet Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] might be governor and knew that I never wanted to be governor, and of course, the politicians' interest in who is governor is much much greater than in who is senator. [Laughter] But at this point, Bailey with his really wonderful instinct for this kind of manipulating and maneuvering of politics, sensed Kennedy's forthcoming appeal, got him to Hartford to introduce him to the political party of our state and chose me as the first speaker to do the introducing. This was the beginning of the intimate relationship between Bailey and the Kennedys and later between Bailey and Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff] and the Kennedys because Ribicoff then ran for governor and just squeaked through, which gave Ribicoff a share with Bailey in the control of the Democratic party in the state. This relationship led within two years to Connecticut being the leading delegation in the '56 convention in Chicago to support Jack Kennedy for vice president. Governor Ribicoff,

[-13-]

as I recall, nominated him. You remember he had a lot of support for the vice presidency. Bailey had an alleged analysis to show that Stevenson would do best with a Catholic candidate for Vice President. And you remember Governor Stevenson threw the convention open to permit it to pick the candidate. Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] had put on a whale of a campaign for the presidency and had won the admiration of the delegates. So Kefauver came through against Jack Kennedy. But all the build-up and publicity helped launch Jack Kennedy as an important national political prospect. And Connecticut was the key pivotal cornerstone in that arch—of the effort at the '56 convention.

MINOW: And this '54 Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner was really the launching of him before the Connecticut...

BENTON: It was not only the unveiling of him before Connecticut, but the major launching before New England. Bailey, as the powerful political boss of Connecticut, is respected throughout New England. He anointed him by putting his hands upon him. And of course, Kennedy, after his election as president, paid off well to Bailey by making him National Chairman. He's still our National Chairman as we're recording this today, though I assume he won't carry on for long after the election under Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. Either Bailey will want to get out or Johnson may want

his own man. But Bailey and Ribicoff, growing out of the beginnings here at this Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in '54, became what the historians say

[-14-]

Genghis Khan used to call “my first follower.” [Laughter] The “First follower” is among the most famous men in the history of Genghis Khan. [Laughter]

MINOW: You contributed to this with your first introduction. What did you say about Senator Kennedy?

BENTON: Well, my speech was of course two-thirds Democratic exhortation with the last one-third about Jack Kennedy. But I said our guest was the first member of Congress on his own initiative to visit Indo-China as a battleground. This visit was back in 1951, the year before he was elected to the Senate. He became the first member of Congress to demand that the share of our foreign aid allotted to France should be contingent on some practical method of developing independence for colonial people under French rule. (This imperative need, for France and for the Western World, was also analyzed brilliantly by Ambassador Bowles, upon his return from India.) Further, I said, “It was our keynoter’s speech in the Senate only last April...”—our keynoter being Jack Kennedy--“...that first dramatized to the Congress the basic difficulties and dangers to the free world in Indo-China. This was a time when the Republican administration was singularly silent on the nature of the struggle now threatening us there. On the domestic side, our Massachusetts neighbor has made all of New England his constituency.” Now there I’m striking the theme, you see.

MINOW: Right.

[-15-]

BENTON: The theme that rolled on through to Los Angeles.

MINOW: And history became *very* important.

BENTON: History became very important. It was then just a hope. It was a gleam in Bailey’s eye.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: And a gleam in Joe Kennedy’s eye. [Laughter] But it was the gleam that carried through to the nomination. I’ll repeat that. “On the domestic side our Massachusetts neighbor has made all of New England his constituency.” It was a great political concept.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: On which Bailey should get a great deal of credit too, in my opinion. Not as much of course, as the Kennedys, but still he ought to be counted. Now my introduction continued, "He has fostered a long-range plan of action to stop the loss of industry in this area, a loss which has gravely threatened our whole regional economy." You'll remember—to interrupt—that Massachusetts and Connecticut, for example, had been losing most of their textile mills to the South. Both states suffered, among other handicaps, from high power costs to our industries. For instance, the Connecticut electricity rate is about two-thirds above the national average. This and various things, cheaper labor down South, the proximity to cotton, cheaper transportation, were driving textile businesses out of Massachusetts and Connecticut. I use textiles as

[-16-]

an example. I'd wrestled with this when I was in the Senate. Jack Kennedy picked it up when I was defeated, when he moved into the Senate.

I went on, "For decades, as all of us know, New England has suffered among other things from a lack of any kind of unified action by its Washington representatives, particularly in the Senate. You've heard of a silver bloc, an oil bloc, a farm bloc, but never a New England bloc. Yet, New England has legitimate aspirations which call for strong national advocacy and leadership." Well, I guess that's enough from the introduction. I end up, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you a great young Democrat, a young Democrat for New England and for America..." But in this speech, which I had forgotten and only found by accident in my files, is implicitly the road of the future onto which Senator Kennedy stepped with great imagination and down which he marched straight into Los Angeles and to nomination in 1960.

MINOW: In the light of subsequent events, it may very well be that the Connecticut talk which exposed him to the Connecticut Democratic party may have been really in effect the very beginning.

BENTON: Well, I think the beginning must have been much earlier than that. The beginning probably took place in a smoke-filled room [laughter] between him and Bailey and maybe Joe and Bobby were there.

[-17-]

MINOW: But certainly—certainly it was important...

BENTON: Yes—and surely in an even earlier smoke-filled room between him and his father. [Laughter] But the story about that '54 dinner is what the historians could get from the records if they could find them, which is most unlikely, and much of the earlier discussions never will come out into the records. I have two other quick comments on his role as a Senator and then I don't have any further recollections worth giving you until he was elected president.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: I might end up with these two and then we might start a new tape.

MINOW: All right.

BENTON: Here's a memo—again on the McCarthy question—that shows how sensitive this was and how pivotal the Kennedy family was in it. You know, at the time of my efforts to expel McCarthy from the Senate, I used to think, Newt, that the two most important supporters of character and quality that Joe McCarthy had were Cardinal Spellman [Francis Edward Spellman] and Joe Kennedy. These are very powerful, potent Americans, and they were open in their advocacy of McCarthy's activities in the Senate. And I naturally watched them with great care because as I continued my efforts to expel McCarthy from the Senate, it preoccupied me more and more. Thus, when I got this phone call on October 31, 1952, just four

[-18-]

or five days before I was up for re-election, it seemed potentially important to me. And this is the message: "Archibald MacLeish called Senator Benton. They are trying to get young Kennedy of Massachusetts to go on the air attacking McCarthy. They want material on McCarthy. They would also like someone to go up there and help prepare the broadcast." And here is my secretary's note to my assistant: "Senator Benton wants you to call Professor Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner] of MIT. Send him Senator Benton's 30,000 words of testimony..." (This was my testimony to expel McCarthy.) "Tell him to buy Anderson's book, send him the pamphlet *The McCarthy Record* put out in Wisconsin. Send him Truman's speech in Bridgeport calling attention to the Baldwin angle." And so on and so on and so on. Of course this attack did not materialize and I'm not critical of Kennedy for not making the speech. I wouldn't have made it, I believe, in his place. It was at the last minute, a week before the election. But it again illustrates the extent to which this was uppermost in the minds of many, including mine.

Now the final point I'd like to comment on while he was a Senator. And, of course, I wasn't paying much attention to senators when I was once defeated and out of the Senate. I went about my business and as you know, all kinds of things preoccupy me. But when Senator Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] asked me to come down and testify on March 6, 1958, before the Foreign Relations Committee, out of my earlier

[-19-]

background as Assistant Secretary of State, when I set up and formed the United States Information Service, I did. And Senator Kennedy, as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, was at that hearing. He came up to me afterwards, enthusiastic in his congratulations of my testimony and asked if he could put it in the Congressional Record. And he did. The testimony is headed "Importance of Reaching the Russian People." And his

questions were very interesting, as I remember them, at the time, as the record of the hearings will show. He inserted my testimony with this introduction, "Mr. Benton's statement is a searching and valuable analysis of ways by which the United States can improve its cultural and psychological effort against the Soviet Union. He points out ways in which we can break the Iron Curtain and effectively reach the Soviet people and its nongovernmental leadership. This is one of the most thoughtful expositions of the problem which I have heard." I'm going to postpone further comments on this particular concern of Senator Kennedy's, and on his deep and special insight into it, until I report to you my first meeting with him when he was President on the occasion when he appointed me the United States ambassador to UNESCO.

MINOW: We'll certainly do that. Before we leave the period of your relationship with him prior to his election, I wonder if you might comment on one other aspect. You were active in the drafting and development of the policy of the

[-20-]

Democratic party in the field of education prior to the '60 election. I think you served, as I recall, on a committee with some other distinguished Americans.

BENTON: Yes, that was the most distinguished committee in all history except for me. [Laughter] I was the chairman and we had five members: Beardsley Ruml, without question one of the great Americans of our time; Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller], who is now chairman of the Economic Advisory Council; Philip Coombs [Philip H. Coombs], who was director of the Ford Foundation's Research Department and became Assistant Secretary of State in charge of Cultural Affairs; and Professor Seymour Harris [Seymour E. Harris] the great economist, chairman of the Economic Department at Harvard. Intellectually all four of them, I submit, are very great committee members. As to the chairman, I did most of the rewriting of the draft but I'm not prepared to take much credit for the intellectual content of it. This Committee was the Education Subcommittee of the Democratic Advisory Council. As a matter of fact, Newt, I was the only man who served on both the two top committees of the DAC—both the Foreign Policy Committee under Acheson [Dean G. Acheson], and the Domestic Policy Committee under Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith]. We operated the Council during the Eisenhower administration. Senator Kennedy and his aides abolished it when they took over the White House, as I would have done. A party needs such a council issuing statements when it's out of power but not when it's in.

[-21-]

MINOW: But didn't the program which the President then proposed to the Congress reflect much of the work which your committee had done...

BENTON: Oh, it did indeed. And the program later advocated by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Yes, our proposal for national scholarships, and many other proposals in that report, have found their way into national policy. And it is one of the few reports by a committee representing a party out of power, or at least out of power from the standpoint of the presidency, that had very great and major impact.

MINOW: That's the point I didn't want us to overlook in our interview today. That President Kennedy seized upon the work of the party intellectuals while out of office, and effectively pushed it toward legislative enactment.

BENTON: Well, perhaps this is a good point—before we get back to the specifics after his election as President—to comment on this remarkable skill that President Kennedy had in combining the approach of a highly trained intellectual, which he was, with the deep insight and uncanny skill of a highly trained professional Irish politician.

MINOW: That was Kennedy!

BENTON: I have greater respect, I must say, for the Irish politicians, as politicians, than for any group in the country.

[-22-]

I have certainly had plenty of exposure to them since I entered politics actively at the end of the war. On all sides we have had the evidence of his intellectual capacity and deep intellectual perception. I suppose he's about as great a contrast as could be imagined in the United States today to Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater], who's just been nominated, who more or less symbolizes a complete anti-intellectual approach. If you have to describe Goldwater in a critical sense, in one phrase, then I suppose you could say he's the personification of the anti-intellectual approach to American politics. I want to tell you an anecdote about Mr. Henry R. Luce, with whom I've been a close friend since we were undergraduates at college together. He was the managing editor of the *Yale News* the year before I was the chairman of the *Yale Record*. We were fellow debaters at Yale when debating invited social ostracism. And we've been friends throughout those 45 years that we've known each other. He was on my yacht a couple of summers ago and he spent every day writing busily on deck. And I said to him one day, "What are you writing?" And he said, "Well, I'm rewriting the preface that I wrote for Jack Kennedy's book written as he graduated from Harvard, *While England Slept*." I said, "Did you write the original preface for that book?" Mr. Luce, to many, symbolizes Republican opposition to the Democratic administrations over the last 35 years. He said, "I did indeed and it's a great book." Well, of course, as an aside, I said to Luce, "How did you

[-23-]

happen to do it to begin with?" And he gave me a three letter word for an answer and you won't have to guess much what the word was. The word was "Joe." At any rate, I'm sure President Kennedy does not deny the great part that his father played in developing his career and success. But here's a young man who comes out of Harvard and writes a distinguished book in his early 20's. His later book, *Profiles in Courage*, which I have read, is a very distinguished book, showing great intellectual insight and perception. These two books show his intellectual capacity. But far more importantly, the more important evidence and his great triumph were the men of intellectual attainment whom he attracted into his administration. I know the State Department best. There never has been such a group of executives in the State Department. I would say he's had three times as many men of absolutely top ability in the State Department as were ever assembled before in the history of the Department. Moreover, at all levels in Washington, including the staffing of the White House, he brought in a caliber of men unprecedented in our political history. I shall again quote Mr. Luce, who of course observes American life and politics very closely. He opposed Kennedy in 1960 although not very energetically and indeed gave him marvelous publicity in his magazines. As a matter of fact that reminds me of a personal remark President Kennedy made to me about the Luce magazines. If I talked all day I could think of more of them. But...

[-24-]

MINOW: What was that, Senator?

BENTON: Well, I'll finish my first story and then I'll get back.

MINOW: All right.

BENTON: Remind me of the President's remark about the magazines?

MINOW: All right.

BENTON: Luce said to me, "I have never seen such a job of recruitment done in the history of American politics. I don't believe any such job has ever been done as the recruitment of the Cabinet and the White House staff and the State Department personnel." Luce included fellows like you, Newt, brought into the FCC. Most brilliant job in all history. I heard your friend Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] played a big part in that. I've never investigated the full background, but the whole credit is Jack Kennedy's. And at the same time of course, President Kennedy brought in the hard-headed politicians like John Bailey and Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and the others who watched over the politics. He had this rare combination of high intellectuality on appointments and on great issues, of which perhaps Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] is a good example. He had this together with an acute sensitivity for the rough and tumble of American political life, much of which is a form of jungle warfare. Perhaps the two types of men may be represented by this anecdote. I remember asking Bailey once about the setup in

the White House when he was telling me of the great importance of Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and Kenny O'Donnell. I said

[-25-]

to Bailey, "What about Ted Sorensen?" "Oh," said Bailey, "he's not interested in politics." [Laughter] I suppose that remark shows the cleavage.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: Sorensen was the intellectual working on the speeches, the great issues, the message to the Congress and so on. And over in the next room were Bailey and Kenny O'Donnell and these highly intelligent, aggressive Irish political experts—Bobby Kennedy combines both these qualities, too; he's like his brother in this.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Not only Jack but...

MINOW: But at really different levels, at different sides of politics.

BENTON: Anybody who studies the stuff that is rolling off onto these tapes, God help him if he had to spend ten years listening [laughter] to it all, but anybody who studies it with the idea of doing a book about Jack Kennedy, or a series of books, has got to probe deeply into this two-sided man, with these two extraordinary and highly developed qualities. One of them coming out of the Harvard and intellectual background and exposure, and the other coming out of Honey Fitz...

[Here the tape was broken and we could not get back.]

MINOW: ...the remark of Mr. Luce...

[-26-]

BENTON: I had three official visits with the President after he was elected. But in one of them we were talking about Mr. and Mrs. Luce [Clare Booth Luce]. And he said to me, "Do you think there's any possibility that Luce could ever be converted into a Democrat?" "Well," I said, "he treated you very well in his magazines during your campaign. He gave you marvelous treatment." He said, "Yes, he did." I then said that Luce may have accounted for that one-tenth of one percent, the margin of his victory, "If he'd really gone after you, it's my belief you wouldn't be President." He said, "That's right. I agree on that." This shows his sense of realism; he was in intimate contact with reality. He then said, "That's why I asked the question." So I said, "the answer to your question is no." But you know I never anticipated Goldwater's nomination. And Newt, I

could be wrong in my answer because I don't know what Luce is going to do with Goldwater. Yes, I could be wrong. It's possible. We're sitting at a point now where we don't know. How could I imagine Goldwater? I mean I couldn't imagine a development of that kind at that point. I will tell you another story to show you the closeness of Kennedy with Luce. And with other Republicans.

Kennedy operated with great skill with many key Republicans. He had two in his Cabinet. He understood that there was no real ideological cleavage between the parties on most issues and that the Russians are quite right when they look at us and say that the two parties are the two halves

[-27-]

of a capitalistic system. [Laughter] He understood this keenly. It was true of Boston at the local level and he applied it at the national level. There were smart political operators in both parties.

Now after his election the President called Harry Luce and asked him who should be Secretary of State. This will interest you in line with your and my joint interest in Governor Stevenson. Harry Luce said Dean Rusk.

MINOW: Really?

BENTON: Yes. Now I know that Bob Lovett [Robert A. Lovett], another Republican, recommended Dean Rusk. I've heard that Acheson recommended Dean Rusk. I don't know how he happened to select Dean Rusk but the fact Harry Luce recommended him probably didn't hurt his chances any.

MINOW: Let me...

BENTON: I only give it to show...

MINOW: Yes. Let me attempt to probe a little more deeply on that. You think he said to Mr. Luce, "I'm considering the following people," and listed Dean Rusk? Or did Rusk just come up...

BENTON: Not the way the story was told me by Mrs. Luce. Now Kennedy's intellectual gifts come through to the American people in his speeches. I think his public speeches are the greatest since those of Abraham Lincoln. I think they transcend in quality Franklin Roosevelt's [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]

[-28-]

speeches. By far. And this takes enormous intellectual skill and power. There's all this stuff about ghost writers. I've used them—everybody important in public life has to depend to some extent on writers. But if you're sensitive to words as Kennedy was, and Stevenson is—as I am—there is no ghost writer who can do the job. In the final analysis you have to take

the responsibility yourself, and sit down in the agony of the final drafting and put the touches in and the key lines. This is not detracting from Ted Sorensen. Chet Bowles told me that Ted Sorensen is the smartest young man he ever saw. I'm not detracting in any way. I've written a few things for President Truman and as a young man for many others. And I've tried to write for Governor Stevenson, but with no success. But when it comes through it's Truman, or it's Stevenson, and when I finish with my own speeches, it's Benton. Even if a man like Truman or Kennedy uses the material verbatim, as Truman once did a speech at Bridgeport which I prepared for him about McCarthy's attack on Ray Baldwin—he used it word for word—probably a thousand words—but it was Truman just the same. He used it because I'd caught his spirit and mannerisms. When he read it, he took the responsibility for it.

Yes, Kennedy's speeches perhaps better than anything else illustrate the astonishing intellectual virtuosity of the President.

[-29-]

MINOW: I think that's a good pause to stop this tape with.

BENTON: Good.

MINOW: We'll begin the next tape with your recollections of the meetings after he became President.

BENTON: Good.

MINOW: Senator Benton, we'll now begin the part of the interview which deals with your recollections of President Kennedy after he became president. I know you had a number of meetings with him and of course carried official responsibility during this period. What do you recall of your first meeting with him after he became President?

BENTON: My first recollection that bears sharply on him after he became President is my meeting with President Truman right after Kennedy's election. And I think that a report of this meeting is worth putting into the record as an opinion which is going to be argued about by historians. President Truman and I had been rather intimate. When I served as Assistant Secretary of State Secretary, Byrnes [James F. Byrnes] was out of the country much of the time and when Marshall [George C. Marshall] came in as Secretary he didn't understand my area of the Department, so throughout my tenure in the Department I dealt rather intimately with the President. I later became perhaps his most enthusiastic and consistent supporter in the Senate. Certainly one of them. Incidentally, when I was spending a weekend with him at his home in

[-30-]

Independence, a week or a month after Eisenhower's nomination, there's a story worth telling—that bears on my earlier remarks about President Kennedy's intellectual aptitudes.

Truman hadn't begun to quarrel with Eisenhower yet. Indeed he was quite proud of him. He'd sent him to NATO and rescued him from his ill-fated presidency at Columbia. He took me around Independence. He showed me the library. He called it the Andrew Jackson Library. I seem to recollect that it was he who had put Jackson's statue up in front of it. [Laughter] He knows a whale of a lot about American history and he greatly admired Jackson. He said, "I read every book in that library before I was 35 years old." Truman is a reader. He's famous as a reader. His house is heaped with books. As a book publisher, I can always tell when anybody's a reader when I go into his home. I can almost smell it. And he said to me, talking about Ike, "You know, his greatest handicap as President is going to be that he can't read." He said, "Ike tells me that when he takes home some manuscripts to read at night, he's—he goes to sleep, he can't read them." Well, we later learned that Ike didn't even read the newspapers. His staff had to put anything it wanted him to read on one page. Now contrast this with President Kennedy.

Getting back to my earlier comments about President Kennedy's astonishing intellectual perception, I believe a significant part of it was the way he had trained and

[-31-]

disciplined himself to read. I've always admired him for going out and taking that course to learn how to read faster. One reason as president that he was on top of his subject matter was that he had done the required reading. He had done the homework. As had Truman. This is one thing these two Presidents have in common—they are both skilled and highly trained readers. Thus perhaps President Truman's comment on Eisenhower is worth throwing in. At any rate, Truman asked me to come up and see him at the Carlyle Hotel.

MINOW: When was this?

BENTON: The week after the election.

MINOW: The week after the election. Of '60.

BENTON: Yes, of '60. You know he had opposed Kennedy's nomination and did not look at all favorably on Kennedy as a candidate. Even in talking to me after the election, he referred to "Your friend Kennedy," probably referring to Connecticut's friend—Truman knew I'd not supported Kennedy at Los Angeles. He knew I'd supported Stevenson. And knew I'd consistently supported Stevenson in '52, '56 and again in '60. And he said to me, "Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] was a very weak candidate." He said, "Your friend Kennedy had to have the weakest candidate that the Republicans had ever put up in order to win." He said, with a sort of sneer, "Even your friend Stevenson..." He didn't like Stevenson either. He said, "Even your friend Stevenson would have swept the country

[-32-]

against Nixon.” He added, “Symington [W. Stuart Symington] would have won easily.” You will recall that he had been for Symington. Now I think this is terribly interesting to the biographers. I happen to agree with it. I thought Nixon was a very weak candidate. Now I’m not talking about his strength as a man or a lawyer or in any other way. Merely his strength or appeal as a candidate. A kind of distinction that Irish political bosses make. Indeed, Nixon later showed how weak a candidate he was by the lousy run he made in California against Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown]. He took a terrible shellacking, particularly for a man who’d been his party’s presidential nominee. Thus on the later record we’ve now got to admit that Nixon was a very weak candidate. The record subsequently demonstrated that Truman was right. Now I know many are going to differ with this, and this is going to get a lot of study.

My first direct communication with him after the nomination—I of course sent him my congratulations and I sent him my campaign contribution. There’s an amusing and interesting story about the contribution. Sargent Shriver called me the week before the election and wanted me to send him some more money for a special last minute effort with the Negro press. I didn’t know Shriver. I’d never seen him. I’d already given very large sums of money, including a lot of money to finance Stevenson’s campaign for the nomination and also Humphrey’s [Hubert H. Humphrey] campaign. But I’d sent \$10,000 to Kennedy the minute he was

[-33-]

nominated. And incidentally the story about my contribution told in Teddy White’s [Theodore H. White] book bears on this. And bears on John Bailey and Kennedy.

MINOW: Teddy White’s book, *The Making of the President?*

BENTON: *The Making of The President.* Teddy White told a story about my gift to Humphrey. I had sent Humphrey \$5,000 when he was campaigning in Wisconsin against Kennedy and didn’t have enough money to take his wife along with him. And I later financed Jim Doyle [James E. Doyle] of Wisconsin and sent him out to Los Angeles where he arranged that great demonstration for Stevenson. For Stevenson and thus against Kennedy. According to Teddy White, John Bailey learned about my Humphrey contribution and got hold of me and said, in effect, “if you don’t quit this, and put a stop to it, and give your money to Kennedy, I’m going to drive you out of the Democratic party in the State.” Well of course this is completely false. A smart politician like Bailey would never say anything like that, nor would any other of the smart ones around Kennedy. No, all Bailey said to me was “If you’ve given \$5,000 to Humphrey, I’ve got to have \$5,000 for Kennedy. [Laughter] Ribicoff and I and other leaders in Conn. are supporting Kennedy and if you’re going to give it to Humphrey you have to give it to Kennedy.” And I said, “If he’s nominated, I’ll send him ten.” Perhaps Bailey thinks that’s how I happened to send him the ten, but I think he knows I would have sent it anyway. [Laughter] So when Shriver called me, I said “Well, I sent him \$10,000

[-34-]

and I've never even had the courtesy of an acknowledgement. Never even a postcard." So, I said, "And for this reason I'm not going to give you a penny for the Negro press. Not a dime." [Laughter] Shriver sounded very startled over the phone. Two days later I had a hand-signed acknowledgement from Kennedy [laughter], showing Shriver knew how to communicate with Kennedy even on the airplanes while he was campaigning around the country.

MINOW: Did this change your mind about making any...

BENTON: No, no.

MINOW: ...contribution?

BENTON: No, I then figured the Kennedy's with my \$10,000 could look out for themselves. [Laughter] But the first thing I heard from the administration was a phone call from Governor Bowles who was then Undersecretary of State.

MINOW: When was this? So we fix this in time.

BENTON: Well, must have been late November, early December.

MINOW: Of '60.

BENTON: Yes. Of '60. It might have been middle December.

MINOW: I see. But it was before the President was inaugurated.

BENTON: Oh yes. While the job of recruitment was being done.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: And Bowles was working on staffing the State Department and the Embassies in his role as Undersecretary.

[-35-]

And he called me and he said, "Bill, would you go to Rome as ambassador? Rusk and I are going to see the President tomorrow. We'd like to recommend you. I've got troubles and difficulties on a lot of appointments and if you're sure you won't do it, we'd rather not make the recommendation, because we don't like to recommend too many people who then just turn us down." Well, of course I suspected that I wouldn't have had that phone call unless it had been cleared with the President, but I never knew for sure. I said to Governor Bowles, "No, I'm not prepared to go to Rome. I don't want an ambassadorship. I'm too old to take an ambassadorship." I was then 60 and I said, "I'm not

prepared to spend 90 percent of my time entertaining congressmen, businessmen, going to tea parties and sitting next to women who bore me at dinner parties—for the benefit of the other 10 percent. That’s for the younger men who are on the make.” I never knew whether Kennedy knew about this for sure until Mrs. Luce, who had been ambassador to Rome, lit into me very critically. She said “What did you turn down Rome for?” And I said, “Well, I was never really offered Rome.” I told her the story. She said “Well, that’s an offer. Of course it’s an offer. You know that you wouldn’t have had that call unless it had been cleared. You ought to know enough to know that.” I said, “I didn’t know that, and it didn’t make any difference because I didn’t want the appointment, so I didn’t care.” I said, “How did you know about it?”

[-36-]

She said, “Well, Harry...” and this gets back to Harry Luce’s relationship with the President and this seems to me an interesting part of the President’s biographical background in politics. She said, “My husband said to the President, Why isn’t my friend Bill Benton in your administration? Why haven’t you incorporated him into the administration? Why are you leaving him outside?” And the President said to Luce, “I offered him Rome and he turned it down.” So from this I conclude that Mrs. Luce was right and it was an offer.

MINOW: When approximately was this conversation with Mrs. Luce? Was this...

BENTON: Oh, maybe two or three months later. Along maybe in February...

MINOW: A month later. Right.

BENTON: February or March.

MINOW: Didn’t the Kennedy administration offer you other posts as well?

BENTON: I was later approached—I have been throughout my life—for several ambassadorial posts. You may remember I wrote a book after my trip with Adlai called the *Voice of Latin America*...

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: This was 1960 but published in 1961.

MINOW: 1960.

[-37-]

BENTON: Yes. This book was a big hit and was published in Spanish in Mexico, and in England as well as here and got me a fame I didn’t deserve. It was a big

hit in part be cause there were so few books of merit about Latin America, which has been largely neglected by our best scholars, and by most competent writers. And I was even indirectly approached as to whether I'd be Assistant Secretary of State on Latin America, or whether I'd go as ambassador to Buenos Aires to be the senior ambassador for all Latin America. I was talked to by Governor Stevenson about other posts. But it gets around, you know, in these sensitive circles, if a man doesn't want to be an ambassador. I had had several previous offers. President Truman asked me to go as ambassador to Paris in 1948, I was approached to go to India as our first ambassador, to Moscow, other places. Some were offers, some were approaches which could have perhaps been converted into offers. I could have made a career out of it if I'd wanted to. I don't recommend it if a man has significant alternatives. At any rate, I did agree with President Kennedy to go to UNESCO as ambassador. I was the first U.S. ambassador appointed to UNESCO. Still am.

MINOW: This was in an area in which you had had prior experience in the government.

BENTON: I inherited, when I went into the State Department as the war was ending, the momentum and background of the widespread desire of intellectuals throughout the Western

[-38-]

world to set up a major and significant UN organization in the fields of education, science and culture. I was thus responsible for the United States delegation at the conference in London in the fall of '45 that wrote the UNESCO Charter. And I was chairman of the first two delegations that followed, at the first two general conferences. President Kennedy in my first interview with him on UNESCO referred to this. About my being the patriarch of UNESCO. And about my being the American founder of UNESCO. In the State Department I pushed the legislation through the Congress. President Kennedy said, "This background will be a big asset to you." I laughed and said to him, "Well, Mr. President, it's just like Thomas Jefferson coming back to Washington and trying to understand the Pentagon." And he seemed to think that was an amusing crack. As a matter of fact, his gaiety and wit were among his most memorable characteristics. He liked wit. He not only gave it out but he liked it when he got it. Here's the news story—and a picture of the President in a rocking chair talking with me—that my office pulled out of the files for this interview today. It's dated Sunday, March 10. I saw him and accepted the U.S. UNESCO ambassadorship on March 9.

MINOW: Of '63.

BENTON: Of '63, yes. I had three meetings between that date and the date of his assassination, growing out of my

[-39-]

ambassadorship to UNESCO. In the first meeting, as I sat down, he went right after me. He said...

MINOW: This was in his office?

BENTON: In his office, yes. He said “Tell me about all these new techniques in the field of education that you’re experimenting with in the Britannica, about these new ways to teach mathematics and these new teaching machines. I’d like to hear about those.” Terribly inquisitive. Marvelous interlocutor. A wonderful inquisitor really. I said, “Where did you hear about them?” He said, “Hubert Humphrey has been telling me about them.” And I said, “Mr. President, if I can perfect the Britannica Schools in Chicago, where we’re now trying to train high school dropouts with all these new techniques, I’m going to give Hubert Humphrey the state of Minnesota as a franchise.” I added, “I’m tired of Hubert having to scrounge around the country without any money.” I then said, “I’m sick of his not having any money to take his wife along in Wisconsin—so that I have to send him \$5,000.” I said, “I’m going to try to make him a millionaire like the Kennedys.” [Laughter]

MINOW: What was the President’s response to that?

BENTON: Well, he laughed and with enthusiasm. I’m persuaded that that was the proper tone to take in talking to President Kennedy. At any rate, after telling him something about Britannica schools and our new teaching methods, I then

[-40-]

said to him, “I’m going to tell you something as we start this interview that will surprise you. The UNESCO ambassadorship—that nobody ever hears about or talks about—you don’t have a big queue outside your office asking for it as you do looking for the post in London—it’s the best ambassadorship you’ve got to offer. It’s the absolutely number one top ambassadorship in the entire world.” He exclaimed, “What!” I continued, “In the first place it’s only two months this year and thus I have ten months to go and do whatever I want to. And I don’t have to entertain any congressmen or businessmen or go to any protocol dinners or tea parties or anything else—or worry about DeGaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle]. In the next place it’s only three months next year. In the third place all the meetings are in Paris—and in the way the CIO goes to Miami in February—all the meetings are in May and September, the most beautiful months of the year in Paris. Yes, this is the premier ambassadorship that you’ve got to bestow on anybody.” [Laughter] Well, I don’t think I could have said anything about UNESCO that could have startled him more and his reply again illustrates his wit. He said, “By God, Bill, it’s wonderful to have a guy in here who’s not complaining.” [Laughter] Of course the unhappy lot of the President is to sit there all day long listening to complaints, trying to stand up against guys who are after something.

MINOW: Right.

[-41-]

BENTON: People who have gripes. People who want promotion. People who want somebody fired. I don't know how to get the scales to weigh it, but it must be 80 percent of the job. [Laughter] I...

MINOW: Didn't President Truman once say that he spent 90 percent of the time persuading people to do things that they ought to have done without being persuaded?

BENTON: That sounds like a good Trumanism. Then, as best as I can remember, I said to President Kennedy, "I want you to become known as the world leader in the field of education. And I'm going to help you get that done as your ambassador to UNESCO. And that's a very great posture for the United States to strike. With your intellectual interests and background, you're the fellow to take that role." I later went down and talked to MacBundy [McGeorge Bundy] about this and we decided that it was a great opportunity for the President. And with his re-election, I think we would have achieved it before the next term. The idea greatly aroused his interest. And it's a much better position for a president of the United States to take than most roles in which he's cast. Contrast it for a moment with Goldwater's position—something about the Marines landing in Cuba and the belligerency in Vietnam—just to take a quick contrast. But it would be a great thing to get world acceptance for a U.S. president in that role.

[-42-]

I don't think it could be done with President Johnson. Though again I'm not being critical of President Johnson whom I expect to be a great President. But every President according to his own type and temperament. [Laughter]

MINOW: Right. Right.

BENTON: Perhaps my suggestion here illustrates again the high aspect of the intellectual...

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: Quality in Kennedy and in his presidency and in his leadership. Secondly, I said to him, "Mr. President, I want to talk to Bobby." Bobby had just written a major article for the *Saturday Evening Post* on the whole subject of information and cultural exchanges, and United States propaganda. I reminded the President of my testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee which he had put into the Congressional Record. I said, "Bobby understands this subject better than any member of the Cabinet we've ever had, including any Secretary of State. He's got it in perspective more than all the others put together." And I said, "I hardly know him. I want you to tell him that

I'll be around to see him because I want his help. He could help UNESCO. I wouldn't take the appointment unless I thought I could help build up UNESCO and make it more important in world affairs. Bobby will understand this; he can help me." And in fact that's why the President wanted me to take it to build up UNESCO. He made that very clear. Again, it's

[-43-]

a tribute to Kennedy's perception that he saw that UNESCO wasn't amounting to enough and that the United States' leadership had largely evaporated. He saw a chance to rebuild it, as did some of the smart men in the State Department. I told him about being in Aspen with Bobby the summer before where Bobby had as his guests a group of foreign students. And Bobby spent all day listening to the gripes and complaints about the U.S. of these foreign students of socialistic and communistic leanings. No other Cabinet minister has ever done anything like that, or as perceptive as that. Bobby picked this idea up out of his trip around the world. He said, "I'll tell this to Bobby." And he said, "There's not a week that he's not annoying me about these foreign students. He's talking to me about it all the time." Well, unhappily, although I tried to get Bobby a couple times in the year before the assassination, I never did catch up with him. And thus I never followed through on this first interview with the President.

Finally, still reporting on this interview, it turned out one thing the President knew well about UNESCO was the booklet UNESCO had published on race relations in the Soviet Union which was more or less a whitewash, a piece of Soviet propaganda that could have been written in the Kremlin. It was a disgrace. Mr. Maheu [Réne Maheu], the Director General of UNESCO, later admitted to me that it was a disgrace. I think I have fixed it so that such a booklet will never happen again, but this isn't for sure. I later

[-44-]

talked [laughter] to Senator Mansfield [Mike Mansfield], and the booklet was the only thing he knew about UNESCO. So I was starting with a shadow which had been created by UNESCO itself, this unhappy piece of Soviet propaganda carrying the UNESCO label. The President said rather helplessly, instead of storming about the matter, he said, "Bill, I suppose there is nothing you can do about this—nothing you can do about this Russian propaganda through UNESCO." [Laughter] A great generosity of attitude that I wouldn't have had. And I said, "You bet your life there's something I'm going to do about it. I'm going to see that it doesn't happen again and that we set up a system in UNESCO so that it can't happen again." Yes, I think I've got that done, though I can't be positive. That's really all I remember about our first meeting.

MINOW: When was your next meeting with him?

BENTON: Well, the next, let me see. The next was about, must have been in October 1963. It would be about six months later. Mr. Maheu...

MINOW: A month before his assassination, then. That might have been your third

meeting perhaps.

BENTON: No, my third meeting was a month later, on November 18, 1963.

MINOW: In other words then your last meeting with him was within a few days of his assassination.

[-45-]

BENTON: It was.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: Yes. The second meeting with him was precipitated by the visit to Washington of Mr. Maheu, the Director General of UNESCO. A very brilliant French intellectual.

MINOW: For the record you might spell his name.

BENTON: M-a-h-e-u.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Rene, Rene Maheu.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: His election as Director General had been bitterly opposed by the State Department. The Department had mistakenly opposed it and took a shellacking on it and the United States was very unhappily positioned in relation to Maheu when I took the ambassadorship. I knew Maheu in the early days in UNESCO. I said to the State Department, "he's a man of outstanding ability. I am not going to go to Paris to feud with Maheu. If you want me to go over there as your ambassador I announce my attitude right now. I'm going over there to cooperate with Maheu. I'm going over there to help build UNESCO." So my position was clear and when I got to Paris I discovered that Maheu had many legitimate reasons for being upset about his background relationships with the United States and with the State Department. Among them was the fact that he had been in Washington and

[-46-]

the State Department had not arranged for him to drop in for a chat and a meeting with the President. And he is the Director General of one of the great organizations of the world. This was a mistake diplomatically. A mistake in our international relations because Maheu has enormous influence in all these underdeveloped countries. One of the most influential men in

the world in the underdeveloped countries, which look to UNESCO for leadership in education, in science, in building their universities, in culture. We don't hear too much about UNESCO in Chicago but I assure you that UNESCO is a magic phrase to conjure with in Nigeria, for instance.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: As a matter of fact I was in Nigeria for the State Department last March and I saw a store about the size of this room and it was headed UNESCO Pool. It was a betting parlor to take wagers on the soccer games and what not and they just took the name UNESCO [laughter]—it's such a favorable name that in Nigeria they want to slap it on the store front.

MINOW: Have to bring a suit for unfair competition.

BENTON: And I found Maheu was emotionally upset because he hadn't been able to see the President. He said to me, "I'm never going back to Washington again." Well, I said to Maheu, "I'll fix that." So when he came back I told the State Department we had to take him in to see the President. And we did go in and Assistant Secretary Battle [Lucius D. Battle],

[-47-]

who is in charge of cultural affairs came along, so there were four of us.

MINOW: Right. This was October...

BENTON: Of '63.

MINOW: '63. Right.

BENTON: I have a letter here of October 31 bringing up some of the points with Secretary Cleveland [J. Harlan Cleveland], another Assistant Secretary, which came up in the visit. So I must have written a letter within three or four days. The President's appointment schedule will show when this date took place.

MINOW: Right. Right.

BENTON: I told Maheu, of course, there would be only 10 or 15 minutes. That's all I expected. And you can imagine my astonishment when we stayed 40 minutes. This again, points up the President's deep intellectual interest. He didn't regard this as something to be rushed through...

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: ...just because it was a ceremonial he had to agree to do and because I had pushed the State Department into it. He started right in after Maheu. He said, "Tell me about what you want the United States to do for UNESCO?" Maheu said, "I want your intellectual understanding and support and comprehension of UNESCO, your perception and insight into UNESCO and its problems." And what a damn smart reply

[-48-]

instead of saying, "I want more money," or, "A bigger budget," or, "I want more American scientists." He couldn't have intrigued the President more. And with quite frequent interjections by me to help guide the conversation, the President went right after him. He said, "Tell me about these new types of educational techniques that were one reason that I appointed Senator Benton ambassador—one reason I sent him to Paris." And I interjected and said, "Mr. President, you know there's a conflict of interest here because the Encyclopedia Britannica is interested in all these techniques and I don't want Mr. Maheu to think you sent me to UNESCO to promote the Encyclopedia Britannica's teaching machines, and what not." He looked at me coolly and said, "I sent you there because you had a conflict of interest..." [Laughter] Incidentally, this conflict of interest subject is enormously misunderstood because the very fact I had this background in the Britannica is indeed...

MINOW: What qualified you for the job.

BENTON: A very important extra qualification for the job.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: Of course. And I ought to be old enough and rich enough to be trusted that I'm not going to try to corrupt UNESCO or to try to get UNESCO to sell our teaching machines to Nigeria. At any rate, Maheu, and remember that most intellectuals and professional educators are resistant to

[-49-]

these new techniques, replied to the President, "We're experimenting." And the President said, "How many experiments have you got?" And Maheu said, "Three." And the President said, "Tell me what they are. Tell me about them." Now this is marvelous skill as an interlocutor, as an inquisitor. And I knew Maheu wouldn't know what they were. I knew he'd be—he'd fall flat on his face. I stepped in to save him. And to tell the President, I diverted the conversation. I think one of the most interesting points...

MINOW: Did Maheu speak English?

BENTON: Yes, very well. I think one of the most interesting points that came up in this meeting was the point on which I reported in the letter to Harlan

Cleveland. I am at odds with the State Department in my efforts to push them into getting changes in the present rules under which American civil servants and Foreign Service officers can be released on leaves of absence to move into these International agencies. Right now a man who goes in and stays over three years begins to be penalized. So they don't stay. As a result the road is wide open for the Frenchmen like Maheu who come out of the Foreign office, go into UNESCO and other UN agencies, and in Maheu's case stays 17 years and takes UNESCO over and becomes Director General. By contrast, we put our men in for three years, as we did with the American Assistant Director General whom I found

[-50-]

there when I got to UNESCO, and he was leaving after his three years because his build-up of his pension stopped, his seniority build-up stopped, and he had to come back to Washington. Our influence on these agencies, with this attitude, is likely to continue to be peripheral until we change it. This I'm trying to get changed. You know the problem of moving the bureaucracy, and here I had a chance with the President. And had he lived I think would have helped get this unhappy system changed, with his support. No one knows the number of strings that were cut by his assassination. The plans of these gifted men around him that were in process of fulfillment that are now snapped and cut and have to be rebuilt and started over again. This is the catastrophe that doesn't show in the newspapers...

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: ...that is lost to public view and is lost to the historians. I give this as one small example. I said to Maheu, "I want you to tell the President about your relations with the French Foreign office and about how you've been on leave of absence for 17 years and how this permitted you to go up through the UNESCO hierarchy and become Director General. I want you to tell him that if you were fired tomorrow, or got out of UNESCO at the end of this term, that you would go back to the Foreign Office with full seniority, with full increments and pension pay

[-51-]

and everything for your full 17 years in UNESCO." And the President said, "Is that true?" And Maheu said "Yes" and told him. And I said, "Mr. President, I welcome the opportunity to have this chance with Mr. Maheu as my illustration to register this very important point because this system of ours has got to be changed." And I wrote Harlan Cleveland on October 31, 1963. This is an example of the papers that won't get into the files up at the Kennedy Library. And I reported to Cleveland that,

"In our 40 minute visit with the President, one of the subjects under discussion was what the United States can do better to help UNESCO. The President kept returning to this: 'What can we do better to help UNESCO? I want a strong UNESCO. How can we help you? That's why I sent you Benton. What can Benton do to help you?'

Maheu was very skillful. He said he wanted the intellectual interest of the United States; the support of the United States intellectually; the support of the United States in top people, top personnel to advise him and personnel for UNESCO. I commented that I thought the United States' policy should be more generous in its allocation of Civil Service and Foreign Service officers to the international organization. I said that I did not think there should be a three year, or a five year limitation. (They're now suggesting changing the three years to five.)

[-52-]

Secretary Battle and I disagreed. We disagreed in front of the President. Luke said, 'No. Five years should be maximum.' I said, 'Absolutely not. There shouldn't be any stop point at that time.' Maheu volunteered that he'd been with UNESCO for 17 years and that if he retired from UNESCO he would move right back at a top level into the French Foreign office. I commented that this policy by the French government helps to account for the fact that the number two man in so many of the international agencies is French. That's what the French want. That's how much smarter the French are than we are. They take their brightest young men and infiltrate them into these organizations. And because they're the brightest and well trained—speak English, French, perhaps Russian—they move right up through these organizations. This is what we don't know how to do in this country. The President understood that.”

The end of my letter to Secretary Cleveland was “There was some joking as to whether this was a matter of priority for the French Foreign office in the advocacy of French ideas.” But of course, the French, like Bobby Kennedy, know the value of ideas. And they know the value of foreign students and of education. They're way out ahead of us in their understanding of these areas and have been for a hundred or two hundred years. Under their

[-53-]

policy they've largely taken over UNESCO. They've largely taken over many other agencies. Under our policy we shall never take over an agency from within. Why should we not have a policy which would enable us to bore from within? Particularly in view of the fact that we're never going to be skillful in boring from without?

This point was worth the meeting, or would have been worth it if the President had lived.

Maheu went out of that meeting stimulated, inspired, writing me letters of gratitude, going back to Paris and making a speech about it. And when I was at Abidjan at the conference in March known as “The first conference of the Ministers of Education of the African States”...

MINOW: '64?

BENTON: '64. Because of that visit I was able to get up and say, “Mr. Maheu, you

remember the President said to you, 'What about these new techniques in the field of education...' and thus the ripples of that visit have gone on and on. I've referred to it again and again in the meetings of the Executive Board. I would say that this particular meeting with Maheu would be in the top ten percent of the productive visits and time spent by the President on foreign policy.

MINOW: I recall your bringing Maheu to Chicago immediately after that meeting to introduce him at the UNESCO conference.

[-54-]

BENTON: I did indeed.

MINOW: And I remember Maheu speaking about...

BENTON: He did indeed.

MINOW: ...that...

BENTON: He spoke about the visit here in Chicago. He later made speeches about it in Paris.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: I made a speech about it in Abidjan and many before the Executive Board. And the fact I had taken Maheu in to see the President hit the Executive Board with great impact.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Because it again dramatized the fact that the United States means business on UNESCO. My arrival there sent by President Kennedy, as he saw clearly, showed them we meant business. Then, my taking Maheu in six months later to meet him showed that we meant business.

MINOW: Well, also the fact that prior to your being appointed, the office did not carry the rank of ambassador. Is that correct?

BENTON: That's correct.

MINOW: So it elevated the office as well.

BENTON: That was not my idea. That was the President's idea or the State Department's.

[-55-]

MINOW: But the President knew that by making the office an ambassador it would elevate the position and...

BENTON: Oh, of course.

MINOW: How did it happen, Senator Benton, that you had a meeting with him only a month later?

BENTON: Well, now we're getting into politics, you see.

MINOW: Oh?

BENTON: And this is the kind of thing that I'll have to mark confidential, or...

MINOW: Right. There probably will be other things in this, too.

BENTON: One or two, yes.

MINOW: You can classify anything you want...

BENTON: Yes. Most, practically all of this is unclassified. But there were two situations in UNESCO that I had to try to clean up. One of them was the Minister who had been appointed as the Permanent United States Representative to UNESCO, who was head of the U.S. mission to UNESCO. We kept an office in UNESCO House with a Minister and three or four Foreign Service officers under him, and a secretarial staff. Our Minister [Crane Haussamen] there was a very nice, agreeable and pleasant man with an exceedingly rich wife [Carol W. Haussamen]. But he was intellectually not qualified for the job. He was not held in respect by the other Permanent Representatives, by the members of the Executive Board. And a brilliant man like Maheu held him in contempt. He was a

[-56-]

very unfortunate representative of the United States in that job. There are other jobs that I think he could have fulfilled suitably if he had tight direction to keep him at work. He was honest, agreeable and he was rich. And these are not common qualities. [Laughter] But he was offered this job in Paris. The State Department knew he lacked the qualifications and indeed, told me about it even before I went over to meet him. I imagine one reason they were pushing and cajoling me into taking the assignment as ambassador was that they regarded this as a much better choice than going over to the White House and facing up to the fact that we had a minister, a man who'd been appointed through political instigation at the White House, who was incompetent or unqualified for the job. And, of course, this man was a tremendous handicap to me at the first two meetings of the Executive Board. And he greatly

confused our delegation, he greatly confused the Foreign Service officers who were under him, and it was crystal clear he had to be changed. But the State Department was terrified about changing him. I wrote them at the time of the second Executive meeting, in October of '63, and told them I wanted him changed while I was there in Paris. I offered to handle it. They were terrified at the thought of possibly getting into trouble with some favorite of the President, or some favorite of Senator Abe Ribicoff, because Abe was important in sponsoring him. He'd given \$10,000 to Abe's campaign. Well, it's a perfect example

[-57-]

of the temporizing in the State Department which often keeps it from doing itself justice. But the Department does have many grave problems in weighing such questions and adjusting to them.

The second situation was the National Commission of UNESCO. Under the act of Congress which I put through as Assistant Secretary of State, which set up UNESCO and authorized our joining it, was established the so-called UNESCO National Commission of 100 people. You've been a member of it, Newt.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Only 15 of these are appointed at large by the President, and another 10 must come from state and local governments, and another 15 from the federal government. You were one of those 15.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: Then 50 or perhaps 60 come from national organizations which appoint their own people. In other words, the President appoints the AFL, the CIO, and the Chamber of Commerce, and then they name their representatives.

The net result of this system is that the 15 appointed by the White House at large, are of enormous importance because they set the tone for the other 85. And if you depreciate these 15 appointments by putting people in who are manifestly not representative of education, science

[-58-]

and culture, you're not merely tearing down the 15, you're tearing down the entire 100. If you put people of top stature in as your 15 appointed at large, then the AFL, the CIO and Chamber of Commerce will have to put top people in or are more likely to put in top people.

MINOW: Sir, I'll have to interrupt there; we'll have to change the tape.
[Interruption]

Senator, you were just describing the importance of the 15 appointments the President makes to the National Commission of UNESCO.

BENTON: I wanted to make sure the President understood this and I wanted Mr. Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] who was the key one of the President's assistants on such matters and whom I'd never met, to understand it. The State Department was very unhappy about certain appointments advocated by the White House to the National Commission which they deemed to be highly unsuitable and didn't want to make. Now the State Department should handle these problems with the President itself. The fact that I had to go over to see him again about three weeks after I had brought Mr. Matheu in, to talk about these political matters, is not to the credit of the State Department. It's an abdication. But they asked me if I would go and see the President to wash their own dirty linen, so to speak. So I did. And I wrote a memorandum which reports to the Department on this visit more fully than my record of the first two visits. In the body of this memorandum is my report on the two

[-59-]

political questions about which I went to talk to the President. I said to the President, "Do you have any interest, personally or politically, in Mr. Crane Haussamen?" (The man who was the occupant of the role of Minister to UNESCO.) And he said, "No, I've never heard of him." And this again illustrates the rigidity of the State Department because they sat there imagining that the President might have some great interest in him. They didn't even know that he'd never heard of him. The President said, "Who is he?" And I said, "He's the Minister to UNESCO and he'd unsuitable, and he's damaging us very greatly and we can't keep him. He was the recommendation of the White House." And the President immediately said, without a second's hesitation, "Well, then he's got to go." Then I said, "I want to talk to Ralph Dungan also about the appointments to the National Commission for UNESCO because it's going to hurt you politically in the United States to depreciate the National Commission, to make it a political dumping ground and to use it as an ashcan for inferior appointments. It's bad for you and it's bad for the Department, and very bad for UNESCO." I explained that ten mediocre appointments to the National Commission out of the 40 available to the White House—with only 15 at large—operated like Gresham's law and caused deterioration of the entire Commission. I said it was like the impact of the new Republican senators who were elected

[-60-]

with McCarthy in the '46 to the U.S. Senate. I guess I couldn't resist that little [laughter] dig about McCarthy. "As a matter of fact," I continued with the President, "the National Commission can be of help to you politically, and when it meets here in Washington, as I used to do with President Truman, I'd like to bring it around and take five minutes and get you out in the Rose Garden and get your picture taken with prints for every member of the Commission. This will help build it up and help get these key people and their organizations aroused to your leadership. I can get their help in making you the world's number one leader in the field of education, because a lot of them are very influential people." He said, "You do that. Bring them around. I want to see them." He understood that kind of language very well. That appealed to him on both sides of his personality. He picked up the phone and asked for

Dungan. Dungan came in and he said, “Benton’s been complaining about a guy named Haussamen and I told him we’ll get rid of him.” And then he said, “Who is Haussamen?” And Dungan said, “\$50,000.” Well, that’s what I call rapid communication. [Laughter]. I can understand that, I can understand that communication myself. I told the President that John Bailey, our Connecticut Democratic Chairman, and now the National Chairman, had never heard of Haussamen. And Haussamen comes from my state of Connecticut, Westport. Dungan then identified him with New York, not Connecticut.

[-61-]

With the Lexington Liberal Democratic group. He referred to him as one of the “money boys.” We then talked about what needs to be done. We agreed that we must have a replacement for Haussamen. He told Dungan to follow through. He ordered him in my presence. He was assassinated a week later—and the State Department wouldn’t follow through. I won’t go into the full story. There were months of shilly-shallying and procrastination. For example, I had a very tough argument with Abe Ribicoff about this. Abe insisted we treat Haussamen with tender care, if we wouldn’t put him into another job. I explained to Abe that he was totally incompetent, but this made no difference to him. The Department, after the President’s death, was afraid of Abe. It finally worked it out to get Haussamen out of Paris before my third meeting of the Executive Board, in May of ‘64, and sent him on a trip all over the world investigating UNESCO projects. And he resigned officially as of the first of September. He’s still traveling through Africa or somewhere, as we’re dictating here today. God save our Ministers and Ambassadors who are going to be burdened with his visits on the false assumption that he’s our Minister to UNESCO. This I deem also to be a failure in the State Department. It’s no way to treat your people throughout the world. At any rate, I said to Dungan, “I’ll be in to see you when I finish with the President.” I went in to see him and told him about the problem of the National Commission.

[-62-]

I liked him. He’s a wonderful example of the able and attractive men that the President had on the political side.

MINOW: ...intellectually, he has a doctorate.

BENTON: He’s terrific. I took to him at once. I liked Kenny O’Donnell too, when I met him. These are very gifted men. They’re as gifted in their way as the Sorensens and Schelsingers [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] are in their way. And they again show the two worlds in which the President lived. And Dungan understood my problem on the Commission and said, “All right, I agree with you on the National Commission. We can make it a political asset. But I’ve got to have some political appointments that you may not like.” I said, “How many do you have to have?” He said, “Two or three.” I said, “All right. That’s a deal. I’ll give you three. We’ll have 12 appointments that have standing in education, science, and culture. Many of them will be valuable politically too, but you can have three of your own choice. We won’t quarrel about

them if you'll hold them down to three." And we made the deal. Of course, with the President's assassination the State Department became petrified again and didn't know whether the deal was made or not. Mistakenly, Cleveland felt we had to start all over again. This held up the replacement of Haussamen for some months. It's another one of those threads that was broken, you know, the kind I referred...

[-63-]

MINOW: How long was your meeting with the President that time? This meeting in November.

BENTON: Oh, a quick 15 minutes.

MINOW: And this was just, as it turned out, a few days before the President's assassination.

BENTON: I wrote this memo to the Department November 18. What was the date of his assassination?

MINOW: The 22nd.

BENTON: My last meeting with him must have been less than a week before the assassination. I probably had the meeting either on the 17th or 18th. I write these memos immediately while the stuff is fresh in my mind.

MINOW: Are you willing to give a copy of the memo to the Library to accompany the interview?

BENTON: Oh, of course.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: At the last meeting, I told the President how much it had meant to Director General Maheu, as reported to me by Ambassador Beebe of Australia, the chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board, to have had the 40 minute visit with him of a couple of weeks before. I told the President he was particularly good at handling Maheu on the new techniques of education. He told me he had his lead on this through Hubert Humphrey. I told him again I was going to make Hubert the franchise holder for the Britannica Schools

[-64-]

in Minnesota. And thus, any alleged conflict of interest I have on UNESCO was well known to the President. I've been a bit concerned about this, I'll say in an aside, while reading the papers about a lot of this nonsense about conflict of interest. So I'm glad to go on record with the State Department.

MINOW: Right.

BENTON: This memo about my last meeting is to the State Department, addressed to the man who will go over as Minister to succeed Haussamen. He is a very able man named Robert Wade who's been acting as my deputy in the Department and at the Executive Board meetings.

I told the President at this meeting that most professional educationists resent these new educational techniques and that this is why Britannica had had the big exhibit in the Pepsi Cola Building in New York: "New Dimensions in Learning." I told the President all about that exhibit, appealing to the public. I further told the President it took 50 years to educate the educators to a new idea that was manifestly good. I attributed this remark to its source, Dr. Ralph Tyler [Ralph W. Tyler]. Well, this memo shows how much better I can report on the third meeting than on the first two. Because for the second one, Luke Battle was there to do the reporting to the Department, and I didn't write such a memo.

MINOW: Right.

[-65-]

BENTON: The first one I reported orally and I don't have a memo on that one either. But here is the full report of the third with the deletion of the '\$50,000' and a few other appropriate deletions. I moved on into comments on heightened Soviet activities in UNESCO. I told the President about the prestige of Sissakian [Norajr Martirosovich Sissakian]; Academician Sissakian is the Russian member of the Executive Board. I told him about the Soviet wives. They're trained as stenographers so that for several Soviet delegates to UNESCO, you've really got two Soviet delegates—the man and his wife, too. I ended up by saying their staff was twice as big as our staff and probably ten times as good. UNESCO has become a kind of dumping ground which is the traditional role of the cultural end of the Department, an area for which I was once myself responsible. It's always been the ghetto of the Department. This may help explain why, at a high level, the Department wanted me to move in and take hold of the disintegrated situation in Paris. These matters have largely been rectified by now in these 18 months after my appointment; the President unconsciously played a significant role in this.

[-66-]

The President's interest in UNESCO guaranteed the State Department's interest. Or perhaps I should say that my interest, plus the President's, guarantees greater State Department interest.

Before I left, the President again agreed to receive Dr. Harvie Branscomb [B. Harvie Branscomb], the new chairman of the National Commission, plus the full Commission and me, in March to have pictures taken in the garden and to make a little speech. That was all I asked for on behalf of the Commission.

I told the President I thought we could find ideas to give him that would be politically helpful in relationship to UNESCO. I said it might be a good idea for him to make a statement on the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. I was going to write that statement for him. I gave him the background here of the importance of trying to tie up the human rights issue in UNESCO with Eleanor Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt]. I told him I hoped to help place him in the position of the most important world leader in the field of education. Same theme as my first meeting. I said that I would work with the State Department on the kind of ideas that would be helpful. And we would suggest to him ideas to stress with the National Commission in March. I think this memo, Newt, is interesting because it again follows this double pattern, you see. It's a memo at a high intellectual level to the

[-67-]

State Department, but it takes in the realities of politics and the significance of the National Commission—potentially—politically. And you with your political experience in Washington, know the double stream that I too learned in my service there and that Jack Kennedy learned at his mother's apron strings. I ended up with a quick summary of the two most significant issues at the recent UNESCO meeting in Paris. The first was the marked progress we'd made in combating the Soviet propaganda drive within UNESCO and the second was our defeat on the budget. I said the budget problem seemed to me to be much larger than just the UNESCO problem. I told him the amount of money was not large. The problem was how to handle similar budgetary problems in the future, not only in UNESCO but in other UN agencies. He did not seem to have thought about this before. He commented that this potentially could be a tough problem with the Congress. As I later reviewed my notes on what I had intended to cover with him, I found the only thing I missed was that I had not seen Bobby.

MINOW: Yes.

BENTON: The President insisted I tell him how he could help. He seemed to be genuinely interested. I have one point I think we should conclude with. I've been dipping in and out of it all through these remarks. But I've got some personal observations to make...

[-68-]

MINOW: That's just what I was going to ask you. I think you made one most important and perceptive one about the rare blend of intellect and practical

politics that characterized the President. What would be your other general observations about him? Your impressions and feelings. What should a historian look for, based on your...

BENTON: Well, running through all these comments of mine is the theme of our loss of a leader with great intellectual perception. I had quite a significant correspondence with him in 1958. About an article he wrote for the *New York Sunday Times Magazine Section*. I don't know whether any other Senator could have written this article. This article was called "The Shame of the States."

MINOW: What was the date?

BENTON: May 18, 1958. He picked up in this article a lot of the issues that I had been hammering in my closing year in the Senate which I would have continued to hammer if I had been re-elected in '52. The subheading is "Legislatures are so constituted they deny cities fair representation, declares Senator Kennedy, and that is one cause of urban ills." Now he did not foresee the possibility that the Supreme Court might declare such legislatures unconstitutional. Whether anybody in '58 foresaw that as a possibility, seems to me exceedingly doubtful. But here he is taking public leadership and writing a major article on one of the deep fundamental ills in our American

[-69-]

political system which only now are we in process of attacking, after the recent Supreme Court decision. Why, Connecticut hasn't changed its legislative set-up since 1818! The State Constitution was adopted at that time. We have a city like Hartford with a population of approximately 200,000 with the same representation in the State Assembly as a little town with 200 voters in it. Or maybe 100 voters. And New York State is now going through the throes of its own reform. I haven't read this article since then but it was pulled out of my files for this interview and I would like to reread it. President Kennedy says here, "In one state 13,000 rural citizens have as many senators as 4 million urban dwellers. Of all the discriminations against the urban areas, the most fundamental and the most blatant is political..." Then he says, "The great difficulty in stating these problems is that there is no apparent solution." He didn't see the Supreme Court as a solution. He refers to the "second class citizens of the city and its suburbs." Senator Neuberger was exercised about this subject, as I remember. But it got practically no attention. This article illustrates how the quality of Kennedy's intellectual leadership—the quality of his writing and his ideas and his speeches—must rate high in any personal observation or evaluation.

Secondly, I think a great deal will develop in these interviews, and in these files, which will bear on the

[-70-]

strength of the Kennedy family as a whole. It wasn't just Jack Kennedy. It was the family to an extent perhaps never rivaled in our country before. Ambassador Seydoux [M. Roger

Seydoux], the French Ambassador to the UN, says there's been nothing like it since the Bonaparte family. I'm not enough of a student of French history to know much about the Bonaparte family and I was surprised when Seydoux said that they were individuals of great ability. Napoleon's [Napoleon Bonaparte] use of his family seemingly wasn't just nepotism. True, Napoleon overshadowed the rest of them.

I am sure that much more will be learned about the Kennedy family as time goes on. I can quote John Bailey on one point applied to the Kennedy family. He said to me one day, "Bobby is the second most important man in Washington, by far." Well, I said, "Good. But what is your evidence?" "Well," said Bailey, "on any of these big issues, after all the meetings and the conferences and the cabinets and the consultations with the State Department people, and what not, Bobby goes into a room with the President and they settle the question." Now Bailey may or may not have been exaggerating, but there must be a great deal to it because this is the kind of observation at which Bailey is a political professional, if there is one to be found anywhere in the United States. He's like a chameleon in the skill with which he takes on an understanding of the environment in which he's operating. And I've always assumed that for all practical purposes, Bobby Kennedy

[-71-]

has been the National Chairman with a few assistants including John Bailey in a key role. Some think that Bailey was for all practical purposes buried down in the hierarchy handling some of the patronage and the traveling and the money-raising and the \$100 dinners and all the routine that traditionally falls to the lot of a National Chairman—very important assignments but not top policy.

I think this leads into another comment that needs exploration in the study of Kennedy and his family. And this is the question that has so often intrigued me since I got into active politics. And that is why the Irish are so successful in our political system. And not merely our political system. I'm told there has never been an Italian cardinal in the American Catholic hierarchy. The bishops are predominantly Irish except in the Middle West where German bishops, such as Cardinal Mundelein [George William Mundelein], Cardinal Stritch [Samuel Alphonsus Stritch], and now Cardinal Meyer [Albert Gregory Meyer], have come to the top.

Why are the Irish so successful in politics? I have a few theories, but this ought to be studied much more. In the first place, they are undoubtedly gay and witty. And they're gregarious. They like people. It's not phony. It's not a fake. I've attended enough Irish wakes to realize this. They're unlike anything to be found in the congregational church, to which I was born, or those in any other human institution to which I've ever been exposed. At the wake, I think perhaps you see exemplified no one of their qualities. They don't hold grudges. They fight like cats and dogs, and then when it's over,

[-72-]

they can jump into bed together. It must be the Irish who gave rise to the aphorism that politics make strange bedfellows. This is a very interesting—well, take your own case, Newt, of the Stevenson law firm in which you were a partner here in Chicago. Stevenson would not

come to terms with Jack Kennedy before the Los Angeles convention. Stevenson refused to nominate him. Stevenson might have been vice president if he had agreed to support Kennedy. Almost certainly could have been Secretary of State if he'd come to terms. Why he didn't is another subject, on which I'd like to do another tape with you. Stevenson's is a much more complex personality for me to understand than is Jack Kennedy's.

At any rate, what happened with Kennedy's election? You were going to come to work for the Britannica. Instead, Bill Blair [William McCormack Blair, Jr.] showed up in Phoenix to tell me that Sargent Shriver wanted you to be chairman of the FCC. What happened to Willard Wirtz [William Willard Wirtz]? Another Stevenson law partner. Wirtz went in as Under-Secretary and is now Secretary of Labor. Adlai has served the administration for four years at the UN. Bill Blair is now over in the Philippines as ambassador. Kennedy took every single one of you. And did he harbor any resentment against me because I supported Humphrey? And before then and again afterwards supported Stevenson? Not a bit. Offered me the ambassadorship to Rome. Contrast this with the way Goldwater has just handled the Republican convention—insulting Eisenhower, insulting Rockefeller, insulting Scranton.

[-73-]

The stupidity of Goldwater is in contrast to the political wisdom of the Kennedy family—the Kennedys, but notably Jack Kennedy, who demonstrated it avowedly more than others. Now that is not merely a quality of the Kennedy family, it's a quality of the Irish in general. All the Irish leaders in my state look up to Joe Kennedy and Jim Farley [James A. Farley] as models. The idea of thinking that the Irish are radical, or a dangerous element just because they are Democrats, or dangerous to the property system or the enterprise system, is a part of the stupidity of what Thurmond Arnold calls the folklore of capitalism. They are essentially conservative, but much closer to the people than the Republican political leaders have ever been. I once spoke to the Law Forum at Harvard with Carmine De Sapio [Carmine G. DeSapio]. Two thousand Harvard law school students. He read a prepared paper. (I know the man who wrote it for him.) In this prepared paper he claimed that Tammany Hall invented Social Security. That Tammany Hall in distributing those food baskets to the starving immigrants when they came into New York was the true inventor and creator of Social Security. And the students just hooted. And De Sapio was amazed. He stopped and looked around and couldn't understand what he'd said that so amused these students. But the truth is, it's true. These Irish Tammany political leaders in New York—close to the people, gregarious—they weren't sitting at home reading the Encyclopedia Britannica. They don't read.

[-74-]

They're not readers. Jack Kennedy's an exception. I have made gags often about this at the Democratic banquets in Connecticut. I say one of my goals in life is to teach the Democratic leaders of Connecticut how to read. And I'm not kidding. One reason is that so many of the Democrats are Irish [laughter] and they'd rather be together at a bar down on the corner than they would be at home reading the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Now all these are qualities that make the Irish more distinct as a group, I think, than any other group in our political society. Their success politically is indisputable. I once jestingly said that you put any Irishman down in Connecticut town, even if he's the only one there, and you go back five years later and he'd likely to be the town Democratic chairman. However, the Irish usually have another Irishman nearby. They had a kind of fraternal bond, much more marked than in other groups. They can always communicate with each other—Irish Democrats with other Irish Democrats, and perhaps equally with Irish Republicans. They never feud for long, or for keeps.

I have never seen any research work on this. I have never known any sociologist or psychologist to study this subject or try to understand it. But it's essential to the understanding of the Kennedy family. And essential to the understanding of their operations, from Honey Fitz

[-75-]

through to Jack, Bobby, and Teddy [Edward Moore Kennedy]. I'm giving you pretty free wheeling stuff here, you know, but only because I'm sure there's a great deal to it.

MINOW: Well, I think it would be terribly important and valuable that you do the freewheeling.

BENTON: I'm imagining that at some future time there might be some chance that some prospecting biographer might listen to all these tapes and try to put them together into a coherent whole. I guess that's the end of my...

MINOW: Before we close, Senator, as a conclusion, I recall you telling me something, but I don't recall the full details, but we might want to end with that. With your guidance the Britannica has published a book—*A tribute to John F. Kennedy*, which is done in association with the Kennedy Library and the money from it going to go to the Kennedy Library. I understand you took some copies of it to Russia with you on this most recent trip when you were there just in the last weeks. What reaction did you have when you gave that book to some foreign officials?

BENTON: Well, I took only a dozen copies and I wish I'd taken three dozen. I wish I'd had one for everyone I met in Moscow. By the time I got to Chairman Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] I didn't have one left. I'd like to have given him one. But the response was emotional and passionate. Kennedy's personality penetrated not merely throughout western Europe, but throughout the entire world, including the people and the

[-76-]

officials of the Soviet Union. The tragedy of his early assassination is felt deeply. Their warmhearted and highly emotional responses to this book surprised me. And their deep gratitude for it. I always showed them the watercolor of the White House painted by Mrs.

Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]. And I would show them two or three of the photographs which show the President in a gay, spirited and ebullient mood. I'm very glad that our art director didn't fill the book with lugubrious pictures. The skill in the selection of the photographs helps give the book its appeal to the Russian ministers and top political figures to whom I gave it. I have speculated a good deal on why the assassination seemed to hit the entire world with such extraordinary emotional impact. I remember President Roosevelt's death. There was no comparable world-wide emotional response. But he was a man of my present age and death is supposed to be coming to people in their middle 60's. However, it wasn't just that Kennedy was young, though I think that that's a big part of it. Or good looking, though that too is a part. Or gay and witty, which is also a part of it. Perhaps it was that he was indeed growing as a great world leader in the field of ideas—in the field of education—another symbol of hope for the world—the symbol of a better life that lies ahead. It's a combination of things that psychologists will probably speculate about for a long time. Newt, you're a good interviewer. I didn't really realize when I agreed to do this that I had as much

[-77-]

material that bears on my relationship with Senator and President Kennedy. Half of it, I think, when you read it, will be just free wheeling speculative comments and ideas of my own about politics and the family and...

MINOW: Well...

BENTON: the President. But maybe the other half will contain enough good hard material to offset the half that is so purely speculative.

MINOW: Well, as an extraordinarily thoughtful observer of the American scene, I think your comments are of much more value than you think. That concludes our interview with Senator William Benton, July 18, Chicago, for the John F. Kennedy Library. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-78-]

William B. Benton Oral History Transcript
Name Index

A

Acheson, Dean G., 21, 28
Agronsky, Martin, 4, 5, 7, 8
Anderson, 19
Arnold, Thurmond, 74

B

Bailey, John Moran, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 25, 26,
34, 61, 71
Baldwin, 19
Baldwin, Ray, 29
Battle, Lucius D., 47, 53, 65
Beebe, Ambassador, 64
Benton, Thomas Hart, 7
Blair, William McCormack, Jr., 73
Bonaparte, Napoleon, 71
Bowles, Chester B., 13, 15, 29, 35, 36
Branscomb, B. Harvie, 67
Brown, Edmund G. "Pat", 33
Bundy, McGeorge, 42
Byrnes, James F., 30

C

Cleveland, J. Harlan, 48, 50, 52, 53, 63
Coombs, Philip H., 21

D

Davis, Elmer Holmes, 4, 5
de Gaulle, Charles A., 41
DeSapio, Carmine G., 74
Dodd, Thomas J., 13
Doyle, James E., 34
Dungan, Ralph A., 59, 60, 61, 62, 63

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 1, 2, 21, 31, 32, 73

F

Farley, James A., 74
Fitzgerald, John Francis "Honey Fitz", 26, 75
Flynn, Catherine, 1
Fulbright, J. William, 19

G

Galbraith, John Kenneth, 21
Genghis Khan, 15
Goldwater, Barry M., 23, 27, 42, 73, 74

H

Harris, Seymour E., 21
Haussamen, Carol W., 56
Haussamen, Crane, 56, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65
Heller, Walter Wolfgang, 21
Humphrey, Hubert H., 33, 34, 40, 64, 73

J

Jackson, Andrew, 31
Jefferson, Thomas, 39
Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 14, 43

K

Kefauver, Estes, 14
Kennedy, Edward Moore, 76
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 77
Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14,
15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,
28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39,
40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51,
52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62,
63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74,
75, 76, 77, 78
Kennedy, Joseph P., 2, 4, 9, 16, 17, 18, 24, 74
Kennedy, Robert F., 4, 9, 17, 26, 43, 44, 53, 68, 71,
76
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, 76

L

Lehman, Herbert Henry, 5
Lincoln, Abraham, 28
Lindley, Ernest K., 11
Lodge, Henry Cabot, Jr., 2
Lovett, Robert A., 28
Luce, Clare Booth, 27, 28, 36, 37
Luce, Henry R., 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 37

M

MacLeish, Archibald, 19
Maheu, René, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53,
54, 55, 56, 59, 64
Mansfield, Mike, 45
Marshall, George C., 30
McCarthy, Joseph R., 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18,
19, 29, 61
McCloy, Jack, 2
McMahon, Brian, 4
Meyer, Albert Gregory, 72
Mundelein, George William, 72

N

Neuberger, Senator, 70
Nixon, Richard Milhous, 32, 33

O

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 25
O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 25, 26, 63

R

Ribicoff, Abraham Alexander, 13, 14, 34, 57, 62
Rockefeller, 73
Roosevelt, Eleanor R., 67
Roosevelt, Theodore Delano, 28, 77
Ruml, Beardsley, 21
Rusk, Dean, 28, 36

S

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., 63
Scranton, 73
Seydoux, M. Roger, 71
Shriver, R. Sargent, Jr., 25, 33, 34, 35, 73
Sissakian, Norajr Martirosovich, 66
Sorensen, Theodore C., 25, 26, 29, 63
Spellman, Francis Edward, 18
Stevenson, Adlai E., 1, 5, 12, 14, 28, 29, 32, 34, 37,
38, 73
Stevenson, Borden, 12
Stritch, Samuel Alphonsus, 72
Symington, W. Stuart, 33

T

Taft, Robert, 2
Truman, Harry S., 5, 19, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 38, 42,
61

Tyler, Ralph W., 65

W

Wade, Robert, 65
Wiesner, Jerome B., 19
Wirtz, William Willard, 73
White, Theodore H., 34

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-lily are full-
its creamy goodness more pl-
bodied... and its tang more pi-
one taste with combine

General
February 20, 1956

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SUITE 202

NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

WILLIAM BENTON
PUBLISHER & CHAIRMAN

February 20, 1956

Dear Jack:

I congratulate you on your excellent article in the Sunday Magazine Section of the NEW YORK TIMES. You are beating a drum which was a favorite of mine, and it cannot be beat too loudly or too often. I wrote and testified at length in this area. I wish you well and I wish I might help you.

Will you be at our Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner next Saturday? I hope so.

I haven't finished your book but I have read large chunks of it and I am delighted to see it climbing up towards the top of the best seller list. You are to be congratulated on a remarkable idea and a skilled presentation. I thought of the book when I read the last paragraph in your NEW YORK TIMES article. Senator Thomas Hart Benton is to me what the Southerners call "kinfolk". When I first spoke at a Jefferson-Jackson Day banquet, I turned to the Encyclopaedia Britannica for guidance on Jackson, and I found that Thomas Hart Benton had put a bullet into Jackson, in a tavern brawl in Tennessee which Old Hickory had to carry to his grave (Senator Neely later corrected the Britannica and claimed that although both Benton boys were involved in the brawl, it was Jessie that fired the pistol). At any rate, I said in my maiden appearance at a Jackson Day dinner, "Where else can you find a man who can make this claim? Where else is there a Jackson Day dinner which has a speaker who can make a claim like this? Where else is there a dinner with a speaker who can claim that he is kinfolk to a man who put a bullet into Andrew Jackson?"

Very sincerely yours,

William Benton
William Benton

mec
The Honorable John F. Kennedy
Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C.

October 31, 1963

Dear Harlan:

One point came up in our visit with the President which I think I should report to you forthwith. Luke and I disagreed on this, and laughingly so in front of the President. In our 40-minute visit with the President, and I think it's fair to say that the visit was so extended because of his genuine interest in his colloquy with Maheu, one of the subjects under discussion was what the United States can do better to help UNESCO. Indeed, the President asked Maheu this question. Maheu was very skillful. He said he wanted the intellectual interest of the United States - the support of the United States intellectually - the support of the United States in providing him with top people, top personnel to advise him and top personnel for UNESCO. I commented that I thought the United States policy should be more generous in its allocation of civil servants and foreign service officers to the international organizations. I said I did not think that there should be a three year or five year limitation. Luke and I disagreed. Maheu volunteered that he had been with UNESCO for 17 years and that if he retired from UNESCO he would move right back at a top level into the French Foreign Office. I commented that this policy by the French government helps to account for the fact that the number two man in so many of the international agencies was French. There was some joking as to whether this was a matter of priority for the French Foreign Office in the advocacy of French ideas.

Now I contribute this because the whole subject is in your lap and because perhaps the subject has not been too often brought dramatically to the attention of the President. Luke spoke up and said he felt that there should be a sharp limitation on the period of service allowed to an international agency. I sharply disagreed. I think the French policy is right. Under their policy, they have taken over UNESCO. They have largely taken over many other agencies. Under our policy, we shall never take over an agency from within. Why should we not have a policy which would enable us to bore from within, particularly in view of the fact that we are never going to be skilled in boring from without?

Sincerely,

William Benton

The Honorable Harlan Cleveland
Department of State
Washington, D. C.

hk

CLASSIFY UNTIL 1975

November 18, 1963

TO: Mr. Robert Wade
FROM: William Benton
SUBJECT: Visit with the President and with Ralph Dungan.

OR UNTIL MR. HAUSSAMAN'S DEATH IF
BEFORE 1975

This is a very brief report.

I told the President how much it meant to Maheu--as reported to me by Ambassador Beeby--to have had the forty minute visit with him of a couple of weeks ago. I further told the President that he was particularly good at hammering Maheu on the techniques of education. He said he had had his lead on these from Hubert Humphrey. I told him again that I was going to make Hubert the franchise holder for the Britannica Schools in Minnesota (thus any "alleged conflict of interest" I have on this subject should be well known to the President!). I told him that most professional educationists resent these new techniques, and that this is why I now have the big exhibit in the Pepsi Cola Building in New York--"New Dimensions in Learning"--appealing directly to the public. I told the President it took fifty years to educate the educators to a new idea that was manifestly good. I attributed this remark to its source, Dr. Ralph Tyler.

I moved on into your comments on the "heightened Soviet activities in UNESCO." I told the President about the prestige of Sissakian; I told him about the Soviet wives; and ended up by saying that their staff was twice the size of our staff and probably ten times as good. I said that I didn't know Ralph Dungan, but I thought I should meet him to discuss our staff problem in Paris. I said I had heard many fine things about him. The President agreed that I had better get acquainted with him. He had never heard of Crane Haussamen. He rang for Mr. Dungan.

I told them John Bailey had never heard of Mr. Haussamen. I said that UNESCO was suffering from the same old trouble under which I had labored when I was responsible for cultural activities in the Department, that it was a dumping ground.

Dungan told the President the background on Crane Haussamen and identified him with New York--not Connecticut--with the Lexington Liberal Democratic group. He referred to him as one of the "money boys." (Later to me he stressed Senator Ribicoff's aggressive interest.)

The President and I then talked about what needed to be done. We agreed that we must have a replacement for Haussamen and a good staff. He told Dungan to follow through. The President agreed to receive Branscomb, me, and the National Commission in March, and

to have pictures taken in the Rose Garden, and to make a little speech. This was all I asked for; perhaps I should have asked for more. I explained that ten mediocre appointments to the National Commission out of the forty available to the White House operated like Gresham's Law and caused a deterioration of the entire Commission. I said it was like the impact of the new Republican senators who were elected with McCarthy in 1946--on the U. S. Senate.

I told the President that I thought we could find ideas to give him that would be politically helpful in relationship to UNESCO. I said I thought it might be a good idea to make a statement on the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. I gave him the background here on the importance of trying to tie up the human rights issue in UNESCO with Eleanor Roosevelt. I spoke of trying to place him in the position of a world leader in the field of education. I said that I would work with the State Department on the kind of ideas that would be helpful and that we would suggest to him ideas to stress with the National Commission in March.

I ended up with a quick summary of the two most important issues at the recent UNESCO meeting in Paris. The first was the progress we had made in combatting the Soviet propaganda drive, and the second was our defeat on the budget. I said that the budget problem seemed to me to be much larger than just a UNESCO problem. I told him that the amount of money was not large, if we decide to accept Maheu's budget, but that the problem is how to handle similar budgetary issues in the future--not only in UNESCO but in other UN agencies. He did not seem to have thought about this before. He commented: "This potentially could be a tough problem with the Congress."

As I review my notes on what I intended to cover with him, I find that the only thing I missed was that I had not seen Bobby.

The President insisted that I tell him how he could help. He seemed to me to be genuinely interested.

Later I visited for half an hour with Mr. Dungan. He agreed that we must build up the National Commission. I told him at some length about Harvie Branscomb and of my hopes for him. He said he had heard very fine things about him. I told him that Dr. Branscomb was a good Democrat and a friend of Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore. I suggested that Dr. Branscomb drop in to see him to talk more about the character of the National Commission. He urged me to send him in.

I felt that Mr. Dungan and I had a constructive and promising talk. I believe the visit will prove helpful to

Secretaries Battle and Cleveland. I am glad the President brought him in and introduced us.

Of course you must know Dungan's background with the President. It is close and remarkable, as you must know.

I suspect he wants some other kind of appointment for Mr. Haussamen. I stated that in any appointment that I could imagine for him he would not be a credit to the administration. I was flat and outspoken on this. We spoke of using him somewhere in Germany. We did not pursue the matter.

I told Dungan that we could do a much better job even at the political level, if we up-grade the Commission. I believe a firm hand here can do the job, and I think Branscomb can carry a part of the lead here in dealing with Dungan. However, this is a decision for Mr. Battle to make. The enthusiasm with which Mr. Dungan spoke of Dr. Branscomb is what made me suddenly suggest that they get together. I think the truth is that we need all the help we can get to firm this up. I told Mr. Dungan that Dr. Branscomb is going to Bangkok and that I hoped he will be with us in our two meetings in Paris in 1964, and that I felt he could be helpful in getting much greater value out of the National Commission both for UNESCO and for the administration.

*Wm. Battle
Haussamen*