

**Corinne “Lindy” Boggs, Oral History Interview – 4/1/1976**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Corinne “Lindy” Boggs

**Interviewer:** Bill Hartigan

**Date of Interview:** April 1, 1976

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Length:** 15 pages

**Biographical Note**

Boggs was president of the Women's National Democratic Club from 1958 to 1959 and the Democratic Congressional Wives Forum in 1962; co-chairman of the Presidential Inaugural Ball in 1961 and 1965; and a Representative from Louisiana 1973 from 1991. In this interview, she discusses her work on John F. Kennedy’s (JFK) presidential campaign and inaugural ball, reflections on JFK’s time in Congress and as president, and anecdotes about her friendship with the Kennedys, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

Corinne “Lindy” Boggs, recorded interview by Bill Hartigan, April 1, 1976, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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## Corinne “Lindy” Boggs

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Oral History Interview

with

Corinne "Lindy" Boggs

April 1, 1976  
Washington, D.C.

By Bill Hartigan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTIGAN: This is Bill Hartigan in Washington, D.C., in the Women's Lounge of the House of Representatives, with Congresswoman Boggs of the Second District of Louisiana. Mrs. Boggs is a former teacher of history and English, active in congressional women's affairs and Democratic activities. She was elected to the 93rd Congress by special election on March 20, 1973, to fill the vacancy of her late husband, Congressman Hale Boggs [Thomas Hale Boggs]. She was re-elected to the 94th Congress, being the first woman in the state of Louisiana to be elected to the House of Representatives. Mrs. Boggs, when did you first meet the late President John F. Kennedy?

BOGGS: I met him when he came to Congress as a freshman in 1947. Hale, my husband, had been a member of Congress since '41 and '42. As the President had, he had served in the Navy and was re-elected to the 1947 session, and it was then that we met the charming, enchanting, attractive, intelligent young congressman from Massachusetts, Jack Kennedy.

HARTIGAN: Were you in a position to be aware of any of the congressional activities that the late President participated in either directly, yourself, or through your husband's association with the young congressman Kennedy?

BOGGS: In the presidential election?

HARTIGAN: In the congressional career.

BOGGS: Oh, in the congressional career. I'm sorry.

HARTIGAN: When he was a freshman congressman.

BOGGS: Well, of course I had the opportunity of knowing him socially. I shared with him the difficulty of being in the throes of a bad case of hepatitis, and he was kind

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enough to come out every once in a while with a group, a handful of friends to our home. Also, in seeing him in the context of the congressman in the extended working hours of the Washington receptions. I had no direct contact with him at that time in legislative matters. I was not well, and I had three tiny children, literally. So I wasn't terribly active in the legislative field at the time.

HARTIGAN: We will move around from item to item, and as we discuss it, I'm sure things will come to your mind, so feel free to put them in at any point you want.

BOGGS: Okay.

HARTIGAN: Having.... I read the transcript that the late Congressman Boggs gave to the Library [John F. Kennedy Library] for their oral history department and in it he refers to his wife, Lindy, who accompanied him to the 1956 convention. Could you discuss, uh, share with us some of the experiences you had during that convention?

BOGGS: Oh, yes. I went to Chicago about ten days ahead of time with a group of women from the Woman's National Democratic Club. We were helping to be in charge of women's activities and cooperating with the host committee, one of whose co-chairmen was Eunice Kennedy Shriver. And we had the rare opportunity of working very closely with both Eunice and Sarge Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] and their large company of friends and assistants. And that was my first really inside view of a convention. Even though I had attended the '48 convention, I think, in Philadelphia, I had never really been on the working end of a convention previously. Of course, when you've been in Congress for a number of years and when you have the opportunity of working with the wives in many civic endeavors and philanthropic endeavors, literary—

sometimes—endeavors, and just socializing among yourselves, you become affectionately involved all over the country—I might say across regional lines and party lines many times. And, of course, I was most affectionately tied to Nancy Kefauver, and it was a disastrous situation for me, personally, when the vote came between Mr. Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] and Mr. Kennedy for the vice-presidency nomination. And there was a crucial moment within that nominating process, and my husband was convinced that Kennedy was going to win the nomination, came over and said so to me in a fairly loud voice, and I looked up and there was my good friend, Nancy Kefauver, looking down upon us, and it was a very shaky moment socially, affectionately for me. However, of course, when Kefauver did win the nomination, both Hale and I worked very hard in the campaign for the ticket.

HARTIGAN: In that convention.... At that convention, late Congressman Boggs mentions in his oral history, that at one point the late speaker Mr. Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn] had indicated to him that he wouldn't be adverse to taking the vice-presidency himself. Did he, Mr.... Did the late Congressman talk to you about that?

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BOGGS: Oh, I was very much aware of the situation. Well, I was made aware of it. I was totally naïve about it, and felt that there was something that was unusual about Mr. Sam not being for throwing the convention open to, you know, nominate really from the floor, almost. That seems strange today, when we have so many open and sunshine rules, but it was later that I was made aware by Hale and listening later to Mr. Sam I was able to realize on my own that he really would have been very pleased to have received the nomination for the vice-presidency. I couldn't imagine that someone who was as active as he and who held such a responsible position as the Speaker of the House, the head of an institution which he loved very much, being interested in what would be a quieter role as the vice-president. But apparently he was, and unfortunately I don't think that he was too pleased with the decision to have this rip-roaring election. [Laughter]

HARTIGAN: Moving up to the 1960 primaries, do you recall any experiences you'd like to relate them to us—I'm talking about now the crucial Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries.

BOGGS: Well, you know, I started out the election year as the chairman of the presidential campaign kick-off dinner. The dinner, very sadly, was to pay off the last of our debts from the '56 campaign. But we had a remarkable number of highly qualified persons running for the presidency. This year, 1976, we seem to forget that in the early '60s we had Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], of course, still running and Kennedy and Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]; Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey];

Chet Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]; Bob Meyner [Robert B. Meyner], the governor of New Jersey; Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown], the governor of California; and Stuart Symington [Stuart Symington, II], the senator from Missouri. And there was great talk of perhaps a locked election and a convention and that in all probability that the compromise candidate who would emerge would be Stuart Symington. And it was really not until the West Virginia primary, which I think was in April of that year, that all of the organizational work and, of course, President Kennedy's own attractive personality began to show some true acceleration. It's difficult now to realize that in 1960 we were apprehensive that a Catholic could be elected president of the United States. But in the West Virginia primary where Hubert Humphrey was enormously popular and where there was a good bit of anti-Catholic sentiment, Jack Kennedy did win. And this began the snowballing of the gathering of delegate votes from then on to the convention. But it was a very interesting election year before the convention, of course, I can't remember—I was seated on the porch with Hale and the interviewers when he gave his versions of his Kennedy memories—whether he talked about the campaign of that year or not.

HARTIGAN: He did talk briefly about it. I thought that possibly.... If you're being repetitious we'll let you know, but I think your views would probably be coming from a different pair of eyes, so to speak, and....

BOGGS: And ears.

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HARTIGAN: I think it would be a great comparison, but I don't believe we'll have any conflict in the information because....

BOGGS: Well, of course, we women—congressional wives in the Senate and the House, on the Democratic side, had formed in 1953 a Democratic Congressional Wives Forum, and we were acting in the '56 campaign—for instance, I had charge for the forum of an Operations Crossroads which was a station wagon operation all over the country when we worked for the top ticket and also for congressional candidates in swing districts. And in 1960 we were equally active in first the registration drive which we thought would be very helpful to the Democratic ticket and then went on into campaigning in many areas—some station wagon work, some fly-ins (by that time we were using small plans very effectively in campaigning). And the wives can be extremely helpful. They are all poised and good speakers, meet people easily, are accustomed to long hours of hard work in campaigning, difficulties—physical difficulties of campaigning. And also they become excited about campaigning. They did become very effective Kennedy campaigners. Of course they were.... All women, I think, in the campaign were inspired to work by the very hard work that the President's mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] and sisters [Patricia Kennedy Lawford, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Jean Kennedy Smith] and his wife [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], and all of them were so involved and really were an inspiration to the

other women who were working hard. Before the nomination, of course, the congressional women were as divided as the rest of the party was into the camps of the various candidates whom I mentioned previously. And, of course, there were very strong feelings for the candidates who were members of Congress—Mr. Johnson, Mr. Humphrey, and Mr. Symington, as well as President Kennedy. So there was no consolidated effort among the wives for a Kennedy nomination, but they were very enthusiastic supporters and active supporters in the campaign.

HARTIGAN: From the point of view of the women that were in this group that were very active (as I recall, meeting them during the campaign), what were the issues that were confronting the women when they were out campaigning? We know what they were from the men's point of view, but it's the first chance I've had to ask somebody about.... [Laughter] Were they precisely the same or the same with a different slant?

BOGGS: Well, I think mostly the issues are the same with men and women. And of course there were always some, perhaps, more humanitarian aspects of the platform or a candidate's stand on issues that appeal to women. Certainly, I think one of the great appeals of the campaign which more or less forced it into existence later was the suggestion of a peace corps. It really caught the enthusiasm of young, and I think young women felt that they would have a place to serve. And it that was one of the electrifying issues in the campaign. I'm sure that the people who were running the campaign and who were deciding which issues to push, and so on, didn't really have this high on their list of priorities. But it was a very interesting aspect of the campaign—one of the issues that sparked the feeling that President Kennedy had something special to offer, to involve people, to be able to inspire them to help to solve problems, to have the sort of image of him projected as a person who was extending the hand of friendship all over the world and yet remained, you know, strong militarily, economically,

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and so on. And I think that he had a tremendous appeal, of course, in just his own attitudes and his personality. He inspired people to work for him very hard. As you know, he was really fairly timid, and this came through at times, which made everyone protective about him. I do remember Hale getting a little provoked one time, though, when he was in a parade in Morgan City [Laughter], Louisiana, in an open car, and the President kept pulling up his socks. And Hale said, "For gosh sakes, Jack, you know, stop pulling up your socks and wave to the people!" [Laughter] The personal feeling that people had towards him certainly was a general feeling across generations and ethnic groups and economic groups and the sexes. It was always affectionately amusing to me that I felt that he really didn't like to be, you know, sort of jammed in and have people showing their affection very outwardly or trying.... You know he would never put on a hat, a silly hat for instance, to be photographed in. But everybody wanted to touch him. Everybody wanted to pull at him. Everybody wanted to

have some personal contact. And I'm not too sure he enjoyed it, but it never came across to the people who were sort of insistent upon it.

HARTIGAN: During your activities in the 1960 campaign, did you run into the religious issue much with the, amongst the women?

BOGGS: I was with an advance team of women who advanced the Lyndon Johnson train through the South. And very cleverly the President and the Vice-President, the candidates and their advisors realized that it was difficult to have the politicians in the South come out strongly for a Catholic candidate. They also realized that no southern gentleman would refuse to see southern ladies. And so we went as the advance team to make all of the arrangements for this tour through the South. We were able, very fortunately, to have Bea Barkley with us who was the wife of Vice-President Johnson's minister. And we also had a young, young girl with us who had been one of the campus crusaders in the Billy Graham organization. And I kept insisting, "Don't you know that I'm a Catholic?" And they said, "Oh, but with an Anglo-Saxon name nobody will ever suspect you." So, a southerner with an Anglo-Saxon name. [Laughter] So we did run into it, and this was an effort to try to dispel some of the prejudice. It was certainly just by seeing us and listening to us and knowing that we were totally committed to the campaign—I think it helped a great deal with some of the other women in the South to accept a Catholic nominee and a Catholic president.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall the speech that President Kennedy made in Houston to the ministers?

BOGGS: To the ministers, yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you get any reaction from the women from that speech?

BOGGS: I think that the reaction was all good from that speech, and, more or less, our presence and our meetings helped to verify the fact that he truly was committed

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to the things that he said in Houston. And, of course, his taking the bull by the horns and going to the ministers' meeting, and the very fact that the ministers embraced the idea that he wished to come, had a great deal to do with helping us in our missionary work through the South.

HARTIGAN: Did you spend most of your campaign activity in the southern states?

BOGGS: I was in Pennsylvania also. In '56 the Young Dems had helped me with my station wagon campaign, and in '60 they had a station wagon campaign. And so I was with them in Pennsylvania and, I think, New Jersey and maybe Delaware. I'm uncertain of that. And I did go on, of course, one-day trips to speak to different groups in different parts of the country.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any other interesting activities that you ran into during the 1960 campaign?

BOGGS: My goodness, I could probably regale you with a thousand. We also, of course, in the South ran into the civil rights problems. And it was very interesting to see the acceptance when it was being suggested from a group of southern women that we should, indeed, embrace and support, elect, this young easterner who was a Catholic and who seemed to have the potential for being very much in favor of civil rights.

HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, your husband, the late congressman, was very friendly with President Kennedy. Can you relate some of your experiences during the Kennedy administration as a result of this friendship?

BOGGS: Well, we were very generously invited to the White House by Mrs. Kennedy and the President. They were very sweet about including us in private parties and in public affairs. And, of course, Hale was the majority whip, and there were Tuesday morning breakfasts at the White House for the leadership. And Hale enjoyed those enormously, of course.

The last time I saw the President was on a Tuesday when I was.... Hale's mother [Claire Boggs] and my mother were up here visiting, and I took them to the White House and certainly was not going to impose upon the President to know we were there. But Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], of course, told him. She was very, very sweet to me, and I loved her very much. And he searched us down and brought us to his office and insisted on having pictures taken and was very dear. And, of course, our mothers adored it and him, and

we went out to the little garden which had formerly been the rose garden and so beautifully done over by Jackie and Mrs. Mellon [Rachel Lambert Mellon]. And the chrysanthemums were all in bloom. And he remarked on what a restful, lovely respite from his thinking and his duties that garden had become for him. And he said, "The chrysanthemums have been so beautiful." He said, "Lindy, how long do chrysanthemums stay in bloom?" He was reluctant to have them go away. And I said, "Well, until the frost comes, usually." And that was the last conversation that I had with him. I guess it was about a week or so before his fateful trip

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to Dallas. But he was like that. He was always very generous to his friends about social activities. And we did many other things with him. He recognized the fact that the women of Washington really are a remarkable lot. Most of them are here because of the insistence of their husbands' ambitions, and they delve right into the life of Washington and do many of the civic and philanthropic, artistic, cultural things that are badly needed in the city. And they raise a great deal of money for all these different organizations. I remember Hale saying once if they cured all the diseases the women in Washington would have very little to do. There was an Eye Ball, a Cancer Ball, a Mental Health Ball.

The President was very interested in Dulles Airport, and he was very anxious to have it finished and there was some reluctance on the part of some of the vendors and the display persons and the commercial interests and restaurant interests there because there was not very much traffic into the airport and it didn't really lend itself under those circumstances to making as much money for the people who had contracts there. And several organizations wished to have parties there—a ball—at Dulles airport, and he used this desire to get the airport finished and asked me if I would be the chairman of such a ball, and I accepted and thought that Travelers' Aid was a proper agency to receive the benefit of having a ball at Dulles. And fortunately the President's instincts were correct. The ladies certainly did get that place finished in time for the ball and hopefully did some good in having the restaurant open and having the various facilities available to the public. And they were able, of course, to put in a Travelers' Aid facility there as well. He was very clever about recognizing the fact that you could pull together the varied interests of persons and gel them all into the public good.

HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, after the election, you were.... I'm not quite sure whether you were appointed to a committee—inauguration committee—but I know personally that you were involved in many activities during the inauguration. Would you care to discuss these.

BOGGS: Yes, I was co-chairman with Stanley Woodward of the inaugural ball. I say  
"ball" because everyone who had had anything to do with the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] inaugural balls, and before, had insisted that it didn't matter how many balls you added on, you could never satisfy everybody. It would be much better to have one large ball and forget anything else. We started out that way. We had five. And the President and Jackie were most agreeable to going to each one of them so we could build a little glamour around each one of the locations. And I think that almost all of

the 27,000 persons who attended and danced and drank and saw them felt that they had had a meaningful experience and a good social experience. And it was a very nice experience for me, a very exhausting one. We worked very, very hard. I was shocked to discover that we were not only to provide a charming atmosphere and beautiful decorations and appropriate programs and danceable music and some pageantry, but that the inaugural committees were charged with responsibility for paying back the guarantors of the inauguration. And I certainly didn't want the first Democratic administration in eight years to be considered fiscally irresponsible. But fortunately, the ball is one of the big money makers, and so we put on—it's about a million-dollar business that you are forced to plan for in a few weeks' time. And it was successful. We paid back the guarantors. And, as I say, perhaps

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two or three hundred out of the 27,000 were unhappy. [Laughter] You have to remember the majority.

HARTIGAN: I think you both did a great job—a lot of things, I'm sure, that we're not aware of, to enjoy the fruits of the work....

BOGGS: I missed the inauguration, incidentally, because of the ball.

HARTIGAN: You did?

BOGGS: There was a dreadful snowstorm two nights before—no, the night before the inauguration. And this meant that some of the tickets that were left at downtown locations that we hadn't had time to mail out—the people were here in Washington, physically could not get to those locations because of the snow. Some of the streets had been cleared for the parades and the things of this sort, but others hadn't. And so I had dozens of people in the inaugural ball committee rooms picking up their tickets for the ball and finally I—when the President was giving his inaugural address—I said, “This is the reason that we're all here. Shall we just stop for a moment and listen to the President of the United States for whom we all worked?” And that calmed them all down. But I did miss the inaugural ceremonies because of the snow.

HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, your husband mentioned in his oral history your activities in the domestic Peace Corps. Could you go into any detail, some detail with us on that?

BOGGS: Well, I was really the helpmate of my daughter, Barbara Boggs [Barbara Boggs Sigmund], who is now Barbara Sigmund. She had worked at the White House. She was in the division of the White House that wrote the proclamations and helped with the letters and things of this sort. And she became so interested in the formation of the domestic Peace Corps that she left the White House to work as a full-time volunteer. That meant that I was a part-time volunteer for it. And I became very excited about it also, and helped her to set up a national committee that was headed, if I

remember correctly, by Ann Chapman [Ann K. Chapman] and Malcolm Forbes [Malcolm S. Forbes]. And she had a very excellent board of governors, sort of across the spectrum of the economic, business, labor, and cultural life of the country. As you know, the concept of a domestic peace corps was really evolved as the VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] program and many of the other programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Hale did push the legislation in the House, and I pushed the volunteer movement, and Barbara pushed both of us.

HARTIGAN: This domestic Peace Corps then evolved into many of the activities that are in existence today, then.

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BOGGS: It did. It gives me great pleasure when I realize that.

HARTIGAN: As a member of the House of Representatives now and with all the experience you've had up until now and the closeness you were to many of the legislative activities that we enjoy that took a lot of sweat and effort, how do you look back on these, as a member of the House of Representatives now?

BOGGS: Well, I think that the activities that I had as a wife certainly prepared me for my task as a member of Congress. I'm not too sure which is the harder job. I do know that it is difficult to be a member of Congress without a wife. I worked very closely with Hale. He was very generous about involving me in political and legislative business, particularly as our children grew up and I had more and more time to spend in these endeavors. And I'm certainly accustomed to the ways of the House of Representatives, the ways it worked, and I have many personal friends and, of course, I have a wonderful residue of goodwill among his friends. And I think that having campaigned throughout the country, I had members who were friends of mine on my own because I've help to elect them to Congress. And I'm sure this would be a very unusual statement in the years to come, but when I first came to Congress three years ago the question I was constantly asked was if I felt any discrimination because I was a woman. And I felt none because I... I felt privileged because I had so many friends and Hale had so many friends. They promoted me, helped me in every way. I received the committee assignments that I especially wanted. I could have recognized the own \_\_\_\_ process of having to work out percentages between the parties in placing any numbers of Democrats of Republicans on the committees that called me, but I could have asked what was available, but the Speaker said, "What committee would you *like* to be on?" And I said, "Banking, Currency, and Housing." The majority leader and the minority leader had to offer a resolution in the House to create another spot on the committee. I was not aware of that until I had been sworn in to the committee. And so I was very pleased that that happened, but I'm telling that to demonstrate the fact there was no discrimination. Instead there was promotion and help.

HARTIGAN: I may have asked this in a less forceful way. Bearing in mind—and your record indicates that you were very familiar with the activity of your

husband's former legislative career and that you were always recognized—at least you were always mentioned to me by good friends of yours such as Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] as being well aware, very much “up” on legislative activities as the wife of a popular congressman. In an effort to fill in some of the gaps that we have with President Kennedy's career in the House of Representatives, do you recall any specific piece of legislation that your husband was involved in that involved the late President Kennedy?

BOGGS: Oh, well, of course, in almost every piece of legislation, because Hale was the whip. And, of course, the whip system is such that, at that time, there were eighteen zone whips, and you had to familiarize yourself with the zones and their desires and their difficulties about legislation. And almost by the time you got into a leadership

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meeting on Thursday—the whip meetings on Thursday mornings, you knew what shape legislation was going to have to take in order to get it passed. And Kenny and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and, of course, the President himself and many others were very, very effective in being able to absorb all of these differences and also sometimes insurances of what had to be in a bill or what had to be taken out of one to come up with legislation that hopefully could cover the area of responsibility that needed attention and yet didn't so offend some persons that they couldn't possibly support it. It was a very difficult couple of years. We would sometimes win and lose by four and five or ten votes. And, the, uh.... Of course, Hale's particular interest—in addition to being interested in all the legislative program because of his leadership role there—was in the fields of his committees—the Ways and Means and the Joint Economic Committee. And on Joint Economic Committee he was chairman of the sub-committee on foreign economic policy. And was coming from the great port of New Orleans, he had always been interested in trade legislation, and I suppose the bill that Hale probably thought was a landmark bill of the Kennedy administration was the Trade Act of '62. There were those who were fearful that a simple extension would have difficulty in passing. And we went on a trip abroad especially to England and to Belgium, because England had not entered the Common Market at that time, but there was great feeling that its entrance into it was imminent. And we both came back convinced that the tax bill would have to be rewritten and one would recognize the fact that we were, after all, in the latter part of the twentieth century and those new conditions existed. Of course, there were many areas of economic policy that were of very particular interest to Hale. The President really did get the country moving again from an economic slump and... [interruption]

HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, I'm sorry for that interruption we had, but you went out to vote, and we had a chance to change the tape. So, I believe you're telling us about your husband's evaluation of President Kennedy's legislation.

BOGGS: I was saying that there were many economic measures that were highly necessary and that the President's thrust in the beginning of his

administration was to get the country moving again. There had been, as you well know, a real recession. And we had a much less severe situation than has existed in the last couple of years, and that is a coupling of unemployment with inflation. And much of his time in the early months of his administration was certainly devoted to the uplifting of the economy. These responsibilities naturally had held Hale's interest especially because of his committee assignments.

HARTIGAN: With reference to.... This may be difficult to answer. With reference to President Kennedy, when he was in the House of Representatives—and I recognize the fact that he was not there too long—but for the record, do you, from your activities (and you were active then as I understand that you are today), do you recall any of his, President Kennedy's, activities when he was a congressman? Do you recall any of his activities in any particular field that come to mind?

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BOGGS: Well, I don't want to deny your nice compliment to me, but I was really not very active at that particular time. I was physically ill, and I had—as a matter of fact I had lost a baby very similarly to the way that Patrick [Patrick Bouvier Kennedy] died. And the combination of physical illness and sort of shock and sadness and the demands of the three small children I did have precluded my intimate dealings with the legislative programs. Of course, they were discussed at home. And when I did have the opportunity of seeing the young congressman from Massachusetts at home and at parties later and so on I—I'm not really familiar with his congressional work.

HARTIGAN: Do you know what your husband's evaluation was of him as seeing this young congressman?

BOGGS: Well, as you probably know, Hale was just very, very fond of Jack Kennedy and admired him enormously, and he felt that he had real leadership potential. And, of course, we liked him a lot in addition.

HARTIGAN: That makes him prejudiced [Laughter]

BOGGS: That's right. Very prejudiced. I don't think he would have been prejudiced in his evaluation of a friend.

HARTIGAN: Did he ever make mention of any of President Kennedy's activities when he, later on, went into the Senate?

BOGGS: Well, of course, I was well enough to be aware of activities at that time, and Hale continued to regard the President with affectionate interest. And I'm sure that I would not have been enthusiastic about a vice-presidential spot for him if I hadn't felt that he hadn't conducted himself and shown some leadership

abilities in the Senate.

HARTIGAN: This question comes up all the time. I'm sure you know what that is, so therefore I'll have to ask it eventually. Where were you at the time of the assassination, Mrs. Boggs?

BOGGS: I was in the whip office. I was the only person of responsibility who—all the members of the staff were very responsible people—but Congress had been in session almost constantly, and the people who were in town, members of Congress who were in town, many of them were scattered to their districts you remember, were mostly not on the hill. Maybe some of them were catching up on mail and things of that sort. Hale used that occasion to be able to go downtown to the bank and do a few things that you never get to do when you're constantly in session. And I was in the whip office. We were trying to catch up on a great deal of office activity because of so much legislative activity in dealing with zone whips and leadership problems that occupied the whip office in those several weeks. And it was

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very devastating to hear the news and almost impossible to believe. Of course the phones in the Capitol became jammed almost immediately. The Speaker, unfortunately, had gone to the funeral of his brother, and the majority leader was out of the office, and the majority whip, who was Hale, was out of the office, and it was a dreadful feeling of responsibility that I was really the only wife of a person of at least related authority who was in the building at the time. As you probably remember, there was some apprehension that this may not stop with the president. Nobody knew whether it was some sort of a concerted effort to attack other members of the government. And, of course, so many of the cabinet members were away on a plane going to Japan. It was a very lonely feeling. Aside, of course, from the unbelievable shock that this really would happen in the 1960s in the United States of America, where the electoral process was so open and so available, citizens' protest was so easy to organize, and it was just unbelievable, of course, that this would happen. Naturally, I was personally saddened.

HARTIGAN: How would you assess the impact it had on your husband? I know we have  
his verbal reaction to it. How would you....

BOGGS: Well, he was, he was devastated. He was personally so, dreadfully. And, of  
course, he believed so strongly in the institution of the United States government, and in the inherent goodness of the people. It was unbelievable to him that this had happened. As a matter of fact, he had.... I had read in various articles in the last year or so that Hale had tried to discourage the President from going to Dallas because he was afraid of the atmosphere of Dallas. But that was not really true. He was not apprehensive about the President being assassinated in Dallas. As a matter

of fact, he had been to New Orleans shortly before that time, and Hale had encouraged him to come to New Orleans despite the fact that some people were apprehensive about it. And he was really concerned about the President walking into a political atmosphere where several of his good friends were on opposite sides one from the other in Texas. And it was totally shocking, number one, that President Kennedy could be assassinated and, number two, that such a dreadful occurrence could take place in the United States of America in that time frame. It saddened him tremendously. He was very, very, very affectionately attached. I think, as many of the President's friends felt, he became more or less dedicated to trying to finish some of the programs that they had begun.

HARTIGAN: You and your husband were actually personally attached to the President.

BOGGS: Yes. Very much so.

HARTIGAN: I know from my own experience that you were.

BOGGS: Very much so. I suppose the most difficult assignment I was ever given was to give the eulogy for the President at the Women's National Democratic Club ceremonies. I knew very well that he would, the President wouldn't like a teary-eyed, teary-voiced presentation, but it was difficult not to cry.

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HARTIGAN: If you can, for the moment, personal emotions aside—can you as a member of Congress evaluate President Kennedy's administration? Is it possible for you to....

BOGGS: Well, I think he began some of the things. He did accomplish the return of a full economy. And he did, I think, find his way and his place in international affairs after a few trial-and-error situations. I think he had become his own man in international affairs and would have continued to have been a very remarkable president in this regard. Coming from my area of the country and the city that's called the Gateway to the Americas, of course, I was enormously pleased with his attention to our sister states in the Americas. I feel most strongly that when any one of us is improved—on the other hand, there's adversely affected though—economically, in health, education that all of us gain, on the one hand, and suffer, on the other. I do feel, too, that those of the American states who have a high standard of living and quality of life have an obligation to help the others. And I think it's very inspiring that President Kennedy is still so enormously popular in South and Latin America. I think that his attitudes towards the other countries, the recognition of the power in the Common Market and its potential. \_\_\_\_ you know, he hated to lose as any Kennedy hates—or as any person and especially a Kennedy hates to lose—as any competitive person does. In his original exchange with Russia I think he was able to overcome that and improve on the situation and....

HARTIGAN: Your husband was deeply involved in that activity.

BOGGS: Yes, he was. As a matter of fact there's a sweet commentary on history, that my seven-year-old grandson, who lives in Greece, recently wrote a play about President Kennedy for his bicentennial project in an American school, and my daughter was able last week to tell Jackie about when she had tea with her in Athens. And Jackie said, "I hope that you told your son how much the President loved his grandfather." My daughter was telling me that it was that, of course, Lee loved everything that he heard about President Kennedy. He especially liked Poppa Hale being picked up out of the sea to come back to Washington during the Cuban crisis.

HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, probably one last observation. You are the permanent chairman of the upcoming 1976 Democratic Convention. Do you have any observations you'd like to make on that and possible comparing it to the 1960.... [Laughter]

BOGGS: Well, I do think that we are following eight years of Republicanism in the White House. We are faced with a recession-inflation, as we were at that time. We do have a wealth of qualified candidates, as we had at that time. I think that the convention should run fairly smoothly. Bob Strauss [Robert S. Strauss], who has been the national chairman of the party, has tried desperately to bring all the sides, groups, variations of the party together, and we did have a mini-convention in Kansas City last year, in '74, which solved a great many problems. We did adopt a charter, the first time a national party in the United

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States has done so, and of course we did set up a judicial review commission for the credentials fights, and the platform committee is already going around the country holding hearings under Governor Noel [Philip William Noel] of Rhode Island's leadership. And the rules committee is well along in its planning. And the arrangements committee finalized some plans last Monday. And it will take more members than were necessary in the '72 convention to bring a minority report or a credentials fight to the floor. There's tremendous participation in delegate selection at the local level so that I think everyone will feel that he or she has had an opportunity to be in on the act. And, hopefully, there will be a good feeling by the time the people arrive in New York. Hopefully, also, New York will be in a good physical situation and will have overcome the obstacles of contract-making with the various city employees whose work will be necessary to a happy, smooth convention—little things like transportation and utilities and garbage collection etcetera. Telephone communications, all of that.

HARTIGAN: Is this the first time we've had a woman as the permanent chairman of the convention?

BOGGS: Yes.

HARTIGAN: I thought it was, and you should be congratulated on that.

BOGGS: Well, thank you.

HARTIGAN: I think probably going there with more experience than even most previous chairmen have had anyway.

BOGGS: Well, one fortunate thing is that the conventions do more or less follow the rules of the House of Representatives with which, of course, I'm fairly familiar.

HARTIGAN: Is there any other general statement you'd like to make before we close the interview, Mrs. Boggs?

BOGGS: I don't really think that I have said what a tremendous help I think Jackie was and the inspiration that she was to so many remarkable restorations, rehabilitations, renovations of historic buildings and places, sites, and that she made the White House a little museum. And she certainly encouraged the uplift and the renovation of thousands of buildings all over this country. And she served the country so magnificently when she prepared the funeral for the President. It was a time when we felt very downtrodden, discouraged and saddened, and I think she uplifted the spirits of everyone by her own courage and by the beautiful pageantry with which she somehow exemplified the glory of this country and the contributions that her husband had made to it.

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HARTIGAN: Mrs. Boggs, I know that this interview has brought back some pleasant memories, and I know, also, it has revived some sad ones for you. You had

the tragedy of a very close president, and I know you have the tragedy of the loss of your own husband. And with those thought in mind, I really and truly appreciate your giving me this time this afternoon on behalf of the oral history department of the John F. Kennedy Library. Thank you very much.

BOGGS: Thank you very much. It was a privilege.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]

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