

John E. Byrne, Oral History Interview—JFK#1, 8/29/1969
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Biographical Note

Byrne, press secretary to the Governor of Maine (1958-1960); an executive at the General Services Administration (1961-1980); and advance man for President Kennedy's trip to Texas (1963), discusses the history of Maine politics and the Democratic Party in Maine during the 1950s, visits that John F. Kennedy (JFK) made to Maine in 1959 and 1960, Maine Governor Clinton A. Clauson's death in office, and the reasons that JFK lost to Richard Milhous Nixon in Maine in 1960, among other issues.

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John E. Byrne—JFK#1

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First of Three Oral History Interviews

with

John E. Byrne

August 29, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Ann M. Campbell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMPBELL: Mr. Byrne, when did you first come in contact with John F. Kennedy or some facet of his career?

BYRNE: The first substantive meeting with Senator Kennedy was November 15th, 1959 when he came to Maine to address the Democratic Party's Issues Conference and also to line up Maine delegates for the National Convention. At that time I was press secretary to Governor Clinton A. Clauson, who was successor to Senator Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] as governor of Maine.

CAMPBELL: May I just go back to the question of this Issues Conference? I've read someplace that it was ar-

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ranged particularly for John F. Kennedy. Would that be true?

BYRNE: I don't think that that was true because—the date might have been arranged with that in mind. But, you see, the Democratic Party in Maine had become—I shouldn't say revived; I should say vivified, because it didn't have a history to go back to, really. But Senator Muskie and Frank Coffin

[Frank M. Coffin], then Congressman, were the architects of the revival of the Democratic party in Maine. And one of their.... It was a very intellectual approach that they took to politics, and the issues conference grew from that. They really wanted to work on the issues in the state.

CAMPBELL: To consider issues.

BYRNE: Right. And so the Issues Conference was a part of the vivification of the Democratic Party in Maine. Now, the picking of the date, I really am not sure whether that had anything to do with Senator Kennedy's time schedule. But I should digress here a moment because there were certain things about

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this election, the 1960 election, which were very interesting for Maine. The whole Maine—again, I don't like, to say renaissance because it was a start.

CAMPBELL: It was a birth, rather than a rebirth.

BYRNE: It really was a birth starting in 1954 when Ed Muskie was elected the first Democratic governor since Louis Brann [Louis J. Brann] in the mid-thirties. He was the second Democratic governor in Maine since the Civil War. And in the '56 election, Frank Coffin joined them as a Congressman. In the '58 election, which was the last separate election that Maine had, Maine picked up two of the three congressional seats. So the Democrats had a lot at stake as they approached the 1960 election. And Ed Muskie was new in Washington, and he also had the rather unusual circumstance of four colleagues in the Senate running for office—for the presidency. And I think as a new Senator, this gave him a little sense of uneasiness, perhaps, and he wanted to be fair to all of them. I had the distinct impression

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that he and Lyndon Baines Johnson did not get along too well at this stage.

But this really leads back to the question about the setting of this date and the appearance of John F. Kennedy. The interesting thing is that Ed Muskie arranged for three of the four United States Senators who were running for the Democratic nomination to appear in Maine. The first one was Stuart Symington [Stuart Symington II], who came and spoke at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in June of 1959 at Rockland.

CAMPBELL: Theodore White's [Theodore H. White] book [*The Making of the President: 1960*] says that Symington had support in Maine. [Interruption] What was the basis of Symington's support?

BYRNE: I was looking through my records in anticipation of talking to you about this thing and I notice I have letters addressed to myself from

Stuart Symington and from Stanley Fike [Stanley R. Fike], his administrative assistant, who came up; and they were overnight guests of Governor Clauson (as well as going to Rockland) along with the Muskies [Jane Gray Muskie] in the Elaine House. And as I recall, we had a very nice session that night. Stan Fike in his letter and Senator Symington

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both refer to the very pleasant time we had. Governor Clauson was a great host. So was Mrs. Clauson. But he came and he spoke, and I remember very distinctly that in his press conference, which we held in Rockland, that the Maine press were very favorably impressed with Stuart Symington, with his shrewd answers to their questions, and so commented to me. As I remember, also, they were rather unimpressed with his uninspired address which followed. I do recall several newsmen making those points to me.

CAMPBELL: At the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in 1959?

BYRNE: In 1959 on the.... June 20th I think it was, Rockland, And then Stuart Symington had, oh, some scattered support around the state. In checking through some records on this I noticed that among the people who supported him were Louis Jalbert [Louis C. Jalbert] of Lewiston and Bill Hathaway [William Dodd Hathaway] of Lewiston. Bill Hathaway is now a congressman from Maine's Second District. I don't know what the basis of his support was. I presume he liked

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Symington. Louis Jalbert is a rather unusual character on the Maine political scene. Louis usually lined up with some candidate in every election and got on the payroll.

CAMPBELL: I see. Is he the man I read about that is of French-Canadian descent and rather a leader of the French-Canadian vote?

BYRNE: Well, he's a French-Canadian, and he's a very shrewd man—last I heard of him he was very ill in Maine—a member of the legislature, had a tremendous conception of Maine's financial problems, never trusted by anybody.

CAMPBELL: And so he was an early Symington man then?

BYRNE: As I recall, the previous election he'd been a Harriman [William Averell Harriman] man and had worked at the Convention for Harriman. So I don't think, in other words, that the support for Stuart Symington was either broad or deep or strong.

CAMPBELL: But there were scattered evidences of some support. You mentioned

the Maine economy. Early in Senator Kennedy's tenure in Washington, he formed rather an organization of New England senators and assigned

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Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] to study the problems of the New England economy. I wonder if Maine felt any evidence of that whatsoever? There was a lot of talk about it in the early fifties and you don't find many results coming out of that program.

BYRNE: No, I really have not much of a recollection of it. The big economic news for Maine in '59 was that old thing, Passamaquoddy development. Of course, the Passamaquoddy had started in the forties—I beg your pardon. I guess it's the thirties. It dates back to early in the Roosevelt Administration [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], where they built three small dams up there. I don't want to get into this, but it has a bearing on this whole election. And there were three small dams built. The idea was to harness the huge tides of the Passamaquoddy Bay and Cobscook Bay down where Maine and New Brunswick rub shoulders. And after the initial small dams were built that carried bridges over to Eastport—roadways I should say—the project languished. Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]

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appropriated some money for a restudy of it, and the Corps of Engineers reported back in October of 1959 that the project was feasible. Now every politician who came to Maine plumbed for Quoddy at that particular time. I'm sure that Stuart Symington did at Rockland. I know that John Kennedy did. This was a major portion of his address...

CAMPBELL: At the issues conference.

BYRNE: ...at the issues conference in Augusta on November 15th. And the third senator who came to Maine was Hubert Humphrey, who was the speaker at the Maine Democratic state convention in Portland on—let me see—when was that? April.

CAMPBELL: That was in 1960.

BYRNE: April 22nd, I think it was, 1960.

CAMPBELL: I wonder who arranged that appearance. Was this Muskie in action again?

BYRNE: Well. I'm.... Since Muskie was the dominant person in the Party, and this was his three colleagues, I'm sure that he wanted everyone

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to get a chance. Now why.... I started out with an observation about Muskie and Lyndon Baines Johnson not getting along too well at that point. I really don't know, of my own knowledge, why he didn't come to Maine. I suspect his hopes were not very sanguine about that part of the country.

CAMPBELL: In Maine. Let's talk about the issues conference. Who accompanied John Kennedy? Who was in his party?

BYRNE: I'll give you a picture as I recall it, just from point to point on it. And I'm not sure that I can remember all the names of the people who were there. I remember them.... I was at the airport—Augusta's airport's on a hill in Augusta. I remember the Kennedy plane coming in late in the afternoon and the Senator getting off, hatless as usual. And with him, as I recall, were Abe Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff], Governor of Connecticut, John Bailey [John Moran Bailey], who was then State Chairman of the Democratic Party in Connecticut, Bernard Boutin [Bernard Louis Boutin], of New Hampshire, who I believe at that time was National Committeeman from New Hampshire, later Administrator,

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GSA [General Services Administration] and head of the Small Business Administration, now a college president in New England. I believe Fred Fayette [Frederick J. Fayette], who was Boutin's like number in Vermont, I believe he was along, too. Now Ed Muskie and Jim Oliver [James C. Oliver], the Congressman from the First District, Frank Coffin were all there. I'm not quite clear about who arrived on the plane and who was already there. But Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] was there because I remember going up to JFK as he got off the plane—our governor was there to greet him—and mentioning the fact, since I was the pressman for Governor Clauson, that all the press people who were there wanted to have a—immediately brace him for a press conference and suggested since we were all going to the Blaine Mansion, Governor's Mansion, that this would be an appropriate place to have it. And he said, "Fine," and waved to the boys and said, "I'll see you there." And he said, "Why don't you get together with Pierre?" So while JFK and that other principal figures rode down with

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the Governor and Muskie, I picked up Pierre in my station wagon and we went over a little strategy about what was going on as we drove down to the Blaine House. At that point he showed me the prepared remarks on Quoddy and wanted to know if they were appropriate. And I recall reading them over and saying, "Well, yeah."

CAMPBELL: Nothing better.

BYRNE: It was the usual approach. Now, what happened then, there was a press conference held in the Blaine Mansion on the ground floor level where they had converted an old porch, I believe, to an indoor facility. And JFK sat down with the Governor in the background and Ed Muskie and started answering question from the Augusta news corps. And I recall again there that the news corps, who I was rather close to, having been a member of it myself, all of them practically coming up to me later on and saying how impressed they were with the shrewdness of his answers. On the other hand, the Kennedy people told me that they were impressed with the press corps because they didn't jump all

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over the religious issue, they asked substantive questions about his beliefs and ideas. And they had just come from areas of the country where they were being belabored by the effects of his Catholicism on his candidacy, and they were rather obviously fed up, I thought. One of the newsmen later wrote, and I remember comments at the time, that JFK was wearing a vest. And with his age of forty-two, the thought was expressed that this was an attempt to add to the aura of maturity.

CAMPBELL: The news conference preceded the Issues Conference?

BYRNE: This is my recollection.

CAMPBELL: All right. And then after the issues conference, I understand, there was a meeting.

BYRNE: Right. As I recall, again, the Issues Conference was a dinner.

CAMPBELL: To which Party workers were invited?

BYRNE: To which anybody in the party who wanted to come.

CAMPBELL: Statewide?

BYRNE: Statewide. And most of the people who were at the all day Issues Conference came to it. I believe they started out with something like two hundred

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people, but they ended up serving six hundred dinners, and the enthusiasm for Kennedy being there was the big attraction. The dinner was held in the Calumett Club, which is a Franco-American club in Augusta, again on a hill overlooking the French section of town. And I remember they ran out of roast beef, they had so many people, so they were serving other things. The hall was packed. I think there were, if I recall the figure, it was something

over six hundred people, which was very large for that particular hall. And I was there, and it was very enthusiastic. It was the enthusiasm that later you began to associate with Kennedy appearances.

CAMPBELL: Now, at this time he was not a declared candidate.

BYRNE: No, he was—I guess everybody knew what was going to happen, but he was not an announced candidate.

CAMPBELL: He didn't step over the line then?

BYRNE: No, but he made it clear. There was a back room meeting in the Blaine House that night after he met the people, and I was in and out of it. I was

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sort of acting as a greeter and bartender and men-of-all-work. And I was in and out of that room several times. As I recall, it was the Maine congressional delegation and Governor Clauson and John Kennedy, Ribicoff, Bailey, Boutin, and the most talking being done by Kennedy and Ribicoff on one side and by Muskie, Coffin and Clauson on the other. It is my recollection that they were really trying to pin down the Maine political leaders about what they would do and that there was a reluctance, particularly among the Washington people, Senator Muskie and Frank Coffin, to go too far in support at this particular time. I think they wanted to, well, play it cool.

CAMPBELL: What factors would have entered into their thinking?

BYRNE: Well, looking at it from Senator Muskie's viewpoint, one thing, here's a new man in the senate and here are four of his colleagues running for president who, I think, would be sure to remember assistance given or slights received. I think this was probably an immediate factor. Secondly, and I

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think this is probably the most important, the election coming up, the presidential election, would be the first time in Maine's history that the state and the presidential election would be held together on the same date. This is a funny story and worth developing a little bit because Maine, since 1829 when it was founded as a state, voted for state election in September and, you know, the old song "As Maine goes, so goes the nation"—which I did an analysis of once and it's patently ridiculous. But it had propaganda value.

In the 1900's the Democrats had sought to get rid of the early election eighteen times by bills in the legislature, between 1900 and 1957. I should say there were eighteen times bills introduced for this purpose. I believe sixteen times they were introduced by Democrats. Finally, in 1957, with a Republican controlled legislature, the measure passed and this

followed, of course, the reverse English that had been put on it by Muskie's victories in '54 and subsequent victory in '56.

CAMPBELL: The Democratic ascendancy.

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BYRNE: That's right. The propaganda value accrued to the Democrats at this time. So the legislature in '57 approved the constitutional amendment. It went to the people in September of that year, and the people approved. So I think Maine Democrats were a little leery about it at this point, but they were hoisted on their own petard. They had fought this for so long that they were....

CAMPBELL: Now even though this was effective or was passed in '57, it didn't become effective until the election of 1960.

BYRNE: 1960 was the first election. The '58 election was the last...

CAMPBELL: It didn't affect.

BYRNE: ...was the last September election. And this is the consideration that, I think, was in the back of the minds of some of the Democratic leaders, what effect would the combination have on the state ticket. And they had reason to be worried. In the first place, Maine had never voted for a Democrat for president since the Civil War—I can't go back beyond that—except in 1912,

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when they.... Wilson [Woodrow Wilson].

CAMPBELL: They would support Wilson.

BYRNE: Well, yes.

CAMPBELL: The Republican vote was split.

BYRNE: The Republican vote was split, and the Republican Bull Moose vote was greater than the Democratic vote, you know, as happened around the country.

CAMPBELL: As it was throughout the country.

BYRNE: But that was the only time that Maine voted Democratic in the presidential election. So here you had a situation where they had

something to worry about. They'd been pressing all these years to put them together and now it was coming up. So they had a real stake not only in electing a president for all the reasons that you want to have a president of your party in, but also the effect that it was going to have on the state ticket.

CAMPBELL: They had a senatorial race and three congressional races and, as things happened, a governor's race.

BYRNE: That's right. Yeah.

CAMPBELL: All of this at stake.

BYRNE: All of this was at stake. Of course, at this

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particular time they didn't know about the governor.

CAMPBELL: They didn't anticipate the governor's race.

BYRNE: But they did have the three congressional seats.

CAMPBELL: All right. Let me just ask you this: would it have been possible, had the Governor and Senator Muskie and assembled leaders been willing to endorse Kennedy in this November meeting, would it have been possible for them to do so and to have assured him of Maine's votes?

BYRNE: No, I don't think.... No, you don't control Democrats, I guess, that well. And even their subsequent statement did not commit the delegates themselves. It would have been a mistake, I think, for them to come out at that point.

CAMPBELL: Even had they been wholeheartedly in favor of....

BYRNE: Yeah. I think it was generally agreed and generally understood by all the candidates that eventually they were going to come out—right from that night on—that eventually they were going to support JFK. But I think that they wanted also to play the reluctant damsel.

CAMPBELL: Leave their options open.

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BYRNE: Yeah.

CAMPBELL: Was it important at this stage in their consideration of Senator Kennedy, was it important that he came from New England? Was this a plus factor?

BYRNE: This was one of the big plus factors. Subsequently, I know Senator Muskie, in discussing this with the press, made a big point out of this that, you know, this is a chance for the whole region to get behind somebody who can do something for this region. And I know right from the beginning Governor Clauson felt this way. When I first discussed the Kennedy candidacy with him, well, he said, "Of course we're all going to go for John Kennedy. He's a New England man. We're naturally all going to go for him." But the Washington people particularly wanted to keep their options open a little bit at this meeting.

CAMPBELL: May I ask you to go back to 1958 and perhaps comment on a report that I've heard that indicates that Governor Clauson was not supported by Senator Muskie in his primary race, and that perhaps as a result of that there was a bit of a rift between the Governor

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and the Senator for an indeterminate amount of time?

BYRNE: Well, yes, there is truth to that. Clint Clauson was a member of the Old Guard in the Democratic Party in Maine, who'd been with it for years and years. He was a chiropractor, incidentally. Did you know that?

CAMPBELL: No.

BYRNE: And he went from chiropractory into becoming head of the Internal Revenue Service in Maine. And he was a long time Democrat and had run for office and had supported it with the.... And it had been ineffectual through the years pretty much. And then in '54 when Muskie and Coffin and I should mention Don Nicoll [Donald E. Nicoll], who is now Muskie's administrative assistant, Don Nicoll, N-I-C-O-L-L. He was another person who was instrumental in the founding of the modern Democratic Party in Maine. There was this division between the Old Guard and the new Democrats and in the '58 election—the primary, I should say, first Frank Coffin came

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out flatly for Maynard Dolloff, who was head of the Grange, for the Democratic nomination as the best qualified man. My recollection is that Ed Muskie never officially took a position.

CAMPBELL: He endorsed no candidate.

BYRNE: Yeah. Some of his close associates said rather harsh things in public or in private public—anyhow, they became known—about the qualifications of Clinton Clauson, which caused a great deal of resentment. And so there was this feeling of resentment. And I think after Governor Clauson became governor that it had diminished somewhat, but there was still this feeling in the background that, you know, that the new Democrats were not particularly pleased with Clint Clauson.

CAMPBELL: What would you say—what inducements for endorsement, what arguments, did the Kennedy people use that night? It was important to them at that time to line up a solid New England delegation.

BYRNE: Yeah. You know, I wish I could speak to that because I think it's important, and I was rather playing host

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that night.

CAMPBELL: In and out.

BYRNE: That was my chore. And, as I say, I was in and out. I do remember coming into that room several times and the conversation on the part of Ribicoff and Kennedy, especially Ribicoff as I recall, was rather animated, I'd almost say angry—at what, I think, he considered dilatory tactics. And I think he was playing up the big thing of having a—“Lets all of New England be together.” But I can't speak very authoritatively on it because I really don't recall, and I wasn't present for all the discussion.

CAMPBELL: What was the outcome of the meeting?

BYRNE: I think it was agreed by the Democratic people, meaning the Governor and Muskie and the Congressmen, that they would get together on it later. I think it was agreed that they realized at some point that they would support, but the question of timing was the big problem. And I do think that they left Kennedy a little bit on the hook. I do recall Ribicoff speaking somewhere

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else several days later, saying he was very encouraged by his Maine visit. So I think by and large they recognized that Maine was going to come along, but was playing hard to get.

CAMPBELL: Then, in the next month, the Governor died.

BYRNE: Yeah. The sequence of events is.... I have correspondence here, which

I pulled out of some old files in the crawl space at my house, which bears upon this thing. And I hadn't looked at it in so many years, I wasn't prepared for what I eventually found. Now, there was this statement agreed upon that was to be signed by Governor Clauson, Senator Muskie, Congressman Coffin, Congressman Oliver, one page statement. Now, the genesis of this comes with a letter to Governor Clauson from Frank Coffin in Washington.

CAMPBELL: Now what was the date of this letter?

BYRNE: This letter is dated December 18th, 1959.

CAMPBELL: A month or more after the Issues Conference.

BYRNE: Right. And it says:
"Dear Clint:
I am enclosing a copy of the rough draft

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of the Kennedy statement for your own scrutiny. In accordance with your conversation with Ed, I understand that we have a bit more time in which to make final decision as to date, time, etc.

"I called Jim and the enclosed statement meets with his approval.

"It may be that there will be some more changes in this either on your end, or the Washington end, although I have, at the moment, no personal opinions as to needed changes, except the language referring to the Senator's announcement. This must be changed to be in accord with the new time schedule.

"Please keep in touch with me if there is anything else I can do.

"With best personal wishes,
Sincerely,
Frank Coffin"

And with that was enclosed this draft. Now I don't know who drafted this.

CAMPBELL: Yes. That would be interesting to know.

BYRNE: From the tone of the letter, when they talk about Ed, obviously it was a joint production of Frank Coffin and Ed Muskie.

CAMPBELL: Senator Muskie.

BYRNE: Don Nicoll may have had a hand in drafting it. But as you see, it came to the Governor's office...

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CAMPBELL: With a cover letter from Coffin.

BYRNE: ...with a cover letter from Coffin and said that "I called Jim," meaning Oliver had agreed to it and takes it for granted that you understand that this has Ed's endorsement.

CAMPBELL: And there's no indication of any action on the Kennedy part, if they've had any part in the drafting of this?

BYRNE: No, there is not. Now, the statement ended up being carried nearly exactly as this draft presents it. What happened now.... Now we're talking about this letter of December 18th. Now I have some other correspondence here and it had the statement which is marked "Confidential For Release Tuesday A.M., January 5, 1960."

CAMPBELL: This would have followed Senator Kennedy's declaration of his candidacy?

BYRNE: Right. Of course, it has the names Clint Clauson, Edmund Muskie, Congressman Coffin, Congressmen Oliver. Now this release was sent on December 29th, 1959 to Senator Muskie, Congressman Coffin, Congressman Oliver, Senator

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Kennedy, Governor Ribicoff, and Pierre Salinger with covering letters which were pretty much the same. Here's one to Ribicoff from the Governor.

CAMPBELL: Governor Clauson, then, transmitted this statement on the 29th?

BYRNE: Right. On the 29th. "Enclosed...."
"Dear Abe:
"Enclosed is a typed copy of Senator Kennedy's statement prepared today.

"We wish to keep this statement confidential until shortly before release time and then distribute to the press here in Augusta.

"Since it is for release in Tuesday's A.M.'s, January 5, 1960, it means that the wire services will be releasing it at 6:30 P.M. the previous night.

"With warmest regards, I am,
Sincerely,
Governor
Enclosure"

CAMPBELL: Now the letter says "Senator Kennedy's statement," but it refers

actually to a statement about Senator Kennedy, rather than a statement of his own.

BYRNE: That's correct. That's correct. The other letters

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are similar. The one to John Kennedy himself says,

“Dear Jack, (This is also dated December 29th)

“I am highly pleased that you are making your announcement of your candidacy. All of us in Maine wish you the best of luck.

“I am enclosing a copy of the statement drafted by the Democratic members of the Maine Congressional delegation and myself in your support.

“We plan to release it for the A.M. newspapers on Tuesday, January 5, 1960, shortly before the release time which is 6:30 P.M., January 4.

“Please accept all my best personal wishes for the success of your candidacy.”

I'm assuming that these letters were signed and went out. I have the carbons. Well, it just doesn't say in it that they were signed, but I wouldn't have the carbons otherwise. I fell heir to the Governor's files after his death.

Well, what happened was on December 30th.... This was the day, December 29th that these letters were written that the Governor went to Lewiston that night to speak at

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some sort of an occasion in favor of—a little manufacturing firm, I believe it was. I didn't go with him as I most of the time did. But when he returned on the 29th and went to bed, he died early in his sleep on. The 30th, December 30th. I was living on the Blaine House lawn—a little aside—in the staff house—my family—and I had a call from the mansion from one of the maids saying, “Come over real quick, the Governor is awful sick.” And I went over there—I imagine it was around 1 o'clock—and Mrs. Clauson was distraught. And I went in and, well, he wasn't awful sick, he was very dead. And I remember we got a doctor, and the doctor declared him dead. Another doctor came in, also.

So the Governor was dead. We had to call the press and so forth. I also notified John Reed [John H. Reed], who became Governor, who was president of the senate and who was a Republican. He was up in Presque Isle, a potato grower up in Presque Isle. I remember calling him about 3 o'clock in the morning and telling him, “John, you're the Governor of the State of Maine.” And

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he came down the next day, arrived the 31st and was sworn into office about 8 o'clock that night, on the 31st. And, as I say, he was a Republican. We had no lieutenant governor, and so, therefore, the leadership of the state changed political hands. And that, of course, looking at it from the viewpoint of this Jack Kennedy announcement, was a rather strange situation

where you had the Governor had already notified people that he was going to come out for—along with the other Maine Congressional delegation—in support of Senator Kennedy, and then to died really before the announcement was made. Now I think that the people in Washington were.... You know, they were conscious of the fact that there had been a little split between Governor Clauson and themselves, and I don't think that they wanted anybody to imagine that they were going to try to put words into a dead governor's mouth. So it had been planned for the Governor to issue the thing in Augusta and so they called me, I believe Frank Coffin or Don Nicoll—Don Nicoll was

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then Frank Coffin's administrative assistant—and suggested that I go ahead as the Governor's representative and issue the thing to the press as had been planned before his death. And I did this. I have a copy of the release here.

CAMPBELL: Did the date of your announcement coincide with the press releases from the congressional delegation?

BYRNE: Right. Well, of course, I just put it out from Augusta. And I put it out with this covering note on it, or covering release, really, because the other thing was called an "attached statement." It said: "For release Tuesday A.M., January 5, 1960," and mean we had kept to the original schedule. "Augusta, Maine. January fourth. A statement supporting the candidacy for president of Senator John F. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and bearing the names of the late Governor Clinton A. Clauson and the three Democratic members of the Maine Congressional delegation, Senator Edmund S. Muskie and Representatives Frank M. Coffin and James C. Oliver, was released here today.

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"The statement was handed to newsmen by John E. Byrne, Governor Clauson's press secretary. Byrne said, 'Governor Clauson and the Democratic members of the Maine Congressional delegation had known some time ago of Kennedy's then-impending announcement and had agreed upon the wording of the statement of their support.' (I guess that's the end of the quote.)

"It was agreed further by Governor Clauson and the Democratic members of the Maine Congressional delegation that Governor Clauson would release the statement to the press this afternoon, Byrne said.

"He added: 'I am carrying out Governor Clauson's wishes.'

(See attached statement)"

And, then, is the statement. Should I read the statement, do you think?

CAMPBELL: Would you please? Yeah.

BYRNE: It says:

“Confidential. For release Tuesday A.M., January 5, 1960.
“Now that a New Englander has formally announced

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his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president, we wish to indicate publicly our personal support for Senator John F. Kennedy.

“In so doing, we would not wish to be misunderstood. We are speaking for ourselves, and we are not committing our fellow Democrats in Maine who may be delegates to the National Convention. We do feel, however, that we are not alone.

“Our reason for breaking informal precedent and speaking out as we are is to indicate our warm support for Senator Kennedy as he enters the crucial period of election year. It is, we think, all too rare an opportunity to be able to support with enthusiasm a nominee who would bring to his general duties a sensitive understanding of the needs of the country’s oldest settled region facing new problems.

“Our support, however, is not based on provincial reasoning. We have watched Senator Kennedy as he has been subjected for many months to unparalleled public scrutiny. He has passed all the tests with poise, courage and good humor. He has increased in stature and effectiveness. He is deeply

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and articulately aware of the great challenges facing this country which can no longer be side-stepped. He has our confidence and support. Clinton A. Clauson, Governor; Senator Edmund S. Muskie; Representative Frank M. Coffin; Representative James C. Oliver.”

A rather eloquent statement.

CAMPBELL: Yes, it was. And we don’t know who drafted it?

BYRNE: I don’t.

CAMPBELL: All right. And just right before the release of this statement, Senator Kennedy had announced his formal candidacy for election in 1960. What role did you play in the 1960 campaign in Maine?

BYRNE: As I recall.... Incidentally, Governor Clauson was buried.... Let me mention this, I think, first. He was buried on the second of....

CAMPBELL: Of January.

BYRNE: ...of January in Waterville, his home town. Pine Grove Cemetery in Waterville. It was January second. That was the day that JFK announced...

CAMPBELL: That he announced for the presidency.

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BYRNE: ...for the presidency. It was a Saturday. And Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] came to the—representing Jack, he came to the Blaine House that day. I was making many of the arrangements for the funeral, which was after the Governor lay in state in the Hall of Flags in the State House. The funeral was held in the State Armory. When I came to the Blaine House, I found Robert Kennedy was there and he'd been looking for me. They told me that they'd told him that I was working on arrangements. And he rode to the funeral with my wife [Beverly Byrne] and myself and with Morris F. Williams and his wife. Mory was driving. Mory was the Governor's other aide. There were just two of us who were the aides for Governor Clauson.

CAMPBELL: Had you met Robert Kennedy before?

BYRNE: I'd never met him before. He was.... When I walked into the Blaine House, he was absolutely pleased to meet me. There were many people around, old ladies weeping and so forth, and he was looking rather lost at sea and so he almost jumped on me,

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I recall. He went to the funeral with us and sat with us. We sat with the family behind the screen. I don't know how that exactly happened, how Bobby Kennedy was...

CAMPBELL: Became a member of the official family.

BYRNE: Yeah. I think Mrs. Clauson, who was very favorable to the Kennedys—I think I can almost say obviously that's what happened, because I was following her wishes in the funeral. He stayed with us during the funeral and then he wanted to ride to the cemetery in Waterville with us, but he had a problem, as I recall, that he'd flown up in a light plane to a little airport at Waterville and they had to leave before dark. His pilot didn't have any navigational aids. So Bobby wanted us to drive him—I mean, he wanted to stay in the car with us, with the close members of the staff of the Governor, and then wanted us to peel off and take him to the airport before we got to the cemetery. But I had a little disagreement with him at that point and said, you know, that would be impossible for us to do. So I got a National Guard car and said, "This is your car,"

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and, you know, "you can follow along behind us and then you can peel off," so that we wouldn't disrupt the....

CAMPBELL: Funeral procession.

BYRNE: ...funeral procession. So that's.... I just wanted to bring out that Bobby was there as representing JFK.

CAMPBELL: Did other candidates have representatives present that you recall?

BYRNE: I don't believe so. No, I don't believe so.

CAMPBELL: All right. Let's move on to the 1960 campaign. Let me just ask you a general question. Before the Governor's death did he express any thoughts to you concerning Senator Kennedy's effect on the statewide ticket in Maine? Did the Governor think he would be a plus factor or perhaps a drag on the ticket?

BYRNE: As I think back, I recollect that the Governor was rather high on JFK. I don't really recall ever having a discussion with him upon the effect. I have a suspicion that it was the Washington delegation

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that this was...

CAMPBELL: That were concerned...

BYRNE: ...that were more concerned about...

CAMPBELL: About the effects. Now in 1960 you played an active role in....

BYRNE : Well, yes. I remember on this announcement.... I'd gone along sort of working for John Reed for the interim period there and also cleaning out Governor Clauson's records. They were turned over to me, obviously; I have some of them here. I told John Reed that I had one final thing I had to do for the Governor. I didn't tell him what it was. And I said, "You'll see it when it comes out." And he did.

Now, Mory Williams had been Ed Muskie's administrative assistant as governor, but Mory was a Republican and Mory stayed on for a while with John Reed as his aide. It was quickly agreed, by mutual consent, that press secretary to Reed was not my cup of tea, so immediately everybody began casting around for alternatives. I moved over to the Department of Economic Development, which was a creature of Ed Muskie's

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regime. And I worked as, I think, supervisor of special promotions. My principal thing during the year I was with them—that was for all of 1960—was to run, with the Department of

Defense, a big procurement conference in South Portland. And that was my biggest official duty. And, yes, it is true. I did play a role in Democratic politics, a rather *sub rosa* role. I expressed my interest. My wife, Beverly, worked very closely as Lucia Cormier's [Lucia M. Cormier] campaign aide in the election campaign, both for the primary and the regular election, handled advertising, things like that. I wrote Lucia's speeches.

CAMPBELL: And she opposed Margaret Chase Smith.

BYRNE: She opposed Margaret Chase Smith.

CAMPBELL: Did she have a chance?

BYRNE: Not really. Lucia is a very wonderful person and had been talked of as possibly, under a Democratic regime, as the first speaker of the Maine House of Representatives. She was highly thought of on all sides of the aisles, a former school teacher, had been a motivating force in the educational

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legislation passed in the state, and very highly thought of. But Margaret Chase Smith was very strong and has remained very strong, and there was then, as there is now, no possibility of anybody unseating her that I know of. And Lucia was defeated rather strongly. A hundred thousand votes, I believe.

CAMPBELL: How did she view Senator Kennedy's candidacy? Did she feel it was helpful to her?

BYRNE: Lucia was a very strong supporter of JFK. Lucia, right up to the end, was rather hopeful, hoping that lightning would strike. Beverly and I sat in her Rumford headquarters that night with her when they counted the election returns. And early in the evening she was hopeful. As it gradually developed, she took it as a good sport. But I think that, like a lot of people, she had been encouraged by going around. She'd traveled the state extensively and she's seen people who liked her, and she really thought that it was going to possibly be her year. And as I think about it more, I think that she thought that JFK would be a help

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to the Maine ticket. As it turned out, of course, it was an unmitigated disaster for the Maine Democratic Party.

CAMPBELL: Yes, it was, and compared to 1958 a particularly bad showing.

BYRNE: Yeah. And I think that the major reason for this well, undoubtedly, was the combination of the state and the presidential elections. People

who never voted in the state election, who always voted in presidential elections, came down from the hills and up from the gullies and cast their votes.

CAMPBELL: And these were Republican votes?

BYRNE: And these were Republican votes. And I mentioned earlier about the Democrats hoisting themselves on their own petard. By the combination of the election at this particular point in history I think the Democrats lost. As I think back on it, I think Lucia would have lost anyhow because I don't think anybody was going to beat Margaret Chase Smith.

CAMPBELL: How about the gubernatorial race?

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BYRNE: The gubernatorial race, I think—maybe this is idle speculation—but I think without the presidential factor there that Frank Coffin, who is a Congressman running for the governorship and who was very articulate and brilliant and warm and liked by most people, I think he would have unseated John Reed, who is a nice fellow, but not a strong governor.

CAMPBELL: And the congressional delegation...

BYRNE: In the congressional delegation.... Let's see. There again I think the Democrats in the state election might have retained two seats, perhaps. Stanley Tupper [Stanley R. Tupper], maverick Republican, won the Second District from John Donovan [John C. Donovan]. John Donovan was...

CAMPBELL: He had also been associated with Muskie at one time?

BYRNE: That's right. He's former State Chairman of the Democratic Party, Muskie's administrative assistant in Washington—he left from that position to run for Congress—teacher of political science at Bates College, now at Bowdoin; he's returned there. And it's very possible that John Donovan would have

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won if they hadn't had the presidential election. Then in the First District, you had Peter Garland [Peter A. Garland] who defeated Jim Oliver, Jim Oliver being a Democrat. Now, Jim Oliver at one time had been a Republican. Years ago I believe that he was defeated by Robert Hale in the Republican primary and Hale became First District Congressman. And Jim Oliver then became a Democrat and in this particular election he was unseated by Garland of Saco from the Garland Manufacturing Company interest.

CAMPBELL: And then the third congressional race was Roberts [David Roberts] and McIntire [Clifford G. McIntire].

BYRNE: Yeah, Roberts was from Aroostook County, as I recall, a young fellow. And I don't think he really stood a chance in that one. The Third District in those days was very strongly Republican. But there was a possibility, in other words, without the presidential aspects of it, that the Maine Democrats may have held on two seats, two congressional seats out of three.

CAMPBELL: Who did the Kennedy people look to in Maine for support? Who were the active campaigners for Kennedy in Maine?

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BYRNE: Well, of course they looked strongly to the staffs of Muskie and Coffin. That was the key people.

CAMPBELL: Was anyone sent in from out of state?

BYRNE: Bill Dunfey [William L. Dunfey] came in.

CAMPBELL: Dunfey was there.

BYRNE: Yeah, he came in on several occasions.

CAMPBELL: Boutin at all?

BYRNE: I remember Boutin coming in in '59. In 1960 I don't remember him coming in, but I don't know. I was playing rather a hazardous role at this particular point. I was still living on the Governor's grounds. And the Governor was running against Frank Coffin. One hilarious day me of my friends borrowed Frank Coffin's car, which had the congressional license plate on it, and drove into my driveway, which was the Governor's driveway, and the Governor came by and I noticed him looking at the license plate. There's his opponents car parked talking to somebody on his own property. [Laughter]

CAMPBELL: Might I ask for your comments about the influence of the religious issue, the influence of Kennedy's Catholicism on the race?

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BYRNE: I have refreshed my memory by looking at some letters I wrote after the election to Frank Coffin and to Ed Muskie, and of course I was much closer to it in those days. I made the judgment at that time that religion had played a rather a large part in the debacle and one thing that comes to mind was,

in the gubernatorial race John Reed, the few days before the election, had a long television show. Maybe it was the day before. It was written, as I understand by John Gould. You know John Gould, the humorist, *Fastest Hound Dog In the State of Maine* and so forth, who at that time was an unreconstructed reactionary. And we used to.... Well, John Gould and I didn't see eye to eye. But anyhow this particular program didn't talk anything about the issues. It talked about protecting Maine's heritage. And I rather thought—although we're talking here, it was a gubernatorial race—that this was a somewhat less than subtle appeal to the religious issue. I could be wrong, but I don't think so. And I think that this was something that certain people in the Republican

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Party harped on subtly...

CAMPBELL: Used to their advantage.

BYRNE: ...during the campaign, and I think it was a factor. Now, of course, on the ticket you really only had one other Catholic. I mean you had it led by JFK. Now Lucia Cormier...

CAMPBELL: Was a Catholic.

BYRNE: French-Canadian background. Born of French-Canadian parents, I should say, and a very, in the usual phrase, devout Catholic, a very highly thought of woman and known for her Catholicism. And I think that might have had a little to do with the size of the vote there, too.

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

CAMPBELL: How would you compare Senator Muskie race in 1954 as a Catholic? This didn't seem to be much of an issue in Muskie's races.

BYRNE: No, in 1954 it really wasn't much of an issue. Nobody talked about it. I remember in 1954 there was one Protestant minister in Aroostook County who came out with some remarks about the Catholicism of Senator Muskie, who was then just Mr. Muskie, and it wasn't widely picked up in the press. And, as I recollect, his own congregation censured him

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so severely that he had to, after the election, had to retract. But it did not become a big issue at all in Muskie's campaign. When you look at '54, you are struck by the fact that here is Ed Muskie, son of a Polish immigrant, a Catholic, and above all a Democrat, being elected in traditionally Protestant, Republican Maine.

CAMPBELL: Were there any organized efforts in 1960 to counter this religious question, to answer it?

BYRNE: I don't believe so. I believe the idea was to, "Let's forget it if possible, and ignore it!"

CAMPBELL: Was then-Senator Johnson an asset in Maine, a liability on the ticket?

BYRNE: I really don't think he had much effect on Maine. Maine was then Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] country, and I think what you did, you got a heavier turnout of people, of Republicans who may not have voted, who voted for religious reasons.

CAMPBELL: John Kennedy made several campaign appearances in Maine. Were you present at any of those?

[Interruption]

BYRNE: Yes, Senator Kennedy came into Maine in September

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for a full day of campaigning.

CAMPBELL: Did he appear at that time with other candidates, the state candidates for statewide office in Maine?

BYRNE: Yes. Yes, he did. I notice I have a note here that JFK campaigned in Maine October second.

CAMPBELL: October second. Well, that's perhaps right after the rump session of Congress that had...

BYRNE: That's probably right.

CAMPBELL: ...that had kept him in Washington.

BYRNE: I remember he appeared in three places: at Portland, Presque Isle, and Bangor, flying visits, and that Senator Muskie accompanied them all the way. And I believe he picked up the individual candidates along the way. Now I was not at any of those places. I was not in a position at that time to be seen in such places. So I really don't have any personal knowledge of exactly what went on. I know he got good crowds.

CAMPBELL: Got good crowds.

BYRNE: Yeah. And especially.... Strangely enough, I had talked a little earlier about the Republicanism

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of the third district. I remember Presque Isle was very strongly for him in that visit, but I think he had a lot of people down from the St. John River Valley, who are French-Canadians, who were very enthused about JFK. I think that they swelled the crowd.

CAMPBELL: And then he visited again. I believe, shortly before the election.

BYRNE: Yeah, now, that was rather humorous from my viewpoint, because—it was in Lewiston, in the Lewiston City Park, that night. And he was hours late. And Ed Muskie and Lucia Cormier were there, and they had to keep this crowd for hour after hour. I remember people talking about this virtuoso performance of Ed Muskie, who told stories and led songs and did everything possible to hold the crowd. I remember the early editions of the.... I think the early editions of all the newspapers—you never saw anything in the next morning about them because he came so late. But he did come and it was enthusiastic, but he was many hours late.

The funny part about it was

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I was sitting over there in Lewiston in the Democratic state headquarters. Since I couldn't be going around publicly, I was manning the phone in the Democratic headquarters. And I got one phone call. A man asked for somebody and I said he wasn't there. And he said "Who is this?" And I said, "Who's this?" And he said, "Well, who's this?" And I said, "Who's this?" It turned out it was Al Lessard, Alton Lessard [Alton A. Lessard], who was State Chairman of the Democratic Party, and I wasn't about to tell anybody who I was. So we ended up laughing rather heartily about it. So I wasn't at the Park meeting at the thing but people came back and told me how fine it went, finally. They did lose a lot of people because of the very lateness of the hour. He'd been to a number of other places that night. This was Sunday night, the sixth.

CAMPBELL: Before the election on Tuesday.

BYRNE: Right. Right. And Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] came to Lewiston the next day in the same place the next morning, Monday morning.

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CAMPBELL: Do you recall if Robert Kennedy or any of the Kennedy ladies made campaign appearances?

BYRNE: I don't believe so. I think it was JFK and the only other one was Ted [Edward Moore Kennedy]. You know earlier in—I don't know whether I've mentioned this at all. Ted had appeared in Maine before JFK did in October of '59.

CAMPBELL: Ted Kennedy?

BYRNE: Ted Kennedy. He'd come to Maine and had spoken in Orono. This was on October 19th, 1959. He went to a meeting of Democrats at Orono and spoke, and at that time he said that Senator Kennedy was thinking on the issues and wondering what type of candidate could best meet them, and he wanted to get a feel for Maine. Of course, he's still an unannounced candidate. And then after that meeting in Orono, where the University of Maine is, Ted Kennedy came down to Augusta.... Maybe it was on his way up or is on his way back, but he came through the Governor's office I remember. I remember shaking hands with him. He was going around seeing everybody he possibly could about Jack's

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possible candidacy. That was the only other visit. Well, of course, you had Ted there then and then you had Bobby, who came to represent JFK at the funeral, and then you had JFK's two appearances—three appearances really. You know, November of '59 and the...

CAMPBELL: And the two fall appearances...

BYRNE: ...two fall appearances.

CAMPBELL: ...In 1960. To just recap a little bit about the election in 1960, what were the major factors in Kennedy's defeat in Maine?

BYRNE: Well...

CAMPBELL: It's tradition?

BYRNE: ...I think we start out from—tradition is the fact that Maine had never voted for a Democrat except that 1912 Bull Moose split election and so you really couldn't be expected to win. Nixon had tied to Maine. He vacationed at Maine at Ogonquit. One of his advisors was Fred Scribner [Fred C. Scribner] of Portland who later became Under Secretary of the Treasury—or perhaps under Eisenhower, I guess it was. So there were a lot of

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ties to Nixon in Maine. The Republican Party there was very favorable toward him, and I think the religion played a part.

Oh, as I think about it now, when I talk about religion, there had been a serious problem in the legislature. It started in Augusta first on a city level, of the bussing of children to parochial schools.

CAMPBELL: This was an issue early in 1960, wasn't it?

BYRNE: Yes. It had been an issue. I'm not quite sure when the legislature met, but the last time the legislature met before the election it had rejected a bill that would have permitted bussing of school children to parochial schools. And this had really put the religious issue in the fire in Maine more so than in previous periods. There was some great anger on both sides. The Democratic.... I tell you what, the Democratic Party state platform, adopted in April of 1960, called for permitting the bussing of children to parochial schools, and this was a red flag to many

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people.

CAMPBELL: I've heard reports that while Senator Muskie did some campaigning out of state for the national ticket in 1960, that he refused to campaign in Wisconsin fearing that he would be identified as a Catholic campaigning for a Catholic in Catholic areas, and that this might adversely affect statewide races in Maine. Had you heard that?

BYRNE: No. It's possible, it's very possible. Let me think now. Wisconsin and Polish. Ed Muskie had been rather sensitive about being used on an ethnic basis. I think that possibly might be the reason.

CAMPBELL: More than the religious issue.

BYRNE: Yes, although, of course, most Poles, I guess, tend to be Roman Catholic.

CAMPBELL: Were there mistakes made by the Kennedy forces in Maine? Could the Democratic campaign have been better?

BYRNE: Well, the only obvious thing was a problem that they had all over the country, I guess. I think people got a little irritated at the.... For

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instance, on that meeting just before the election, the huge time that elapsed between the announced arrival and the arrival. I don't know what sort of effect that might have. It irritated people.

CAMPBELL: Scheduling.

BYRNE: Yeah, the fact that being late. This is a minor thing, but I have to talk about a minor thing because I can't think of major things.

CAMPBELL: No major mistakes.

BYRNE: No. Really, I think they made all the appropriate movements that could be done. They certainly gathered all the delegates from Maine, they had the leadership of Maine, they had visited Maine even right up to the...

CAMPBELL: To the end.

BYRNE: ...to the final gun. So I really do not recall any grievous mistakes.

CAMPBELL: In 1961 in the spring you came to Washington. How were you contacted regarding a position in Washington?

BYRNE: Well, I did a little contacting myself. I had really stayed on in Maine because of my interest

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in the Democratic Party, I think, to work in the election. And, well also, it was rather a shock to have left the news business. I had been United Press man for ten years, and I had severed that connection to go with Governor Clauson, who was the first Governor elected to a four year term. That was another Constitutional change. And so there was a four years that I had planned for, and in one year everything was over. So I had to make personal arrangements.

After the election I was in contact with Frank Coffin—we always had humorous communications back and forth—and with Senator Muskie and Don Nicoll and with Pierre, who I'd gotten rather chummy with in our visit. He was absolutely impressed by the fact that I was living on the grounds of the Blaine House. He says, "Well, I haven't seen a newsman fall into such a nice thing in a long time." So I had written to all these people and I guess what really put the—it was the connection of Ed Muskie with Bernie Boutin of New Hampshire, who was named Deputy Administrator of General Services Administration, their close connection, that

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got me the job in GSA as Deputy Assistant Administrator, Director of Information. And so I came down there in April of '61 and remained in that job until June of this year, at which time the administrations changed and I became a member of the National Archives staff.

CAMPBELL: What exactly did the position involve in 1961?

BYRNE: The position with GSA?

CAMPBELL: Yes.

BYRNE: Well, actually you're the chief contact person with the press. I also wrote. I wrote the addresses and speeches for Bernie Boutin. We had a rather small staff over there. Bob Griffin [Robert T. Griffin] of Boston was Assistant Administrator and he was in charge of congressional affairs, and I was his assistant in that area, too. But the way we broke it up, I pretty much handled all the public information aspects and he handled the congressional with his—he had a separate staff for that, too. But we worked very closely in concert. Under that Administration, GSA was very strongly congressionally-oriented. We didn't

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try to blow our horn too much in the public press. We tried to let the congressional people and the Administration savor the good news first.

CAMPBELL: When you arrived, Mr. Moore [John L. Moore] was the Administrator. Do you know the details of his resignation?

BYRNE: Oh, to a certain extent. John Moore was a sort of a fish out of water in Washington. He'd come down from Pennsylvania where he was the nominee of Billy Green [William J. Green], who wanted one person in the Administration. Bernie Boutin apparently had been slated for the top job, but Pennsylvania had been crucial to the Kennedy hopes and Billy Green had been so helpful that when he wanted his man in there from the University of Pennsylvania, he put him in.

CAMPBELL: He prevailed.

BYRNE: But it was like putting a cup on a volcano, putting him over Beanie Boutin. [Laughter] Bernie had all the contacts with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and all the people in the White House and dealt directly with them. And John Moore didn't like all this political

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shenanigans particularly, so he was very unhappy. And it just didn't work out.

CAMPBELL: And he went back to the academic life.

BYRNE: He went back to the academic life, and Boutin took over.

CAMPBELL: Let's start on this again.

BYRNE: Okay.

CAMPBELL: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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