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Do you recall your first contacts with JFK [John F. Kennedy]? For example, did you attend the 1956 convention when he was almost nominated for vice president?

No, I was engaged in my first election campaign in Idaho and I had no time to spare for a national convention, even though they were more relevant then than they are now. So, I did not attend the convention, but Kennedy came to Idaho...

...in '56, prior to the convention, and spoke for me at Twin Falls in a small theater filled with people. I was to learn a great deal more about political techniques in the years that followed that. Even then we understood that it was important to hold a rally in a small theater, in order to be certain that the place was crowded. And Twin Falls is one of the most Republican communities in the state. The theater turned out to be crowded. People were standing outside. It was a very successful rally. Kennedy left in a one-engine plane for appearances in Nevada. We learned later that his experience entailed such a fright that he phoned the Democratic National Committee and told them that
he would never leave the ground again on anything other than a two-motor plane with pilot and co-pilot. Apparently, the plane turned completely over in flight from Idaho to Nevada. None of this did we know until much later. But that, I believe, was the first time I met Kennedy personally.

STERN: Did he aid you at all in your—in that first campaign? Was this, this first talk in your campaign a big help?

CHURCH: Oh, I think that it was definitely helpful. He was a national celebrity and, even though we failed to carry Twin Falls County in that election, Kennedy's appearance in such staunch Republican country was helpful to me.

STERN: Well, once you got to the Senate in '57, I know that your aide at the time, John Carver [John A. Carver], who has done an oral history for us, said that your office was very close to Kennedy's and that you "saw him all the time." At least that's what Carver said. Was it evident to you immediately when you got there, that he was running for president, after having come so close to the vice-presidential nomination? Did that seem clear to you at the outset? He was certainly making a number of trips and there was a lot of speculation.

CHURCH: Well, I assumed that he would be a candidate for president in 1960. Everybody else thought so too, for the reasons that you've mentioned.

STERN: Did you ever talk about it with him, that you can recall?

CHURCH: No, not at first. I didn't feel that it was my business to talk to him about it. And I don't recall in the early months that I served in the Senate discussing it with him. But then there was a general feeling that he would be a candidate.

STERN: OK, why don't we move on to some of the major issues in the Senate in those years in which you both served together. The first in which you made your first speech was on the Hell's Canyon issue, which Kennedy endorsed. And, at the time, there were many who said that this was part of the process of building a western base in 1960. Do you have any recollections of negotiating with him about that?

CHURCH: I didn't negotiate with Kennedy personally. I worked hard on the Hell's Canyon speech as a maiden speech. Back in those days, the freshmen who were senators were not supposed to be heard for six months. And then they were supposed to speak on a topic that was related to their state. Times have changed. But, in accordance with that practice, I chose the Hell's Canyon issue as my maiden speech. Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] helped me line up votes following the speech. At that time Lyndon was trying to move Texas out of the South and into the West along, I think, with
Oklahoma, so that he could run for president as a westerner, instead of a southerner. He was more active in the, in giving me help, but I appreciated Kennedy's vote.

STERN: By '58, you were both on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and kind of...Especially on the Latin American subcommittee. Can you recall what your assessment was of Kennedy's performance on the committee and how effective he was?

CHURCH: Well, by then Kennedy was working a good deal harder on his presidential campaign. My principal recollection of his contribution to the Foreign Relations Committee

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had to do with a speech he made on Algeria which seemed to be a departure from the conventional wisdom to which he otherwise subscribed. And I suppose that's why the independence he showed on Algeria was noteworthy. Kennedy spoke of a new generation of leaders, but his foreign policy was really one of continuity with the past with some notable exceptions, one of which was Algeria, and that's an important commendation.

STERN: On the Civil Rights Bill in 1957, he, you may recall—I hope you recall—got caught on a very difficult issue, which was the Jury Trial Amendment, with the liberalest people in the country against the course of discrimination in the selection of members of juries in southern states. And he ended up voting for it with a great deal of, much difficulty. As I was able to discover, you helped him out—you and Scoop Jackson [Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson], by proposing an amendment to the jury-trial section which was aimed at wiping out discrimination against black jurors in federal courts, which, of course if it were effective, would have eliminated a lot of the objection to voting for the Jury Trial Amendment. Do you have any recollections of that whole struggle?

CHURCH: Yes. I hadn't remembered that Scoop Jackson was involved, but perhaps he was, I just don't recall. I had been one of the original sponsors of the Jury Trial Amendment, along with Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] and a senator from Wyoming.

STERN: O'Mahoney [Joseph Christopher O'Mahoney]?

CHURCH: No, no, no. The old gentleman who was then the senior senator from Wyoming. Pop—his name should come to my head.

STERN: Well, I can—we can check that. That's no problem.

CHURCH: The reason I subscribed to the jury trial was because westerners have a strong and abiding belief in juries And, it seems to me, that criminal prosecutions without the benefit of a jury trial are contrary to the constitutional guarantee
and the American tradition. The vote was very close. It became clear that the Jury Trial Amendment would be the deciding factor. There had been no civil rights act passed in eighty years. And the avoidance of a filibuster was crucial to the passage of legislation. For this reason, the Jury Trial Amendment appeared to be the key. The only argument against it that seemed to have any substance was the fear that juries would not convict. White juries, that is, would not convict other whites accused of violating civil rights or voting rights.

STERN: Certainly, I wouldn't see that.

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CHURCH: There was evidence of that, but it was also a time when the juries were selected in such a way that the blacks, the blue-ribbon juries, you know, were much touted. And there was no assurance that blacks would serve on federal juries. So, it occurred to me that an addendum to the amendment might make it possible for a few, a handful of senators to come aboard and vote for the amendment. And it turned out that way. In fact, after the vote it happened that John Kennedy was leaving the Senate through the revolving doors on the first floor or the Senate wing, and my wife [Bethine C. Church] was coming through at the same time. And he said through the door as they passed one another, "Frank did a great thing today. He enabled me to, he made it possible for me to vote for the jury trial. And, so I think that this addendum—which I might say was orchestrated by Lyndon Johnson in the sense that, once he became apprised of the amendment and the fact that I was going to offer it, he then took charge of the timing and, like an orchestra conductor with his baton, indicated when I was to rise and present it to him. And so he stage managed it for maximum effect.

STERN: Which I am sure was well appreciated.

CHURCH: In any case, this addendum broke the roadblock. The Jury Trial Amendment was subsequently passed. And that made possible the passage of the legislation itself.

STERN: Okay, that's helpful. Let's move on to 1960. Now of course, at the '60 convention, you served as the keynoter. I was interested in, it seemed to me, from the evidence I saw at the library, that, although you may not agree with this, that basically the Kennedy people supported your selection, which struck me as being somewhat unusual since you were a) a junior senator and b) from a state they couldn't possibly carry, one they had no chance to carry. I was wondering if you had any insight into why that...

CHURCH: Yes, I think the reason was that Kennedy and his people were concerned that his youth might be used against him at the convention and that some delegates might be swayed to vote for other candidates, like Lyndon Johnson, on the
ground that he was an older and more experienced man and that Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon], having served as vice president and having long been in the national limelight, would put heavy emphasis, if not upon age, then upon experience...

STERN: Which he did.

CHURCH: …which he did, and that the Democrats ought to have a candidate, an older candidate with more experience counteract the Nixon strategy. So I think the reason that the Kennedy people wanted me to be the keynoter—and I believe they did—was because I was a senator who was even

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younger, conspicuously younger, than the candidate, John F. Kennedy, who, by contrast, benefited from his greater maturity. Being thirty-six at the time, I still looked to be about twenty-six and Kennedy appeared to be in the vigor of his middle age by comparison. I think that may have been at least one of the reasons for their choice.

STERN: Can you recall the conflicts at the convention, particularly the very bitter Johnson-Kennedy, the attacks that were made by Senator Johnson's people on the basis of Kennedy's health, some implications of problems with his father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and of course that famous meeting they had during the general session of the Texas and Massachusetts delegations? Do you have any recollections of those events?

CHURCH: Well, I have a recollection of the joint meetings.

STERN: Were you there?

CHURCH: No, I listened to parts of the debate. I was busy preparing for the keynote speech, but I listened on the radio to parts of the debate that took place. And I thought, from what parts I heard, that Kennedy definitely benefited from that exchange. Otherwise, the Johnson people had pretty much written me off and left me alone. I think they concluded that the convention machinery was in the control of the Kennedys and that anyone who served as the keynoter, or chairman, in any one of the leadership roles at the convention, had been selected by the Kennedy group.

STERN: Yet, basically, though, you were forced to remain publicly neutral until, I guess it was the night before, when the Idaho Caucus declared for Kennedy. Yet, the delegation split. It was by no means a Kennedy victory: he got six votes, but Johnson got four and a half, Symington [Stuart Symington, II] got two, and a half went to Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. So, it was certainly not a victory for Kennedy.
CHURCH: That's typical of Idaho delegations. They're stubbornly independent. And, in this case, one of the delegates, Tom Boise [Tom W. Boise], had been ardently wooed by Lyndon Johnson. John Kennedy later told me that Tom Boise was the only ward-heeler politician of the big-city type that he ever met west of the Mississippi. Tom Boise was a very influential figure in the Democratic Party of Idaho and had been for many years, particularly with the activists, those who attend the national conventions. And Johnson got to Boise and apparently convinced Tom that Austin was much closer than Boston to Idaho and her needs, and that, if we were to take control of the delegation away from this upstart young senator, Lyndon Johnson would remember. And Tom was, became a strong convert to the Johnson cause. And that accounted for the split within the delegation.

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And others, not wishing to choose between Tom Boise and me found it possible to compromise on Symington and Stevenson, so the vote went in all directions.

STERN: Did you participate at all in the platform fight, particularly on civil rights?

CHURCH: No, I didn't get involved because of my keynote role. And I thought it best to stay out of the various convention fights.

STERN: During the campaign itself, I know that Kennedy did make at least one appearance in Idaho, perhaps more. Do you have any recollections of those? I have one little anecdote. Which he was speaking at Pocatello and was embarrassed in the midst of his talk to learn that the local Burns Creek Reclamation Project was already before the Senate, which he didn't know, and he just quipped about it, but afterwards dressed down some of the staff for not having informed him beforehand. I was wondering if you recollected this.

CHURCH: I recollect the incident. I had flown out with him on his plane to Boise.

STERN: More than one engine, I hope?

CHURCH: Yes, his own this time. His fortunes had improved and he was traveling in a Convair. But it was, nonetheless, a long flight, because the Convair is a slow plane. And we flew overnight. I had a bad cold. I didn't want to infect him, so I stayed as far away from him as possible. If we had had more of a conversation on the plane, it might have occurred to me to discuss Burns Creek—that was one of the score of different questions that might have come up—and, as a consequence, I did not mention it. His staff had not briefed him. And I remember afterwards he was quite upset, because he had been caught off base. And he said something to me about it, told me what had happened and said that he wished that I had mentioned it to him while we were en route to Idaho. So, it wasn't just the staff that got the dressing down.
STERN: In the fall of 1960—I think it was after the election—you made a trip to Africa with Gale McGee [Gale William McGee], Frank E. Morris and Ted Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy]. You sent your report to President Kennedy in February of ’61 and he gave a speech in the Senate in June of ’61 on the way you felt the United States should deal with African nationalism, neutralism, dependence, et cetera. What was your sense of Kennedy's responsiveness to the whole...? What was your sense of his, for example, the appointments he made in Africa to people like Soapy Williams [G. Mennen “Soapy” Williams] and the ambassadorial appointment? Did you feel that he was moving in the right direction?

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CHURCH: Well, the trip itself was indicative of his interest in Africa. So far as I know, he may have been the first American president to take a personal interest in African affairs. He understood the importance of the collapse of colonialism on that continent, the emergence of the independent governments, and the need for the United States to establish good relations with these governments. He sent us, or asked us to go to Africa while he was still president-elect on a kind of goodwill mission to those newly independent African countries. And it was a fascinating trip. I thought that Soapy Williams made up in energy what he may have lacked in knowledge about African politics. And I think he worked very hard to educate himself on the subject once he became assistant secretary. Furthermore, he was philosophically in tune with the newly emerging Africa. And, so, on the whole, the appointment was satisfactory.

STERN: Certainly the African reaction to Kennedy was very positive.

CHURCH: Indeed it was. And this was clear from the excitement that Ted Kennedy, although he was not yet a member of the Senate, elicited wherever he went, because he was known to be the new President's brother. And besides, of course, he had the Kennedy appearance, and was easily identified. There was an excitement throughout Africa at the time about Kennedy and some understanding that he had shown more interest in African affairs than previous presidents.

STERN: I know that there was, in particular, a lot of disillusionment about Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], who seemed to just ignore African affairs almost entirely.

I was looking at some of the material in the transition papers we have at the library. I found quite a number of letters which you wrote recommending various people for appointments to various federal positions. On the whole, my sense was that you weren't too lucky.

CHURCH: No. Some of those letters may have been pro forma.
STERN: John Carver did go to Interior, although you recommended him for the Federal Power Commission as federal power commissioner.

CHURCH: Later he did go to the Federal Power Commission.

STERN: I was wondering what your general assessment was of the transition in terms of the selection of personnel by the Kennedy people. Did you think it was a rational process? Was it one that you felt was done well? I know, for example, that Dan [Dan H. Fenn, Jr.] was involved in it later in the White House, the so called talent search.

CHURCH: Well, I really don't know I was close enough to the talent search to the process, to give an informed answer—I do know that Kennedy was interested in obtaining the best people he could find. Some of them turned out to be good choices, and others, in my judgment, did not.

STERN: Are you willing to be more specific?

CHURCH: Well, I thought that his Secretary of State turned to be very weak. His Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], on whom Kennedy was very high, turned out to be totally wrong in all of his projections with respect to Vietnam, while Rusk [Dean Rusk] kept looking for a new argument to justify continuing war, so that. There were men in the cabinet whom Johnson certainly should have changed when he became president, but did not, much to his own bereavement, I think. However, John F. Kennedy must have been satisfied with most of his appointees. I have been told that he had thought of dismissing Rusk in his second term, but I don't know whether that is true.

STERN: I wonder, could you depict a point here: I was going to ask you about this later, but since you have mentioned Vietnam. In many ways it's a purely speculative question, but I would just be interested in what your feelings are. There are, of course, arguments on both sides as to what would have happened in Vietnam had Kennedy lived. On the one hand, you get people like Roger Hilsman [Roger Hilsman, Jr.] and Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], and there's the remark quoted in Kenny O'Donnell's [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] book saying that Kennedy would never have gone down the same path. On the other hand, there is a very persuasive argument which is look at the people who advised Johnson. They were, to a man, all Kennedy's people. Do you have any strong sense of that or do you think it's really just....

CHURCH: I don't know what Kennedy would have done. I like to believe that he would not have made the fatal error of committing American troops to another Asian war in pursuit of a policy that made no sense, the policy of surrounding China
with an alliance of pygmies in the name of containment. I remember that Kennedy said in a television interview shortly before his assassination, something to the effect that this was a war the Vietnamese had to win for themselves, it was their war, and there was no way that we could win it for them. I think that that was one of the few wise statements ever made by an America chief executive concerning the whole debacle. And I have preferred to believe that he meant that when he said it, and

would not have been drawn into a full-scale war in Vietnam.

STERN: Of course, we'll never know. I thought I would show this to you. Perhaps you would have some recollections of some of these specific appointments. For the record, just let me say that is a list of your White House appointments during the Kennedy administration. If there are any substantive things you can recall about any of those meetings, or even any interesting anecdotal kinds of recollections, I think they would be very nice to have. Some of them, I am sure, were basically fairly formal, but some suggest to me that they were more than that.

CHURCH: The March fifth meeting with National Congress of American Legions is one that I do not recall, although I was apparently present. However, it does bring to mind an anecdote concerning Kennedy when he came to Pocatello. This was during the campaign. This was the same time that he had the Burns Creek incident. He was presented by the Chamber of Commerce with an Indian headdress. And, instead of putting it on in the Coolidge [Calvin Coolidge] fashion, he simply held it at his side and said that he appreciated having it, but the next time he watched a western on television, he'd know which side to root for.

I always was intrigued with the way he managed to keep his dignity while engaged in a difficult campaign. He had a ready wit, one which he was careful to use sparingly until he became president. When it came to the shenanigans of campaigning, the hoopla, and the kinds of presentations that tend to make candidates look ridiculous, he avoided this pitfall very skillfully.

STERN: Well, perhaps some things will occur to you.

CHURCH: Just off hand, it is very hard for me to remember the particulars.

STERN: I'm not surprised. It's twenty years in some cases.

CHURCH: Some of these meetings were social. Others were parochial in the sense that we were discussing matters close to home. However, I found that President Kennedy was one of the most accessible presidents. I didn't often have occasion to phone him or to speak to him personally about any matters for I was relatively junior in the Senate. And, not being the chairman of any major committee, there were few
occasions that I needed to have direct access to the President. But, when those occasions did occur, I had no difficulty getting through to him by telephone.

STERN: Were you able to call on your line directly?

CHURCH: He would usually answer the call or he would return the call very shortly afterwards. And, whenever I needed his help, even in a matter reversing his own Secretary of Agriculture [Orville L. Freeman]—I recall that particular incident. He was prepared to give in, once convinced that my position was sound, both on the merits and politically. He had no difficulty making up his mind, or calling his Secretary of Agriculture, in this particular case, and directing him to reverse his decision.

Now, I always regarded that as very strong personal leadership. Others have told me, "but this is not the way a president should run a government, because no one man can spread himself that thin." But, as a junior senator at the time, I appreciated presidential help whenever I could get it.

STERN: I'm sure you did. Maybe we could look at some of the specific legislation, particularly in the Senate during the Kennedy period. I found a good bit of material on the National Wilderness Preservation System Bill, which was adopted in 1961 by a lopsided vote: seventy-eight to eight. It was supported by the president and apparently you were the floor leader. Why was it that, despite that enormous margin in the Senate, it was not actually enacted until 1964, during the great push of Johnson legislation? I assume, of course, that it was the commercial interests: lumber, petroleum, natural gas, and the others who had great lobbying power.

CHURCH: Yes, and Les Aspinall [Wayne N. Aspinall] was then chairman of the House Interior Committee. He was strongly opposed to the legislation, partly, I think, because of the user groups, who were strong in his constituency, and which he often represented, his own belief in multiple-use principles for all parts of the national forests. And so the legislation was held up in the House of Representatives on that account.

I am trying to remember how the deadlock was broken. But it was a trade. Oh, I believe it was a trade—you had better check your records on this—but as I can recall, it was a trade involving the Colorado River Development Bill, which was very important in terms of irrigation projects and the storage of water both for the upper and lower basins. And the Senate held that up until an understanding could be reached on the Wilderness Act. And then both bills were enacted.

STERN: And that was in 1964. Johnson made it part of his legislative package in January of 1964. And that obviously was very helpful, given his position at the time, and the fact that it was hard for him to lose on many issues.

I also found a good deal of material on your personal interest in Food for Peace, which George McGovern [George S. McGovern] of course was running in the White House.
There were a lot of letters back and forth and proposals being sent from his office to your office.

How effective do you think McGovern was in running the Food for Peace program?

CHURCH: Well, I think that he...

STERN: For example, just let me add one other thing before, sorry for cutting you off. You made a proposal in March of ’61 that food deliveries be labeled in the language of the receiving nation, which I was astounded to realize had never been done before, and of course was immediately adopted. And there was a little note from Kennedy saying how essential and sensible he thought that was.

CHURCH: I think that George McGovern did a good job. He was ill part of the time. You will remember, he had probably contracted the disease in South America. The process takes a long time to recover, to regain energy. And so he was handicapped with health problems during a part of the, a substantial part of the time he served as director.

But I strongly believed in the program for two reasons. There were lots of starving people that needed food and we had surpluses which were very costly to the taxpayer to store. And it just seemed sensible to make that food available to reduce own surpluses and help hungry people at the same time.

I now remember another occasion. This does not deal with Food for Peace, but an amendment I was trying get passed on the foreign aid program to put a stop to military grants and aid to European countries, NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] countries that had fully recovered economically from the ravages of war and, in fact, had achieved a level of prosperity better than any they had known before, who were nevertheless, eight years after economic aid had stopped, still receiving substantial grants from the United States for purchase of military equipment.

And I had a very hard time getting the amendment passed. The Pentagon was against it. The State Department was against it. Going programs must never be terminated. New excuses must be found to justify them. And each year we had a whole plethora of new excuses. And, but I was persisting and the second time and the third time I brought it around, I was gaining votes all the time, because it was so difficult to justify this expenditure in face of the European prosperity. So, when it looked as though the amendment would pass, I was told that the State Department and the Pentagon went to the President and asked him to intervene to prevent passage of the amendment. Call up a few senators to tip the balance against the amendment.

He asked for an explanation of the amendment. And when I told him what it was, he said, "Well, I'm not against it; I'm for it." And, as a result, he did not intervene. I did secure the votes. And, in the end, it was finally put to the further American grants to these prosperous countries.
STERN: That's fascinating. I thought I'd go back for a

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minute. I realized that there was a part early on, it was actually just before the
inauguration and I hope you have some recollection of this. I was interested in
asking you about Lyndon Johnson's role as vice president. To what degree did he obtain any
clout if that's the right word, at all in the Senate? There was of course that very generally
well-documented meeting in January of 1961 when the leader of the democratic Senate was
caucused, and Johnson essentially asked to chair the caucus as vice president, with
Mansfield's [Mike Mansfield], who was his successor, approval. It was adopted. I have the
vote. It was a lopsided, he won by forty-two to seventeen. But, was so chagrined by the fact
that some of his strongest friends, people like Clinton Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson], voted
against him, that he essentially withdrew. And that from there on in, that was it, that Johnson
played very little role as vice president. Were you there? Do you recall this moment?

CHURCH: Yes, it was a pyrrhic victory for Johnson. I don't recall how I voted. I may
have voted... Do you have my vote there? I may have voted for Johnson.

STERN: I think you did, yeah.

CHURCH: It was a wrong vote. I should have voted with the other guy. But, I say that
with the experience that came with the years that followed. I was still rather
young in the Senate. The Vice President is, being an agent of the President, is
no longer a member of the legislative branch.

STERN: That was the reason given, sure.

CHURCH: And he has no place chairing a Democratic caucus or caucus of Democrat
senators. And, had that vote taken place six years later, whatever, I'm sure I
would have voted the other way. But, at the time, Johnson's persuasiveness,
Mansfield's acquiescence, my own juniority caused me to, I suppose, to vote for him. That
may be the worst mistake I ever made in the Senate.

STERN: He was, he, at the same time, Johnson wrote a memo to the President
asking— he did more than asking—saying that he thought that certain very
specific responsibilities should be carefully and concretely given to the Vice
President. He named them, making him a kind of assistant to the President, in a sense. And
Kennedy now literally threw it away.

And apparently, I'm just wondering about your sense of Johnson as a vice president.
Certainly, from what I have found it seems to me that he played very little role. And it would
have been unreasonable to assume, that given what he had been up to January 20th, 1961,
that he might have been a very helpful person to the President. But he seems to have lost all his
influence almost immediately.

CHURCH: I don't know how much influence he had to begin with...

STERN: Except for his position.

CHURCH ...I think that the people that surrounded Kennedy were mainly easterners.

[Interruption]

STERN: We were talking about the National Wilderness Preservation Bill, and why it had taken so long for it to get through, and then Food for Peace. I wanted to move on to some, an interesting little thing that I found. I wonder if you recall it, and how you feel about it today.

In May 1961, at the time right after the Bay of Pigs, when there was an effort being made to organize an exchange of the prisoners for tractors. I recall that Eleanor R. Roosevelt was involved in it and many other people. Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] ran into the halls of the Senate and asked their opinion about it. And there's a little note which I found in his handwriting, in which he said, and I'll quote it to you, I felt it was very interesting, this was his quote from what he said that you had said to him:

The idea is awful. It is a confession of our sins, playing into the hands of blackmailers. In effect, admitting our part in the fiasco, which we are attempting to redeem, when we should be exposing Castro's [Fidel Castro] police state to the world. Once a blackmailer succeeds, what next?

That was O'Brien's recollection of what you had said to him. I was wondering how you felt about that now in terms of your perspective on the issue.

CHURCH: Well, I don't know that there was any other honorable course left to Kennedy, given our complicity in the Bay of Pigs, to try and rescue those that had been damaged. So I suppose I would be leery about it now. The other, the other course would have been to follow through with some kind of a military action, on our own part, which would have compounded the problem.

My whole view of American policy toward Castro changed with Vietnam and a perception of the world that came to vary almost totally with the Cold War concepts that had dominated I think. I realize that I certainly...

STERN: Sure. I was just curious how your perception had changed.

[-13-]
Speaking of Larry O'Brien, I wondered if you might be able say something briefly about the whole congressional liaison operation in the Kennedy years, particularly Mike Manatos [Mike N. Manatos] of the Senate and how effective you thought they were in the White House, et cetera? Did you get along well with them?

CHURCH: Yes, I got along well with them and they were effective. The circumstances that enabled Lyndon Johnson to secure the passage of the legislation that Kennedy was unable to get through the Congress.

But Johnson had a personal liaison with so many of the congressmen. He was a past master of manipulating Congress. And clearly in this respect, he was a, he was superior to Kennedy. Furthermore, in the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination, there was a greater disposition in the Congress to adopt what was once Kennedy's program.

STERN: Did, was the White House and particularly President Kennedy helpful to you at all during the '62 reelection campaign which was when you ran for your second term.

CHURCH: Well, the President, I think, meant to be helpful. He scheduled a stop in Idaho, in my behalf. It never occurred because of the Bay of Pigs, I mean because of the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, when that crisis broke, I having gone to Guantanamo to obtain a briefing at the site, having been assured by the military commanders that nothing other than defensive missiles had been installed, and having communicated that information to a hundred and fifty thousand Idaho households by a newsletter that arrived on the day the President told us we were on the brink of nuclear war and that Cuba was full of offensive missiles.

I.... I was a bit desperate. So, in an indirect way, the Administration did assist me. I called the State Department and obtained.... And Harlan Cleveland [J. Harlan Cleveland] was then officer of the day or officer on watch, or whatever it's called. And he took my call. I explained my predicament and he said, "Why don't you come back here and wait for Rusk. I think it would be well for you to go to the UN [United Nations] and confer with Stevenson."

I said, "I think that's a very good idea." And they sent a jet in to Boise. And the local newspaper was not reporting on me at the time or as little as they could, but the local television station picked it up, and I then had my meeting with Rusk, and then I went on to New York and I sent many news releases back, dropped with as many names as I could, giving the people in the state a one-sided story. Then I returned to Idaho and, in a state-wide broadcast, I managed to overcome what seemed to be mortal blow. And in that way the Administration was helpful.

STERN: That's a very interesting story and also very

[14-] embarrassing.
You went to the Far East in late '62 with Senator McGee and Senator Morse [Wayne L. Morse]. Again and again made recommendations to the President. Did you feel that those were...

CHURCH: I'd have to review the recommendations now to pass judgment on them. I do remember that it was a trip to the troubled spots of Asia and Burma. We were in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. We were in South Korea, Indonesia, all around the rim, Taiwan. We were all around the rim of Asia. We were up to Quemoo, Gwoko Matsu and Quemoy that figured so prominently in the Kennedy-Nixon debate. And I remember that on that trip I came away with my first strong misgivings about Vietnam and our policy over there. They took us on a typical cook's tour and showed us what was meant to impress us. It was very unimpressive.

STERN: At just the same time of course, people like General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor], McNamara, and Vice-President Johnson were going and were coming back with much different information.

CHURCH: I don't know how they reached. It's clear to me that when you had to engage a substantial army to get the Korean, or the Vietnamese president from the outskirts of the city to his palace and push the population back a block on either side of the boulevard and force the closing of all the windows on either side and then bring in with four different limousines and fifty or sixty motor cops going full speed down the avenue, that security in the city was not all the best.

That happened just as we arrived and we took advantage of the motorcade to give us interference. And thus we were able to go quickly to our hotel. That was my first impression of Saigon. [Laughter] Then they took us out to a fortified village where we were supposed to be impressed with the fortifications and how all of this had worked in Malaysia, or in Malaya. And I was simply impressed by the vast amount of jungle we flew over and the perfect cover that gave guerrilla forces. And these fortified settlements were pitiful little islands that meant nothing and could easily be surrounded and isolated.

So I, it seemed to me that the whole military strategy showed a clear weakness of the South Vietnamese government among its own people. The methods that we were using were all part of a bigger program that was bound to self-destruct. And so I came away from that trip with very definite misgivings, and that's what ultimately led to my split with the policy.

STERN: On a very very different subject to say the least, I wonder if you might just briefly say something about serving on the Interior Subcommittee on Indians. John

Carver, for example, recalls that, I'll quote him, "It was just the kind of fudge factory that drove him and his crazy," that you found the intricacies of Indian politics very difficult to deal with.
CHURCH: It's not so much the intricacies as the feeling I had that Indian people were being used by an Indian Bureau that wished to perpetuate itself, by Indian tribal councils that sought to exploit the conditions to their own advantage, by Indian lawyers who extracted huge fees, from awards that were made to Indian tribes, and from a land problem that had become as fractionalized as this vase through airship distributions through the generations to the point where much of the land lay idle, lacking value because it could not be efficiently tilled. And this simply accentuated the general conditions of poverty among the Indian people.

And any attempt to reach through and rectify these problems was immediately interpreted as a hostile act against the Indian people. And the only thing that Congress seemed to be able to do was to pass boondoggle legislation conferring money on Indian tribes for one reason or another. And that this money was distributed on a per capita basis usually and then in a few months the money was spent, so nothing was solved, and the incapacity of the liberal press to understand this, the influence of special interests, the vested interests in the system had in the Congress, made it a futile endeavor.

So, in the end I gave it up and, as soon as I could move on to another subcommittee, I decided to do it. There was, I was just getting bloodied for my efforts.

STERN: I gather you did not have the best of relationships with Philleo Nash either.

CHURCH: Well, no, Philleo Nash, I think that Philleo Nash was part of the problem. Certainly, he was no part of the solution. I think he once made some kind of remark that any attempt to define who was an Indian was a racist, was manifestation of racism.

He was heading the Indian Bureau, which was managing Indian affairs, but he felt that just who these people were ought not to be subject to definition. I mean I, it was mind-boggling.

STERN: I realize that you're in a rush; I've just got a more things. Do you have any particular insight about, recollection of the failure of the Medicaid bill in '62 by two votes. Why, for example, the administration not get people like Jennings Randolph, John Sparkman [John J. Sparkman], Smathers [George A. Smathers], Lister Hill, and Mike. They should have gotten at least two of those people and thus Johnson could have broken the tie. What went wrong?

CHURCH: I don't know.

[-16-]

STERN: I know the President was furious.

CHURCH: I was not on the committee, and I wasn't close enough to the struggle to have an answer to that question.
STERN: That's fair enough. On the defeat of the Urban Affairs bill, there are many who say that one of the great mistakes that JFK made was at naming Weaver [Robert C. Weaver] beforehand, which in a sense gave certain people in the Senate the opportunity to fight Weaver and thus defeat the bill. And that's what happened. Did you have any....?

CHURCH: As to that, I couldn't say.

STERN: Last two questions. The impact of Kennedy's death on the whole legislative program. Do you feel that essentially the Administration was deadlocked in the Senate and that his death broke the deadlock, thus allowing Johnson to reap the harvest?

Larry O'Brien says no. He says that he thinks that virtually all of the legislation would have passed anyway. He uses as an example, as one case the Civil Rights Bill, which was had already assented and it had gone a long way.

CHURCH: Well, I don't know that.... Here again we are in the area of forecasting the unknown. Probably the truth lies somewhere in between. Something of the legislation no doubt would have passed. I think that other bills gained impetus in the Congress because of the assassination and the sympathy for Kennedy that the assassination aroused.

Lyndon, on the other hand, everyone who knew Johnson would agree, I think, that his ability as a persuader was immense and that his knowledge of the Congress was encyclopedic and that he carried all those talents that enabled him to give a virtuoso performance as majority leader to the White House. Johnson must be given his share of the credit for enacting the program.

Just one other matter that might be of interest to you. I remember one time at one of the meetings you gave me to review. I'm not certain when, but I believe that it was an evening meeting upstairs in the White House with several other senators. That the subject of Abraham Lincoln came up. And I remember Kennedy saying that if Lincoln had been assassinated in his third year, he would today be an unremembered president. But having lived until his fifth year before being assassinated, he was now remembered and venerated as our most beloved president. I remember the remark because Kennedy was of course struck down in his third year. And what kind of president he might have become remains for speculation. I thought he was maturing in the presidency and showing signs of becoming a great president given the view of the way he handled the Missile Crisis as compared to the original mistake he'd made upon becoming president, in the

Bay of Pigs. But here again, we'll never know. Perhaps because he didn't live until his fifth year, the Kennedy period will be an era that will soon fade away.
STERN: It is precisely that last point in a sense that is my last question. The fact, of course, is now that it’s twenty years since you took office, and soon it will be eighteen years since the administration ended. I wonder in the light of the things that have happened since, for example, your own committee, the Church committee, in terms of the wiretapping of Dr. Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.], what we now know about Operation Mongoose and the whole covert operation that was going on, and even the things about his personal life, how do you feel today about the Kennedy years as opposed to the way you did in say, '63, '64, or '65. Have you changed your views as you looked back?

CHURCH: Yes, I, of course my perspective has been changed. The more I learned about what was going on, the less impressed I became. Certainly, that had a disenchanting effect.

But we knew so very little at the time of the inside workings of the presidency. Moreover, it was generally thought in those days that presidents were infallible, particularly where foreign affairs were concerned. They had a free reign to do whatever was necessary to further the national security, as it was called.

And the Congress during those years did not even wish to know what was happening. When we found out later, as a result the Watergate affair and the fall of the presidency, it was not a very pretty picture.

I hope that that my investigation, which has shown these abuses in both Republican and Democratic administrations alike, will have some lasting deterrent effect. I keep hoping that the two permanent committees, that were established as a result of that investigation, will prevent such extremes from ever occurring again.

STERN: Do you have anything to add?

CHURCH: Nothing except that if we learn from the, from what we now know of the past, we will be better able to preserve a free society in this country. The president of the United States is not a godfather with large entitled to ignore the law and send out his enforcers to create mayhem or even to permit murder at his pleasure. And if we revert to such tactics again and set loose in this country a secret police operating outside the law and undertaking political missions for the president, then we will have commenced the countdown on freedom. It will just be a question of time until all of the constitutional protections are eroded away.

[-18-]

STERN: Well, thank you very much. I wish....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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