

LeRoy Collins Oral History Interview—11/2/1965
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Collins, Governor of Florida (1955-1960), President of the National Association of Broadcasters (1961-1964), and the Under Secretary of Commerce (1965-1966), discusses the 1960 Democratic National Convention, John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign and relationship with the South, and the broadcasting industry's fight for free access to information for use in broadcasting, among other issues.

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LeRoy Collins

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Date:

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LeRoy Collins

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Oral History Interview

with

LeRoy Collins

November 2, 1965
Washington, D.C.

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: This is an oral history interview for the John F. Kennedy Library with Governor LeRoy Collins, currently U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce. The interview is being conducted in Governor Collins' office at the Department of Commerce in Washington, D.C. The date is November 2, 1965. The interviewer is Ronald J. Grele.

Governor Collins, do you recall when you first met John F. Kennedy?

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COLLINS: I think the first time I met him personally and had an opportunity to exchange any conversation with him was during the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. I had just recently been elected Governor of Florida at that time, and I got to see Senator Kennedy on several occasions then and to talk with him in a semiprivate way at one time.

GRELE: What were your impressions of him at the time?

COLLINS: Well, I felt immediately that there was in this man great promise and hope, idealism, and personal attractiveness. I felt that he was bound to be an important national leader. I felt that he would perhaps get the vice

presidential nomination as that Convention developed, but where nominee Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] refused to make any indication of a choice and put the matter

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before the Convention for open decision, Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] was nominated over Mr. Kennedy. Prior to that time, in the Convention, Senator Kennedy narrated a film that depicted highlights of the Democratic Party, and I think he made, through that contribution, a rather profound impact on the Convention. I think that involvement catapulted him into the picture as a strong contending force for the nomination for vice president. While I had nothing but high regards for Senator Kefauver, I still felt some inner disappointment that Senator Kennedy was not chosen to be the nominee. After that I had occasion to see him from time to time, but only spasmodically and not intimately.

GRELE: You say you met him on a number of occasions at the 1956 Convention. In relation to the nomination?

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COLLINS: Well, no, not specifically. I think I had a chance to meet him three times. Two times it was just at formal receptions or at times that I had no opportunity to exchange any conversation with him. But on one occasion in the hotel, he and I sat down and had an opportunity to have a very interesting and a good conversation. He impressed me then as having extraordinary energy and interest in better things in government, and I felt strong hopes for giving that kind of leadership in my state. So this type of appeal had quite impact on me at that time.

GRELE: Did he ask you for your support at that Convention?

COLLINS: No. No, he said nothing about that actually. You know his candidacy actually developed rather spontaneously, or about as spontaneously as things like that happen. Of

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course it meant some planning and some effort made by his friends. I was not privy to those efforts. But I did get interested as the matter developed. Most everyone assumed, as I recall, that Stevenson would make a choice. So obviously no important campaign effort could have been made until he made the announcement that he would not make a choice. Then it was just a matter of twenty-four hours or less before the Convention would make its own choice. There wasn't any time for a great amount of campaigning.

GRELE: You were a "favorite son" candidate of the Florida delegation, I believe, for the vice presidency?

COLLINS: Not really. I was placed in nomination, yes. I mean I was not really a candidate, but you characterized that as “favorite son” which is appropriate. One of the

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members of our congressional delegation placed my name in nomination, but it was understood that it would be no more than a gesture, and the votes were changed before the roll call was completed. As I recall, most of the Florida votes went to Kefauver but many went to Kennedy.

GRELE: Can you recall any discussions within the Florida delegation as to where the votes should be cast and why they should be cast in a particular way?

COLLINS: No, I was not a delegate to the Convention. We had a rather well established system of evaluating delegates in Florida, and the delegates who had the voting strength had run in the same election in which I was elected Governor. While I might have had a status as an alternate, it was no more than that, so I did not become heavily involved in their caucuses or in

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efforts to reach a decision there. We haven't had in my state tradition of the governor being the strong-man leader of the delegates in a national convention. I have never known a governor who figured too importantly in the convention voice from our state.

GRELE: Did you have any contact with John Kennedy or any member of his staff during the time you served as chairman of the National Governors' Conference or the Southern Governors' Conference prior to the 1960 Democratic Convention?

COLLINS: I don't recall any specific contact through any effort stemming from the Governors' Conferences.

GRELE: Were there efforts to contact you for support in 1960?

COLLINS: Oh yes.

GRELE: By whom?

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COLLINS: I had contacts with a number of the potential candidates leading up to the 1960 Convention; but these efforts never matured or were never pressed because the arrangement committee of the Democratic National Committee, in

advance of the Convention, selected me to serve as Permanent Chairman, and of course, that served to disqualify me from being partisan in respect to any of the candidates. But I made it my business to contact all of the candidates, including Senator Kennedy. I recall so well a conversation that we had in his Senate office here in Washington. I came to Washington after the Committee had voted to ask me to serve as Permanent Chairman and I first visited with Speaker Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] to get his advice and counsel because he'd long been serving in that capacity.

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He was disqualified in 1960 because of his close relationships with Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] who was regarded as a candidate. That was the opening which caused the Committee to bring me into the picture.

There were some other factors involved in that, but I'm sure that the Speaker would have been named again had not that development come along involving Senator Johnson.

GRELE: What were the other factors involved in your selection?

COLLINS: Well, I think the fact that I had served as Chairman of the National Governors' Conference; that I was a Southern Governor with, at the same time, a broad national outlook and interest. I think the fact that I was Protestant entered the picture to some degree, or the fact that I was a

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non-Catholic. Because of some very unusual coincidences there were many Catholics in the picture. Candidate Kennedy was a Catholic; Chairman Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler] was Catholic, and there were others. There was talk at the time of Congressman Hale Boggs [Thomas Hale Boggs] as a good prospect for Chairman, and he was Catholic. So I think there was just some feeling that maybe we shouldn't have a Catholic as Permanent Chairman. At least I was told that this entered the picture to some degree. But I made it my business to visit the potential candidates. I think my first stop was at Senator Kennedy's office, and I found him very concerned about some aspect of the Convention that I think is very interesting. He pointed out that in the 1956 Convention, when he and Senator Kefauver turned out to be the two high men on the first roll call

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in which votes were cast, the Chairman, Speaker Rayburn, then proceeded to recognize various delegations for the purpose of changing their votes. And whether by chance or otherwise, Speaker Rayburn recognized a series of delegations who were very partisan for Kefauver. So, it was explained, there was created a sort of a bandwagon feeling for Kefauver which hurt Kennedy. He was very anxious that in the 1960 Convention there not be a repetition of that. He didn't have any suggestion to make about how it would be avoided, but he told me of his deep concern about it. I told him that I was glad to know of that and I would

be giving thought to ways in which we could deal with it in a very impartial way, so that no candidate would be able to derive any special advantage or suffer any disadvantage.

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He spoke to me about this several times afterwards, as did some of his friends. I gave the matter a lot of thought and announced, before we started the roll call in Los Angeles in 1960, a plan by which a repetition would have been avoided had Senator Kennedy not obtained a majority on the first roll call. The plan was that we would go through with the roll call and then, if there were states that wished to change their votes from favorite sons to contending candidates or change them in any way, they would be recognized one time for one change. And this was to be done in alphabetical order of the states. This, I felt, was a completely fair way but Senator Kennedy, just like the other candidates, didn't know what the plan would be until he heard it announced. But it was his initial concern

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about this that created the interest I had in it, and then it got to be a matter of national interest. I remember that in a television interview a week before the Convention I was interrogated about this particular problem. I didn't offer the plan on the television program, but I did say that I would find a way to deal with this in an assured, impartial manner.

Actually it was not necessary, the way it developed, to follow through on this, because Senator Kennedy, by the end of the roll call, even without any of the favorite son votes or any of the others, had the majority that would assure his nomination. So a prior motion was made to make the nomination by acclamation, which was put and carried. That made it unnecessary for any state to change because, in effect, in a parliamentary sense, they were all changed to make it a unanimous vote.

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GRELE: I have been told that the Kennedy strategy changed in the closing days of the pre-Convention drive and that they were very anxious to have delegations such as the Kansas delegation change their vote. Did you hear anything about this?

COLLINS: No, but I know there were several states that got their politics very badly fouled up because of this. Florida was one of them. Senator Smathers [George A. Smathers] was nominated as a favorite son candidate for president from Florida, and it was planned that, at the end of the roll call when Florida's time came to be recognized, its votes would be shifted—the preponderance to Senator Lyndon Johnson, but a rather solid minority group of votes to Senator Kennedy. None of them got to go on record as carrying out the delegate's expressed intention because, with this motion for nomination by acclamation,

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the Florida vote was left on the record, I guess, the way it was cast—for the favorite son, Senator Smathers. New Jersey got terribly fouled up in this same way, as I recall. I think Kansas—I'm not sure of this—was smart enough, as I recall, to sense that this was going to happen. And when Kansas was called first, the Governor or the chairman of that delegation announced that they intended to cast votes for a favorite son, but that instead of doing so they would cast then for Senator Kennedy. So I think they got on the record. Florida and New Jersey could have done the same thing, but they didn't.

Senator Kennedy and his forces were also very concerned, during the Convention, about what time the voting would start. They felt the sooner the better. All the

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other forces, those for Johnson and the supporters of other candidates, wanted the vote delayed as long as possible. I had to decide as Permanent Chairman whether or not to begin the vote on the evening of the nominations or whether to adjourn the Convention after all nominations and have the vote when the session resumed the next day. I was getting besieged from all sides about what I might do. The Johnson forces, particularly, wanted a delay. Obviously they weren't sure of their votes and thought they could only gain by more time. On the other hand, the Kennedys felt that they had the votes and that they could only lose by a delay. Well, I tried to call that right down the middle. I told the Kennedy people and the Johnson people exactly the same thing. I said I just

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must follow a rule of reason: if we finish with the nominations within a reasonable time to allow for one roll call vote before adjournment we're going on with that roll call vote and not delay it. On the other hand, if the hour is late and we won't have time for one roll call vote without extending the session to an unreasonable hour at night, well, we'll just wait until the next night for the voting to start.

Once Senator Kennedy called me on the telephone while the nominations were under way. (I don't know that I've ever told this to anybody). It was when we getting close to the end of the nominating speeches, and close to the time when a vote would proceed. There was a telephone right there at the podium, and nobody got a call on it unless somebody

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let it come through. But I got word that he was on the telephone and wanted to speak to me so I told somebody to take over and spoke to him right there. He asked me if I had reached any decision and I told him I had not, that it would depend altogether on how quickly we would get through with this preliminary work. And he said, "Well, we hope that we can go on with this this evening." And I said, "Well, Senator, if we get through in time to get one complete roll call within a reasonable hour, why, we'll go. I'm not going to hold it up on any arbitrary basis and, at the same time, if it doesn't come out that way, if this session gets

protracted, I will wait. I won't go ahead and proceed to have a roll call at an unreasonable hour of the night when it's not necessary." He said,

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"Well, I can't quarrel with that." We had a nice, pleasant signing off and that was it. Well, it wasn't over thirty minutes after that, I think, that we were on our way with the roll call vote.

GRELE: Did you have any conversations with Chairman Butler about the organization of the Convention?

COLLINS: Oh yes. A great many. I mean about normal and traditional procedures and things of that sort.

GRELE: Some people, most notably former President Truman [Harry S. Truman], claim that the Convention was rigged. You denied this at the time. In any of your conversations with Chairman Butler, did you have any impression that it was organized for any one particular candidate or any one way?

COLLINS: No, not at all. There was no rigging of the Convention by the officers or those

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with authority to control its procedure. The only thing "rigged" about it was that the Kennedy forces had their votes before the Convention started. Every time that happens, people get the impression that it's being rigged and this is a convenient thing for those who aren't the winners to say. But, after all, a convention is not in reality a decision-making process. It's a confirmatory process. Hardly anything actually is decided in a convention but much is confirmed there. The Convention is too unwieldy a body to allow for a great deal of debate and decision-making in line with the debate that occurs.

In this Convention, the candidates had worked very carefully, and knew basically where they stood; the Kennedys got to Los Angeles with the votes. That

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became rather clearly apparent as soon as the people had the opportunity to express themselves. The same was true, for example, in the Republican convention the last time. Senator Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] wasn't the product of a convention. His nomination was assured at the Convention by work that had been done before the Convention. And I think that's been essentially true over the years. Now, with improved communications and transportation, I think it's truer in our age and time that it was back in the old days, because there was less an opportunity then for the candidates to work as extensively with the delegates as is the case now. But there wasn't a thing in the world about Paul Butler's actions or mine or anyone else's in that Convention that was partial or that was designed to afford favoritism to any candidate.

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GRELE: Were you among the Southern governors who met with John Kennedy to suggest the vice presidential nomination go to Lyndon Johnson?

COLLINS: No. No, I was aware essentially of what was happening about that time, but I was not privy to those discussions.

GRELE: Did you think that the nomination would help or hinder the ticket?

COLLINS: I thought it would help more than it would hinder, but I did not think it would be as decisive in the end result, as a great many other people thought.

GRELE: In June of 1960 you predicted, quite correctly as it later turned out, that there would be no Southern walkout at the 1960 Convention. Did you have any information upon which to base that prediction?

COLLINS: Well, I just felt the Southerners would

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have learned a lesson from the previous Dixiecrat experience that would obviate any repetition of that. We were getting along in 1960 toward a more mature political point of view in the South than was the case in the aftermath of the 1954 Supreme Court decision calling for desegregation of schools. Immediately after that, there was for several years a great, burning fervor and the fires of resistance were being stoked by the extremists. By 1960, the people of the South could see that segregation was doomed to pass away. I felt that the majority of Southerners would not want to be associated with this kind of a last ditch or rearguard action before the people of the nation. I just felt more confident in the maturity of the South and the Southern representation, frankly.

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GRELE: Were you aware of any attempts by the Kennedys to secure support in the South? Did they make any attempts?

COLLINSY Oh yes. And they had support in the South. Senator Kennedy had a lot of friends in the South. He would have carried Florida except for one rather unfortunate development, in my judgment. And this involved Senator Johnson, too. But the fight in Florida before the Convention was between the Kennedy friends and the Johnson friends, and the Johnson friends had the largest part of the political leadership and strength. Both of our Senators were strong Johnson supporters. While Senator Smathers was regarded as a personal friend of President Kennedy's, he never made any bones about the fact that his allegiance was to Johnson over Kennedy. In fact, just

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before the Convention he was associated with what was called the “Stop Kennedy” move that was being made in the South.

Now I was, at that time, mobilized because of having this job, but my normal instincts and inclinations were to Kennedy. We had a political situation in Florida where we had a group of pros who came to be called the “pork chop” gang. There’s an article about them in the current issue of *Harper’s Magazine*. This force was largely rural, and derived their strength largely through a malapportioned legislature. I had had a continuing battle with this group. My campaign for governor was largely made against this group. Most of my friends and most of the newspapers of the state were opposed to them. Well, when Johnson was nominated vice president, all of this group that had been fighting

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Kennedy came over into the Kennedy campaign, and it was quite uncomfortable for the pre-Convention Kennedy people to coexist with them. This was especially true of the newspapers. So Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], the Republican, wound up by getting endorsements by many of the newspapers that normally would have supported Senator Kennedy very strongly, had he not developed the alignments that he did in Florida. When, in a sense, he turned the campaign over to the pre-Convention Johnson friends it became more difficult even for me to help. I didn’t want to see the campaign dominated in my state by this element that I did not think was in tune with what I felt Senator Kennedy believed in and was seeking to achieve for the country.

So it caused some rather serious

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problems in my state when the group that was supporting Senator Johnson just took over. The loyal Kennedy people were in a position of having the candidate they had supported turning to other people with whom they had little or no rapport and who didn’t think the same way or in the same terms that they felt Kennedy thought. This muddled the situation and, in the unhappiness of it, the election came on and Kennedy lost Florida by a narrow margin which shouldn’t have happened.

GRELE: Where did he lose in Florida? What sections of the state?

COLLINS: He lost largely in central Florida around Orlando and over on the West Coast, Tampa, St. Petersburg. He lost that area pretty heavily. And also much of the lower East Coast, except Miami. He carried Miami. The margin of the loss statewide wasn’t

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a great deal, just forty some thousand votes as I recall.

GRELE: What would you say was the one issue in Florida, if you could pick one issue?

COLLINS: In that election? Between Nixon and Kennedy? Well, I don't think there was any one. I think the Republicans had going for them a minority party that was more solidly committed to its candidate. I think they came out and voted solidly for Nixon mostly because he was the Republican candidate. Then I think we had the dissidents from the Democrats—and there were perhaps a half dozen segments of these—that made up the difference. We had those who were unhappy about Medicare. All of the doctors were involved—or most of them. And we had this “pork chop” element and we had this hostile newspaper influence that was very substantial. For

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example, the *Orlando Sentinel* in central Florida is a hard-hitting, effective newspaper. It crusades, it really goes out to elect or defeat candidates. I think that newspaper alone could have made the difference in itself. It was against Kennedy very strongly.

GRELE: After the Convention you were one of three Southern governors to attend a unity meeting called by the then-Senator Johnson in Nashville. Why did so few Southern Governors attend?

COLLINS: We had more than that. I'm very sure there were more than three there.

GRELE: I got the number “three” from the *New York Times*. It might have been more...

COLLINS: I saw a picture somewhere of that group. I remember Governor Ellington [Buford Ellington] of Tennessee was there and Governor Patterson [John Malcolm Patterson] of Alabama was there, and I was

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there. Also I remember Bert Combs [Bertram Thomas Combs] of Kentucky being there and Governor Luther Hodges [Luther H. Hodges] from North Carolina. I think there were still two more. I'm not sure of that, but I'm rather sure your information about the three is wrong. Perhaps it was three who boycotted the meeting. That was on the occasion of Senator Johnson, or Vice Presidential Nominee Johnson's, first campaign speech. We had a rally there and these governors all met out at Governor Ellington's official home. We had a good meeting.

GRELE: Can you tell us what was discussed?

COLLINS: We just talked about the campaign. Pulled it together. Senator Johnson did

most of the talking in his inimitable way. He was telling us that it wasn't "All the Way With LBJ" anymore but "All the Way With JFK" so far as he was concerned. He called

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on everybody, no matter whose friend they were before, to join together and help elect the ticket. There wasn't anything said there that couldn't have been printed on the front page of a newspaper.

GRELE: What was the Kennedy strategy in the South? Was there a strategy?

COLLINS: Well, I had the feeling that the Kennedys largely turned this over to the pros in the South. I think they turned it over to Senator Johnson and his closest friends and these were largely from the U.S. Senate and House. I think the Southern organization was worked out largely on the basis of old, thought-to-be established political lines, which I feel was a great mistake. I think if Senator Kennedy had come down to Florida, campaigning with a call for new vigorous help by all the people of the state—regardless of party or affiliation—

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to get the country moving again, and had not been handicapped at every turn by seeming to be relying upon people who could not be judged compatible with such a philosophy, he would have done better all over the South. That's my personal view.

GRELE: Did he come to Florida during the campaign?

COLLINS: Yes, he was there. But a great effort was made to get these new campaign colleagues out openly for him. This helped perhaps in the Northern part of the state, where they had substantial rural strength, but in the heavily populated areas it didn't help at all. It worked the other way. Traditionally, the Democratic Party organization in Florida has been a very poor one. As governor, I had little affinity with my party organization. I was trying to get some things done that were way beyond what

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that organization normally would have been associated with. In fact, if I had called on my party to support what I was trying to get approved by the legislature, it would have seemed ridiculous. It's not that way in all the states. It's not that way in all the states in the South. North Carolina, for example, I know has a rather substantial party organization of people who have substantial positions in their communities.

But in Florida it has not been uncommon for people to run for election to party positions simply on the ground that they had popular sounding names.

GRELE: Do you recall who represented the Kennedy organization in Florida? Did any representatives of the Kennedys come into Florida?

COLLINS: Yes. The present U.S. Senator Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings].

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GRELE: And he worked with this crowd of hacks?

COLLINS: He did the best he could. They were not all hacks.

GRELE: Do you have any comments on the role of Senator Smathers during the campaign? Did he support the ticket?

COLLINS: Yes, he supported the ticket very strongly, but he helped pull together a lot of "pork chop" political leaders. He even brought a bunch of them up to Washington and got Senator Kennedy to see them, to talk to the group. This was widely publicized in Florida and was very unfortunate, I thought, at the time.

GRELE: Friends of the President have remarked that the only time Senator Smathers stood up for President Kennedy was at his wedding. Were your relations with Senator Kennedy then strained because of this experience?

COLLINS: A little bit. I was unhappy about what was

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happening in Florida. I thought that we were just wasting an opportunity. I thought the state was not being put in a good light to Kennedy. I called and told him in a telephone conversation that they were making it almost impossible for many of us to help him in Florida and to let me help in some other place. He asked me to serve as Chairman of the National Speakers Bureau. I worked on that awhile and made several speeches in other states: Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. I felt largely immobilized in Florida, and I think he understood this. But Senator Kennedy seemed to feel that the only thing he could do was to go with the people who had positions of power; he underestimated his own ability to go over their heads to the mass of people, I think. In the campaign, I

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think he sought too much support from politicians with whom he had little affinity in philosophy. I think he felt that in a campaign like that, everybody could just put aside their own personal allegiances and loyalties and interests and pool a common effort. But he did not understand, and couldn't have understood, really, some of the background of relationships that existed.

GRELE: After the election, did the President continue to work with this faction in Florida, with this group of people? Was there any alternative?

COLLINS: Yes, I think he did. After the election I went out of politics. I went into my work as President of the National Association of Broadcasters.

GRELE: Were you offered a position in the Administration?

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COLLINS: Yes, at one point I was. Not at the start, but I think President Kennedy always felt warmly toward me. He indicated that on many occasions, as did the rest of his family. But I had accepted this job with the Broadcasters. It was a good job and one that I needed, really, for a while to help get my economic situation better straightened out. I had gotten behind pretty badly while I was governor. This was a good paying job and was a job that appealed to me, also, because it had national scope and it dealt with a communication medium of enormous importance. I thought perhaps I could do as much good for the country there—I hoped I could—as I could in a political position, and with the added advantage of being better paid for it.

But he did not talk jobs with me

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for some time. He invited me over to the White House many times. He was always very cordial. I think he felt that I represented and was seeking to support the kind of things that he was interested in. Then Senator Ribicoff [Abraham Ribicoff] resigned as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, there was a good deal of feeling manifested to him, without any encouragement on my part, that I should be appointed to that position. It is a position that a lot of people felt I had natural qualifications for because I had always been interested in all those areas as governor and legislator. This got to him, I know, in some significant force because people would tell me about discussions with him about it. He appointed Mayor Celebrezze [Anthony J. Celebrezze], and the day after he appointed him he called and asked me to come over to

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see him. I went over and we had a good, long talk. He told me that a number of people had talked to him about me serving in that position and that one of these was his sister Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver].

GRELE: Had you met her?

COLLINS: Yes. I saw her out at the Convention. Also I had seen her on several occasions after the inauguration and she'd been real nice. But he said that the circumstances were such that he thought he should appoint Celebrezze, and I

congratulated him for it. I didn't know Celebrezze personally, however. I made it very clear to him that he didn't have any problem about giving me a job in the Administration; that I had a job and it was a tough one; and I thought that it gave me an opportunity to do significant work in the public interest.

He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I

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would like you to do." And then he told me about some of the problems that were developing between Canada and the United States. He thought these relations were going to worsen, and that a great amount of skill was going to be required to represent our country there and that he would like me to serve as Ambassador to Canada. He said, "I'm not thinking in terms of this being just a final end to what I may ask you to do for the country, but this is where I'd like you to go soon if you can. But," he said, "I'm not asking you to make a decision about it now. Certainly you'll want to talk with your wife [Mary Call Darby Collins] and some other people." So I told him I would see him in two or three days, and he asked me to call him if I could in a couple of days because he needed to move on it. I was

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out in Seattle, Washington, two days later and called him and told him I felt I should decline. My work with the broadcasters was most demanding. I told him further, "Of course, if you ask me to do this regardless, I will. But I would like to be relieved of accepting." He said that would be perfectly all right; that we would keep in touch with each other; that something else might develop. That's the only time he ever talked to me about a specific job. But I saw him from time to time.

GRELE: In 1962, as President of the National Association of Broadcasters, you criticized the President and his staff, particularly the Departments of State and Defense, for suppression of news in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Did you ever confer with the President on this issue? Did he ever speak

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to you about it? Do you recall the incident?

COLLINS: I don't remember the President being directly involved in that. I remember Sylvester [Arthur Sylvester] came out with some statement about news and the control of news. I remember he used an unfortunate phrase—I've forgotten what it was right now—and I was critical of that. But I don't recall any criticism addressed to the President. And yet I may have, because I was fighting a battle there of free access to information for use in broadcasting. My position was closely in line with the newspapers' interests also. The President was very amenable to criticism and, as I recall, there were some changes made in response to that criticism. I don't feel it was done in

response to my criticism, but rather to the fairly general antagonism that was reflected in the press

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and broadcasting at the time.

GRELE: In general, how do you feel the Kennedy Administration handled their press relations or their handling of public information?

COLLINS: I think in general the answer is "fine." I think the Administration was trying to make the news available but, at the same time, it becomes kind of sticky for any administration to be as open in respect to news as the news media would like from time to time. Certainly President Kennedy wasn't any more to blame for any policy or attitude of that kind than any other president that I've known. Any president would feel better if some news wasn't developed and published. I think the situation was quite critical during the Cuban crisis. But I don't remember enough about the details of that to comment very intelligently.

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GRELE: Were you ever involved with the attempts of President Kennedy to win support in the business community? Through the Business Advisory Council?

COLLINS: No. Not except with broadcasters. I sought to get support for him with broadcasters. We had a group of broadcasters in once and had lunch with him in the White House. They were tremendously impressed. I also asked him to include the broadcast editorial writers in their national media conferences; they had never been included before, and they were happy to attend. In most of that I was dealing directly with Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], however.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the controversies engendered after Mr. Minow [Newton N. Minow] criticized the broadcasting industry?

COLLINS: I was deeply involved with the broadcasters

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I represented. I never was anti-Minow the way a great many broadcasters were. I openly and publicly said on many occasions that I thought what Minow had done was helpful to broadcasting and not hurtful. There were some things he said, some things he did, that I took issue with, but on the whole, coming at the time he did, it was helpful for broadcasters to have had him be the crusader that he was.

I was trying to give leadership among the broadcasters to the proposition that their best interest was the public interest and that when broadcast practices impinged on the public interest, while they might obtain some temporary gain from it, in the long run they would lose. I was trying my best to get them to elevate the quality of the programming and to use a little more sanity and reasoning in regard to commercial

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interruptions and things of that sort. I mean, I always prodded the broadcasters as their leader, creating all the while a rather strong feeling of opposition among the broadcasters, but I always felt I had the majority of them rather strongly supporting me. We developed a Code of Good Practice for the broadcasters. We took many steps that Mr. Minow also approved very strongly and openly. I never did offer any broad criticism about his general position and general interest and his leadership. And I praised him to the President many times.

GRELE: At the time there was legislation before Congress to reorganize the F.C.C. [Federal Communications Commission], I believe, by giving the Chairman more powers over the Commission. Do you recall what your position was on this legislation?

COLLINS: I am a little hazy on that one.

GRELE: You also served on the Advisory Council to the Peace Corps?

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COLLINS: Yes.

GRELE: How did this work come about?

COLLINS: Well, the President asked me to serve on that, but I was just one of some twenty-five citizens around over the country. It was an interesting assignment, although we had little to do with the actual organization and program accomplishments of the Peace Corps. We met about once every three months and got reports of fine things they were doing, discussed programs past, present, and future. Mr. Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] would bring before us occasionally some policies that he would ask us our advice and counsel on, but it was more of an interesting experience than it was a work experience.

GRELE: Do you recall anything interesting or significant about your role in the discussion of legislation to revise the equal time formula in political campaigns? Do you recall

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in 1960 there was temporary legislation to allow the debates and then in '61 and '62 there was discussion of permanent legislation.

COLLINS: The broadcasters supported very strongly the liberalizing of that and the carrying forward of the exception that would allow for the debates.

GRELE: Did you ever discuss this with the President?

COLLINS: I don't recall that I did. I talked about it to Mr. Minow many, many times, and to Pierre Salinger. We talked about it several times, but I don't think with the President.

GRELE: How would you describe your relations with Pierre Salinger?

COLLINS: Very friendly and cooperative. Not intimate, but very cordial.

GRELE: Is there anything we've missed?

COLLINS: I don't know of anything except the President

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told me something once at a lunch that impressed me. We were talking about the campaign, and he asked me what I thought was the most enthusiastic rally in that whole campaign, Republican or Democratic. I said I had no real idea.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

COLLINS: Perhaps his New York rally in the closing days of the campaign, which, as I recall, was a very enthusiastic one. He said, "No, it was a Republican rally. In Atlanta, Georgia, for Richard Nixon." And he said that based on all the reports he had that that was the most enthusiastic rally that occurred in the whole campaign, and it was his impression that in a real sense this helped him tremendously. He rationalized it this way: that Nixon, after that rally, got the impression he could carry the South. And it was not long after that that the

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episode developed about Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] being arrested and put in a Georgia jail; the Nixon forces were calling on Nixon to repudiate this and to stand out on King's side. Nixon, thinking that might keep him from carrying the South, refused to take any side on it and just sidestepped the issue completely. So they moved into it very importantly—both Senator Kennedy and his brother Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. I think Senator Kennedy called Mrs. King [Coretta Scott King] and had a telephone conversation with her. I think his brother had some contact with some lawyers down there to

try to get King out of jail. But anyhow the President explained they had pamphlets printed about Martin Luther King and his troubles and where they stood and where Nixon stood, and on the Sunday before the election these were distributed in enormous quantities all

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over the areas of Chicago where Negro residents were predominant. He said that that easily could have made a difference in carrying the state of Illinois because it was a very close vote there. But, aside from that, it influenced a large number of colored voters, he thought, all through the North and, so far as he was able to determine, it had no damaging effect in the South. So he said that Nixon's success in Atlanta was his failure.

GRELE: Did he ever confer with you or did the Attorney General confer with you about the problem of civil rights in the South?

COLLINS: Yes, we talked about that in many conversations, but I don't recall any specific involvement. Both the Attorney General and the President were very complimentary about some things I said and did on that issue in the South—positions I took. They felt very keenly

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that I had indicated a high degree of leadership for good in that area.

GRELE: How would you characterize their position on the issue?

COLLINS: Well, I think that it was firm and very sincere and deep, and I really think President Kennedy would have turned out to be a very strong man in this area as time went by. He was inclined to go softly during that first session of the Congress because he felt the influence of the Southern senators and the Southern congressmen would be such that, if he antagonized them in that area, it would militate against the success of much of his program. I don't know whether he was right in that judgment, but there is no doubt that that is what he felt. He might have come out better, or as well, had he just moved right on out strongly on that issue from the

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beginning. But I don't think his failure to do that was any weakness in his own feeling about the issue. I think he felt as strongly as anybody could feel on that issue, but I think it was a practical decision. Whether history will judge it to have been sound tactical experience, I have some doubt.

GRELE: You have worked closely with two presidents now, two Democratic presidents now. Would you be willing to offer any comparisons or contrasts between the two presidents?

COLLINS: Well, I think there is a very sharp contrast. I think that Kennedy was a much more sensitive person to the position he held. I think he thought in broad terms of the future. He was concerned not only with what he did but how he did it. I think he felt that a president should lead with consistent dignity and purpose. President Johnson, on the other hand, is a very practical, a very hard-driving

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man who counts success only one way and that is by the “skins that are on the wall”—by what’s actually done; by bills that are actually passed; and by appropriations that are obtained. He more easily accepts the position, I think, of the ends justifying the means, than President Kennedy. I think he’s a much stronger president in the sense of drive to get a program approved, but I think that, on the way there, he loses some qualities of leadership that wear better, and that I don’t think Kennedy would have lost. I think it’s going to take some time to try to assess these two men—the pros and cons of both men—and form the judgment of which might earn the greater posture in history. We cannot tell at this point what’s going to be the aftermath of praise or the backlash of blame which will flow from the kind of effort and the kind of drive that

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have gone into this record that President Johnson has made. It is a record that now seems extraordinary and, perhaps, unmatched in all time.

GRF.LE: The South was going through a great period of upheaval during the presidency of John Kennedy. Do you think he was aware of it? Was he aware of the changes taking place?

COLLINS: He was aware, but he wanted much more change. He was irritated rather deeply by the fact that there were Democratic senators and congressmen who stood absolutely opposed to every principle of the Democratic Party that he understood and believed in. He would have been much happier had these people been Republicans. He told me so one time. I don’t know whether he ever said it publicly or not. Yes, he would have been much happier. As he saw it, lines then could have been drawn and issues battled out. He felt it was

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terribly hard to have in his own party ranks people who believed diametrically in opposition to his own views. I think that really worried him and remained a bone in his throat. I think if he’d had his way, he would just as soon have given the Republican Party quite a few of those Democratic congressmen and thought that the nation would have been better off for it. Not that he would want to stifle their viewpoint, or not that he would want to say that viewpoint didn’t have a place in the nation’s councils.

GRELE: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you feel we should go into?

COLLINS: I don't think there is anything.

GRELE: Thank you very much, Governor.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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