

Philip H. Des Marais, Oral History Interview – JFK #1, 3/9/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Des Marais was a political organizer in Louisiana and Missouri during John F. Kennedy's presidential in 1959 and 1960. After the election, he was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, a position he held from 1961 to 1969. This interview focuses upon the Kennedy presidential campaign in Louisiana and Missouri, and personal recollections of John F. Kennedy, among other issues.

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Philip H. Des Marais
JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Philip H. Des Marais

March 9, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Let me start by asking you how you came into John Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] orbit?

DES MARAIS: I was a member of the Louisiana delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1956. At the Convention the Louisiana delegation was one of the first to announce public support for Senator Kennedy for vice president. He came over to our headquarters in the Palmer House Hotel several times to meet with the delegation leaders, they being primarily Governor Earl Long [Earl K. Long] and national committeeman Camille Gravel [Camille F. Gravel Jr.]. I might add also Mrs. Long [Blanche R. Long], the Governor's wife, was a delegate as the national committeewoman.

My position in the delegation was one of being a close friend of Mr. Gravel's, and I had been appointed to fill a vacancy shortly before the Convention. So I spent most of my time hanging around with Mr. Gravel

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That's how I had an opportunity to meet Kennedy and primarily Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. As I said, they made a couple of visits – at least three – to Mr. Gravel's suite in the Palmer House Hotel, and I just simply sat there and listened.

I was very much impressed with Mr. Kennedy. I might say at the time not so much impressed with Mr. Sorensen as I later became. He was a very shy, truculent type, I thought, and we didn't like him at all. But I was tremendously impressed with Kennedy. He was very diplomatic and ingratiating, for one thing. He read to us his proposed nominating speech for Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] – I might add that the Louisiana delegation was very strong for Stevenson for president, for the nomination again – and asked for our views about what he planned to say. This, of course, flattered and pleased us, and we all made a few suggestions. Sorensen took notes. I thought the speech was very impressive. So that was my first encounter with Senator Kennedy.

MORRISSEY: Why had the Louisiana delegation come out so early for him for the vice presidential nomination?

DES MARAIS: Well, I think this was primarily the work of Mr. Gravel and Mr. Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler], who was the national chairman at that

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time. Both Paul Butler and Camille Gravel who were then two of the top leaders of the national committee thought it would be a big advantage to have a Catholic as a vice presidential running mate. They were much impressed with the Connecticut chairman's memorandum. What was his name?

MORRISSEY: Bailey?

DES MARAIS: John Bailey's [John Moran Bailey] memorandum which had actually been drafted by Ted Sorensen and which, as you recall, gave statistical arguments as to why a Catholic on the ticket would be advantageous. From the standpoint of the Louisiana delegation this was very logical because Louisiana has about a 33 percent Catholic population. The Catholic population includes the part of the population that is in the highest segment of the voter group. That is, they're practically all white, and they're located in the parts of the state where there's a much higher percentage of voting in presidential elections than in other parts of the state. So we would consider that simply a big asset to the ticket. Furthermore, those of us who were very strong for Stevenson realized that he lacked appeal to south Louisiana French Catholics

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and so on, and we figured Kennedy would add something from that standpoint.

This, however, was not proved to be the case because.... Well, he didn't get on the ticket. I should say that this proved to be the case, pardon me, in the fact that the Stevenson-Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] ticket had no appeal in 1956 in Louisiana. I was ultimately the secretary of the Stevenson for President Committee in Louisiana in the '56 campaign, and the only bright light of the campaign was a fund raising dinner which was addressed by Senator Kennedy in New Orleans. He got much more interest than Mr. Stevenson did when he

appeared in New Orleans at a rally, a daytime rally, and motorcade. We sent Senator Kennedy to Opelousas, Louisiana, for the Yambalaya Festival – this is sweet potatoes – and he seemed to enjoy himself and entered into the spirit of the thing – rode in the parade and crowned the queen and met all kinds of people. He obviously had a very good grasp of what the people were interested in in that part of the state. So this impressed me, also, naturally, and we worked like dogs for Stevenson in '56 and lost the state by a big margin to the

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Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]-Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] ticket. We lost particularly heavily in southwest Louisiana where there is a large Catholic population, where you have counties that are 75 and 80 percent Catholic and the rest are Negro. Eisenhower just carried those overwhelmingly. So we saw that the ADA-type [Americans for Democratic Action] liberal candidate was not going to be popular in Louisiana; it never had for that matter.

It was this situation that inclined those of us who were interested in Democratic party politics in Louisiana to immediately being thinking of Kennedy for the presidential candidate in '60. The nucleus of the small group that worked full time for the presidential campaign in '56, a couple of nights after the election, sat around and said, "Well, the thing to do is to start working for Kennedy to be the candidate in '60 if we want to have any kind of candidate that can carry Louisiana." This consisted of the national committeeman, Mr. Gravel; Mrs. Long, the national committeewoman, Governor Long's wife; Judge Reggie [Edmund M. Reggie] from Crowley, Louisiana, which is in southwestern Louisiana; and myself. We sort of constituted ourselves an in-

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formal Kennedy for President nominating group from Louisiana. So that, I think, sort of sums up my first contact with Mr. Kennedy at the Convention and during his visit to Louisiana in the '56 presidential campaign.

I might say that Mrs. Long and Mr. Jackson, both of whom are very influential members of the state central committee, were very leery of Kennedy's religion as being a negative factor. I think they also had real, personal scruples about whether a Catholic could be a completely objective president in certain issues. This was a continuing discussion that went on back and forth among the group. But, anyway, at least three out of the five were definitely committed and two had reservations. Well, that's part one.

I think the next point of interest, which doesn't involve any close connection with Senator Kennedy, was the organization of something called the United Democrats of Louisiana. This was an organization that was started in 1957 by Mr. Gravel and myself and Victor Bussie, the president of the Louisiana AFL-CIO. It was an effort to bring together primarily liberal intellectuals, labor union people, and some

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active political leaders and office holders who were interested in the national Democratic party, and students, some college students. We organized, incorporated and began having a series of conferences and seminars and conventions which went on for a three year period. Once a year we would sponsor a fund raising dinner in the name of the Democratic party. Our legal authority for this was the fact that one of our board members was the national committeeman, Mr. Gravel. We would send a delegation to Washington for the regular Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinners that were held here in Washington in the Mayflower Hotel in those days, or at the Sheraton Park. This was the group that kept up the connection between the nationally oriented Democrats in Louisiana and the Democratic party in Washington, and most specifically, Paul Butler who was the national chairman and very close personally to Gravel, both of them having attended Notre Dame at the same time. Mr. Butler used to come down to visit us at least twice a year during this three year period, '56 to '59, and we would organize a reception for him. The speakers at our dinners would usually be somebody like

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Governor Meyner [Robert B. Meyner] or the governor of Colorado, Steve McNichols [Stephen L. R. McNichols], who was a close friend of Gravel's – people who would not stir up things too much but were good Democrats. Really, as I look back on it now, the underlying objective of this group was to form a nucleus of people who would be for Kennedy for the nominee in '60, but we were also interested in continuing to wave the flag for the national Democratic party which was something the normal political officeholders in Louisiana were not interested in doing. Many were negative, of course, but there were many who just didn't consider this an interesting or important thing politically, including many of the congressional delegation. I would say the only members of the congressional delegation who showed any interest were Senator Long [Russell B. Long] and Congressman Boggs [Thomas Hale Boggs] at that period. They would always attend our meetings and give us their encouragement and endorsement but that's about as far as it went.

During this time Mr. Gravel was becoming more and more an important member of the National Committee and was appointed chairman of the Site Committee for

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the 1960 Convention. This put him into the Executive Committee of the National Committee and made it necessary for him to go to Washington frequently – four or five times a year – from '58 to '60 and I usually accompanied him. He had many contacts with Senator Kennedy personally, Ted Sorensen, and Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith]. Those were his three principal contacts. We would relay information to them about the situation in Louisiana and a lot of these reports here. But the climax of these activities was a visit we paid to Washington the weekend of March 1, 1959, when Mr. Gravel, Judge Reggie and myself went up to Washington to attend a Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. This was a very well attended affair with both the ground floor and main ballrooms of the Sheraton Park filled to capacity at a hundred dollars apiece. It was certainly a showcase for all the contenders. Stevenson was there; Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] was there; Senator Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] was there. They all had a part in the program, and for some reason or another

Senator Kennedy was not on the program. He sat in the hall, in the ballroom, at a table. As a matter of fact, Mr. Gravel and I had a table which was the

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best table in the place, number one, right beneath the speaker's rostrum. So Senator Kennedy came and sat at our table for awhile because it was much more in the spotlight. I was impressed again with the tremendous interest; it was almost embarrassing to the head table. There was a continuous procession throughout the entire evening, three hours, to the table wherever Senator Kennedy – he table-hopped a bit – was sitting of people simply coming up and shaking hands and saying, "Hello." I remember in the course of the evening Dick Murphy [Richard James Murphy], who is now Assistant Postmaster General and who was then the executive assistant to Paul Butler, an old friend of mine, and I went and stood in the back of the hall and simply exchanged views about the whole event. We concluded that none of the people who spoke that evening really were the kind of people we thought could get the nomination, could beat Nixon, and we both agreed that Kennedy was certainly the most exciting person there in terms of candidate possibilities. At the close of the evening, Kennedy said to Gravel and myself, he said, "If you and Reggie and Des Marais are free tomorrow afternoon I'd appreciate it if you'd come out to our

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house for lunch." Well, of course, we said, "Yes."

So we arrived there at 1 p.m. That session lasted all afternoon. The other people there were Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Field [Marshall Field IV and Katherine W. Field] from Chicago, Governor Edmondson [J. Howard Edmondson], Ted Sorensen, Steve Smith and Mr. and Mrs. [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] Kennedy. We spent most of the time.... I was impressed, first of all, by the way Kennedy – as I guess he did on many occasions – primarily with Gravel, started going though the delegations state by state saying, "Who's with me and who isn't?" particularly the national committeeman and the state chairman. He would ask Camille, "Well, Camille, do you think Joe Smith is with me?" Camille would said, "Well, no, I don't for the following reasons. However, so and so in that state is with you." They went down about twenty states in this fashion, and the rest of us mostly just sat and listened. I was impressed with how completely candid and obvious Kennedy was in now lining up support for himself. This was on March 1, 1959, a full year and a half before the Convention, but already they were being very practical, very specific.

Then the discussion shifted as to where the Con-

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vention should best be held in terms of Kennedy's advantage, although they were a little bit ambiguous on this because, after all, Marshall Field was there; he was from Chicago, and he was plugging for Chicago. They didn't want to really come right out and say, you know, "Well, if we had it in Chicago, it'd be better for the Kennedy candidacy than if we had it in Los Angeles." But Kennedy put up a big argument for having it in Chicago and obviously

was trying to persuade Camille Gravel, the chairman of the Site Committee, to use his influence to have the decision made in favor of Chicago. The facts of the alternative choices revolved around money. The major reason why Gravel and Butler were not favoring Chicago was that Dick Daley [Richard J. Daley] was not coming forward with firm offers of funds to subsidize the Convention which is the traditional method of determining where it's going to be. Well, the Los Angeles people had made a very specific offer of a very substantial sum of money. I've forgotten the exact amount now. I think I heard something like maybe seven hundred thousand dollars mentioned that Sunday. They'd made all kinds of commitments and they were very specific

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and detailed. So the whole argument then revolved around Mr. Field's ability to persuade Dick Daley to make up his mind and come up with a firm offer. And so you know how people can go on and on about something like this. But it was an interesting thing to observe this discussion.

My part, quite limited, however, was extremely interesting in that they got on to the religious issue. About two weeks before, which would have been around the middle of February, 1959, *Look Magazine* had published an extensive interview with Senator Kennedy about his views on many things. I think it was by Fletcher Knebel. (I haven't checked it lately. I've got everything else in my file except the *Look Magazine* interview.) In this interview he made some comments about how he thought that it was probably unconstitutional to provide any federal funds for federal aid to parochial schools. The publication of this interview resulted in a great deal of controversy primarily by Catholics. Many important organs of Roman Catholic opinion criticized Senator Kennedy's statements about the parochial schools and also about his general concept of church-state relationships. From my point

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of view the most significant criticism was in an editorial in *America* magazine, published by the Jesuits in New York City. Somewhere along in the conversation, in a lull in the conversation – you know, they were looking for something else to talk about – I brought up the religious issue. Immediately there was this deathly silence in the room. [Laughter] I said, "Senator, how's the religious issue coming along?" He said, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "Well, did you see the *New York Times* today?" He said, "No. Jackie, have we got the *New York Times* around?" She left the room to get it. I said, "Well, the *New York Times* gave prominent feature to *America*'s editorial criticizing your interview in *Look Magazine* on the religious issue." "Is that so? What did they say?" Well, we went around and around on this a little bit. I said, "It so happens that Father Davis [Thurston N. Davis], who is the editor of *America*, is going to be in New Orleans next week. I don't agree with his analysis of your interview, but, nevertheless, it's not always so important what you said but what people think you said." He said, "Oh, you're very right. I agree with you." He liked that. So I said, "I'm going to talk to Father

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Davis and find out what's really on his mind." He said, "Oh, that'd be excellent. Do that. I'd appreciate you letting me know. You let Camille know and he can pass it on to me." This was very interesting that he.... It was an interesting introduction to his attitude towards this issue. Well, we sort of dropped it then.

MORRISSEY: Did anybody else participate in this discussion?

DES MARAIS: Nobody else participated in this discussion. Nobody else was willing to say anything. The thing continued to be agitated in the press. I asked permission.... Well, he made some comments about his attitude toward the religious issue which I thought were very, very skillful, and he made some distinctions about the religious conscience and public responsibility. When I got back to the hotel, I sat down and made notes on all these things he'd said. Then I got home and I asked Gravel if it would be all right if I wrote an article for the New Orleans paper as if I had interviewed him on this issue. He said, "Well, I'll call him up and ask him." He did and then message came back to me, "Fine. Go ahead and write anything you want." So I wrote an article which was carried in the entire

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Catholic press in the United States, for the most part, and the NCWC [National Catholic Welfare Conference] put it on its news service. I have that here.

MORRISSEY: Good.

DES MARAIS: So that was an interesting thing for me, you know, to get involved in that issue. And I was very impressed with the fact that he authorized me to write anything I wanted about having personally discussed this with him in his home. It gave me a lot of personal publicity, I might add, which also pleased me. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: Did he ever comment on the article to you?

DES MARAIS: Never did, never commented on the article. I never got any acknowledgement of it from him. I doubt that he ever saw it. I didn't send it to him. I really wasn't trying to impress him at the time. I was much more concerned about.... I wasn't trying to impress Kennedy; I was simply concerned about what I thought was a great deal of misunderstanding between whom I considered the important leaders of Catholic public opinion, if there is such a thing, and Kennedy. And I thought since I had had the advantage of discussing

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this issue with him and he had given me permission to quote him, that I should write the article. As I said, I wasn't writing it for his benefit at all. I wasn't trying to convince him of anything for myself. I was trying to convey some of his ideas which I thought were quite good. And I also found out that all these Catholics were shooting off about Kennedy and none of them had bothered to try to call him themselves and ask him what he really thought. So I wrote a letter to the editor of *Commonweal* and also to the editor of *America*, both who had sounded off, and pointed this out to them. They both wrote back very apologetic letters saying that I was absolutely right, that it never occurred to them to phone Mr. Kennedy and interview him themselves. Then he wrote a letter to me and said, "I still haven't heard from Father Davis, the editor of *America*. I'd be glad to talk to him if he wants to call me, but I think he should call me." So we dropped it; I dropped it at that point. This writing the article, the exchange of correspondence, and this little flurry in the Catholic press over this issue persisted over a month. It was a very interesting experience.

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MORRISSEY: During that discussion in his home on the first of March, do you recall any indication on his part that maybe he feared he overstated his views to Fletcher Knebel?

DES MARAIS: None, whatsoever. I had a feeling that he felt that it was a good interview. As I pointed out in a letter to either him or Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] later on, I found that among my Protestant friends this interview was received very favorably. This reassured them, you see. So I passed this on to them too. I had the feeling, based on some comments I got later on from Larry O'Brien, that they were sure they were going to get a lot of the Catholic vote so they weren't really too concerned about any little reservations they might have about certain of his particular viewpoints or pronouncements on parochial schools or ambassadors to the Vatican or anything like that.

The final thing that I should mention about that visit on March 1 was that we secured from Mr. Kennedy a commitment to visit Louisiana the following fall on October 15 and 16. Again I was impressed with his willingness to commit himself very specifically that

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far ahead – and to us. He said, "Okay, you fellows set it up and I'll be there. You just tell me what you want me to do." Well, it wasn't quite that simple of course but that's the way he put it. [Laughter] And he gave orders to Sorensen and to Steve Smith he said, "Put that on our calendar. We're going to Louisiana in the middle of October."

So we went home and immediately started planning for this visit which was to us a very good prospect. It gave us a project to do, you see. So that's the next major contact that I have listed on my checksheet here – his visit to Louisiana. I don't know how much detail you want me to go into this at this point. You know how detailed these things get.

MORRISSEY: Well, the more the better.

DES MARAIS: I have the schedule here and some of the relevant documents.

MORRISSEY: Why don't we insert those into the transcript?

DES MARAIS: Yes. All right. Let me say this in the beginning – I had been working in practical politics for ten years at that time and worked in presidential campaigns. When I lived in Minnesota I was once a campaign manager for Eugene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] in one of his campaigns, worked in

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Humphrey campaigns. I have never seen a project that was better organized in terms of cooperation received from, you know, the visiting firemen and their willingness to follow a very carefully worked out, detailed program which was a two day affair. I think the Planning Committee – I have a letter here somewhere that makes it explicit – was Mr. Ralph Jackson of the Oil and Gas Building in New Orleans, Judge Reggie, Mr. Gravel and myself. We were advised to consult with Senator Russell Long, which we did. We went up to see him about a month before, in September, on a Sunday morning at his mansion in Baton Rouge and presented to him our ideas. He said, "Well, I'll be very glad to go along with your plans. You know, Jack's a nice guy. I don't think he's going to be president, but I'll introduce him at the dinner if you want me to." I'm sure Senator Long today would not deny that he had that attitude. But other than that he offered no particular advice or reservations about anything we were doing, and in a sense he was very helpful because he didn't say, "Well, I don't want you to do this and don't do that. I'm the senator, you know" and so on. So he

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left it entirely up to the national committeeman and the small Arrangements Committee that had been appointed.

The visit of Senator Kennedy to Louisiana in '59, which was to be the only visit he would pay to that state until a year and a half after he was elected president, was a two day affair. It was arranged for him to start out at the state capital in Baton Rouge at noon on October 15; then go from there to New Orleans for an evening dinner and press conferences and so on; then the next morning to meet with Negro leaders in New Orleans; then go by plane to Lafayette, which is the center of the oil industry, for a noon luncheon; then go by plane from Lafayette to the Rice Festival at Crowley in the middle of the afternoon to participate in that affair; and then in the evening to end up with a dinner at Lake Charles which is in the southwestern corner of the state. That was the general outline. There was an interesting aspect to this visit which to me symbolized his political appeal. The luncheon which he addressed in Baton Rouge was organized by the service clubs – Rotary, the Lions, Kiwanis and one other. They volunteered to do this.

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I might say that, in the meantime, when the public announcement was made of his visit we received a tremendous number of offers from all kinds of individuals and people to be host for this or host for that, requesting him to come here and there, and the whole thing for awhile became terribly complicated. I said that Senator Long did not try to interfere or to control the agenda, but many other people injected themselves. This presented many problems, and it became so acute the last week before his arrival – there were all kinds of attempts made to influence the schedule and to get people to meet him or get him to meet people, or to do this or to do that, see this person or see that person – that Larry O’Brien sent out a telegram to about twenty people in Louisiana. I thought I’d just read it because I got a big kick out of it. “Phil Des Marais has been designated by me to clear protocol and transportation for each phase of Senator Kennedy’s two day Louisiana tour. Stop. Phil will contact you regarding Crowley to insure continuity. Lawrence P. O’Brien, Assistant to Senator Kennedy.” Well, this was a sample of the kind of telegrams that went out. So this, of course, put me right in the middle of all this

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(You can have this when I’m through. I have to refer to it.) for this particular visit which made it very exciting for me personally. As I said, the luncheon in Baton Rouge was sponsored by the service clubs which are normally non-political. The press was billing Senator Kennedy’s trip as an obvious but unannounced campaign effort to secure the nomination. But still they were most willing to be the sponsors. They had a tremendous sellout crowd a week before the event in the Capital House at Baton Rouge.

So we started out from there. Then Mr. Kennedy left Baton Rouge, the state capital, at 2:30 that day and flew to New Orleans and went to the Roosevelt Hotel for a press conference. It was the local press. I might say that the press accompanying him was very small. He had only Beverly Smith from *The Saturday Evening Post* and the *Time Magazine* bureau man from Atlanta, Georgia, whose name I don’t recall and who is no longer with *Time*. They were traveling with him. And this was the first time the Senator used the Caroline, incidentally. So the whole group – Senator Kennedy, Larry O’Brien, Steve Smith, the two people from the press, and that was all, that was all that came on the Caroline.

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It was a rather small group. Mrs. Kennedy also came, but she arrived by commercial plane at New Orleans. She did not go to Baton Rouge. This was also very important from our standpoint. We’d never had any wives accompanying anyone to Louisiana before for some reason. [Laughter] Of course, Mr. Stevenson didn’t have any. But this was a big item in the minds of Louisiana voters so we were very please to have Mrs. Kennedy. She joined the Senator that afternoon at the Roosevelt.

One of the few requests we had had for special attention that we had acceded to, after checking with Larry O’Brien, was for Senator Kennedy to address the National Radio-Television News Directors’ Association which was meeting in New Orleans in a convention at the St. Charles Hotel. We checked and they said, “Yes, the Senator will be glad to speak to that group.” It’s obvious why he would. Bill Monroe [William B. Monroe, Jr.] who was the

news director for WOSU-TV in New Orleans at that time and is now the director of news for NBC here in Washington was the host of the convention. He was a good friend of mine, and he had originally relayed the invitation to me. He was in charge of the affair, and

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they set up a special session at 5:30 p.m. just to hear Kennedy. Senator Kennedy in his usual – which I learned later to be his usual – nice way of giving one of his assistants or workers a little identification walked up to me in the hotel after his press conference and said, “Phil, would you like to take me over to the St. Charles Hotel?” So just the two of us walked down from the Roosevelt down Common Street to the St. Charles – it was a nice afternoon – and nobody else along. Of course, he started gathering a little crowd as we went along. He swept into the correspondents at 5:30, and he got a tremendous ovation. Many of them had had three or four cocktails while waiting. He gave a barnburner of a speech – that’s the first time I ever heard him speak extemporaneously – and told a lot of jokes. It was very helpful to me in terms of my later work for Kennedy to have been able to bring him over to that meeting and to be introduced as being accompanying him because from then on all the radio and TV people in Louisiana who were there knew who I was, you see, and this had a very important impact later on in connection with something we had to do. Again I was tremendously impressed with how Kennedy....

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This was my first inkling of this great ability that he had to understand what the press wanted to hear and his rapport with individual reporters and so on, that he was completely at ease. He just had a great time. He stayed a half an hour longer than he was scheduled to stay. Then I walked back with him to the Roosevelt Hotel. Several of the correspondents by then decided to accompany us. At this point they were going to give up their convention and cover the dinner.

The dinner was a very gala affair. We had spent a lot of time planning it. We had heard that the Kennedys liked Dixieland music so we had arranged for Al Hirt’s band to provide the music. At that time he wasn’t as well known nationally as he is now. We had a very interesting time trying to line up the head table group, you know, before they march in. But we had a wonderful effect with a procession going into the International Room of the Roosevelt Hotel, which is a very impressive room, led by Mr. Hirt with his trumpet and a long line of the Governor and his wife and four of the gubernatorial candidates who were running in the primary at that time. We did have a

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very wonderful turnout. I think every prominent elected official in the state showed up for the dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy were bringing up the line. I went in first, and I stood by the head table to tell everyone where to sit as they marched down the dais so that nobody would get out of line. It was very amusing – when Larry O’Brien came along, he handed me a full water glass of daiquiri. He said, “Phil, hold on to this. After Jack gets seated at the table, go

up and take this by his place.” [Laughter] So I did that. Then Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy came in at last. I’ve never seen a more glamorous looking couple than they looked that evening. The dinner was a big success. The speech that night was not particularly notable. He didn’t say anything very important, but it was really the whole idea of meeting all these people. The dinner had been preceded by an hour and a half cocktail reception to which everybody at the dinner was invited. That’s the way we always fixed them up down there. We never had any of these private affairs for the elite few. So he had probably shaken hands with practically every one of the one thousand paid

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guests at the dinner.

After the dinner the Kennedys went up to the International Suite where we had arranged an after dinner party. We brought up some of the best talent, local talent, from the Quarter – the two girls that play the piano in Pat O’Brien’s and different people like that. They put on an impromptu show for the Kennedys and Steve Smith and Larry O’Brien. Senator and Mrs. Long were there and Mr. and Mrs. [Corrine C. Boggs] Hale Boggs and the Kennedys got a.... Senator Kennedy got a terrific kick out of this entertainment. I don’t think Mrs. Kennedy particularly enjoyed it because it was pretty raucous. [laughter] But it was a wonderful party. Finally, somebody had to close it down. So I was the one who had to go around and tell the entertainers to leave and close the bar and so on. But everybody had a great time, and it was interesting to see how.... I think it was on this occasion that Hale Boggs really cemented his.... I could see that Hale was making up his mind that he really liked Kennedy after all. I’m not so sure he was so sure up until that evening. But anyway they didn’t go to bed until about 2.

Now the thing we had scheduled for the next morning, which was something they had requested, was a meeting with

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the Negro Democratic leaders of Louisiana. This was a hilarious affair in a way as I look back on it now. Nobody wanted to do much about this so it devolved upon me as the man in charge of the schedule to set it up. So I called upon the head of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] who was a good friend of mine there, Mr. A.P. Tureaud [Alexander Pierre Tureaud], who is still the chief attorney for the NAACP in Louisiana, to assemble the group. They met in the Peter Claver Hall, which is a building owned by a Catholic Negro fraternal organization. The Kennedy party proceeded from the hotel to the hall on the way to the airport. Nobody wanted to run the meeting so it devolved upon me to run the meeting with the Negro leaders and introduce him. No Louisiana politician was willing to do it. [Laughter] So that gave me a chance to introduce Kennedy. I always felt I didn’t do too good a job; I didn’t really rise to the occasion. But anyway the meeting went off fairly well, and from my standpoint it was useful because the Negro leaders felt that they had had a chance to meet him. Even though it was a segregated meeting, they did not resent this, and they were very understanding of the situation. They pledged to work unitedly for Kennedy. In 1956, 75 percent of the Negro

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voters had supported Eisenhower. Our calculations were that, if we were to carry the state for Kennedy, we had to have the complete switch of the Negro vote, 75 percent for Kennedy. And that's exactly what happened. That's the only time he ever met with the Negro leaders of Louisiana because they would never be able to get to Washington. But he really sold himself on that one morning meeting as far as the leadership was concerned. We had all the Negro union leaders there and the Negro religious leaders, ministers and so on.

MORRISSEY: I assume then he was not one bit reluctant to do that.

DES MARAIS: Oh, no no, he wasn't. The national press accompanied him, too. There were a couple more reporters. The AP [Associated Press] bureau chief of Louisiana was with us all day. He was very relaxed about it, not at all nervous as far as I could see. Everybody else was very nervous, and I was very nervous myself for a different reason than the other people. I was afraid the Negro leaders were going to be offended at the fact that we had had to arrange a segregated meeting while the Louisiana group, which consisted of Mr. Gravel and a few labor leaders and a former national committeeman, Frank Ellis [Frank B. Ellis], who later became the head of the....

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MORRISSEY: Emergency Planning?

DES MARAIS: Emergency Planning. They were extremely nervous about the situation. We went then to the airport. We had the "Caroline" and another Trans Texas Airlines plane that we had chartered. We had a group of about twenty-five people all together. The "Caroline" could only carry twelve so we had to put the overflow in the other plane. We went from there to Lafayette.

At Lafayette, they had the luncheon at Lafayette at the Oakbourne Country Club. It, as well as the appearance at the Rice Festival in Crowley, had been under the local direction of Judge Edmund Reggie from Crowley. His family acted as hosts through the whole affair, and there was no charge for any of the events for the rest of the trip to the participants, whereas the dinner in New Orleans had been a hundred dollar-a-plate fund raising affair. As they said for many months after in Louisiana, those events – the luncheon in the Oakbourne Country Club and the reception which the Reggies gave in their home later in the afternoon in Crowley – were certainly the most outstanding social events of the decade in Louisiana. Reggie, who was a pretty good personal friend of the Kennedys and had been for a long time and had had some contact with Mr. Kennedy, Sr.,

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and had visited at Hyannis, had gone all out, so to speak. They had put out engraved invitations, you know, and things like that and worked over this invitation list for months and

had done a lot of things which I had to go in there and monitor eventually. With all of that, the luncheon was a glamorous event. They had three bands inside the club, and they [had] two high school bands outside. They had a wonderful menu. It was a Friday, and they served stuffed flounder. Then they had waiters just continually going around with huge trays of martinis and champagne. I remember Larry O'Brien drank five martinis, and he didn't really recover until we got to Lake Charles that night. I think the Kennedys really thought it was a splendid affair, because it was very delightful. Everybody was having a great time. Nobody cared what anybody said, you see. That was the idea; it was a social occasion. Louisianians, more than any other people I think, like to socialize their politics. They like to make social events out of political activities if they can possibly do it. So the women wore their most glamorous gowns. Many of them had been to Neiman-Marcus for this purpose. We had invited all the officials of all the major oil companies, all of which had installations in Lafayette, and they all came.

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This is the schedule that I actually used for that day. You see, I have some notes on it here that I made the night before, after going over it with Larry O'Brien. I remember the first thing he said – “No sirens, huh?” – and after, “Who will introduce?” What did I have here? Mrs. Long [pause] was there, too. And Clayson – Clayson was the mayor. Then at Lafayette, “Who will be at the airport?” The mayor of Lafayette, Ed Willis [Edwin E. Willis] – that's the congressman – and I can't remember that other name.

But anyway we got into sixteen white Cadillacs at the club and went by convoy to Crowley – or by motorcade, I should say. I could see that at this point Senator Kennedy was very much agitated. He saw sixteen white Cadillacs, motorcycle escorts with red lights flashing. He and Larry O'Brien came up to Gravel and myself and said, “We said no sirens. All these Cadillacs! That's terrible. Can't we get back to the bus or something?” (because we had come by bus from the airport to the country club.) But it was too late. By this time, Judge Reggie and his committee had taken over. I said, “Well, it's in Reggie's hands. There's nothing we can do about it.” So then Larry O'Brien said to me, “Well, Phil, will you ride

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in the car with these press people and explain to them what's going on?” He could see that it was really going to get complicated at this point. They had never been here before. So I rode in the cavalcade with Beverly Smith of *The Saturday Evening Post* and the AP bureau chief and the man from *Time [Magazine]* and Judge Fournet [John B. Fournet], the chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, who is a very active partisan Democratic. We proceeded down the highway, and all the way there were people parked in cars and standing and so on, a tremendous amount of traffic. We never could have gotten through there if it hadn't been for our motorcycle escort. We swept into Crowley and came around behind the courthouse. There was a tremendous din – bands playing and, you know, crowds cheering and yelling and screaming. I'll never forget the sight as the motorcade swung around in front of the courthouse square, and you looked from the courthouse square in Crowley down Parkinson Street six blocks to the railroad station, which forms the outer boundary of the downtown

area. It's the Southern Pacific lines. We got out of the car, Judge Fournet and myself and the *Time* man and the *Saturday Evening Post* man. There were all

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these bands playing. We started to mount the rostrum. As we got to the top of the rostrum, you looked out at a sea of faces. Judge Fournet said to me, "My god; Huey [Huey P. Long] never got anything like this." Well, the *Time Magazine* man picked that up right away. He said, "Is that right, Judge?" He said, "Why I've never seen anything like this in fifty years." [Laughter] Well, we just stood there in amazement. This fellow Fred Bandy of the *Crowley Daily Signal*, really described it very well. You said not to read anything into this, but this is the only copy of this that I have, and I hate to let it go. He said:

"Estimates of the size of the crowd on hand when the Senator roared into the city varied. However, Monday morning we were handed a sheet of paper on which police chief Max Barousse gave his official tabulation. The chief's report reads as follows: 'I have checked with members of my department and reviewed aerial photographs of the crowd and discussed the matter with the Louisiana state police and we have concluded that this was the largest Rice Festival in our history and certainly the largest crowd assembled in Louisiana to hear a public speaker. Our estimate of the crowd ranges between one hundred and twenty thousand and one hundred and thirty thousand people.'"

The following week *Time Magazine* reported it as a hundred and twenty-five thousand. I think everybody agreed that it was the largest outdoor crowd ever

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assembled to hear a political speaker in the history of the state. *Time* was the only one that really covered it. They were the only ones that had a correspondent there. Of course, this made a tremendous impact on all the Louisiana people – you know, convinced a lot of the doubters that Kennedy had great appeal. And Mrs. Kennedy made a very nice little speech in French from the rostrum, and that received quite a bit of publicity.

Then the plan was for Kennedy to ride in the parade after crowning the queen. This was to be followed by a reception at Judge Reggie's house to which had been invited six hundred people from the southwest Louisiana area other than Lafayette. The Lafayette people had been invited to the country club. So we proceeded over to Reggie's house. In order to get there, I had to commandeer an ambulance, and I got all the people in the Kennedy group into the ambulance and then drove us (it was the only way we could get out of the crowd) over to Reggie's house which was about five blocks from the courthouse. While waiting for the guests to arrive, Camille Gravel, Steve Smith, Senator Kennedy and myself and Reggie went for a swim in his pool.

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Larry O'Brien wouldn't come in. He sat beside the pool in his suit and just talked. It was, of course, again a lot of fun too to go swimming with Kennedy. I remember very distinctly

when he was getting undressed, he pointed out some of the scars on his back. You know, he said, “Would you like to see my operation?” He was sort of joking, and he made us all look at it. I was kind of embarrassed but then that’s the way he was. You know he liked to make jokes about it. Well, furthermore, he knew that one of the things I had done at all the places where he was to sleep, which was three different spots, I had arranged to have one of those boards put in the bed, you see, and so on. He thought it was Reggie probably and made a little joke about it. But anyway he was very relaxed and obviously enjoying himself that afternoon.

Then after about an hour of this, all the guests had assembled, which was 4 o’clock, and he had a press conference in Reggie’s bedroom, which was quite large. Then they received the guests. You mentioned people and bottles. I remember very distinctly that one congressman got horribly loaded, and we were delayed a half an hour trying to get him into the cavalcade. [Laughter]

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I think Kennedy said, “Well, take off without him.”

The planes had been brought from Lafayette to a very scrubby little airport outside of Crowley, which was not a regular commercial base, and they were waiting. When we arrived at the airport there, the high school glee club was assembled. They sang a song to the words of “The Children’s Marching Song” by Bertolt Brecht. It was special words written by the teacher who directed the glee club. Well, that was one of the most touching things that I have ever heard. It made a big impression on the correspondents. There were about fifteen press people by this time who were coming along.

Then we went to Lake Charles which is only a twenty minute ride by plane. We had a dinner there at the Petroleum Club on the top floor of their building. That was really a gourmet affair. They had a lot of French wines and seafood and so on. It was really a very – strictly a social affair again. We didn’t try to.... Everybody was dressed up.

Then we went from there to a motel on the outside of town – the Belmont Motel – where he held another press conference. Quite a few Texas press people showed up from Beaumont and places like that. They were there.

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Then he took off from the airport at 10 o’clock that night and that was it.

But it certainly was one of the most spectacular political tours I’ve seen in terms of somebody who was not a candidate. It convinced me. If I ever had any doubts that Kennedy should be the nominee, or any of us had ever, by that time that convinced us that, as far as Louisiana was concerned, any other candidate would be totally unsatisfactory by comparison.

MORRISSEY: Even Lyndon Johnson?

DES MARAIS: [Laughter] Well, Lyndon Johnson, yes. I think he could have carried Louisiana, but you never know. He didn’t carry it this time. The

problem with President Johnson is not himself. It is simply the fact that he is a Texan. Louisianians don't like Texans. This is something you just have to accept. I can't visualize to this day Louisiana voting for a Texan. So that was something we had to contend with. So I've taken a long time to go through this, but I think that from our point of view it was a very thrilling experience, a very successful political operation. It solidified the support among those who would do some work for Louisiana as far as Kennedy was concerned.

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(No, I don't have a copy of this. I think there's probably another one....) He "___" writes about at the airport at Crowley:

"The Kennedys were given a send-off that according to all deeply touched the couple. The Senator's private plane and the plane that moved the newsmen from place to place were landed at the Larose Airport (?) ready for take-off. The Kennedys and their entourage arrived and were met by the Crowley High School glee club under the direction of Miss Barbara Hoffpower (?). The girls sand a special song for Kennedy with words written by Miss Evelyn Gladfay (?) and "Auld Lang Syne." The Senator then made it a point to personally thank and shake the hand of each girl in the group."

I might say that at the Reggie house the one, I would say, unsuccessful aspect of the affair was that the three major aspirants for the gubernatorial nomination were there. Kennedy had a private caucus with them in one of the bedrooms. That was Jimmie Davis [James H. Davis], who was to be elected governor, and Chep Morrison [de Lesseps S. Morrison], the mayor of New Orleans, and Jimmie Noe [James A. Noe] from Monroe. He tried to get a commitment from each of them that, you know, they would support his candidacy. The only one that would make a commitment was Chep Morrison. I came in. I was permitted into the room. Larry O'Brien guarded the door. I was permitted into the room at the end, and when I walked in, Chep was saying, "Well, Jack, I just want you to know that whatever happens I will be for you,"

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which was true. Of course, ultimately, Jimmie Davis defeated Morrison in the primary and became very anti-Kennedy, bitterly so, I think primarily because he just could not stomach the idea of a Catholic being president. Neither could Governor Davis' wife [Alverna A. Davis]. They, in turn, were able to ultimately control the state central committee and prevent the committee from electing a pro-Kennedy slate of delegates to the Convention. So that was a very crucial meeting in a way, and it was in a sense a failure from that standpoint. I would say that the political outcome of Kennedy's visit in 1959 to Louisiana in October was to ensure ultimately that he would get the popular vote of the voters, but he failed to assure himself of getting the support of the Louisiana delegation at the Convention.

[TAPE I; SIDE II]

I had mentioned in my discussion of the Kennedy visit to Louisiana that there was a question of getting the state delegation. During the period of October, 1959, to May, 1960, there was a long struggle which involved the election of a new state central committee, the election of a new national committeeman, the advent of the administration of Governor Jimmie Davis. These events resulted in a situation whereby the state central committee had a

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majority of members under the control of the Governor who was opposed to Kennedy's candidacy. He succeeded in getting them to elect a slate of delegates to the Convention which was pledged to Lyndon Johnson.

I had been one of the delegates at the state central committee who was outvoted. At this point, those of us who had been working hard for Kennedy had sort of a recess in our activities, you might say. Many of us had put in a lot of time and felt we ought to get back to our jobs. So for a period of about two months there, I would say, except for the state central committee meeting in May, until the latter part of June, I personally did nothing with respect to the Kennedy situation in Louisiana or the national Convention. I had lost my place on the delegation. I was going to be a delegate, and I didn't get on. I didn't lose interest, but I didn't see what I could do at that point.

However, a friend of mine who was the leader of the Young Democrats in New Orleans called me up and asked me if I would have lunch with him one day – a fellow named Clarence Martin who is now congressional liaison at AID [Agency for International Development], a young lawyer. He said, in so many words, "You're the only

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person that I know who has any contact with Kennedy. I think there is tremendous support for Kennedy in Louisiana. I think it's too bad that we have a delegation that is not for Kennedy. But I think something should be done to arouse public opinion to provide a platform for Kennedy supporters to rally around. Why don't you organize a committee?" I said, "Well, I can't do that. I have no authority to do that." He said, "Why don't you call up Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] and ask him if you can do this?" I said, "Well, I don't know if I should." He was a very persistent fellow and he actually got me to go down to our United Democrats office in the St. Charles Hotel and call up Kennedy on the phone. Miraculously I got him on the phone and I told him what was happening. He said, "Well, I don't see why you couldn't organize a committee if you want to, Phil. Go ahead." I said, "Well, can I say that you authorized it?" He said, "You certainly can." Clarence Martin was elated at this. He was sitting by when I was on the phone there. We called up a friend of ours who was a TV man in town, Argyll Campbell. Argyll came over to our office. He was very strong for Kennedy. He said, "Well, if you fellows want to organize a committee, I'll resign my job and I'll be your public relations man. In fact, I'll start right now." He typed out a press

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release announcing the committee. We took it over to WDSU. As you remember, I mentioned the fact that all the TV people had seen me escort Senator Kennedy to their convention. Immediately they put me on the 6 o'clock television show, a statewide TV show. [Laughter] And we were off.

The reaction was tremendous. We got phone calls, people coming in making contributions, requests to attend meetings all throughout the state. So right the next morning we took off in a car, the three of us, and we went to Lafayette and to Baton Rouge, to Opelousas and Crowley and to Abbeville where we had the most tempting offers of support or meetings to be organized. In two days we addressed large meetings in all of these towns in which all the judges were there, the mayors, the parish jury which is equivalent to the county board – they all were there. All pledged themselves to Kennedy for president. At each meeting Mr. Campbell would get on the phone and call the AP bureau headquarters in New Orleans and issue a release. Well, we had our names and pictures in the paper on the front pages for three days solid and were being continually interviewed. It was very embarrassing to me; I'm not the extroverted type. But I was the only one who had made public statements for

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Kennedy for president – that is, other than local officials such as the ones who had supported us, you see.

So the committee was organized, and we had various meetings and raised money and distributed literature and buttons. One of the things we did – we had great difficulty getting literature. We designed our own little car sticker. This is something I designed which was very popular – “J'aime Jack” you see. We had a great time; it was loads of fun. We organized this Kennedy for President Committee, and I would make weekly reports to Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] or to Bob Kennedy. So on one of these oral reports by phone he said, “When will I see you in Los Angeles?” I said, “Well, I hadn't planned to go.” He said, “Oh, I expect to see you there. Come to room so and so at the Biltmore Hotel, and I will put you to work.”

So then I decided to go even though I wasn't a delegate. I was there for about ten days and did all kinds of little odd jobs. I got assignments from Bob Kennedy or from Larry O'Brien or later from Pat Lucey [Patrick Joseph Lucey], who was the Wisconsin state chairman and was a very effective organizer at the Convention. I was more or less assigned to Mr. Lucey, who was a classmate of mine in college. We had a wonderful time there, met a lot of people, and did a

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little work, you know. But we were unable to ever get the Louisiana delegation to go for Kennedy, but that really wasn't the job.

MORRISSEY: Were you assigned to other delegations?

DES MARAIS: I was assigned to other delegations. Exactly. Primarily in the Midwest.

MORRISSEY: Which ones?

DES MARAIS: Minnesota and Iowa and did some work in Illinois too. It was simply talking to people. They were very much impressed that somebody from Louisiana was for Kennedy, especially with a French name. They didn't know I was a native of Minnesota.

MORRISSEY: Were you present when the Minnesota delegation split?

DES MARAIS: Oh yes. Of course, having been active in Minnesota politics, being on the state central committee in Minnesota before I moved to Louisiana, I had good entrée to all the Minnesota meetings. I sat in on many of their caucuses, simply as an old visitor and friend. I wore my Kennedy button; they knew I was for Kennedy. But there were many people for Kennedy on the Minnesota delegation. They were really in their usual agonizing state, as they always are at national Democratic conventions – wringing hands, sobbing, and very emotional at every caucus

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they ever had, and divided right down the middle, nobody able to deliver the vote of that delegation.

MORRISSEY: Is that why it split in so many diverse ways?

DES MARAIS: Exactly. It's always been interesting. If you study the history of Minnesota delegations, until this year neither the governor or the two senators were ever able to deliver the vote of that delegation in twenty years – from '48 to '64 nobody has ever been able to deliver the vote of the Minnesota delegation. Whatever that means, I don't know, but that isn't what we're discussing here.

Anyway, I had a wonderful time there. Since I've been active in the Democratic party for many years, I know many people in many states, and visited all my friends, and told them I was for Kennedy and that I thought Kennedy could carry Louisiana and was the only one that could beat Nixon as far as Louisiana was concerned. So I guess this contributed a little bit to the ground swell. But I didn't see much of Senator Kennedy there. I saw a great deal of Bob Kennedy – at least twice a day every day I was there – and a lot of Steve Smith, also. I would meet him at the Biltmore bar, and we would hash over what we had done during the day. That was my main contact there. As I said, I didn't

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see much of Senator Kennedy there.

Then after the Convention, I went back to Louisiana and wasn't doing anything really because once Kennedy was nominated, Senator Long and Congressman Boggs flew to Hyannis Port and pledged their full support. Kennedy more or less committed them to

organizing the campaign for him in the state. Those of us who were not elected officials and who had worked previous to the Convention really didn't... We felt a bit left out but we realized this was the practical thing to do. However, Mr. Boggs, who is my congressman and a neighbor of mine, was a very good friend of mine, and he would always call me in at all the meetings and kept me involved with the new group that was forming.

Then one day I got a phone call from Ralph Dungan. I think it was about August 15. He said, "Could you devote three months full time to working on the campaign?" I said, "Well, I'd love to do it, but I'll have to check." He said, "Well, call me back tomorrow." I said, "Does it have to be that soon?" He said, "Well, the sooner the better." So I checked around and called him back the next day. He said, "I think we'd like to have you be one of

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these coordinators that we're designating for various key states. It's not been decided which state you will get yet, but you come to Washington right away and start getting briefed. We'll decide in the meantime."

So I went to Washington and I met with Larry O'Brien and Ralph Dungan and Esther Peterson [Esther E. Peterson], who was labor coordinator, and Robert Kennedy and Steve Smith, who was in charge of money, you know, and discussed various technical activities that they were interested in having coordinators keep track of. Then I was told I was to go to Missouri. They gave me a telephone charge card and an air travel card and said, "Take off" which I did.

While I was coordinator in Missouri, Kennedy came there three times – on September 13 to address a machinists' convention, on October 2 to address a fund raising dinner in St. Louis, and October 22 to make a cross state tour. I was more or less in charge of each one of these events and worked with... They sent in advance men because they were very complicated things. They sent in outstanding people to help. That always impressed me – the caliber of the people that came in.

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MORRISSEY: Such as?

DES MARAIS: Well, I had "Red" Roche [Redmond H. Roche, Jr.] from the UAW [United Auto Workers] who is now over in the Veterans Administration, who was an attorney for the UAW. He was my labor man so he would come in and help line up the labor union support for whatever had to be done. Then the chief advance man from Washington was a fellow named Bob O'Hare (?) from Massachusetts. And then "Tip" O'Neill [Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr.] Congressman Tip O'Neill, came in also, twice, to help line up the congressional delegation to turn out for the appearance of the candidate because they were pretty lukewarm to Kennedy, having all been for Symington [(William) Stuart Symington] and feeling pretty crushed after what happened to them at Los Angeles.

MORRISSEY: Had they had high expectations that Symington would be the vice

presidential candidate?

DES MARAIS: Oh, I'm sure they had. They had had high expectations that he would be the presidential candidate.

MORRISSEY: Because of a deadlocked Convention?

DES MARAIS: Yes. So, of course, it took them about a month to recover from this stunning experience that they had had out there.

MORRISSEY: Had you had any previous exposure to Missouri politics?

DES MARAIS: I think the exposure to Missouri that I'd ever had was

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that I attended a college press convention in St. Louis once in 1941. [Laughter] That was it. And all I'd seen was the inside of the Statler Hotel where I stayed.

MORRISSEY: Were there problems when a outsider like yourself would come into a state that he didn't know and try to coordinate the local political people?

DES MARAIS: Well, obviously there were problems, and there were advantages. The principal advantage was that none of the local political powers considered you a threat in terms of future political action in the state. You were there as a technician, as a representative of the national candidate, and you were not out to gain any personal status in the state political organization, any permanent personal status. This was the big advantage.

The disadvantage, of course, was that they just resented the idea of an outsider coming in and, in a sense, calling the shots on a lot of the details of the presidential campaign.

The first thing that I did upon arriving in St. Louis on a hot last week of August – I don't know if you've ever been in St. Louis in August, but it's the hottest spot in the United States – I looked up the county chairman whom I had met in Washington the week before.

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Larry O'Brien had taken the trouble of calling in Jack Dwyer [John J. Dwyer], the St. Louis chairman, a long time political boss there. He came to Washington and we met in Larry O'Brien's office the week before I left for Missouri. Larry O'Brien was very matter-of-fact about it. He said, "Jack, this is Phil Des Marais. We're sending Phil out to work in Missouri and I hope you'll cooperate with him." You know, he sort of grumbled to me. [Grumbles] But at least the contact was established so I looked up Jack.

It was very fortuitous now as I look back on it. I arrived on a Saturday night. I went to the Sheraton Jefferson Hotel and checked in there. On Sunday morning I went to church. There's a very old church in the urban renewal area, called the Plaza there, which is a very interesting place. I went over there, and as I was coming out of church, who should be coming out of church but Jack Dwyer. So I said, "Well, how are you, Mr. Dwyer?" He said, "Well, how are you? You're here, I see." "Yes, I got here." He said, "Well, let's have breakfast tomorrow morning. You meet me at the Missouri Athletic Club at 8:30." So I went down there Monday morning, and he had all the ward chairmen there. He was going to do

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his duty, I could see. So we didn't really do much. We just talked a little bit. They were discussing voter registration.

Jack was a very difficult person, a very wonderful guy in many ways, but he was an old man of about 68 with a kidney ailment – not in good health. His position was threatened by the Negro vote in St. Louis, and here was this young squirt coming in, you know – one of those professors. He used to call me "the professor" all the time. He certainly was fair and square. He complained a couple of times to Larry O'Brien that I wasn't doing certain things, but on the whole we got along pretty well. I operated out of his headquarters. He gave me a desk and a phone and a key, which I thought was really a great confidence. I think he and Leonor Sullivan [Leonor K. Sullivan], the congresswoman, were the only people who had a master key to the front door of the Democratic central headquarters in St. Louis. So I could get there at any time of the night and day, and it was only a block from the Sheraton Jefferson Hotel. I worked out of there. As it turned out, he said, "I'll take care of the city, and you take care of the county." So that's the way it worked out.

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But then about two days later I went out to Jefferson City, the capital, with Mr. Dwyer and met with the governor, who was not for Kennedy at all.

MORRISSEY: Was that Blair [James T. Blair, Jr.]?

DES MARAIS: No.

MORRISSEY: Dalton?

DES MARAIS: Dalton, John Dalton [John M. Dalton]. We went out to discuss a fund raising dinner which was ultimately set for October 2. That was five weeks later. That was a very difficult session but at least.... I'm a great believer in the old French theory of *politique de presence* – the fact that you're there and you don't always have to say something. I simply stayed there and I would never say "yes" to anything I didn't like but I tried to be as polite as I could.

MORRISSEY: What was bothering Dalton?

DES MARAIS: Oh, well, it was the religious issue. He made it very plain. He said, “This religious issue is going to kill us. It’s just going to kill us.” He was a thirty-third degree Mason, and the Masonic Order is very prominent in this area, and all of his friends were against a Catholic for president. He just looked upon it as a terrible burden to bear – that he had to run on a ticket with a Roman

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Catholic, and he practically said so. He was on the ticket, you see, running for governor. He was the attorney general at that time, not the governor. When I said we met the governor.... You were right, the governor was Mr. Blair. He did not figure in the campaign at all. He was not running for re-election.

But I think the most interesting thing to get to – and time is running along here – is the decision that was made by the Kennedy people to have him address the Machinists’ Convention in St. Louis on September 13. This was a last minute decision. It came about because “Red” Roche from the UAW came out and stopped by simply to meet me since I was in his territory. He was sort of a traveling coordinator for labor relations. We discovered that the Machinists had invited both Nixon and Kennedy and that Nixon was going to accept. We simply called up Washington and said, “Nixon is going to accept. We recommend that you accept.” They accepted our recommendation and said, “We will.” This was on a Monday, and it was the day after the Houston ministers speech which was on a Sunday, September 12, I believe. Or was it on Saturday, September 11? One or the other.

MORRISSEY: I can’t remember.

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DES MARAIS: But anyway this whole thing.... Because of the fact that the speech in St. Louis was preceded by the Houston ministers speech, which got tremendous coverage, the interest built up. I still have my schedule from that visit. I think the significant thing was that here was an opportunity for Kennedy and Nixon to address the same meeting, literally, in the same city, twenty-four hours apart. The Machinists had Kennedy on Monday morning and Nixon on Tuesday morning, at 9 o’clock in the morning, in Keele Auditorium which seats fourteen thousand people. There were one thousand Machinists at the convention so that meant there were thirteen thousand seats to fill at 9 o’clock in the morning. That was my job – to get thirteen thousand people into that place. Then, of course, the other part of the job was to get all of the political leaders to really show up for Kennedy. It was only three weeks away, not yet a month, since the Convention – about three and a half weeks – and the job was to get them to turn out. So we really had to work like mad. We for this line-up of people at the airport, you see. Wait a minute. Did I say Sunday? It was Tuesday, September 13, and Wednesday, September 14. It was on Sunday that he spoke in Houston. He didn’t get to St. Louis until

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Tuesday, September 13. We had Senator Symington, congressmen, Mayor Tucker [Raymond R. Tucker], two of the aldermen, the national committeeman, the labor people, the regional director of the AFL-CIO and so on. That was the line-up at the airport and then the Machinists' Convention leadership. Another thing we had to do was to get the Machinists to vote a resolution endorsing Kennedy, you see. So we had three jobs to work on: fill the auditorium, get the Missouri political leadership to show up for the candidate in St. Louis, and get the Machinists to pass a resolution to support Kennedy for president. We succeeded in all three.

The most dramatic thing of this particular event on September 13 was the airport reception. On Monday, September 12, I was attending a meeting of the Democratic state central committee in Jefferson City, the capital, and I persuaded Mark Halloran [Mark R. Halloran], the national committeeman, to drive me back to St. Louis Tuesday afternoon because I had some tasks that I had to look after at the airport that had been assigned to me by the advance man who was actually in charge of the actual visit and all. But he depended on me to do a number of things. Mr.

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Halloran, who is a prominent Catholic layman, was very scared of the religious issue, He was very pessimistic. Mayor Tucker rode with us, too. I'll never forget that ride. We drove in from Johnson City, and we veered off toward Lambert Field, the airport, about, I would say, 6 o'clock in the evening – we expected to get our supper at the airport. We got within about ten miles of Lambert Field at about 6 o'clock, and the traffic was blocked. Halloran is one of these types that has... He's an honorary member of every police force, and he has a big Cadillac. He finally hailed down a state highway patrolman who recognized him. He said, "What's going on here?" "I don't know," he said, "but Kennedy is coming into the airport, and there's a big crowd collecting." So Mayor Tucker perked up a little bit. He wasn't even going to come to the airport. We spent an hour trying to persuade him to go down with the reception committee. So the state highway patrolman said, "Well, follow me." And we broke out of the line, and we started to slowly make our way up to the airport. You could just see the thousands of cars moving toward the airport. Well, this made a terrific impression on people. I was

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getting more worried every minute because we hadn't arranged for very complex police protection at all. We had arranged for twelve policemen from St. Louis to be there to accompany the motorcade into the city of St. Louis. The airport is in the county which has eighty-nine separate municipal jurisdictions. We had arranged for the county sheriff to have his patrol at the airport and then there were the airport police. But all in all I don't think we had more than twenty-two officers alerted to handle the crowds at the airport. Then we had all the regular paraphernalia that the Kennedys had planned by then. You know, we had the Kennedy girls and things like that. I had to assign the Young Democrats the responsibility of organizing one hundred Kennedy girls. They had shipped in the hats and the sashes and so

on. My first realization of the pandemonium was when I walked into the main terminal building. I jumped out of the car about a half mile and ran up ahead. I walked in, and there was the president of the Young Democrats of St. Louis with one thousand screaming girls occupying one whole end of the terminal. [Laughter] They'd showed up to be Kennedy girls. So we divided up the sashes and divided up the hats so we had

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at least two hundred with some symbol on. Well, it was really a very highly organized riot. They figured there were about twenty-five thousand people there, and none of the reception committee ever got to meet Kennedy. Bob O'Hare and myself and Symington – I must say he was the pro there – we managed to get down and get Symington on to the plane. Kennedy was to make a speech there, and we got a hold of one of those unloading ramps and got a microphone on it connected to the loud speaker system. Symington, finally after thirty minutes waiting inside the plane to get the crowd cleared, escorted Kennedy from the plane to this ramp. I was up there holding the microphone and he pushed him up. He didn't even try to come up himself. He was supposed to introduce Kennedy, but he couldn't get up to the ramp because of the crowd. So Kennedy just started speaking without any introduction. Well, it was the most tumultuous reception he had received so far in the campaign and got very good press coverage. It really set the campaign off at a great rate.

Then he went in to the hotel that night....

MORRISSEY: Was Mayor Tucker properly impressed?

DES MARAIS: Yes, he was. His wife [Mary Tucker] was, particularly. But I never saw Mayor Tucker that night. I guess he showed up in the Park

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Plaza Hotel later on that night at the suite and paid his respects, him and his wife. But he was impressed.

Then the next morning Kennedy appeared at the auditorium. The labor people had lined up the crowd. Del Garst [Delmond Garst], who was the regional director of the AFL-CIO, had the idea of getting the schools to permit high school age kids to attend the rally if they wanted to – attend the meeting. We had negotiations. We got the parochial school board, the Lutheran school board, and the public school board all to announce that the high school children could attend both meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday to hear Kennedy and Nixon. So we filled that auditorium at 9 o'clock in the morning. He made a very good speech, and he got a tremendous reception. They didn't even wait for Nixon to arrive. They passed a resolution that afternoon endorsing Kennedy for president.

That was really not a Missouri meeting. It was a union meeting. But the most important effect in Missouri from that appearance was that it impressed the St. Louis *Post Dispatch*. I've been told by all the analysts in Missouri that the *Post Dispatch* endorsement was worth fifty thousand votes which he otherwise wouldn't get. So

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this is one of the few things that I told Kennedy.

MORRISSEY: In more than one state?

DES MARAIS: Well, it was worth fifty thousand votes in Missouri, and that's all I was concerned about. But it was worth votes in Illinois, too, southern Illinois. He said, "Well, you work on that now. This is something very important, and I want you to talk to me personally or only Bobby on this matter. This is something I am going to handle personally. I want you to tell me when is the proper time for me to call up Joe Pulitzer [Joseph Pulitzer] and ask him for his support. I'm going to do that myself. Now you tell me when to do it." I was very impressed that he would do it this way. That's exactly what happened. It was his next trip on October 2 that I arranged for him to meet with Joe and Mike Pulitzer [Michael E. Pulitzer] after the fund raising dinner in the Chase Hotel.

That was an interesting little event because Ted Sorensen and I and Bob O'Hare got Kennedy out of the dinner. Truman [Harry S. Truman] was there, and it was a huge affair and all this. We got him out of the ballroom. Pulitzer had a suite up on the fourth floor and Marquis Childs [Marquis W. Childs] was there. They brought him in from Washington. Ted Sorensen went ahead being a good friend of Marquis Childs, and Bob

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O'Hare and Kennedy and I went up in the elevator and got stuck. That gave Jack a chance to have a nice visit. He asked me how I was getting along, and did I like doing this, and how was it that I was willing to leave my family and come up to do this. He asked a lot of personal things which was interesting. He didn't ask me for any political information at that point at all. Then Sorensen met us when we finally got off on the fourth floor and escorted us down to the suite. He fully expected to go in with Jack I could see. He just said, "You fellows wait here," opened the door and went in and slammed the door. He was in there for two hours; so we had to wait there for two hours. He came out smiling. I said, "Was it a good meeting?" He said, "I think we did all right. Come on, let's have a drink." So we went back up to the suite. There were a lot of people up there by the end of the night and I didn't see him any more that evening. But really the high point of that visit was the meeting with the Pulitzers. It was about a week later that they came out and endorsed Kennedy. He went in all by himself; that impressed me. This is something that he had decided he was going to do, and that was it. There had been rumors and rumblings among the liberal cog-

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noscente, you know, that Kennedy really wasn't his own man in many instances, that Ted Sorensen formulated his thoughts and wrote everything and so on. But I saw many instances – well, half a dozen in my limited contacts with him – where he was completely on his own,

where he decided what was to be said and said it and nobody else had anything to say about it. This was a good example of that.

MORRISSEY: Offhand, could you give another example or two?

DES MARAIS: Well, his impromptu speeches. On his October 22 visit he had.... That was the other highlight of the Missouri campaign – his October 22 visit – which was somewhat of a repetition in a way, only in Missouri style, of that Louisiana trip that I described – tremendous crowds unprecedented in the history of the state. He made seven speeches during the day. He had both Ted Sorensen and Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] along as chief speech writers. They kept me up all night mimeographing their drafts, you know, for every little point in the trip and everything that he was going to say, and he didn't use a damn one of them. He gave the most marvelous speeches, and they were all extemporaneous, and they were all fitted to the situation. He would ask a few people around who were there as he

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arrived, “Well, now, should I say this or should I say that or something like this or that?” He would consult with Truman or Symington, or O’Hare or myself or Mark Halloran or the AFL-CIO people in the plane between stops on this day-long tour which started at 6 in the morning and ended at midnight. Or he would consult some of the press people. And I was just impressed with the fact that Dick Goodwin and Sorensen worked like dogs. It was good stuff that they turned out, but he didn't use any of it. It must have been very discouraging. As a matter of fact that night of the 22, when we arrived at the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City at 7 p.m., Ted Sorensen took me aside and he said, “Phil, can you get me a car to take me back to the airport? I'm exhausted, and there's no goddamn reason for me hanging around here anymore. I'm going back to the plane and go to sleep.” So I got him a car and got someone to take him and Dick Goodwin back to the plane.

But anyway, let me just mention a couple of the interesting things about that visit. First of all, we had decided that he would not visit St. Louis at all. He would concentrate on St. Louis County which had the same number of registered votes as the city – approximately 330,000.

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St. Louis County had never gone Democratic, but apparently some polling that the Kennedys had done, which I never saw the results of, indicated to them that they had a good chance of carrying the county. So it was decided that they would concentrate on the county. Now this did not please Senator Symington or Mr. Dwyer, the party leader, who thought he should go to the city. But they had decided this, so we painstakingly organized a fourteen mile motorcade across St. Louis County, south to north, into that Northbrook shopping center. It started with a breakfast at the motel where they were lodged, having arrived late the night before, at 6:30. There was a breakfast meeting with the county political leaders. Then they got into this motorcade of open cars. We had two busloads of correspondents. I still have the

telegram giving the names of all the people that were there to get hotel reservations. I rode in the first correspondents bus with, I think it was, Bob Novak [Robert D. Novak] who now, you know, has that column. Well, it was tremendous because all along this route through St. Louis County, which is one of the richest counties in the United States and the most beautiful and prosperous with all these residential areas, you had tremendous turnout. Whole families came out –

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mothers and fathers and all the children and the grandmother and everybody. The entire fourteen mile route was lined with people. Then when we arrived at Northbrook shopping center, he debarked from the car and made a speech. There were sixty thousand people there which was just unbelievable. Nobody could ever imagine anything like this. This is Symington's home county, and he accompanied him along the way. I know to him it was a devastating experience, you know, to see this stranger come to his county and receive this reception which probably they will never see the likes of again in Missouri.

Then we got on a plane and went from there all the way across the state to Joplin. We had planned to go to the Missouri-Iowa football game in Columbia early in the afternoon, but we found forty-eight hours before that the planes couldn't land there at the airport. The airport couldn't take them. So they went all the way across the state to Joplin, Missouri, which he never carried. They had a capacity crowd there at the airport.

Then we went from there to Wichita, Kansas, where he had a capacity crowd at the ball park. Then from there we went back to Independence, Missouri, where we landed at the Air Force base and went in a cavalcade in the twilight

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to downtown Kansas City. There was a buffet supper for the press and Kennedy in the Muehlebach Hotel.

We drove into Kansas City – of course, I had been making advance preparations for all these things – in the dusk. It was a beautiful fall evening. There was a big crowd all along the way. When we got downtown to the Muehlebach.... There's a big square behind the hotel, and the Muehlebach is on one side and the auditorium is on another side – that whole square was filled. We had an awful time getting him into the hotel. He was to speak at 8:30. So I went up with the correspondents. I was riding in their bus trying to interpret some of the things that were happening and where we were along the way. Oh, I remember. I was with William S., Bill, Lawrence [William H. Lawrence] who was then with the *New York Times* – he's now with ABC – and a very sarcastic, cynical guy. Somebody had said, "Keep with him. He's so critical, and we don't have time to look after him." So I stuck with him, and I saw that he got a plate of food and a couple of drinks and so on. Then I said, "Now we'll go over to the auditorium." I led a whole trail of about fifteen press people across the plaza to the auditorium, and we couldn't get in. The firemen were there, "Filled. Closed."

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Well, they were furious. “This is outrageous. We’re the press.” “Well, we can’t let you in, sir. It’s a fire law.” Well, we finally went around the back and somebody in this Kansas City committee who was at the entrance where Kennedy was going to come in recognized me and I got them in. I will never forget that. We came in under the stage because we came in through the stage door in the back and through the orchestra pit and out the orchestra pit to where they had the press tables set up in front of the stage. Well, that place was just a complete din. You couldn’t hear anything, they were screaming so loud. Nothing was happening. I have never seen such an enthusiastic crowd in terms of noise in my life. Many other crowds were larger, but this was by far the most enthusiastic crowd I ever saw in an auditorium during the campaign in the decibels of noise. Those people were just so excited. We had a terrific military band from the military academy that we’d hired to play martial music, and they were very good. But we had to wait about a half an hour. Harry Truman was to introduce Kennedy.

So, finally, Mr. Truman arrived on the stage with Symington before Kennedy arrived. Truman got a nice handclap, but then they started to chant, “We want

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Kennedy.” Truman had to sit there and take it for twenty minutes after all he’d said about Kennedy before the Convention, but he was very nice about it. So he got up and he tried to introduce Kennedy but they just screamed and yelled. This was his home town. [Laughter] So finally Kennedy stood up and he silenced the crowd so Truman could finish the introduction. He gave a marvelous off-the-cuff speech slashing at the Republicans. Well that was really the climax of the campaign in Missouri – October 22. There were two weeks left to go, but, of course, we were terribly optimistic after that night you see.

MORRISSEY: Were the local pros as optimistic?

DES MARAIS: No. We then started to circulate these confidential survey sheets which we’d been asked to give to the pros to fill out. The reports came in. I still have them all here. I was to digest them and send them on to Washington. Several of them, including the national committeeman, said that the religious issue was very critical. It’s very difficult, therefore, to get an accurate assessment of the sentiment at this late date. I asked various people to make predictions – the state chairman, the national committeeman, the governor,

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Dalton, Dwyer, and so on – as to how Kennedy would carry either statewide or countywide and so on. The only man in Missouri who came close to predicting the accurate vote was the national committeeman, Mark Halloran, himself a Roman Catholic. His brother is the president of St. Louis University, a Jesuit institution. He said, “I think it will be twelve thousand, if we’re lucky.” And it was about ninety-nine hundred you see. And John English, the state chairman, predicted that Kennedy would carry the state by a hundred thousand. Most of the predictions ranged between fifty and a hundred thousand. I reported all of these

dutifully to Larry O'Brien. It was simply, "This is what people predicted." The Pulitzers reported that they figured that he would carry by fifty thousand – their votes you see. But there were some hopeful signs. The Negro leadership that I checked said that Kennedy would carry the Negro vote by at least three to one. It was twelve to one. He carried St. Louis city by a margin of a hundred thousand votes. He carried St. Louis County by a margin of ten thousand votes. He got the Negro vote twelve to one. Those were the three factors that carried the state for him. When you factor those together in some way, you end up with the... And Nixon carried ninety-one counties –

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ninety-one of ninety-seven counties. He carried the Kansas City County by approximately twenty thousand votes only.

MORRISSEY: Was this Kennedy?

DES MARAIS: Kennedy. So it was very close, but he did it himself. He didn't get much help from the state ticket at all. He got very little significant help from Senator Symington who was on the ballot and who had his own separate campaign committee, his own fundraising organization and did very little really to contribute to the.... As far as I know, Senator Symington never made a single major speech for Kennedy for president.

MORRISSEY: Did his people steer clear of you?

DES MARAIS: No. His administrative assistant, Stanley Fike [Stanley R. Fike] gave me every possible assistance. He gave me a lot of valuable information, took me on many tours of the state, and introduced me to dozens of political leaders. Stanley was a former newspaperman, and he introduced me to a lot of newspaper people, too. But, you know, it was an interesting situation. I think maybe Symington figured that there was maybe nothing he could do about it. But Kennedy had to do that on his own. I would said he only got about 65 or 68 percent of the Catholic vote in Missouri,

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much of which is traditionally Republican. He had a very good labor organization; he had a good volunteer organization; and he had three very carefully planned campaign visits to the state which attracted maximum press, TV crowd coverage and contact with key political leaders. This is what did it. It had to be very carefully worked out by he and his staff because he couldn't depend upon – other than the organization in the city of St. Louis – any traditional Democratic organization in the state.

MORRISSEY: How much effort did you devote to getting out the vote in those Negro wards?

DES MARAIS: Well, I personally met with all the Negro leaders at one time or another. I had to make a judgment as to which ones were reliable – some of them weren't – in terms of their ability to evaluate and in their sincerity and in telling the truth. But I talked to so many who told me that we didn't have to worry, that Kennedy was going to get the Negro vote, that all we needed to do was to get them registered and keep them stirred up. One of the things we did was to arrange for Eleanor Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] to visit St. Louis City the week before election day and to address a major rally in the Negro area of the city. All the Negro leadership turned out for this, and this

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was a good spark to ignite their enthusiasm. We got good cooperation from the ward leaders to see that the Negro voters got registered. They hired buses and took them to the polls for registration and on election day. I pretty much depended on the St. Louis city organization plus the United Automobile Workers to get the Negro vote registered and to get it out. Roy Reuther came in and checked the registration drive that had been going on there. There was no doubt in my mind that Kennedy had tremendous appeal to the Negroes, and this was getting through through television. Adam Clayton Powell [Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.] came to St. Louis and held a meeting in a Baptist church. I remember he sent in a day before his arrival a photostatic copy of the deed of trust for Nixon's house in Spring Valley. We had to have this blown up. He had this on a chart on the stage. I've forgotten the exact phraseology, but he had it all lined in red. There was a line in there about the restrictive covenant on Nixon's property. He built up to this. Then he'd have that thing opened, and he'd say, "There it is." [Laughter] And he had all the Negro ministers of St. Louis there. "Any man in this audience who would vote for *that*, you don't deserve to wear the cloth you've got on." And he stalked off the stage, you

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know. [Laughter] Well, that convinced them.

MORRISSEY: Sounds like a great show.

DES MARAIS: Oh, it was brutal. [Laughter]

MORRISSEY: Had you made any precautions about absentee ballots in Missouri?

DES MARAIS: We didn't probably do as much absentee ballot work as we might have done. Some was done, but that was probably one of the places where we didn't do as much work as we might have. I think the major issue in Missouri was without a doubt the religious issue. Oh, we did many things to counteract this. I arranged for him to meet, for Senator Kennedy to meet.... I just picked this up today from my file. Hotel Muehlebach – 9 a.m., October 27 – Doctor “__” Behnken [John W.

Behnken] to meet Kennedy at Park Plaza.” Doctor Behnken is the president of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. You know we did all kinds of little things like this to try to get to the top leadership of the Protestants.

MORRISSEY: What was the outgrowth of that meeting?

DES MARAIS: Well, many Protestant ministers preached sermons calling on people to eschew religious prejudices and vote for the man and religion wasn’t an issue, but as many did the opposite. So it sort of cancelled itself out.

I think

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there was a maximum impact over the religious issue in Missouri in terms of losing votes for Kennedy for a number of reasons that I’m not qualified to give. You had a combination of circumstances there – the combination of the large German Lutheran group which had two strikes against Kennedy. They were mostly Republicans to begin with, and then they were Protestants who couldn’t conceive of a Catholic being president. Then you had the interesting other factor of the large wealthy, upper middle class Catholic group that looked upon Kennedy as a lukewarm Catholic. About the only personal campaigning that I did myself.... My name only appeared in the paper once in the three months and that was in St. Joe [St. Joseph], Missouri. I gave an interview there simply the mayor asked me to and I couldn’t turn him down. That’s the only time my name ever appeared in the paper in the whole three months. But I did quite a bit of speaking in the St. Louis area at private gatherings primarily of Catholic college – St. Louis University – graduates who wanted to be convinced that they should vote for Kennedy for president. They were all Republicans. It was an interesting situation you see. You had a strong, Republican,

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conservative Catholic element. You had a strong Republican, conservative Protestant element. He had a lot of strikes against him there.

MORRISSEY: When you talked about going out there with Steve Smith and Bobby Kennedy, had they anticipated that this religious issue would cut that deeply in Missouri?

DES MARAIS: I don’t really think they’d given it too much thought. Steve Smith, of course, would never discuss such matters. Bob Kennedy’s only advice to me was, “I want you to visit every one of the ninety-six counties.”

MORRISSEY: Did you?

DES MARAIS: No, I didn’t. [Laughter] That would have been a waste of time.

MORRISSEY: Yes.

DES MARAIS: I visited probably about twenty counties, maybe twenty-five. To my way of thinking, it wouldn't have done a damn bit of good to go to a lot of those other counties. If Kennedy could have gone to some of them, it would have done some good. I think we would have increased our vote by twenty-five to thirty thousand if he could have made that appearance at the Missouri-Iowa football game with sixty thousand people in the audience. Every radio station in the state is hooked up to that, and they were going to put him speaking on the field at halftime. That was our greatest

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tactical miss – that we couldn't put that across. And the university was willing to cooperate. Forty-five radio stations hooked in to that, everybody in the state listening and sixty thousand people there – right in the heart of the state, you see. But instead they went to Joplin. I'll never know why.

MORRISSEY: I was wondering if there were some areas that you thought you could write off, like Springfield.

DES MARAIS: Well, he did pretty well in Springfield. LBJ came to Springfield and had a good meeting there. But if they did decide to write off Columbia, Missouri, and Jefferson City, they made a mistake. I don't know whether they did or not. It was on the schedule until we discovered that the four-engine planes couldn't land there, and by that time, October 22, they had such an enormous entourage they had to have two of these big – what do you call them; they're still using them – four-engine....

MORRISSEY: DC 6?

DES MARAIS: DC 6, I guess. So that I think.... Kennedy was his own best vote getter. We used to say it started the chemistry working when he came around. The fact that he didn't get into central Missouri, I think, cut down on our vote there because we had a good little organization

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working there. There were a lot of students and faculty at the university, and we had a good county chairman there who worked hard, and he had a good headquarters set up and lots of literature distributed. They were so anxious to have him come in there, but we didn't. I think that was a factor too.

Then, on election night, of course, we were hooked in to Hyannis Port, and the vote kept going down and down and down. Tom Eagleton [Thomas F. Eagleton], who was elected the new attorney general and he was an ardent Kennedy supporter, had his people all over the

state checking the ballot boxes and he assured me that Kennedy wouldn't lose the state. [Laughter] So I went on his assurance. He called up all the sheriffs, and I don't know what went on but that's what happened. So finally we held it.

MORRISSEY: Did you get any calls from Hyannis Port that night?

DES MARAIS: Oh, about every twenty minutes. After the election, of course, we came to the Inauguration, and it was a wonderful affair. I only had two really good talks with Kennedy after he was elected president. One was in March of '61. Camille Gravel and Judge Reggie came to Washington to consult with John Bailey and Ralph Dungan on some patronage matters, and they called me up and said,

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“We're going over to see Ralph Dungan at 5 o'clock. Do you want to come along? We'd like you to come.” So we went in and visited with Ralph and Larry O'Brien and Mr. Bailey in Dungan's office. Suddenly President Kennedy walked in. He said, “Well, there's the Louisiana gang. Come into my office.” So we all went in there, and we spent about two hours. During the course of the conversation, Kennedy said, “Well, how am I doing, Camille?” He said, “Well, you're doing great, Mr. President. The only thing is this Federal Aid to Education Bill of yours. You left out the parochial schools.” Gravel is the attorney for the diocese of Louisiana, various Catholic bishops. He said, “Bishop Greco [Charles P. Greco] told me when I was leaving yesterday, ‘Tell the President he's not going to get that Federal Aid to Education Bill through ignoring parochial schools the way it does.’” So, Camille just spoke up like that. Kennedy looked a bit startled. He stopped smiling. He said, “Well, my god, Camille. Here I am, the first Catholic president. I cannot come out for federal aid for parochial schools. You know that as well as I do.” He said, “Well, okay, but you're not going to get your bill through.” Of

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course, it never did go through. So that was the one visit. It was really just reminiscing.

Then the other occasion was a caucus was had in the White House. It was several – two or three, you know – meetings on legislative matters, and I sat in. It was nothing particularly personal. I went over with Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff] and Wilbur Cohen [Wilbur Joseph Cohen] and Commissioner McMurrin [Sterling M. McMurrin] – usually on educational legislation. It was always interesting – usually on the parochial school legislation. We wrestled with that and wrestled with that and tried to work out compromises. I must say that neither the President or Ted Sorensen ever came up with anything very imaginative in that area. I mean, I think they were hemmed in by what they considered to be unavoidable restrictions on their freedom of maneuver in that area. So it was very frustrating and that was really the... Ribicoff said that was his greatest disappointment as Kennedy's secretary of HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] – that he was not able to get the elementary and secondary education bill through because of the religious issue.

So that is where I must stop.

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MORRISSEY: Maybe you'll answer one final question. How did your job at HEW develop?

DES MARAIS: I got a letter a week before the elections from Ralph Dungan – I have it here somewhere. I just found it today – saying, “If you'd be interested in coming to Washington after the election, I think we'd like to have you work somewhere in the Administration. Please let me know.” So I fired off a telegram to him saying that I'd be interested. At the Inaugural Ball at the armory I remember that Dungan, whom I've known for many years, was introducing me to Archibald Cox and his wife [Phyllis A. Cox]. Dungan was a good friend of Archibald Cox because they'd worked together on the labor bill. After that he said to Cox. “Well, Phil is going to have a good job too, probably in HEW.” I didn't know about it. He said, “Can you stay on?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well, come around and see me in a couple of days.” Then we discussed several possibilities, and then he sent me over to Ribicoff and that was it.

MORRISSEY: What were you teaching in New Orleans?

DES MARAIS: Well, I had the title of executive vice president of this college, St. Mary's Dominican College, but I taught one course in political parties. I was primarily an administrator.

[-83-]

MORRISSEY: Let me go back to that discussion you had with Marshall Field and others on the site of the Convention. Did anyone mention that Chicago might not be a good city because obviously it was in Illinois and Adlai Stevenson, if he made a bid, might have an added advantage?

DES MARAIS: No, that did not come up. As a matter of fact, as I recall, Senator Kennedy felt that Chicago would be much better for him. This was very obvious. I have since checked that with Mr. Gravel, and many times we've discussed this and gone over and over again the problems that came up with.... I've always kidded Gravel and Paul Butler about going to Los Angeles and seeing what happened there with the Stevenson demonstrations and so on. I think that, as far as I know, Kennedy always preferred Chicago. I myself preferred Chicago.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-85-]

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