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Creator: Dennis J. Roberts

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Biographical Note

Roberts was the Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, from 1941 through 1951, and the Governor of Rhode Island from 1951 until 1959. In this interview Roberts discusses working with John F. Kennedy [JFK] on New England issues when he was a congressman and a senator; JFK and the American textile industry; JFK and other New England governors; the significance of New England solidarity at national political conventions; Adlai E. Stevenson and the 1956 Democratic National Convention; JFK's bid for the vice-presidential nomination at the 1956 Convention and arguments against him; Stevenson's reaction to JFK as a vice-presidential possibility; contact with JFK and his staff after 1956; dealing with the religious issue when gathering support for JFK; meeting at Hyannis Port in October 1959; JFK's 1960 presidential campaign; the 1960 Democratic National Convention; JFK's reception in Rhode Island; interactions with President JFK and working with his Administration; and JFK's political legacy, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Dennis J. Roberts

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Oral History Interview

with

DENNIS ROBERTS

Providence, Rhode Island

December 1, 1966

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Governor Roberts, let me first ask you, when did you first meet John Kennedy? Do you remember the circumstances, and do you recall what your impressions were at the time of him?

ROBERTS: Well, my first recollection of meeting John Kennedy was when he was ^{a member of} in the House of Representatives and I was mayor of Providence. He came to Rhode Island to speak at some of our dinners, dinners similar to the Democratic State Dinner or Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, --

dinners that had a political significance. He was then serving his first term in the House. Naturally, like everyone who had the opportunity of meeting the late President, you were impressed by his youthful appearance, his good intellect, and his very warm and real personality.

STEWART: Did the fact that he was the son of Ambassador [Joseph P., Sr.] Kennedy, ~~did this~~ have an influence on his being invited to speak at these various occasions?

ROBERTS: Well, I think it was one motive or factor for inviting him, that his father had been the Ambassador and his father was active in the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt Administration. He was Chairman of the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] at that time, and of course they were closely identified with Massachusetts and with Boston. We are neighbors so that you

know by reputation and you have the opportunity of meeting. I met his father on several occasions during this period when he came to Rhode Island either to speak or in his official capacities and so forth.

STEWART: When did you first become aware of his ambitions statewide, I assume shortly before he ran for the Senate in 1952. Were you at all involved in that?

ROBERTS: No, I was not involved in his senatorial campaign in Massachusetts. This wouldn't be a . . .

STEWART: No, no. Then you had known Ambassador Kennedy at least . . .

ROBERTS: Well, I would say at least a half a dozen years before I first met John Kennedy.

STEWART: During the time that President Kennedy was in the Congress, do you recall some of the contacts you had either with him personally or with his office on common New England problems?

ROBERTS: As I recall, the first contact I had with Senator Kennedy in his capacity as a member of the United States Senate. . . . This contact came about by reason of fact of the New England Governors Conference, which is composed of the six New England governors. At that time I think I was chairman of the Conference. We had economic problems, textile industry, rubber, unemployment, attraction of new industry into New England. Senator Kennedy, somewhere in this time, had made a very exhaustive study of the economy of Massachusetts, and in this study he had taken in, naturally, the area economy, New England, and both southern and northern New England. It was a very well done study, it was very informative and something that we as governors of New England were attracted to. Between the problems that we had ascertained through analysis of our

own jurisdictions in New England, the six governors came up with a series of solutions or proposed solutions. This resulted in ⁶ meetings with the New England Congressional delegation, composed of House and Senate members, in Washington for an exchange of ideas. And the New England Governors Conference had Seymour^u Harris, who was ⁷ the head of the Department of Economics over at Harvard, as our advisor in this economic area, particularly in textiles and tariffs was a great issue. He was very friendly with John Kennedy and the Ambassador ^{had} he'd ⁸ been an advisor in the economic area to them ⁹ and he was a great friend of mine. So we had several meetings, formally and informally, in Washington with the New England Senators and particularly with our Senator [John O.] Pastore and ¹⁰ the then Senator [Theodore F.]

Green and Senator Kennedy. During these conferences the problems were discussed, *and* *in* whatever ability we had to propose solutions which were very difficult to these economic problems were brought to the table and John Kennedy always had the initiative and the vitality and the intellect to grasp them and to suggest action. This is, I think, perhaps occasions where I had an opportunity in observing his personality and his character very closely and, *naturally*, *I* was very much impressed. I always had a very great high personal affection for him, and I think there was a mutual response to this.

STEWART: Would you say that this was really the first effort by a coordinated group of New England Congressmen to look at the New England economy as a whole as opposed to looking at the economies of the individual states?

ROBERTS: It's my opinion -- I may be wrong, but it's my opinion -- that this was the first time a conference of the entire New England delegation of both parties, and also the Governors Conference which is split down the middle, two Democrats and four Republicans, had given attention to the economic problem on a regional basis. Because what affected the eastern part of Massachusetts affects Rhode Island,[^] what affects the south[^]eastern part of Connecticut affects Rhode Island,[^] and this pertains to the states. We were coming to realize that the northern states were assuming a greater industrial character than they had in the past. And, of course, unemployment was high_^ and the economy of the area was rather dismal. So it needed leadership and it needed attention. The area needed the attention of Washington. John

Kennedy, in my opinion, sparked this.

Perhaps the other Senators wouldn't agree with me, but he made the basic study. He had Seymour^u Harris and some of these economists . . .

STEWART: [Theodore C.] Sorensen had done quite a bit of work on that, hadn't he?

ROBERTS: I can't recall Sorensen at this time, but he was in Kennedy's office and he most likely had his hand in it. It was a very good study in depth and a study that you could easily handle and ^{start} stop to ask for some results from it. And as a result of this, I think that attention was focused on. I remember we had quite a bit of concern with the tariff situation, textiles were a big problem here, and being a simple industry, the Japanese had picked it up and they were sending back into the United States competitive goods that were giving us a bad time. They were also competitive in the

rubber^s and they were competitive in ^{the} jewelry,
and they were competitive in most of the
stuff that is produced ^{or} and manufactured in
New England. This was, naturally, it was a
problem that had greater extension than
we, as New England governors, wanted to
consider or perhaps were concerned with.
We had a selfish interest of doing something
for our jurisdictions, our states here in
New England, and we weren't too much concerned
about the relationship between Japan and the
United States. But the members of Congress
have^d this further responsibility, they have^d
the overall national interests, and John Kennedy,
who was very profound in this, I think, with his
usual ability was able to balance the equities
and maybe curtail our selfish drive^s to cut out
anything that affected the New England economy.
We had meetings with the Tariff Commission, we

had meetings ~~with~~ through the Congressional group with the President at that time. It took an awful lot of drive on the part of the Congressional delegation and again, I think John Kennedy was one of the motivating forces in it to get some attention from the Tariff Commission, and to get some attention from the President. Because helping the domestic economy in this area was posing great problems for the State Department and for our relationship with Japan. If you recall at this time we wanted to put Japan back on its feet. What was the slogan, "Buy, not aid. We don't want aid, we want you to purchase. We want an economy." This ^{was} is the concept of what they were expressing. During this period I had quite a bit of access to John Kennedy and association with him on this problem. He came to Rhode Island many times at my request

for meetings, and also for political meetings. He really did quite a bit, he did everything he could for me in the political area.

STEWART: It's been said that his attitude about the textile industry, particularly in relation to the textile industry here in New England and in the South, changed over the years, and that he came to believe it really wasn't as significant as a lot of people had thought in holding the industry here and in keeping the textile industry ^{thriving} private. Did you find any of that, or did you ^{see any change in his attitude.}

ROBERTS: Well, I think we were in agreement in our analysis and appreciation of the significance of the textile industry in New England. If you will recall, at that time anybody that held public office, the criticism directed against you was, "You're losing industry" and the industry we were losing was the textile industry.

At that time, I think, in manufacturing employees and manufacturing in Rhode Island, which we are a highly industrial state, and therefore a great percentage of our employees are in manufacturing, ^{-- but} ~~so~~ some ⁴² ~~forty-two~~ percent of the manufacturing employees in Rhode Island were in the textile industry, and another ¹⁶ ~~sixteen~~ or ¹⁷ ~~seventeen~~ percent were in the jewelry industry. Now both of these are low ^e wage industries, they're highly competitive, they're seasonal, and they're by no means an asset for the basic strength of an economy. At that time the drive was to keep them. This is why we made the great effort to get tariff concessions and to use tariff to help the industry and so forth. ^f The industry was going South where there was cheap labor, not organized, where they could go into a rural area and get a plant

built for them and practically set up a little bit of a village, which ^{was} ~~is~~ typical of the textile industry. This is its history. Being a simple industry the people down there could be trained to operate the looms and go through the textile process without too much trouble. It occurred ^r to many of us -- and this was something that took a little bit of courage to say publicly -- that perhaps we'd be better off without the textile industry. Now, the minute you made this statement publicly, you had the people who had money invested in it, the bankers and the people who were in it, screaming, "You have no interest now in dear little old New England." But I think it was just typical of John Kennedy's vision. We would be better off with more substantial industry, units of industry that paid higher wages, that had a

twelve months employment history, that wouldn't require the textile as a public health drain. It's a problem. We couldn't hold the industry anyway because we couldn't compete wage-wise. So it was better off to have a gradual removal of the textile industry out of Rhode Island in my opinion, and I think John Kennedy held the same opinion about the southern New England, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island, and so expressed it. Our efforts then were to get other segments of industry back into Rhode Island ^{or} and into southern New England. Electronics was a big movement at that time. See, most of the eastern and southern Massachusetts textile area and the shoe area, and Rhode Island and some of Connecticut ^{is} has a -- the asset that we have economically is skilled personⁿnel, good labor market. We're a high power cost area, and we're off the beaten

path of transportation and markets, so we have to be competitive. Our best performance is in assembling; this would be radio and television, electronic devices, and so forth. We have a high percentage of female personnelⁿ in our labor market. These all added up that you ought to ^{start} stop to think of things other than the textile industry.

STEWART: From your personal discussions with President Kennedy, do you feel he understood the intricacies of the New England economy, or did you ever feel that he hadn't thoroughly done his homework^e as far as knowing exactly what the problems were?

ROBERTS: Well, it's my best recollection that he was profound in his knowledge of the basic economy of the New England area. He knew it, he knew its vulnerabilities, and he had the drive and the youth and the intelligence and the courage

to go ahead and ^{to} start to do things about it.

STEWART: Then there were no significant differences between either you or the other governors and he in ^{the} how you ^{to} approached these problems?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, no no. Some of the New England governors. . . . We also advocated -- we have a power problem in New England, particularly here in Rhode Island. Our power costs are the highest in the United States of America, and this pertains to Fall River, New Bedford, and the Attle boros, this section of Massachusetts where John Kennedy was very much concerned and was very well liked, and received strong votes from this area. Now in order to get to the power costs ^{we} we had to start to think of how ~~are~~ ^{we} you going to get it down here, how ~~are~~ ^{we} you going to get it more cheap. This sets up the northern New England

states. The governors there didn't want this power thing ^{to} raise ^d because this means you're going to convert pasture into hydroelectric areas, and this got an awful lot of resistance. Then the utility companies were dragging their feet. They didn't want to be disrupted, or they didn't want any impact on them; they had a good thing going. We also -- and this was John Kennedy -- advocated a crash program in developing atomic energy so that you could manufacture power and compete commercially with it or compete industrial-wise with it. He was very active in this; [^] he was very active in the development of water power; [^] he was very active in the development of the national resources through ~~f~~ New England, right from the Canadian border down into Long Island Sound. He, in my opinion -- I was very much interested in this and had maybe had some time

put on it before John Kennedy went to the Senate. This was our problem when I was mayor of Providence, from 1940 to 1950.

He was the one that you could get some spark out of and get some drive out of. My experience in talking to a congressional committee,

that they're most attentive, and they really give ^{you} a good listening ^{deals} to you, but very little ever comes out of it unless somebody takes

ahold of it. Because these are problems, ^{and} a man in a legislative capacity many times doesn't want to start to push into the administrative side of government, ^{and} to start to get the things that are necessary to alleviate and these conditions/to solve some of the problems.

STEWART: Did his stand on the St. Lawrence Seaway, ^{does} ~~did~~ that affect ^{Providence or} harbors in Rhode Island at all?

ROBERTS: It didn't affect Rhode Island.

STEWART: Primarily just the ports ^{of Boston} ~~of~~

ROBERTS:

We have a ^{good} (big) port down here, but we're between Boston and New York so nobody uses it. That's just a fact of history and geography that you've got to be reconciled to. But John Kennedy made a -- I think he made the right decision. The development of the St. Lawrence Seaway was going to enhance the economy, going to strengthen the economy of the area. What helps New England helps Rhode Island, helps Massachusetts. Now, he got a lot of resistance out of Boston on this because Boston felt that it would be a competitive situation with their port, which I don't think it would. The St. Lawrence Seaway, if you could use that commercially for water borne freight and so forth you're just developing the investment in the entire area. And in this day and age -- we're not back in the 1770's -- what's good and what's strong economically in one area

of the country has a tendency to seep over and help the other areas.

STEWART: Do you recall when you first began to recognize the significance of New England solidarity at national political conventions? It's often been said that the hundred and ~~four~~ some odd votes that New England could generate as a unit certainly had a good deal of significance *beginning* in about 1956.

ROBERTS: Well, I think it gave New England some attention. I first brought it up because I was Chairman of the New England Governor's ^{and} Conference ^{so} we had some exposure to the other states. Many of the governors were Republican, but nevertheless, it was very very strong in front of me that if you could organize it for some efforts to do something in the economy and the social advancement of the area, that if we organized the Democratic delegations from each state

into one block, we would have had a hundred and fourteen votes, and we would have been as important as New York or Texas, California and so forth. In other words, you would have had to be considered in the deliberations. Prior to that -- and I had been going to national conventions since 1932 -- prior to that Rhode Island, with eighteen votes, and Massachusetts with thirty-five or forty, or whatever it is, and Connecticut with twenty-two, you were consulted after the score was counted and the nominations were over. Naturally, because you were scattered and you didn't have any potency. I first broached it to my colleagues, Democratic colleagues, in the New England Governor's Conference, which was Paul Dever. He was enthused about it, and then we got to the Democratic State Chairman and other groups, because I think he and I were the only two

Democrats in the Conference at this time. I think Connecticut had John Lodge, and Maine and New Hampshire; Maine was [^(Frederick Go)] Payne, and New Hampshire, I forget who it was. It was Sherman Adams.

STEWART: Right, but anyway they were all Republican.

ROBERTS: They were Republicans. So we developed this idea, and I, through the phone and correspondence, got ^{to} the other Democratic organizations, and we met in Boston as the guest of Paul Dever at the Engineers Club.

STEWART: This would have been before the . . .

ROBERTS: This was '56. This was in the interest^s of [Adlai] ^{EO} Stevenson. We started this to get some votes for Stevenson out of the New England area. We met there and started to form the organization and, of course, you had the usual political bickering, who was going to be the captain and so forth, typical of the Democratic

Party. We had all chiefs and no Indians. But it was a realistic concept, and it gave some firmness to the New England political significance, and we developed it for Stevenson and delivered the votes. Now, while we were doing this, ^{^ [Francis X.]} Frank Morrissey and [Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy, and I think (Theodore C.) Sorensen or somebody else representing Senator Kennedy, participated in some of these discussions. At that time, I forget who brought it up, but the suggestion was made that if we're going to deliver this to Stevenson, we ought to start to have him deliver something to John Kennedy.

STEWART: Right. But there was no thought of Kennedy in the beginning; it was strictly a Stevenson thing.

ROBERTS: Actually, the first motivation was to get the hundred and fourteen delegates for Stevenson.

Then there was a question whether John Kennedy wanted to participate as a candidate for vice president, and so forth.

STEWART: Do you recall when ~~the~~^{it} first came up, or when it first came to you that he could possibly be the vice presidential nominee in 1956?

ROBERTS: The exact time in these discussions and meetings that we had, mostly in Boston, about organizing the New England delegates for the Convention, just when in this period it came up, I'm not clear.

STEWART: But it was during these meetings?

ROBERTS: But it did come up in these meetings, and when some of the other personalities were being advanced throughout the country as the candidate for vice president, we felt that John Kennedy could have added something. My own personal

feeling^s and I think it was shared by some
of my colleagues[^] I know it was shared by Paul
Dever[^] was that Stevenson was going to run
against perhaps one of the most popular
Presidents vote-wise^s [Dwight D.] Eisenhower,
in the history of the country. Stevenson
had an appeal and, I think, a thrust through-
out the country. But the appeal was more
of an intellectual, sensible, action type
of political leadership. I have^d great
admiration for Stevenson and I^e think he
would have made a great President. Unfortunately^s
he couldn't get elected. I think to compliment^e
the Stevenson personality and his political
leadership and his significance through^t the
country that John Kennedy would have been ideal^e
because he had the intelligence, he had great
political concepts, and he had the ability to
translate it into action. And he had a forth-

rightness and an essential honesty that came forth, that made him very attractive. You talk to most people, and they'll talk about the attractiveness of the late President as his appearance and he was so nice and so forth. What they fail to realize is that John Kennedy had a wholesome appearance, but he had an essence in his being that he could translate by language and action that was substantial, that indicated political leadership, that wasn't just a Madison Avenue figure. There was really a thrust there that comes to people. This is what Bobby and the other boy, [Edward M. Kennedy], Teddy have. But this, in a political arena, in the convention or a deliberative body such as the United States Senate, this, I think, was the great strength and the great asset of John Kennedy. His real intellectual and spirituality that he

could drive these things out that were meaningful. This is very difficult; you find it in very few people.

STEWART: What was the reaction of people you talked to at the 1956 Governor's Conference in Atlantic City to the word that there was some support for Kennedy for Vice President? I understand Governor [Abraham] Ribicoff^{PO} especially₃ was very active₃ and I assume you were at that Conference in trying to get support.

ROBERTS: Well, the reaction you would get -- and this would be a typical reaction -- when a man is being put forth for the top nomination, the presidency and so forth, the vice#presidency is sort of muted. It's something we're going to handle to the advantage of the prime candidate, the candidate for President, and it's supposed to complement^e him politically and every other

way. So that when you started to mention Kennedy, you were mentioning him against four or five others and so forth. The vice~~pres~~ presidency as a political movement at this time doesn't get the magnitude or the depth because it's overshadowed and it's against the main movement, which is the dickering around for the presidential nomination. He had great support in New England, [^] he had great support in some of the northern states; he had some support in New York, [^] he had some support in Pennsylvania, [^] he had support in the Chicago area.

It wasn't that ^{not} they were screaming on the thing, but he did get some support there.

Then we met sometime later on in the Century Club in New York to talk about Stevenson's candidacy. ^{There [David L.]} ~~It~~ was ^{KO} Dave Lawrence, [Thomas] Finletter, ⁻ I think he was the host, ⁻ Dever,

myself, [^{Ao}James] Finnegan, Ribicoff, [Hyman B.]
Hy Raskin, Hale -- Boggs, is it? -- and a
half a dozen others. Of course, this was in
the interest of Stevenson. We from New England
rather brashly kept bringing up Kennedy's
name.

STEWART: What were the major arguments you were using,
do you recall?

ROBERTS: His youth, his ability, his appeal to an age
group of voters that Stevenson didn't have.

STEWART: And the main arguments against it, I assume,
were his youth and his religion, or. . . .

ROBERTS: The main arguments against it. . . . Well, if
anybody was politically -- if it wasn't recon-
cilable to their own political situation or
thinking, naturally they gave some specious ar-
gument that he's from Massachusetts or he's too
young, or something else. The main objection to
him was his religion, and this came from fellows

like the late Dave Lawrence, who ^{was} a Catholic,
and Finnegan, who's a Catholic, and so forth.
They had much concern about whether what
Protestants were going to do on this vote.
As a matter of fact, in my experience in going
around the country for John Kennedy and his
presidential nomination, I found that the
Protestants weren't quite as concerned about
it as the Catholics were. But this was one
of the things that was raised at this meeting.
I'm not too clear on all the details step by
step going through to the climax of this
situation.

STEWART: But after this Governor's Conference, I assume
this probably would have been in the spring of
1956, in the intervening months until the con-
vention, what was your major activity as far as
the vice-presidential candidacy was concerned?

ROBERTS: Well, actually, the major activity was the

presidential. Stevenson had a lot of opposition throughout the country, and if you were interested in him, this was your main thrust and so forth. But equal with that, or coupled with that, was our interest here in the New England area for Kennedy for Vice President. But your meetings and your contacts would be for the number one spot, but you ^{would} always bring up the second situation. And John Kennedy was ^{up} --- there was some question in his mind whether he should be in there or not. How real it was, I don't know, but I think there was some question.

STEWART: ~~That brings up a question to mind.~~ What types of contacts were you having in this period with either President Kennedy or people on his staff, with Bobby or Sorensen or any of these people?

ROBERTS: It was principally with John Kennedy and with

[Steven Eo]

Sorensen, and Steve Smith, then Bobby.

STEWART: They, of course, were urging you to, in your contacts in relation with Stevenson, they were urging you to push his candidacy also?

ROBERTS: Yes. Now, urging may be too strong a term, but they were consulting, and you could say urging, yes.

STEWART: Do you recall any differences within the Kennedy staff at that time as to whether he should push for the nomination in '56? Or did there seem to be some reluctance . . .

ROBERTS: Well, I know that Bobby, and Steve Smith, and [Bo Kenneth] Sorensen, Teddy, O'Donnell, and the group were very very interested in it. Because when we got to Chicago to that convention, Stevenson practically had the nomination, ^{and} Now the question was. . . . So we visited with Steven-
- - Mo
son, [John] Bailey, Ribicoff, and myself and

Paul Dever had a conference with Stevenson.

STEWART: At the convention?

ROBERTS: In the hotel at the convention. And told him very frankly that we didn't want this a concluded fact. You know, Stevenson ^{had} adopted the attitude he wasn't going to put his hand in the vice#presidency and so forth, that he wasn't going to do this and wasn't going to do that. In our conference, in short, we just said to him, "We don't want to read about this in the paper. Before any decision is made on the vice#presidency, we want to be consulted." Finnegan and Lawrence, of Pennsylvania, weren't too warm to this ^{because} I suppose ^a Catholic running for national office in Pennsylvania creates a problem. Lawrence was the first Catholic Governor in the century, I guess, to be elected there. And Finnegan was being promoted by Lawrence and [Carmine] ^{GO}

DeSapio and [^{Mo}Jacob] Arvey, Jake Arvey, as the National Chairman. Stevenson was getting Finnegan whether he wanted him or not. So that we didn't want this group, when Stevenson got the nomination, to have a ^eforgone conclusion on the vice#presidency and shut out John Kennedy. We got the promise from Stevenson that before the vote on the vice#presidency, ~~that~~ we would be consulted.

STEWART: Did you ever get any indication from Stevenson as to how he viewed the possibilities of having Kennedy on his ticket before the convention or during the convention?

ROBERTS: If I recall correctly, I think the conversation I had with him he realized the advantage of having Kennedy because of the youth, because of the appeal he would have to an age group, the young voters group, that Stevenson wouldn't have, but he was apprehensive of the religious

question.

STEWART: This was uppermost in his mind then.^p

ROBERTS: Well, honestly, it was uppermost in everybody's mind, including Kennedy's.

STEWART: Did you at any time feel that Stevenson was seriously considering offering the nomination to Kennedy?

ROBERTS: I can't say that I was ever convinced that he was, that he was going to take action on behalf of Kennedy. I think he felt that there was some liability on the religious issue.

STEWART: What was your reaction, do you recall, when he threw the thing open to the convention floor? Or had you known about this before?

ROBERTS: Well, this is what he said he was going to do, but we, naturally, there comes a time when this position by the so-called establishment ^{of} the candidate for President who is nominated, he's got to make some decision. I think he had led

himself into this area so deeply that he couldn't do anything but say, "My hands" you know -- "Do what you want." But yet, from my experience, I know the man that gets the nomination for President, you can say "Do what you want" but his thoughts have a great impact on the organization. I don't think that his -- if he was free without any consideration, I don't think he would have put his hand on Kennedy's shoulder.

STEWART: Do you recall the meeting of Kennedy forces that evening, I think it was, at the Conrad Hilton Hotel when, presumably, the plans were laid to do what ever could be done to get the nomination?

ROBERTS: Yes, I participated in that.

STEWART: Do you recall. . . . What were your impressions of it? Was it a well organized thing, or do you feel people were basically floundering to

come up with a good plan or what?

ROBERTS: It wasn't well organized because of the attitude of the President keeping hands off and not naming, and so forth, prevented you from drawing lines. Then there was some question as to whether or not the President's father wanted him in this. I think there was a telephone conversation where the President made his mind up that he was going into it. Then we met in the Conrad Hilton, and we realized that there were an awful lot of people who would be sympathetic to John Kennedy's nomination as the candidate for Vice President, but we hadn't gotten them together. DeSapio of New York was one, [^] [Robert] ^{Fo, Joe} Wagner, I knew from my own personal friendship with Wagner, I knew how he felt. He would have preferred Kennedy, although he was being bruted around as a candidate, which actually he wasn't. ^{said} But he

would have preferred Kennedy. We got Wagner out of bed at four o'clock in the morning to get ahold of DeSapio. DeSapio came to the Conrad Hilton and went along. Now, this meant a great deal because this was going to bring New York state. I think Pennsylvania dragged its feet until the end, I think.

STEWART: Who was particularly effective, do you recall, in trying to get some organized effort out of that meeting?

ROBERTS: Well, it's hard to say because it was such a sudden and impromptu -- I mean, everybody going there ⁱⁿ ~~re~~ own way. Everybody was to go out and come back in the next morning or whenever you got the information as to who was going to do what, bring it back in so you could start to count noses. I wouldn't say that the -- I would say that the President was the leader.

STEWART: How was work divided up, [?] or how did you get people ^{just} to volunteer their -- to do what they thought they could best do, and then, presumably, it ended up that all ends were covered, or were any specific assignments given out to people?

ROBERTS: Well, I can only remember my own part in it. We'd just got down to this, John Bailey was there, and Bobby and Teddy, and one or two of John Kennedy's sisters. Camille ^{Gravel} ~~Rabell~~ from New Orleans was there, Hale Boggs was not there. There must have been, oh, anywhere from twenty to twenty-five people, there and to just, in order to try to get some organization. John Bailey was setting up a formal structure of organization, and this was going to be all over the next noon^{time}, so I don't know why we wanted to move desks and stenographers, what the hell did it mean? So it was decided if

Roberts knew somebody that had some control

^{7 a}
~~over the~~ delegation to talk to him. I knew

^{Bo}
[Robert] Bob Meyner -- you know, he was in the

thing himself; ^ I think he made an awful

mistake out of it -- through John Kir^vwick

and some other people in New Jersey, so it

was one of my understood assignments to try

to work through Kir^vwick and Meyner and so

forth. Then, because of my own personal

friendship with Bob Wagner, I spent the

late part of that night with him, and he

was very helpful. I don't think he ever

got the credit he deserved, because DeSapio

was the so-called boss of the thing. And

DeSapio came over that night, came to the

hotel. Because of some participation in the

National Governor's Conference, there were other

governors that I went to.

STEWART: Were there any Southern governors, do you recall,

or people from the South that you talked to?

ROBERTS: John Battle of Virginia was a very good supporter for John Kennedy in both conventions, for the vice-presidency and the presidency.

STEWART: Were you surprised at the amount of support he was able to generate in the South?

ROBERTS: He generated a lot of support. The delegation in back of us was South Carolina, and this was not a state that was known for Catholicism by any means. They supported Kennedy against [Estes] Kefauver. He got a lot of the Southern support because there was a rift with Kefauver for some reason, I don't know what it was. And he got a lot of that support. Then he eventually got Texas, didn't he?

STEWART: Right, right. But still through this whole thing the religious issue was the big argument that you encountered that came back to you

after you made your push?

ROBERTS: Yes.

STEWART: Were you surprised, generally, that he came so close? Did you at all anticipate this?

ROBERTS: Well, I was such a partisan in building enthusiasm that I was disappointed he didn't.

STEWART: This whole matter of [Sam] Rayburn's recognizing certain delegations has, of course, been ^{thrown} flown ^{and around} around and around and there are all kinds of stories on it. Do you have any recollections of that at all?

ROBERTS: Well, I don't have it too clear, but I might as well express myself. I think it was obvious to the establishment of the convention, to Rayburn, to the so-called power structure, that he was going to win it. And I remember Senator [Albert] Gore, Stuart Symington, and somebody else -- I don't know whether it was Finnegan or Lawrence, or who it was -- in a huddle

coming into the convention. And I said to John Bailey and to Paul Dever, "This is it." This is where Missouri, was it, got up?

STEWART: Right. He recognized Missouri.

ROBERTS: He recognized Symington, was it?

STEWART: Right. No, [Thomas Co. Co.] Hennings, I think it was.

ROBERTS: Hennings. Oh yes, the Senator. They switched and they threw the vote. And I think if they had kept the tote board on ^{when} ~~that~~ an awful lot of delegates would realize that John Kennedy was within striking distance, I think that would have motivated them to go. But this was a power play, somebody was brought in, and these three people participated in it.

STEWART: Did you have any discussions with Rayburn during this ^{period} or before?

ROBERTS: No, I didn't have any closeness to Rayburn.

STEWART: Okay, unless there's anything else that you can

recall about that convention why don't we move on to the post-convention period. Is there anything else that you feel is of significance?

ROBERTS: Well, I don't know how significant it is, but it was interesting to me. Ribicoff was nominating him for the vice^{presidency}. John Pastore of our own state asked me to ask Kennedy to permit him to be nominated, but he had already committed himself. And this was over in that Stockyard Inn, if I recall correctly. I sat there while some of this was going on with John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy. John Kennedy was laying on the bed very relaxed, and he had the problem, if he made it of going over and accepting, or going over and endorsing whoever ^{got} would get the nomination. It was an experience that was very revealing as to the character of John Kennedy. He had complete composure and control and a thorough analysis of what

was happening over there.

STEWART: Even more so than perhaps some people around him as far as the composure was concerned.

ROBERTS: He had a great sense of humor. He made some remarks about some people who had been spreading rumors about his health and so forth that were really good.

STEWART: Do you recall any of them?

ROBERTS: Well, it involves names so I won't put it in.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

STEWART: You were there then during the voting, you were with Kennedy during the voting.

ROBERTS: Yes. Part of the time.

STEWART: When the decision was made to go over and he made a little speech asking the convention to endorse Kefauver unanimously, you were there at that time?

ROBERTS: Yes.

STEWART: What do you recall about his -- he was still quite calm and ^{*collected*} quite good about the whole thing?

ROBERTS: But he had ^e a, he had a little bit of a ⁻⁻ he was firm. Have you got the tape on?

STEWART: Yes. What do you mean, firm in what way?

ROBERTS: Well, he knew what had happened to him. He wasn't juv^enil^e enough to think that. . . .

He knew just what the mechanics were and what had happened to him, he went through ^{his....} ~~it~~ he did his part.

STEWART: Do you recall who he was particularly angry with or upset with?

ROBERTS: Yes, he was a little bit perturbed with ^[James] Roosevelt, with Jimmy Roosevelt, ^{Because} Jimmy Roosevelt had spread the rumor through the convention about Jack's health.

STEWART: I wasn't aware of that.

ROBERTS: You know, that ^{there was} he had an alleged back situation, which I guess he did have this disc. And Roosevelt had spread it through the convention that because of this he couldn't

serve and so forth and so on. And this annoyed the President, it annoyed Jack Kennedy at ^{that} ~~this~~ time. On his way up to get to the rostrum on this platform -- I didn't see this, [^] but John Kennedy told me this -- Roosevelt put his hand out and John Kennedy walked by it. So coming back -- and I don't have the exact facts of this story so perhaps I shouldn't say -- coming back Roosevelt stopped him and said, "Jack, you're not madⁿ, or some little thing. He says, "No I'm not mad." He had a famous story, [^] he said, I think he said, "You're not hurt or mad or something." He said, "No, [^] it ^s reminds me of the Indian story." I think you've heard him tell this story. The Indians caught this settler^s and they buried several knives in him, in his back, and somebody said, "You're not mad^s are you,[?] it doesn't hurt^s does it?" And he ~~said~~, "No, it

only hurts when I laugh." So he gave this story to Roosevelt, and Roosevelt revealed in this conversation that he had said something because he said to John Kennedy, he said, "I didn't say it about you. I said that there was a John Kennedy who was in the railroad, one of the Railroad Brotherhoods, *Remember this?*" He said, "I was talking about this fellow." *.....* which was obviously, he was evading it.

STEWART: As it turned out, of course, it's doubtful whether Kennedy could have helped Stevenson enough to win this election.

ROBERTS: Well, as it turned out, it was the most successful vote John Kennedy ever had when he lost that. Because I don't think he could have carried *---* I don't think Stevenson could have won under any conditions. I didn't realize the depth of popularity of Eisenhower, even here in our state. We hadn't lost the state of Rhode Island

for a Democratic President since prior to
[Alfred E.]
Al Smith's election. And we lost this state
so the Eisenhower popularity was very, very
great. If John Kennedy had been the nominee
for Vice President, he'd have gone down and
he would have carried a great burden. The
blame would have been on his shoulders, he
was the Catholic.

STEWART: Right, right. Well, moving on, what contacts
do you recall you had with either Kennedy
or members of his staff after the convention?
Did he campaign at all for you in 1956?

ROBERTS: Yes. He came to Rhode Island ^{and went} on television,
and helped me tremendously.

STEWART: Did you travel at all with him? I assume you
were, in '56, you were running for governor
yourself and you were . . .

ROBERTS: I was running for governor, and we never got out
of Rhode Island.

STEWART: You never got out of Rhode Island.

ROBERTS: But I don't think he was up for Senator,
I think . . .

STEWART: No.

ROBERTS: He came to Rhode Island on several occasions
and went on television for me and did every-
thing he possibly could.

STEWART: After that election, do you recall what contacts
you had between that time and the start of
the presidential campaign in 1959?

ROBERTS: Well, I had several continual contacts with
John Kennedy and his staff when they started
to organize, to go out and count noses, and
with Steve Smith. I did a lot of traveling
for John Kennedy as a governor to go into
other areas. I went with Sorensen into
New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and in
through the New England states. Teddy Kennedy
was with us, Bobby Kennedy, and this was. . . .

There was some repeat in this. What we actually did ^{we'd} was to go in and try to get a meeting, or have a meeting set up with the state committee or a city committee, or the national committee, and people who had been delegates to the national convention, and talk to them on behalf of John Kennedy's candidacy, and try to get their support and their pledges for delegates to the convention. Of course, you have ^d the big selling job, particularly West Virginia. We were in West Virginia, in Huntington, West Virginia, and Charleston.

STEWART: This would have been in '57, '58?

ROBERTS: Yes. And it was the religious question. . . .

The amazing thing to me, it always came up with somebody by the name of McGovern, or O'Brien. We had an interesting experience in Santa Fe. I think there was a national committeeman by the

[Tom E. S.]
name of ¹Brown who had been national committee-
man for many many years. He was a Baptist
in this area of New Mexico. Of course, this
is a community that's split in half, [^]it's
half Latin and half Baptist, [^]so there is
a religious situation there. And in discussing
it in this meeting with the then Governor, who
was a Democrat, and members of the county
committee and so forth, [^]who would be influential
in designating delegates to the convention, the
religious thing was always brought out. We never
left it unsaid because it was on their minds
and you might as well bring it up and see what
you could do with it. This fellow said, this
elderly man Mr. Brown, [^]said that when Al Smith
ran, [^]his family was quite large and quite
influential. He was the only one that voted
for Al Smith. He was talking about whether or
not the religious factor was as great for John

Kennedy. A definite majority of his family was going to vote for Kennedy, that the religious factor was not as potent or not as heavy in this. I came back to Rhode Island and met with the mayor of Providence at that time and some of his city committee and people who would be delegates, practically 9/10 of them Catholic. They raised ^{''''} do you think when you tell them what a fellow in New Mexico is going to do, generation after generation and so forth.

STEWART: Do you recall what your main rebuttal to all this talk was, especially to people outside of New England? Did you, for example, use this so-called Bailey report that was prepared in '56 to presumably show that a Catholic would be a great asset to the ticket? ~~the ticket?~~

ROBERTS: We used that, but it would come up obliquely. Many people wouldn't want to look you in the

eye and say, "Well, I don't want to vote for you because you're Protestant or Catholic or Methodist" or whatever it is. So there's always an oblique approach. You think somebody else will do it, or you think this or that. So you just had to play it by ear, you just had to try to improvise to meet it. There was a book written by a ~~man~~ this outstanding Protestant. I don't know

whether he was Episcopalian, ^{man} Oxen is it?

Go Bromley Oxnam?
Keith Romely Oxen?

STEWART:

ROBERTS:

that that was quoted quite a bit. I never read the book. He apparently had some very good . . .

STEWART:

Well, Paul ^{Shard}Blanche had written a famous book . . .

ROBERTS:

And ^{Shard}Blanche I know the statements ⁻⁻⁻I gathered from the way they were raised that if you have a Catholic, you're going to have ^{invasion}a version of the papacy and so forth. And Catholics have

to ^K ~~fl~~owtow to the hierarchy, and part of their religion is that they have to execute as a public administrator whatever the hierarchy wants and so forth and so on. This, perhaps, I was in the best position to answer it as a Catholic, and had been Governor for six years and Mayor for ten years. I could just tell ^{them} ~~of~~ my own experience here in Rhode Island. I always felt that the Catholic clergy were Republicans, I never saw them.

STEWART: Did you try to argue with people that in fact from a strictly political point of view that ^a ~~the~~ Catholic would bring in many more votes than he lost?

ROBERTS: No, I always tried to keep away because you had to be careful you didn't precipitate a religious argument. Once you get into that area, ~~why~~ it's just futile. It would be detrimental to your candidate. But my attempt was

always to try to reason and to try to be logical about it from my own experience. And then they raised that situation where the Archbishop in Philadelphia asked John Kennedy to stay away from some dedication of the three faiths, and so forth and so on. Sorensen handled that because he had some documentary evidence that Kennedy couldn't be there, some letters and so forth.

STEWART: Right. In October, 1959 there was a meeting in Hyannis Port which many people consider to be the official start of the 1960 campaign. You, I assume, were at that meeting?

ROBERTS: Yes.

STEWART: Were you ^{↑ one} ~~more than~~ satisfied with the results of the meeting, with the overall strategy that was developed then? What generally were your impressions of the meeting?

ROBERTS: Well, of course, I don't think that was the....

That perhaps was to the press the initial meeting, but an awful lot of legwork had been done prior to that. Most of the people that attended that meeting were people who had done the legwork in sections of the country. Prior to that John Kennedy and Bob Kennedy had divided the country up into areas and had tried to get into that area people who were directly connected with the political organizations, Democratic organizations, if not the next best, and the next best, and so forth. So that you had an active, aggressive solicitation in each of the states, and the states that had big metropolitan areas you broke them up to meet the political situation and so forth. And this had been going on for at least eighteen months prior to the Hyannis meeting. The Hyannis Port meeting, in my opinion, was just to bring in an accounting of who has seen who and what has

been the results. I think that that was, perhaps, ^{it was,} I think it was to count noses and to indicate to people throughout the country who were not there that there was strength and what the strength was and how significant it would be in the convention. And that, frankly, was starting to get into the phase of planning of what you're actually going to do ^{on} in the convention floor. You have these assets to work with, these delegates to work with. You have these problems that necessitate some strategy. So this perhaps is why it's considered the meeting. But the assets were all gathered, the delegates were gathered much prior to that.

STEWART: Now, what again did you see as your primary role or your primary function at that time?

ROBERTS: The New England delegates. Then in my going around with Sorensen and Bob -- I'm trying

WALLACE ?

to think of his last name -- and Steve Smith
young
and/Teddy. We went down to a meeting in
Albuquerque which was the Western Democrats
which ^{was} ~~is~~ set up for [Lyndon B.] Johnson. This
fellow ^{by the name of} ~~is~~ Jack Beady down there who did an awful
lot of work for Kennedy. Actually ~~is~~ Kennedy just
stole the show on him. It was a great asset
for Kennedy after it was over, and Kennedy
didn't have the opportunity of getting in there
until late Saturday night. The thing was so
arranged ^{so} that the climax was the dinner Saturday
night, and John Kennedy didn't get in there
until late that night. But he had a meeting
in ^a ~~the~~ Municipal ~~the~~ Hall in Albuquerque where he got
six or seven thousand people, and this was the
time he had the press conference. You know,
he set the press up there ~~and~~ and he had sort of a
confrontation with the press. One of the reasons
for doing this was the religious situation ~~plus~~ plus

water in that area is a big problem. It takes a courageous decision to come out and tell what you're going to do with the Colorado River water or something. I'm not too familiar with it. And he did a terrific job there.

STEWART: What did you do between October '59 and the start of the primaries in 1960?

ROBERTS: What did I do personally?

STEWART: As far as the campaign was concerned, do you recall?

ROBERTS: Well, we didn't have any problem in our own community because our delegation was pledged and New England was pledged. We may have had a problem with one or two in Maine, I'm not certain -- one or two delegates in Maine. But we worked on the solidarity of the New England hundred and fourteen delegates. Then, if I recall correctly, I went to some of these

other states with Sorensen and these other people on Kennedy's staff. We went to Wisconsin and West Virginia.

STEWART: This would have been before the primaries.

ROBERTS: Yes.

STEWART: Were you involved at all in the decision as to ^{which} ~~what~~ primaries he should enter? Did you have any opinions on that?

ROBERTS: There was a decision made, and I think it was after consultation with many people, I say many people ^{who} were in this activity, about going into primaries. This is always a tender thing because if you go into, for instance, the Ohio situation you offend one faction ^{who will} ~~which~~ control some delegates and you please another faction, and so forth. And the Wisconsin thing ^{where you're} ~~we were~~ stepping on [Hubert H.] Humphrey's toes, and so forth, ^{and} ~~and~~ these are situations that I think the old-line politician has a

great reverence for. You're not supposed to go into the other fellow's ball park. This was discussed at some great length and the decision was made_^ and I thought the decision was the right one. Kennedy had to win primaries because he had to prove that he could win, and if he won the primaries_^ he would convince the Democratic organization that he could win votes. If you could win in West Virginia and you could win in Wisconsin right in Humphrey's back yard_^ and Humphrey and ^[James] Jim Rowe and these fellows were actually working to knock him off. In my opinion, Humphrey and Jim Rowe were working for Johnson. I don't[↑] Humphrey was working for Humphrey_^ because I met Jim Rowe in New Mexico and down in that area and he was ¹⁰⁰ a hundred per_^ cent Johnson man. I've known him for years, and all of a sudden he's the manager of Humphrey for President_^ ^{It just} which doesn't add up.

STEWART: Well, he and [Joseph L., Jr.] Rauh went separate ways after West Virginia. Joe Rauh then went for Kennedy in . . .

ROBERTS: Jim Rowe.

STEWART: Yes. But Joe Rauh, the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] man in Washington who was also active with Humphrey, went for Kennedy then, and Rowe, the fellow you mentioned, of course went for Johnson.

ROBERTS: Well, he practices law with [Thomas G.] Tommy Corcoran, you know, and they were very close to Johnson.

STEWART: Right. Were you active in the primaries at all? Did you take any part in either Wisconsin or West Virginia?

ROBERTS: No, no, I wouldn't be of any value there.

STEWART: What else before the Convention did you do, do you recall? You kept up this traveling during this whole period?

ROBERTS: Yes, and the the President, or John Kennedy,

would send you a sort of ^a preview of what position he was going to take and ask you to make some comments on it, what did you think the reaction would be and so forth. Then, of course, I was running myself here.

STEWART: ~~Right, right.~~ Do you recall any issues that you disagreed with him on as far as the stands he eventually did take?

ROBERTS: No, I can't recall any.

STEWART: What did you view as your function at the convention? I assume you were there at the 1960 convention.

ROBERTS: Yes.

STEWART: What did you ^{view as} ~~add to~~ your function as far as Kennedy was concerned?

ROBERTS: Well, he had a system worked out with communications for each state delegation, and then _{of} course _{there} was a strategy of position of getting states to indicate they were going to go for

Kennedy so that you would try to create a movement ^{and} ~~to~~ get some thrust behind it. As I recall, I acted as sort of -- not a floor leader, but a contact with the New England situation. Of course, we were loaded ^{in New} ~~with~~ ^{England} ~~leaders~~, we had Ribicoff and Bailey and [Edmund S.] Muskie and all these people. There was really an over^{abundance} of people who were active in Kennedy's behalf in this New England area. But I had some contact with the New Jersey group because of John Kir^ywick and Bob Meyner, and I had some contact with Dave Lawrence, and so forth. You just played it by ear and tried to fit ~~it~~ in where you could.

STEWART: Lawrence, of course, was a key figure. Do you recall any of the conversations you did have with him?

ROBERTS: I don't exact^{ly} because Dave Lawrence always wanted to deal directly with the principal.

STEWART: Was there ever any doubt in your mind that Kennedy would be nominated on the first *ballot* after you got to Los Angeles?

ROBERTS: I was very confident he would be nominated, and I was confident that he would go over on the first ballot.

STEWART: Did you feel, as most people, that if it went beyond that, ^{his} chances would start to go down?

ROBERTS: Oh yes, yes. See, he didn't have the assets to be a compromise candidate. He was an issue, and when there was a confrontation on this issue, ^{John Kennedy and all his assets and so forth, he could do nothing but lose. He wasn't in the position of standing over here as an attraction, ^{if two} ~~to~~ other people ~~who~~ are in a hassle. He was the hassle, ^{and he had to win on the first ballot.}}

STEWART: Were you with him at all during the convention, do you recall?

ROBERTS: Yes. I can't recall exactly.

STEWART: Were you involved at all in the decision to pick Johnson as the vice#presidential nominee?

ROBERTS: Well, I think Bobby talked to me about it. I wouldn't have picked him,^ I wasn't sympathetic with Johnson.

STEWART: Your immediate reaction was . . .

ROBERTS: He irritated me.

STEWART: . . . was unfavorable?

ROBERTS: Well, I think the luncheon he had confronting John Kennedy in this debate, he did everything he possibly could to ruin a candidate for ~~the~~ election.

STEWART: Did you argue against his selection then?

ROBERTS: Well, I wasn't consulted too much, but when Bobby Kennedy told me,^ I thought that either [Henry M.] Jackson would have made a better candidate, or -- there's somebody else. I can't

think of who the other fellow was. But I think it was a wise choice. I think they were thinking in different [—]_^ they were evaluating Johnson much differently. I perhaps was emotional about it, [^]and they were thinking of his control in the Senate, and if you didn't have him in your house you had him outside, ~~then~~ he'd be a trouble-maker. So it's better to have him indoors.

STEWART: What part did you play in the campaign? Of course, you were running -- you weren't running in Rhode Island at that time, or were you in 1960?

ROBERTS: Well, I had just gone through a primary campaign for United States Senator and got licked.

STEWART: Oh, that's right.

ROBERTS: Claiborne Pell beat me in the primary.

STEWART: So what did you do in the campaign of that year

as far as the. . . .

ROBERTS: What I did was here in Rhode Island, and I didn't do too much.

STEWART: You didn't do any traveling outside of the state at all?

ROBERTS: No.

STEWART: Were you surprised that Rhode Island gave Kennedy such a large majority? Not at all?

ROBERTS: No. I wasn't surprised at all. It surprised some of our politicians, *though* \odot

STEWART: It did? Everyone, I assume, anticipated that he would win, but the size of the vote that he did get?

ROBERTS: He was terrifically popular in Rhode Island. I guess we gave the biggest percentage of . . .

STEWART: Yes, I think it was ⁷¹ ~~seventy one~~ or ⁷² ~~seventy two~~ or something like that. It was even bigger than Massachusetts I think.

ROBERTS: Some of our office holders on a national basis

didn't[—] they weren't too keen about John Kennedy.

STEWART: Such as?

ROBERTS: I don't want to get into it.

STEWART: ^{As I} ~~They~~ say^{ill} you have every opportunity to close this material for as long as you want so I think certainly if you feel it's of any significance to the whole Kennedy story, I wish you would . . .

ROBERTS: Well, I don't think it's that significant. It's maybe just a I mean, I don't think it has any real bearing or adds any weight to the history. Except for the fact that these people were under the domination of Johnson, and I guess he used a strong hand. Because I remember when we had a meeting of the Executive Committee, the secretary, one of our United States Senators, had some Johnson paraph^{er}ania.

STEWART: This was in 1959^{60 in} . . .

ROBERTS: This was prior to the convention.

STEWART: Oh, prior to the convention. So there was a certain amount of . . .

ROBERTS: If there was a second ballot, we would have lost these people in the Rhode Island delegation.

STEWART: Was this true in other parts of New England? Do you feel on the second ballot you would have lost quite a few people?

ROBERTS: I don't think quite a few, but you would have lost those that Johnson had an influence over by reason of his position in the United States Senate.

STEWART: But a significant number^{of people}/you feel.

ROBERTS: Out of the hundred and fourteen or whatever it was, I don't know how many we would have lost, but it would have been maybe twenty.

STEWART: Did you ever consider joining the Administration

after Kennedy had been elected?

ROBERTS: Yes, I was asked by the President if I wanted to join the Administration. I said that I did, and I talked to him on the phone several times. I talked to him when he was down here in Newport, and I met with him in the Carlyle Hotel, and in Washington and discussed [~~Federal Communications Commission~~ ^{the SEC}] FCC, the Atomic Energy Commission, a judgeship and so forth, and I was in the position where I'd just got out of office and I started to practice law again. I couldn't, financially, couldn't do this because it would cut off my income, and the only income I'd have is what I earned, and I couldn't take a job. Later on he offered me the ambassadorship to Australia, and I was interested in it, but this also became a financial problem to me, so I couldn't. As a matter of fact, I had dinner with Ted Sorensen and his

wife down at the Cape last year in the fall₃ and he brought this up. He said, "Why didn't you ever take a job?" I said, "I just couldn't afford to take a job." He said, "Well, the President always was curious as to why you never took one." And it was a financial impossibility for me to do it, to have to open up another house. It's all right if you have a private income from other sources₃ but I didn't.

STEWART: What further contacts did you have with President Kennedy after January, '61? Did you see him in the White House at all?

ROBERTS: Yes, I saw him several times in the White House. I visited with him₃ and I asked^{him}/to make me a trustee of the New Haven Railroad. He asked me what the hell I wanted that for. I said₃ well, it has a legal background, and if you did^a the job₃ it would have been to my advantage

and so forth. And he and Bobby as Attorney General did everything they could, but the judge wouldn't appoint me. I got a lot of unpleasant notoriety out of it, I don't know if you remember it or not.

STEWART: I think I do vaguely. Were you involved in this whole business to any . . .

ROBERTS: Well, you see the trustees are appointed by the United States District Court, and in the ordinary bankruptcy situation the creditors ^{would the} ~~were~~ ^{But under the} ~~In the ordinary~~ elected trustees. ~~In the ordinary~~ railroad act, the actual trustee of the bankruptcy is the judge of the district court, and the other trustees are merely his agents or his legmen. And this fellow [Robert P.] Anderson just was an arch Republican, and he just kept this all to himself, then when he got the whole situation lined up, he lowered the boom. I don't think the President realized and I don't think Bobby realized the authority this fellow had

although I tried to get it to Bobby and I tried to withdraw but [Myer] Mike Feldman said, "We don't quit."

STEWART: You did work with Feldman. Feldman was actively involved in this whole business I guess.

ROBERTS: Yes. He was involved ^{with} ~~in~~ the transportation problems.

STEWART: Do you recall any other contacts you had with the President after he was in the White House?

ROBERTS: Well, I visited with him on, oh, I don't know how many occasions. Generally we used to go up to -- I'm not quite sure of the name of this room. This was the room they put the new window in that you could see right up Mrs. Kennedy had sort of an oval window, not an oval window but a curved window put in. This was a beautiful view. ^{where you} ~~We~~ saw the Jefferson Memorial and went

right up. Now, I think from this window you

^{can}
could see John Kennedy's grave.

STEWART: Is that right?

ROBERTS: He was always very kind and very good to me.

We had some ^{general} you know just rehash ^{ing} []
and so forth.

STEWART: Primarily social occasions.

ROBERTS: His evaluation of the candidates and the
political situation.

STEWART: Did you get the impression that he was still
actively interested in keeping up with New
England political activities?

ROBERTS: Oh yes. He had the capacity of keeping himself
informed about the political ^{economic} [] and
social activities, the general welfare of the
community and the personalities in it.

STEWART: Do you recall the last time you saw him?

ROBERTS: I'd say it was about six weeks before his death.

STEWART: Do you recall what the occasion was?

ROBERTS: Yes, I do. I'm an alumnus of Fordham University and they wanted him to go to a dinner ^{--⁵ their annual....} It was something 125th something, I don't know what but it was a dinner and they wanted me to ask him I went down to ask him. This was the reason I was down there.

STEWART: Did he ever speak there? Oh, that was a few weeks . . .

ROBERTS: Well, he didn't want to go into New York because he was going to go in ⁻⁻ there was an election in New York, and he didn't want to go in at that particular time. This was the time we walked from his quarters back to his office. He showed me this little russian dog that was in the Sputnik, you know? So the humorous part of ^{is} it, talking about going to the Fordham dinner, and I said, "Well, I can't tell them you don't want to go to New York because there's a political

situation. What do I tell them?" He said, "Well," he said, "I don't know. What do you think?" And I gave some answer. He said, "Oh don't say that." He said, "That's like telling them you're Irish and letting them knock you down again." He said, "That doesn't fit ^{it} in at all."

STEWART: Did he ever discuss the '64 campaign with you or plans for the '64 campaign?

ROBERTS: No.

STEWART: Of course in the fall of '63 they were just starting to lay some plans for that. Well, I have no further questions unless there's anything else you would like to add. There's still more tape there.

ROBERTS: No, I don't. You know, you could go on for hours because. . . . When you're living through these things you never anticipated the tragedy and the loss that happened so you don't just. . . .

But he certainly was a greatly endowed individual.

STEWART: He changed the whole complexion of politics in a number of states I think.

ROBERTS: You see, I had had the opportunity when he was in the Congress, oh he looked sixteen years old. I have a picture of John Kennedy

I sent a copy of it to Steve Smith. It was taken down at the Dunes Club ^{down here in Narragansett} ~~now near []~~.

it's this beach club. And he came over to

visit with us one time, he was sitting in this veranda talking, and this woman of course everyone in the place was all thrilled about

Kennedy, this was before the election. Barbara

[] took a snapshot of him, my sister

and myself sitting at a table and John Kennedy

and he looked sixteen years old. I was at his

wedding. He had the greatest ^{his} great asset was

I think he had an awful lot of firmness and an

this sound like ERIC LIONS but possibly it is Bob

awful lot of steel. And he had an intellect and a natural forthrightness and ^a direct honesty that just made him stand out. This gave him capacity ^o with his back ^o which gave him physical pain ^o and many of the other problems that he had. He just had a real character that was strong. Actually, in my opinion ^o I said ^o this to some old-line Democratic politician once ^o -- John Kennedy and his election saved the future of the Democratic party. We were about done after the [Harry S.] Truman situation and after candidates like Kefauver and this type of stuff. Leadership in the United States Senate, the Democratic party was right about on the brink. Maybe this is one of the reasons John Kennedy got the nomination. ^{You} We didn't have a strong intelligent leadership with some vision and some comprehension of what's coming. His election and his short period of time in the

White House gave a leadership to the party, ~~and~~
that ^{the} momentum is still carried on. The testimony
to ^{it} ~~this~~ is that Johnson is trying to imitate
him.

STEWART: He certainly stepped in and took control ~~at~~
^(a) as you say, at a very crucial time in the
Democratic party. There really was no one
else around that was able to pick it up.

ROBERTS: You were a defeated party, and you were losing
control of the Senate and House. When you get
the momentum going that way ^{it} takes somebody
strong to stop it and to turn it around, and
that's what he did. I guess it was his destiny.

STEWART: Okay, I'll shut it off.