

Fred R. Harris Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 07/29/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Harris was an Oklahoma State Senator from 1956 to 1964; the U.S. Senator from Oklahoma from 1964 through 1973; the chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1969 to 1970; and a close friend of Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] during their time together in the Senate. In this interview Harris discusses his work with RFK in the Senate on various committees; RFK's relationship with other senators and with President Lyndon B. Johnson; the attempts to stall and amend the 1967 social security bill; working on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders; RFK's decision to run for President in 1968; and working on Hubert H. Humphrey's 1968 presidential campaign, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

FRED R. HARRIS

July 29, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay, what I wanted to begin with is kind of obvious. When do you first remember meeting Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] and what were the circumstances?

HARRIS: I met him the first day I came to the Senate. I had seen him in person before that. We came in—the people who had been nominated for the Senate and were not incumbent—for a kind of school for Democratic candidates. Bob was one of the speakers. It was at that meeting where he made what came to be a rather famous statement about how he was sorry to take so many people over the side with him and that President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] had announced that nobody who was in the Cabinet, or who'd met with the Cabinet, would be chosen as Vice President. That was the first time I saw him in person.

Then, the day I came to the Senate was the day after the elections in November of 1964. Mike Mansfield [Michael J. Mansfield] asked Joe Montoya [Joseph M. Montoya], Bass [Ross Bass] of Tennessee, Bob Kennedy and myself—who all happened to be in the Capitol the next day—to come by for coffee, and so we got a chance to visit. I was surprised how small he was; I expected a larger fellow. He was very warm and outgoing, I thought, and a little—very interesting contradictions all remote, too. I think warm and outgoing and remote, at the same time. Those were sort of the first impressions. I was very much

impressed with myself on knowing such a person, as famous as he was. I thought, “Oh, my God, isn’t this amazing! Here I am getting to know Robert Kennedy in person.” [Laughter]

GREENE: Was there any discussion, then, or in succeeding weeks about committee assignments...

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HARRIS: On (Senate Committee or) Government Operations?

GREENE: ...The same committee, yeah.

HARRIS: No. No, it was a good long while before we ever really had much of a relationship. I suppose the first time really was in the Government Operation subcommittee on executive reorganization headed by Abe Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff]. We got into that whole Nader [Ralph Nader]-GM [General Motors Corp.] question of GM having Nader under surveillance. I suppose that’s the first time we really kind of worked on something together.

GREENE: That was really his first active participation in that subcommittee, as I recall, wasn’t it?

HARRIS: I suppose so because it’s the first time I remember my own participation that much. We later were active in the hearings that Ribicoff had—in the same subcommittee—on city problems. I recall Bob and I particularly asked a lot of the same questions of the building trades unions. He had a whole line of questions about how few minority members they had and so forth. I recall those two thing in particular. They were fairly early, but, of course, the Nader thing was much earlier.

GREENE: What was the impression of him within the subcommittee room and within the committee, as a whole?

HARRIS: The thought Robert felt toward some witnesses, I thought, he would almost be too mean. He didn’t really ask questions; he really was sort of making statements sometimes in the form of questions. It was terribly effective, I thought. I would say he was conditioned to that. He was intense, he was furious about the issues and he was rather well-prepared.

GREENE: Was there a feeling of resentment on the other committee members’ part because he did come on so strong and got so much publicity, especially on this occasion?

HARRIS: I’m not aware that there was. There was a member of that committee who often came in late, left early, asked special permission to ask a question or

something out of time, and who, thereby, generally made the headlines that day. We used to laugh some about that because Robert was not that kind of person. He didn't come in and ask for special privileges or anything. It was obvious to everybody that aside from what he did or said, he was going to be specially noticed. I think he felt, you know, that that was a burden about as much as it was an asset. I don't think people had the feeling that he was pushy. I think most everybody—or really, anybody that I knew—recognized that he, by and large, had no control over the fact that he was that much news.

GREENE: Did you ever notice him holding back to keep from stealing the scene, let's say, from lesser known senators?

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HARRIS: I just wouldn't know about it. I don't know of anything like that, except that he would hold back in regard to criticism of the President for a good while. I think he was afraid that that would appear to be political since his brother [John F. Kennedy] had been President, that he was speaking out against Johnson out of either personal political ambition or unreasonable animosity.

GREENE: Was this something that he actually discussed with you?

HARRIS: At one point. He invited me over to his house one night, to read the Vietnam speech.

GREENE: Which one?

HARRIS: The one where he suggested a bombing halt. It was the Vietnam speech which was his major break with the Administration on that subject. At that time, he discussed with me—I don't know whether we had earlier or not—how he'd felt, and that he'd been under considerable restraint. He was worried that people would say that he was just trying to make political capital out of criticizing Johnson, or that it was just a matter of longstanding personal animosity with him, and that he was trying to hurt Johnson for those petty personal reasons.

GREENE: Was this something, you think, that was generally understood among other Senate members so that he was not asked to do certain things?

HARRIS: No, I wouldn't think so. I hadn't thought a great deal about the restraints that he felt that he was under until he told me that. I wouldn't think so. At least I wasn't aware of it myself; that just never occurred to me.

GREENE: How did you find his preparation for committees you were on with him—general Senate work? Was he well-prepared and well-informed?

HARRIS: Very well. Very well-prepared and well-informed, which was the result of

two elements, I think. One, he had excellent staff work. When he sat down in the committee meeting, somebody handed him a piece of paper and whispered in his ear for a while. The second thing was that he actually grasped the issues; he understood the issues involved. Often, it's so easy for senators, rushed and busy, maybe to just read a question, which he could do. He could question a witness that somebody had prepared him to question without really understanding the concept. But follow-up questions and comments and so forth made it clear that Bob actually knew what he was talking about.

GREENE: Did he seem to leave more to his staff than other senators?

HARRIS: No, I think that he had to have more staff and, perhaps, better staff or greater numbers of high quality staff by reason of being

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from New York, where there is a good deal more press focus on any senator, and by reason of his own personal stature. He could not simply specialize in two or three main areas as most senators try to do and thereby become expert in a few areas. He had to speak out on virtually every area, and he had to be prepared at any moment to be asked almost any question.

Coming from the government—he had been in his brother's government—and having been the first confidant of his brother made him, in addition to his personal stature, a very uncommon senator. He had a far wider grasp, personally of the issues—from having been involved in them in an administrative way—than most senators and certainly than any freshman senator, ever.

GREENE: Is there anything that stands out in your mind about his relations with the other committee members?

HARRIS: He actually had good relations with people. I remember at the time he came here—and I came at the same time; his brother Ted [Edward M. Kennedy] had been in the Senate before then—it was very popular to write in the columns that Bob Kennedy would never be the kind of senator that his brother was; that he was more like Jack; that he was not going to really be a senator; that Ted was more of the Senate type; and that Bob had an additional handicap which his brother Jack didn't have—he was more vicious and was less interested in building personal friendships in the Senate. I never thought that was true. If it were really true, I think he couldn't have been elected. But I personally never witnessed that. I personally had good relations with him myself because I saw him, I suppose, as much or more than anybody else in the Senate. We sat next to each other all the time he was in the Senate. He and I and Fritz Mondale [Walter F. "Fritz" Mondale] had an extremely rare kind of joking relationship. All three of us were always sending notes around to whoever was presiding or to each other or to somebody in the gallery or whatever. We laughed a great deal. I remember a time or two when very serious matters were being discussed in the Senate, we worried about how we looked down there on the floor, giggling around and trying to hide it.

So I never did think that that conventional wisdom of that day was correct. But you take, for example, he got in a lot of trouble over a photograph which normally he would have been far too inherently wise to have allowed to be taken. We was smoking a cigar in public. He liked to smoke cigars now and then. He was in the [Senate] Judiciary Committee, and Jim Eastland [James O. Eastland] gave him a cigar. And because, you know, unlike what people might have thought, while detesting so much of what Senator Eastland would be for and so forth, and disagreeing with him on issues, on a personal basis, Robert could have a warm relationship with a man like Senator Eastland and others. And I think, unlike that image, Jim gave him a cigar, and he on an impulse, lighted it up, and they took that picture. I don't know what the hearings were, whether it was exactly in the same committee or not, but that's where he got the cigar. And it was an awful picture. I think that they were, at the time, considering something that had to do with poverty one way or another. So the picture made it appear that he was just sitting up there looking very wealthy and very successful and rich and with that cigar in his mouth talking about poverty. It's a very bad picture.

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GREENE: What about his relations with Mundt [Karl E. Mundt] and Curtis [Carl T. Curtis] and McClellan [John L. McClellan] and the more conservative members of that committee?

HARRIS: Well, I don't know how he got along with Mundt and Curtis. McClellan seemed to like him a great deal from their past days. Bob never wavered in the things that he stood for and that was very much different on such matters as civil liberties and other things from what John McClellan believed. But there seemed to be, oh, in some ways, the remnant of what one would suspect might have been a stronger one—of a kind of father-son relationship between the two of them.

GREENE: A personal father-son?

HARRIS: Uh-hm.

GREENE: What about Javits [Jacob K. Javits]? Was there any obvious competitiveness between them there?

HARRIS: Bob didn't try to compete with Javits, I think. Senator Javits, coming from New York, had a lot of the same kind of problems that Bob did; that is, he was expected probably by the press and others to speak out on more issues than most senators are expected to be experts on. In some measure, a senator from New York must, I think, be in the news more in order to stay in office, probably. Bob recognized that that was the requirement under which Senator Javits lived. I'm sure that he recognized that Javits had to work at it maybe more than Bob did. Bob didn't have to really do anything to make news, and Javits had to work at it more. I don't mean to take away from Senator Javits' motives which are good, but the press is a thing that you live with every day. He needs that in

order to stay in office in a state like New York. All of us do, I suppose, to some degree but maybe not that much.

He thought Javits had an unusual ability to come into a committee meeting and size up the situation in a question or a statement in an almost cannily articulate way, sensitive way, and a phrase or a question which would make news. And it would really more or less capsule what had gone on for two or three hours in the committee.

GREENE: What about in the '67 hearings that we talked about before, on the problems of cities? There was a confrontation that made a lot of news with Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] and Yorty [Samuel W. Yorty], and this kind of thing. How did that go over with the rest of the committee?

HARRIS: I would have to go back to then and try to reconstruct my own calendar to figure out why; I can't right now figure out why. There were some days of those hearings I missed. I don't know what I was doing right along then; I must have been involved in some other activity. Now I remember the confrontation with Yorty. I thought that was a good example of all of the qualities of Bob Kennedy as a committee member asking

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questions that I was talking about a while ago—mean as hell—and he had Yorty dead to rights for not being concerned about things that he should be concerned about, and it was a very.... I thought it was something that he handled very well. The Lindsay confrontation I don't remember at all now.

But what I remember from those hearings was a time when we had heads of each international union of the building trades unions, and Bob Kennedy asked them very searching questions about their rather poor record in hiring of minorities and bringing them into apprenticeship and other programs in the unions' bringing them into union membership. That's the highlight in my mind of those hearings which, of course, Bob took part in.

GREENE: I know there was a strong feeling on both your parts about the problems of the American Indian. Was this something that you talked about, or was this something understood between you?

HARRIS: I think Bob had been concerned about that dating back to the days when he was in his brother's government. And he knew a great deal about it. He was terribly curious about that subject like he was about nearly everything, and I think his interest was probably intensified by LaDonna [LaDonna C. Harris]. They had a kind of teasing relationship about being Indian and so forth, but he also talked seriously, as we all did, about it. I think his interest then was intensified and I think he became more knowledgeable because of his contact particularly with her. We talked, for example, once about Indians in some detail when he was setting up an Indian education subcommittee, which I thought was a good idea.

GREENE: Was there any concern on his part that this might appear to undercut McGovern's [George S. McGovern] subcommittee?

HARRIS: I know he discussed it with him. I know that it came up later on, after his death, as to whether or not that committee should continue because of the jurisdictional dispute involved but I never knew anything about it earlier. He would ask LaDonna and me to think over the people he was considering for staff director. I believe he even asked her to talk to one or two of them and give her advice, but we were not involved in that question of jurisdiction.

GREENE: Did she finally come up with someone?

HARRIS: He chose Parmeter [Adrian L. Parmeter], Adrian Parmeter and, I believe, she gave him some favorable comment on him as well as what she'd been able to find from others who had known him, and also gave one or two or three others. She was not the decisive factor in the hiring of Parmeter but she did some assessments, as I recall.

GREENE: The date your secretary gave me was March 14, 1967, when he appeared in Oklahoma before your wife's organization's Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity [OIO]...

HARRIS: Right.

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GREENE: ...annual meeting. You were there, I believe. Is that right?

HARRIS: Right.

GREENE: What are your recollections of his appearance at that meeting and also at the university afterwards?

HARRIS: It was great fun. It was the first time, of course, that I had ever seen him in a crowd, which is a hell of a stimulating experience and frightening in some ways to see the numbers of people crowded together so closely around him. And then the frenzy involved—people wanted to touch him. It was the first time I had ever seen anything like that. I had traveled with the President some—President Johnson. I had been with him a time or two in a crowd, but nothing I ever saw was just like that. The first thing would be it was fun, and the second thing was crowds.

Then he made a very good appearance which startled a lot of people, a lot of the news people. He was much more human and believable in person than they had been led to believe from the papers. They had him figured as a kind of a cold fish, ruthless kind of fellow, and he didn't turn out to be that at all. He spoke to that Indian group, which I am sure equaled any of his finest appearances because primarily he got them asking questions. He was awfully good

and, of course, he was terribly knowledgeable. He was well-prepared, had a good statement. He said, at one time he was interrupted for overwhelming applause. "I wish I had been born an Indian." He said it in a joking way but serious. The phrase itself in print sounded rather vacuous to think anybody might say that. But it sounded so real and also kind of wistfully funny that everybody laughed and applauded overwhelmingly.

Then we went to the field house. The crowd was just unbelievable; they were just stacked into that place—I think five or six thousand. They had questions and answers. I recall he said—Dr. Cross [George Lynn Cross] I believe, had said some nice words at first; he's the president of the university, and he said, "That's the nicest thing any president has said about me in a long time." And then he joked about me; I said some nice things in introducing him. Then I thought that, again, it was mostly his questions and answers. I thought the best thing that I have ever seen.... I asked him later if he'd done it before; he said he'd done it quite a few times. At one point in his speech, in a definitive remark, he had said that he was for cutting out the draft deferment for college students. And there was a considerable amount of harsh reaction—there was hissing and booing and a lot of clatter and talk and restlessness in his audience—and he defended it and went right on. So when later he said, "Let me ask you all some questions," and he said, "How many of you are for"—he discussed primarily the Vietnam War—"How many of you are for immediate withdrawal?" There were hands, and there was a small minority. And then, "How many are for President Johnson's program?" And there'd be a larger number but a small minority. "How many are for...." I suppose he'd gone into his own position, and there were more people for that but still a minority. Then he said, "How many of you are for escalation of the war?" By far the greatest number of those college kids held up their hands for escalation and also applauded. And then he said, "Let me ask you one other question." He earlier said, "How many of you are for draft exemp-

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tion for students?" They were overwhelmingly for exemption from the draft. So then, after he'd finished how many are for escalation and got that, he said, "How many of you who voted for escalation of the war also voted for the exemption of students from the draft?" There was this stunned silence. It was just kind of a gasp out of the crowd. They'd realized what they had said, and then they applauded, which was a very interesting thing.

So I said, "Have you done that before?" He said, "Yes, I've done it quite a few times." Then I said, "Is it unusual that they would be mostly for escalating the war, the plurality of them would be?" He said, "No, that's generally not understood, but students are not that overwhelmingly for peace." He would have said, I suppose, what Jack Newfield said, a prophetic minority of students and leaders, you know, and so forth but not necessarily a majority at that time. I think that began to change with him, perhaps, and others over time. But he said he generally had that same kind of reaction around the country. I thought that this was a rather dramatic kind of confrontation and wound up causing him to be far more popular with those students when it was over for having disagreed with them on both points.

GREENE: He did that a lot in the campaign, too. What about the attempt at the National Farmers Union? I think that was with the Senator...

HARRIS: Yes, it was; that's right.

GREENE: ...and Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had appeared there hours before, I believe, if not maybe the day before. What kind of reception did he get there?

HARRIS: Respectful. They didn't clasp him to their bosom. Humphrey was really more one of their own. Humphrey was adept at that folksy, loquacious kind of speaking style which kind of covers everything and reminisces about their joint associations over the years and the fights that he and the Farmers Union had been in and so forth. So, overall, Humphrey's was an appearance which was really more popularly received.

Bob's was very sharp and crisp on some really good, tough issues and, I think, much better than they would have supposed he would have done. I thought it was a good, tight, short, brief speech with a lot of good crisp points in it. I don't recall now some of them, but I think they'd be like limiting payments to large farmers and that sort of thing which was in line with the Farmers Union philosophy. It ended on that kind of approach. I think that he made a better pitch than they expected, and it was certainly respectfully received, but he wasn't overwhelmingly popular.

GREENE: Do you remember his personal reactions to this whole trip out to Oklahoma? Did he seem to enjoy this kind of appearance?

HARRIS: We did, and I suppose he did. We had—while he was there at a breakfast with a bunch of my closest friends and supporters—a small dinner for him in the hotel room. He seemed to have a good time; we did, too. He met at one of those meetings the young fellow who later on more or less sort of headed up his campaign down there, a fellow named

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John Robert Kennedy who had not a Kennedy supporter until that time.

GREENE: Yeah. I saw his name.

HARRIS: Yeah.

GREENE: Is there anything else on his interest in Indians that comes to mind? Anything you asked him to get involved in, he asked you to get involved in, perhaps?

HARRIS: No. He was coming to Tahlequah later on as chairman of the Indian Education Subcommittee for a hearing in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, up in northeastern Oklahoma. It started out, you know, on that basis: "Do you think that I should do that?" I thought so and LaDonna thought so, and we offered him help

in setting it up, particularly the help of the staff of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, the group that LaDonna had headed that he came to speak to.

But all that got lost in, I thought, awfully poor staff work, unnecessarily clumsy and unnecessarily offensive to a great many good people such as some of the staff of OIO. They kept changing the date and so forth and eventually got the date set up at a time when I was scheduled on his arrival—the night of his arrival in Oklahoma—to speak to a brotherhood dinner of B’nai B’rith in Tulsa, and I forgot what else I had during the next day, when his hearing occurred. So it wound up neither one of us could even go.

Well, he was just crushed and caught me in the Senate a day or two beforehand—I had sent him over a little note telling him what my schedule was—and he said, “How did we get in this kind of mess? Has my staff mishandled it, or what’s happened?” So I didn’t want to say much about that. He said the only reason he was going was because he wanted to do what LaDonna and I wanted him to do.

So somebody then wrote in one of the Oklahoma papers that there was some strain between us on his hearings, that it seemed very unusual that a senator who was from the state and one particularly interested in Indians wasn’t even going to show up at the hearings. So what I did was I sent LaDonna to the airport—she missed the brotherhood dinner—when he landed in Tulsa and brought him down to that dinner. Then, in what got to be the high point of that club’s history, I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, there’s a friend of mine who happens to be in town, and I thought you might like to say hello to him. Here’s Senator Robert Kennedy of New York.” So he came up from behind some curtains. People were just agog; they just couldn’t imagine.... He said a few words and went on. Then, you know, people wrote up the thing.

GREENE: Was the staff work on the Kennedy subcommittee generally poor do you think or...

HARRIS: I don’t know.

GREENE: ...was it just a bad occasion?

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HARRIS: It was just awfully clumsy about dates and with people. I mean, he’d say, “I want you to come on Tuesday,” and then the next thing you know they’d call up and say, “That’s been changed to Thursday,” and so forth. It just changed constantly, and nobody could get any picture there on the ground, when hearings were to be held, where they were to be held, who was to be heard from and so forth, up until just the very last moment. I don’t know why. You know, that might have been because Bob kept changing his own plans or something, but I don’t know. But that was my only contact with that group in that kind of way.

GREENE: Okay. Let’s talk about the social security bill in ’67. Can you remember conversations with him about it when it was before the [Senate] Finance

Committee, after you received the bill, and conversations, I guess, about the House amendment?

HARRIS: No, I just remember something like this: the bill had come out of the Finance Committee, and he said to me on the floor of the Senate, or somewhere like that, “Isn’t it just awful what they’ve done?” So I said to him, “It really is. There are many bad features about that bill.” And I said, “I did my best to try to change it in committee, but there wasn’t much that could be done.” We did win on this or that, as I recall, but the rest of it—there just wasn’t any chance. So he said, “I think we ought to make a fight on that. I don’t think that we ought to let this thing go by.” So I said, “Well, I’m willing.”

GREENE: Now this is after it’s come out of conference committee?

HARRIS: No.

GREENE: Out of...

HARRIS: Wait a minute.

GREENE: Because the bill that came out of the Finance Committee...

HARRIS: Well, it’s out of that committee.

GREENE: ...was pretty good.

HARRIS: Well, we still wanted to add a bunch of things, and we did.

GREENE: Oh.

HARRIS: So he said, “I think we ought to make a fight on it.” So what we did was divide up the amendments—the Kennedy-Harris Amendments, as they came to be called—and we got different ones to sort of handle pieces of it. As I recall, we got virtually every one of them adopted in the Senate, some by roll call and some by majority vote. I mean, just voice vote and whatever.

One I can’t even remember now who—one guy was supposed to show up to

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handle his amendment, didn’t, and I think that’s about the only one we lost. He just wasn’t there to do it.

GREENE: How did you select the senators who would be involved in this?

HARRIS: I don’t even recall. I suppose we just kind of knew who was sort of

interested and who was on the committee. As I recall, we used people on the committee a lot—like Hartke [Vance Hartke] and Metcalf [Lee Metcalf] and Ribicoff and so forth.

GREENE: Bayh [Birch Bayh]?

HARRIS: Well, Bayh's not on the committee. When it went to conference and most of those things that we thought were important were dropped—they came back with a very repressive, regressive measure—Bob said to me, “I think we ought to make a fight on this.” Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman] was his staff member during all that; I think Vick French [Yorrick O. “Vick” French] was the one who was working on it for me.

So, earlier, I said to him, “It might be a little embarrassing because Hartke outranks me on that committee. Maybe he should be the guy to handle it. I'll do all the work or whatever.” But he insisted that I do it. So there was one little episode early on with Hartke when I sort of went through the right kind of motions to show proper deference to him, and then I took over from the committee side. Well, we got into that really tough bind, then, on holding up the conference. Bob said that he thought I ought to call a meeting, which I did in S-224. We sat around the table, and everybody said, “Yes, isn't it awful what they've done.” There were about ten or eight of us, and so Bob Kennedy said he thought it was not only awful, but that the whole bill ought to be killed if necessary, and just make them start over. I don't know whether he used the word, and say, “Now this is the time for some moxie. What we need here now is a little moxie. Wilbur Mills just got all these fellows staked out. He just says that *he* won't do this and that. Why don't *we* say that? We'll just be head to head, and let's see what happens in regard to social security. They can't stand the pressure, the Senate's about to adjourn, and so we've got more power than we normally would have by delaying the adjournment of the Senate and by delaying the passage of the social security benefits.” Some said, “Well, won't we get ourselves in an awful political bind if we are the ones who hold up the social security increase?”—which I recall was 15 percent, or maybe it was 7. We'd had a couple of increases in those periods, in that period.

GREENE: Well, you were talking about 15 and the House was talking about 12.

HARRIS: Well, that's it. Anyway, we said, no, that we could still enact it in time, eventually, since it had a delayed effective date anyway. So I said, “I'm willing to go.” Bob Kennedy said he was willing to just do whatever—have an extended debate. It would have been sort of a filibuster to hold things up; the question was whether we had enough senators to do it.

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GREENE: Who were the men involved in the discussions, the senators that offered the amendments?

HARRIS: Well, Hartke was in there, I know, and I'm pretty sure Birch Bayh was.

Past that, I just can't recall, but there were seven or eight people. Some expressed misgivings about whether it would work or not, but nearly everybody thought it should. Bob and I were about the only ones that said, "Well, we'll do it. Now what do the rest of you want to do?"

So I think it sort of wound up everybody got off the hook the first meeting by saying, "Well, why don't you"—talking to me as a member of the Finance Committee—"go talk to Mike Mansfield and see if you can't work something out." All sorts of negotiations began from that point, and we began at the same time to hold up the thing in the Senate. It just sort of started, and then we decided we were going to have to go to some formal way to do it. So we assigned times and days when people responsible for the damn thing on the floor to keep them from passing it while we talked.

Well, the pressures really became I thought unconscionable. Mike Mansfield did something I never have understood: he called a meeting in which Bob Kennedy and I had to listen while he and others running for office that year, including my own colleague from Oklahoma, Mike Monroney [Almer Stillwell "Mike" Monroney], told us that we were going to get a bunch of our Democratic colleagues beat if we persisted in this effort, that everybody agreed that we were right and we were certainly to be complimented for feeling deeply about it, but that we were going to see a lot of our colleagues beaten. Both of us thought that that was very, very unfair. We'd never heard of anything like that being done, and I haven't heard of it being done since. We were young and new in the Senate, and it was especially hard. But each of us just kept to our own position at that particular meeting, I remember, and we had two or three like that. I remember one in particular in Mike Mansfield's office with a bunch of people like that. We just said that, you know, each of us has to do whatever he has to do. And it broke up that way. I..

GREENE: Did you get more people at that point?

HARRIS: No, we never really had anything but a kind of ragtag bunch anyway, and there never was any agreement on how long we could go or what our plans were. We didn't really know how many people we had with us; we didn't have very many, probably. And people were saying, "Well, work it out, and then let's go at it again next year, or something."

Then I was under enormous pressure from the Johnson people. Marvin Watson, Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], and Joe Califano [Joseph A. Califano, Jr.] all came to see me. No, Marvin Watson and Joe Califano. I don't know whether Larry was in it or not, come to think of it. Joe led the administration end of it. The Administration was very anxious, number one, to get the social security increase passed, number two, to get the Senate out and the Congress out and go on home, and was wildly opposed to doing what we were trying to do—send this bill back to conference and so forth.

Mansfield always would use the same thing these fellows did, and Russell Long [Russell B. Long], saying, "Go talk to Wilbur Mills yourself. He said there will not be another conference; the conference has ended. He's not going to meet again

if the Senate turns us down.” And so we would say, “Well, why can’t we be as tough? Why don’t our leaders represent us as strongly as Wilbur Mills stands up for the House?”

GREENE: What did you actually hope Mansfield would do?

HARRIS: He said, “Why don’t all of us just agree....

BEGIN TAPE I, SIDE II

HARRIS: Robert and I had a plan whereby we could be saved from getting into the position of having held up the social security increase—I can’t remember the exact details now—but we could get no agreement, and we felt very little willingness to agree, from our side of it.

And the same with the President. Joe Califano, the best he would say from their side was, “The President will assure you that if you back off and let him have this bill now, he will make a statement, number one, deploring these repressive provisions in this bill when he signs the social security bill, and will pledge himself to join with you next spring, next year, in changing that.” So I said, “Will he say it publicly now?” He would not do that. He said, “The President won’t enter into an agreement publicly to do that. All I can tell you is that I think he’ll do that.” So we said, “That isn’t good enough.”

So then we assigned the days.... You know, we had to be there at certain times and so forth. Joe Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings] took the first day which was a Tuesday, as I recall. He was to be there at 9 o’clock when the Senate was going into session and stay on the floor all day or until noon—or whatever it was—both days. Well, I was a little worried about just having one man handle the floor so I went to the floor myself that day just in case something should happen. Joe Tydings was sitting in the back of the Senate at his desk, going through a lot of material he had to do, on other things, I suppose. Russell Long was there; Bob Byrd [Robert C. Byrd] was there; I forgot who was in the chair.

Mike Mansfield asked if he could talk to me. As I recall, we talked on the Senate floor. He said, “Here’s our problem. The OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] appropriation is waiting on the calendar and unless it’s passed by tomorrow”—or whatever date it was—“the employees there will not be able to get their salaries. I have approached the fellows here against you on this bill, and they say they will not agree to lay the social security bill aside to take up that or any other measure. So they’ve got the pressure back on you now, and they want to pursue the position that you’re holding up salaries for OEO and cutting off the entire OEO program.” And Mike was, you know, at that point trying to be procedurally helpful; he was just discussing the problem with me. So I said, “I don’t know. I’ll get back to you. I certainly wouldn’t want to agree to anything now.” So I went—I was going to go to the phone—back to Joe Tydings’ desk and said, “Joe, you’re in charge in this. If anything comes up, put in a quorum call and send for me.” He said, “All right.” I walked out to Bob Kennedy on the phone. He was in a committee meeting or something; I think he must have been presiding over it. Charlie Ferris [Charles D. Ferris] came running out and said, “They passed it!” And

I said, "Passed what?" He said, "Passed the social security bill." I said, "Well, how could they have passed it?" He said, "Russell just brought it up and passed it." And I said, "Well, where was Joe Tydings?" And he said, "Just sitting there." So I said, "Well, God, let's go in there and move to reconsider!" He said, "No, they've already killed that."

Well, I ran back on the floor, and he said, "I'll get Mike Mansfield." Mike came in very mad about it. Though I thought it was certainly a very intolerable thing that he [Russell] did, we were more mad at ourselves for allowing it to be done, for not being smart enough and alert enough. And poor Joe, he was in awful trouble and just was terribly chagrined about it, and there wasn't any excuse. He just sat there and didn't pay attention while they did it, even though he knew he was in charge. Well, he got up and said a few things, trying to excuse himself. Mansfield said some very harsh things about the tactic. Russell then had the advantage; he wouldn't back up unless we would agree to a vote. Mansfield asked me and said, "Why don't you agree to a vote, and then how long would you want to go?" And I said, "Well, I don't know." So he said, "I think that we ought to back it up and vote. And if you'll agree to some kind of time limit, well, Russell will do it. That's the only way he will." I did.

Then Bob Kennedy came; Peter Edelman strongly felt—I thought wrongly, and I don't know but what Bob might have said—that we should not have backed it up; we should have left *that* issue; they just had not allowed us to even have a roll call and so forth. I didn't think so. I thought it was worth going back through it for a roll call and I wasn't interested in converting it into a procedural issue. Bob then made a very harsh statement on the floor, which was answered by Byrd and Long. That's the way we wound up the year. It was a rather depressing time.

We later got some of the those things changed. Two things were obviously unworkable. One was the limit on AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] payments. The House kept extending it little by little every year and finally had to just repeal it as we suggested to start with. The "man in the house," I mean, the "unemployed father" thing we have won in the Senate from time to time on other matters, but we've still never been able to get the House to agree with much of what we were for. Now we've got all these issues again. Still have them. But that was an awful time.

GREENE: Do you think you would have had the vote or at least the volume of people to keep it going if the Senate...

HARRIS: Yes. It wouldn't have taken long, but you see, here we were getting in a bind. We didn't know where we were going, we didn't know really how long we could do it, and we were going to have to begin to face issues like holding up other appropriations, holding up people's salaries. I don't know what would have occurred.

The other side showed no signs of giving in. Mansfield and Johnson, President Johnson, were adamant and showed no signs of backing off. So I don't know what would have eventually happened. A wire story came out saying that what Johnson would do—which I think came from a meeting that Mansfield had with the [Democratic] Policy Committee. Joe Califano told me on the phone that the President was upset about that quoting of him in the paper,

and he didn't know whether he would go through with what Joe had said or not. As it turned out, he did not.

GREENE: Did you speak directly to Senator Kennedy about that, or were you kind of going...[inaudible]

HARRIS: I don't recall. Senator Kennedy and I talked back and forth all during the thing, but I don't recall. I was authorized to try to see what might be negotiated, and that would always be by this little larger bunch of seven or eight, you know. Many of them, I think, were hoping that they wouldn't have to back us in what looked like a futile fight to some of them and political trouble. I think they were hoping something could be worked out. So a lot of them would always sort of wind up saying, "Why don't you see what you can get out of Mike [Mansfield]? See what the President will say. Then let's meet again." It was kind of that way.

GREENE: Was Edward Kennedy in on these meetings? He offered two amendments that I remember. One was rejected and one was accepted.

HARRIS: Yeah, he was involved. Well, I don't know whether he came to any of the meetings or not. I think it was just assumed that he was interested. I don't believe he was involved in any of the actual strategy sessions.

GREENE: Well, first of all, how were the amendments composed? Did you decide in the small group what should be covered by the amendments and then just hand them out?

HARRIS: We had kind of a laundry list of explanations of them which Peter Edelman and whoever was staff for me—I think Vick French—pretty much put together. The later bills that we introduced were done the same way. We had a long laundry list of things we were interested in, and we divided them up into a couple of bills.

GREENE: This is now '68?

HARRIS: Uh-hm.

GREENE: In fact, maybe if you...

HARRIS: I think they were compiled the same way. The staff primarily put together the kind of laundry list, and then somebody would just say, "Well, I'll take that one and I'll take this one, and you take that one," and so forth.

GREENE: Maybe if you looked at the cosigners you will remember.

HARRIS: Who were at some of those meetings?

GREENE: Yeah. I think they're pretty much the same group in each case.

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HARRIS: Mondale, I think, was involved with us and Tydings was. I suppose Muskie [Edmund S. Muskie] must have been—I see his name here—but I don't see anybody else who was very deeply involved in it that are listed as cosponsors here. I mean, you know, this didn't come out in the strategy and so forth. I seemed to think that Bayh was there, you know, in a meeting or two. Then a fellow like Nelson [Gaylord Nelson] or Muskie might have been in one or two of the things but not that deeply involved in it.

GREENE: Was there any hope after this parliamentary maneuver that you could defeat the Senate...

HARRIS: No. We always knew we did not have the votes. We did not have the votes. That was why we were going to use our strategic position as a result of the fact that people wanted to go home; the thing was over...

GREENE: There was no question of people being angry enough at the way it was done to vote against it?

HARRIS: No. No. And most people just didn't feel that touched by it, you know, probably; then a lot of guys were off campaigning and just were anxious to go home and continue their campaigns. And it was important to a good many of them to say that the Democratic Congress and the Democratic President were able to get through this social security increase.

I was involved in the Kerner [Otto Kerner, Jr.] Commission, I guess, at about that time.

GREENE: Yes, in fact that was one of the things I was going to ask you about.

HARRIS: That's where I had learned more about welfare than I did on the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee hadn't gone into that subject until then, but in the Kerner Commission I had spent a good deal of time on income maintenance and the harsh effects of the welfare system on people. It was from that that I really got interested in this. And it happened that I was on the very committee which had jurisdiction. But I would have probably been very deeply involved in this as a result of that Kerner Commission study. It had not completed its report up until that time, though...

GREENE: Right.

HARRIS: ...as I recall.

GREENE: No, that didn't come out until February.

HARRIS: That's right, in the following year.

GREENE: Did you talk to Robert Kennedy in the course of the commission...

HARRIS: Yeah. He didn't think it was going to amount to anything. He and

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Ribicoff both were opposed to the idea. I dreamed up the idea of the Kerner Commission. Well, I say *I* did. Really, what happened one morning is that a professor called one of my staff people—and, goodness knows, it would be nice for somebody to know who that was—and said, “You know, I think we ought to have some kind of a high-level, blue-ribbon commission on the black riots in the cities. I think this really threatens to get out of hand—the great reaction you get out of the country and the lack of understanding of the depth of the causes and so forth.” And I liked the idea so I got a fellow on my staff to put together some language, which I didn't like. So then, I got a secretary over to the Senate that morning and dictated the resolution. I called up Mondale, he agreed with it, and he and I made a little brief speech on the Senate floor and introduced a resolution. I then held hearings on it and a few days later the President.... And I said at the time we introduced it, when Mondale and I spoke on the Senate floor, that actually the President could do this by executive order and ought to, and outlined then what actually, eventually happened. Johnson then called me, said he was going to appoint it, and he was going to name me a member, which surprised me.

But, as I recall, Ribicoff and Kennedy had been involved in those urban hearings in the Ribicoff subcommittee, as had I. They basically felt—and I think quite honestly—that what we needed was action, not study, and that we knew what to do, it was just a question of doing it. I agreed with that basically, except I thought that the country didn't understand, number one, what had happened. And I think that proved right in, for example, the sniping. You know, we were able to show that a lot of the reported facts of the riot had not been true as when investigated. Secondly, I was convinced that the people didn't understand the causes and, therefore, didn't understand really what had to be done. I hoped that attention which a high-level commission might get could generate the will to act, though that's been only very partially successful. And so, to some degree, I suppose Senators Kennedy and Ribicoff were correct.

But they were wrong in this respect: they also felt—Bob felt, I think—what was current in liberal and leftist circles at the time, that this was a rather mediocre, middle class group of people who were not going to say anything worth listening to. And so, at one point, Bob said to me—we talked two or three times about what he said—“What do you think about John Lindsay?” I said I thought he was really working at this. And he said, “Is he really?” So we talked some about that and about the kinds of things John and I were doing together—we

worked together very closely on the commission. He said, “You know, you won’t really come out with anything on it, do you think?” And I said, “Yes, I think we will.” And that surprised him and, I think, began to change his mind that we were going to really say some really tough things. I don’t think he expected it, and most other people didn’t.

But he was also aware that we were going to recommend an income maintenance system and take out some of these hard provisions in the welfare laws because we discussed that in connection with these social security amendments as well.

GREENE: Did you get any clear impression in this conversation among others about how he felt about Lindsay? Do you think it was kind of disappointing to him that you thought Mayor Lindsay was doing something

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worthwhile instead of really kind of incompetent?

HARRIS: No, I think he had the impression that John was an elitist and a dilettante. Now, whether his views changed over time or not about that, I don’t know. He never said it that abruptly.

GREENE: That’s an interesting relationship with him.

HARRIS: Uh-hm.

GREENE: Well, anyway, I guess as long as we’re talking about Kerner Commission, what happened when the report came out? What was his reaction to the whole thing and to the Administration’s lack of concern?

HARRIS: Very impressed. First he went immediately to the floor and made a very strong statement about that Kerner report. He often said to me several times he was just very much impressed with it, thought we’d done an excellent job. Then he really began to put the squeeze on Johnson, as he often tried to do. He got him to move. I recall, in particular, I testified before Joe Clark’s [Joseph S. Clark, Jr.] subcommittee—I believe it was manpower, or whatever—in the big auditorium in the New Senate Office Building. Bob Kennedy was there. John Lindsay testified that day, and so did I and someone else. What we were talking about were the recommendations of the Kerner Commission. I went through the thing as I saw it. Bob said at that time, “I think that’s the best statement I’ve ever heard about what the situation is.” I’d like to look at that record again sometime because we got into a lot of questions and answers about things and about what was going to be done about it. I believe New Hampshire had already occurred by then. I think he talked to the press outside that day and said that this was one of the reasons he was disturbed with Johnson—that he wasn’t moving on the Kerner Commission. And I think it might have been that night or soon thereafter that he made that statement in New York that he was reassessing his position—it might have been that day there, but it was right around

that same time. He was very impressed—he said to me and others—by what we had recommended.

GREENE: I know from what you've said that you had considerable contact with President Johnson. Did you ever get a clear feeling of Johnson's feelings about Robert Kennedy in the course of your....

HARRIS: No. It was the strangest thing. President Johnson—and I had a good relationship when I first came here because we, for one thing, had accents alike and we used the same kind of colloquialisms. So there was an easy communication between us; we were at ease with each other. That began to become rather strained and became more and more strained, particularly over two things: one was my friendship with Bob Kennedy and the other was my membership on the Kerner Commission. Johnson, I'm sure, felt that I had double-crossed him in the strong leadership role I took in the Kerner Commission. I think he always saw that—perhaps he's changed his mind now—as a slap at him. It did not sufficiently praise him for all the good

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he'd done. We even had a fellow, Henry "Boots" Taliaferro, Jr., make up a list of favorable references to the Johnson Administration in the Kerner Commission report to send over to him and, I think, just the page numbers and references alone came to seven or eight pages. But, by that time, it was too late—if there ever was a chance—to get him to say something favorable about it.

I never talked to him about it. The only time I ever talked to him about it was way back at the beginning at two different times: once in his office and once at a social occasion. He made some caustic reference to my friendship with John Lindsay, but in a kind of joking, laughing way that you could take either seriously or not. But he was very serious. Johnson is like a lot of people in public office, he doesn't say anything accidentally. He was very deliberate about it, and he intended, of course, to make some impression on me.

Prior to that time—and I don't know exactly when—Bob Kennedy and I and our families had become close friends. But the point when that caused some problems with Johnson was on the social security bill. Now, I was mean enough and, from Johnson's view, irresponsible enough on the social security bill that that alone should have cause some sort of strain between me and the President. But I'm confident that that strain was worsened by the fact that it was Bob Kennedy, of all people, I had yoked up with to fight the bill. As I told you, that was the point at which it got to be some problem. I never mentioned it to Johnson; he never mentioned it to me. He never in my presence said anything unfavorable about Bob Kennedy. Bob Kennedy knew that I was good friends with Humphrey and, for a time, got along well with Johnson. I don't know whether he ever knew that I had some problems of estrangement with Johnson dating from along in there somewhere. They got worse near the end of the term.

GREENE: Was he pretty frank, himself, about how he felt about Johnson?

HARRIS: No, we discussed that one time at Hyannis Port. We were walking to or from the boat, I think, one time, and we got to talking about 1960. He realized that Johnson felt or he said Johnson felt very hard toward him dating back to those days, and he had some quarrels with Johnson over those days and mentioned one or two in specific. He thought both of them had good reason.

GREENE: Do you remember the incident he mentioned?

HARRIS: He was particularly bitter about what he thought was a reference by President Johnson to his father's [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] appeasement of the Germans. I don't even remember; I have only...

GREENE: This was before the nomination?

HARRIS: Right. I have some vague recollection of having read about it at the time or something. I don't know what it was, but that I recall in particular.

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GREENE: Carrying Chamberlain's [Neville Chamberlain] umbrella or something like that.

HARRIS: Yes, that particularly struck in his mind. But Bob Kennedy was never one much to go into that kind of detail, and he was the sort of fellow, as I think I am, who's not much good at chitchat and also not too much about, you know, talking about personal stuff anyway. He was very uncomfortable talking about anything very close to him. One time in particular, we were having dinner at his house with Rowland Evans and his wife, LaDonna and I, and Bobby and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy]. There had just been something in the paper again or in the magazines or something about that famous episode with Bob Kennedy in Lyndon Johnson's room: Did or did he not try to thwart his brother's plan to choose Johnson as his vice-presidential nominee? He had up to that time read Philip Graham's posthumous piece that was published in *Life Magazine*, I believe and something that had just come out. Rowland Evans—and I was a bit aghast that he would do so—said, “Well, exactly what was the situation in regard to that? Now, we have everybody's view but yours and you're the one man who can tell us what really happened?” We were in a very intimate setting, but nevertheless, Rowland Evans is a newsman. I was really aghast that he would ask such a personal question. And Bob very adroitly turned off the conversation. He said, “I think things like that.... I have my view of it and others have their view from their vantage point, but I think things like that are better left to history.” And the conversation switched to something else.

GREENE: Can you think of any issues that he was not asked to get involved in that he might otherwise have been a natural participant, because of his relationship with Johnson and because it was known that he hesitated to attack him publicly?

HARRIS: No. I can't imagine anybody asking him not to get involved in anything, and I doubt if he'd pay any attention to it anyway, you know, if they did. I don't know of anything like that. There might have been some, but it was unknown to me.

GREENE: Okay. Is there any time that you can remember when you approached him for support on legislation you wanted that you thought he could be helpful on other than the things we've talked about?

HARRIS: The only thing I ever asked him to do, he did. It wasn't any legislation. I don't think any legislative stuff now because that we'd just be talking about from time to time, I suppose. But one year Joe Clark and Russell Long were running for whip—no, no, Joe Clark and Bob Byrd were running for the third position. I felt Muskie should run for it, but he wouldn't. There was some talk of somebody else running and whoever that was wouldn't. So a couple of people, a young senator and an older, more senior senator said, "You might be able to put that thing together and be in a place where you could win." So I said that.... I'd talked to Bob at his house one time. We were sitting down by the tennis courts; Ethel, I think, was playing tennis with General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor]. So I told him

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that, and he said, "Well, you know, I would support you." He said it very quickly without any hesitation. So I said, "Well, I want you to think about it. I will, too, and see." I talked to a few more and got interested, talked to him again, and he was quite firm in his willingness to do it. After a kind of run at it, it became obvious that there wasn't any way to do it and to put the votes together. Bob Byrd had done his work much too well and he had a few of the people that I would have had to have from that side of things in order to put it together, so I just backed out. I think there was some attempt to get Muskie or some other fellow back in again, but by then it was too late for the same reasons I couldn't make it. Byrd had worked far too long, much longer than any of us realized, and somehow or other he had progressive senators on his side, which was a surprise. But when I had asked Bob, he just said it immediately. When I talked to him later on—there hadn't been any casually given commitment—he understood he was committed and was quite willing to be committed.

GREENE: What about discussions about Vietnam? You mentioned talking to him about, I assume you meant the '66 speech—the one where he was later accused of letting the fox into the chicken coop.

HARRIS: No, when he said that, that was later; that was on coalition.

GREENE: Yes.

HARRIS: He talked about a coalition.

GREENE: It must have been the '65 speech then.

HARRIS: It was his first major speech in the Senate; it was in the Senate. He called for a bombing halt and I forgot what all else. Seems like he made it like a three-part thing.

He called me up—I guess he was at home—and said, “Why don’t you all come over. I want you to look at this speech.” I don’t know whether he said “on Vietnam” or what. So we sat in that little drawing room in the front of the house there, with a fireplace, a little small one—Ethel and LaDonna and Bob and Brumus and I—we might have eaten in there, too; I don’t know. I read that speech, and I said to him, “I don’t agree with you on stopping the bombing, but I think this is a great speech. I think it will rival your brother’s inaugural address in moral tone and content and style. And it ought to be done; it’s some way to help get this thing over.”

Much later is when—it might not be as far back as that; it doesn’t seem like it would’ve been that early that you’re talking.... I don’t think it would’ve been '65; it seems to me it was later than that.

GREENE: Well, the speech in '66 was the coalition, and then in '67 was—could be that’s the one you mean. Yeah. It was '67...

HARRIS: That sounds more like it.

GREENE: That’s where he gave the three-part initiative.

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HARRIS: That’s right. Well, I began to...

GREENE: Coming up with the Kosygin [Alexei N. Kosygin] letter.

HARRIS: Yeah, that’s right. That’s right. “If we had done as my brother [John F. Kennedy] did and chosen the letter we wanted and accepted it, as my brother did in regard to Cuba and so forth, we might have had some response.”

He was responsible for my beginning to doubt the moral and practical justification for the war. I really was pushed over to that view in a small luncheon we had in the Vandenberg Room over in the Capitol with Roger Hilsman, who had just come back from, among other places, Paris and had talked to a good many people, I believe, including representatives of the North Vietnamese. Hilsman, I thought, made a convincing case for an unconditional halt in the bombing. I eventually spoke out on both the bombing halt and de-escalation; I was not willing to do that at the time he had me read that speech. I thought it was an excellent speech. That’s when he said, “I’m under such a handicap. People are going to say that whatever I say is for those reasons,” that I mentioned a while ago.

GREENE: That was the one that followed his trip to Europe where he was accused, well...

HARRIS: I guess...

GREENE: ...he was not accused; he didn't realize it was a peace feeler. Did he discuss that part of it at all?

HARRIS: No, not that much. It seems to me that was later, but I don't recall discussing that with him.

GREENE: Did he make an effort to convert you to a more dovish position?

HARRIS: No, except with things like getting me exposed to fellows like Roger Hilsman in private. There was probably about five guys at that little meeting over there.

What we used to do—he was good at it; his brother [Edward M. Kennedy] also did some; Birch Bayh did; I did—for a while, we were having little luncheons in our own offices if we had some interesting fellow. Like I remember one time we had—oh, gosh, the name just left me, great old French internationalist, wonderful figure of a man. Anyway, we had a luncheon over there in his office; I think it was the last such luncheon. We talked about NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and so forth. We did a lot of that when he was here. That's the way that Hilsman thing was.

He was not that kind of fellow. He always figured I'd have to be a little more oriented toward my state in some issues than I would turn out to be.

GREENE: I was going to ask you that.

HARRIS: Yeah. He just expected that I would have to take a different position than the one I took. He was always sort of surprised that I

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wouldn't be more responsible to some conservative interests in my state.

BEGIN TAPE II, SIDE I

GREENE: What other things do you remember about Vietnam going up, let's say, to the time of the announcement? Comments, say, on McNamara's [Robert S. McNamara] resignation and the offensive, the request for troops and this kind of thing. Did you discuss any of them?

HARRIS: I don't remember any details like that. I had been with him when Maxwell Taylor was present at social functions at his house. I'd been with him at

social functions when McNamara was there, but I don't remember any details much about Vietnam. Nothing occurs to me.

GREENE: Okay. Can you remember when you first discussed the possibility of his running in 1968 with him?

HARRIS: Never did.

GREENE: No.

HARRIS: The one time in all of our lives that it ever came up, we were on his father's boat at Hyannis Port—Ethel and Bobby and LaDonna and I; Mary McGrory might have been along, I don't know; maybe one or two of his sisters. He and I had been discussing the New York political situation, and we were coming back over to the house after lunch. Ethel was engaged in a conversation with someone else, and Ethel turned to Bob and said, "Bobby, explain to them how it's so unusual for a person to run against an incumbent President of his own Party." That was a tipoff that there had been some discussion about it. So he said, "Who do you have in mind, General McClellan [George Brinton McClellan] running against Abraham Lincoln?" Everybody laughed, and we went on to something else, which was another way to avoid talking serious business. Get a good laugh, you know. In other words, Heaven, you're not thinking about me running against Lyndon Johnson. You must have in mind an historical situation with General McClellan against Abraham Lincoln.

GREENE: When would this have been, do you have any idea?

HARRIS: In the summer, but I don't know what year. I was at his house the night, I suppose, he decided to run, but I only vaguely knew that it was going on and read later that they met afterwards.

The day that I testified before that Clark committee, I think we were out to their house for a dinner. It was after New Hampshire. They had the New York press in, which wasn't considered to be the most exciting evening of all time for them, so they asked some of their friends to come both to impress the visitors, I think, and to while away the hours. So I was there and Rene Carpenter and LaDonna and I forget who all else now, maybe two or three news people, maybe Wallace [Myron L. Wallace]...

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GREENE: Newsmen. Mike? Roger Mudd [Roger H. Mudd]?

HARRIS: Roger Mudd. Newfield [Jack Newfield] and Rene Carpenter and I were sort of radicals at our table. They scandalized the hell out of two or three news people, talking about legalizing marijuana, abortions, and a little bit of everything. I'm not sure we did him too much good.

He made a joke that night about his brother's presidential flag, which shocked me for two reasons: one, it was some public acknowledgement of the fact that he was on the verge of some kind of a decision, one way or another, at least to say it publicly and in a joking way; and secondly, it was the first time I ever heard him say anything about his brother in a joking way. His brother's flag was there in the room. I don't even know now what it was, but he was very clever that night, as usual. He said something about, "You notice we have the presidential flag here." So when he said it, it really just brought the house down because it was on everybody's mind, I suppose. We left then. As we left, John Whittaker [James W. Whittaker] was there. Ethel said, "John, this is Lyndon Johnson's main man, Fred Harris." We were around the foyer; you know, she was teasing me because I had agreed to head up Town and Country for Johnson and Humphrey—it was a rural and small town organization. Bob Kennedy had on several occasions, of course, endorsed Johnson's reelection, too, and then I had agreed to this position. So Ethel said to John Whittaker, "John, this is Lyndon Johnson's main supporter," or something like that.

GREENE: You mean Jim Whittaker, the mountain climber?

HARRIS: Yeah. What did I say, John?

GREENE: Yeah.

HARRIS: And that was as we were leaving; Bobby and Ethel and Jim Whittaker, LaDonna and I were standing at the door. So I said, "Well, I just made the same decision Bob did, but I just hadn't changed my mind." And we laughed. I said, "Bob, I know that you've got a tough decision to make, and *you* know that I can't be of any help to you in making it," what I intended to be a reference to my own position with Johnson and Humphrey. I said, "Do what your heart tells you and that will be the right thing." I left really not thinking much that he probably would run. I thought he might—despite how he felt about McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy]—endorse McCarthy or something like that; I knew he was getting all sorts of conflicting advice. But that was our last conversation, the last time we ever talked.

GREENE: So he would never really have even approached you.

HARRIS: No, it's hard for people to understand exactly, and I think LaDonna understands better than probably anybody else the kind of relationship we had. First of all, let me say, a lot of people didn't realize that I was close friends with Hubert Humphrey as well. Bob Kennedy did. He knew that. And I had agreed to this position in the Johnson-Humphrey campaign. Then I was in New Orleans speaking at a student conference of several universities at Loyola University in New Orleans when President Johnson an-

nounced that he would withdraw as a candidate. I flew back into Washington the next day, getting in here, seems to me, like maybe 1 o'clock or something like that. I found that Bob Kennedy had called me. Humphrey was in Mexico. No one knew whether Johnson had taken Humphrey "over the side"—to use Bob's phrase—with him or not. There was some thought that maybe he must have discussed it with Humphrey, and just as he had said that he didn't want to be involved himself politically, he might have said to Humphrey, "Neither can we stand the Johnson-Humphrey Administration involved. Therefore, you've got to agree, too, not to run."

So I didn't have any idea what the situation was. Bob had tried to call me; he had twice been on the phone personally... [Interruption] Bob had called twice from New York and had talked to my secretary personally. He was on the line himself, I recall, because she was impressed by that. So I tried to call him back in New York. He'd gone from New York to Philadelphia, his New York office said, so I left word in New York for him to call me and called ahead to Philadelphia. He'd not arrived; I left word there. Then he didn't call all evening long.

Humphrey, in the meantime.... I don't know what day he came back—that night or the next night. Anyway, I told Vick French I wanted to be sure that Bob knew that I'd tried to get him back. So Vick called Peter Edelman at the office the next day and said that we'd left word; Bob never called back. So he said, "Well, Bob is at home. If the Senator would call him, he could get him on the phone." So I called there and got Angie [Angela M. Novello] on the phone. She said, "He's in a meeting for about an hour." I said, "Would you tell him that I returned his call and I'll be here in the office." He never called back. I think really because he just didn't particularly want to have to solicit my support. I think it would have been a distasteful thing for him to do that.

What I did with Humphrey then.... Humphrey came in maybe that very day or night or whatever and called and said would LaDonna and I come to breakfast at his apartment the next morning—he got in at about 9 o'clock—so we did. The four of us had breakfast the next morning. He was getting advice to announce immediately, but he didn't really want to decide yet. So I agreed that I would wait and not make any decision until he had decided what he was going to do. I sort of proceeded from that prior commitment to the Johnson-Humphrey ticket and friendship. So I wound up in Humphrey's campaign on the direct solicitation eventually of Mondale. But Bob and I never talked; I think, you know, he just really didn't want to.... There was a story in a column or two that I had failed to call *him*. I once went through that with Ted Kennedy just to be sure he didn't misunderstand, giving him the exact people who had been involved—Peter and Angie and so forth.

The last time we ever talked was that time at his house, the night apparently that he pretty much decided to run.

GREENE: Would it have made any difference to you if he had come out earlier, or if he had gotten back in touch with you and solicited your support at that point or much earlier, before he even announced? Or did you consider yourself committed?

HARRIS: I don't know. You know, now there's no way to look back on what

the situation was. It was an awful kind of thing. I had had the vague thought a time or two, very fleetingly, that wouldn't it be terrible in '72 if Hubert Humphrey and Bob Kennedy were both candidates for the presidency. That seemed so remote. The idea that Johnson wouldn't run again sounded crazy to me. I didn't think that was any possibility—that he would not run—and at the time, just as Bob did, I couldn't see anybody that would challenge him. I sure as hell didn't want Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. Now, as you look back on it, of course, after his death and the campaign and so forth, your views are colored by that. I don't think there's any way to know now what you would have done then.

GREENE: Did you have contact from this point on at all with his people, with Edward Kennedy or Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] or anyone like that? Did any of them try to get to you before Humphrey did?

HARRIS: No, not another soul. I don't think any of them would have dared to call me.

GREENE: Well, I have a number of questions on the campaign and particularly things like Ohio—no, not Ohio, but the Pennsylvania situation. But I think we have to stop.

HARRIS: Okay, why don't we do that, and then pick it up at another good time like this in the afternoon. I'm going to be gone for a week though; I'm going to South America for a while...

GREENE: Oh! How nice!

HARRIS: Friday.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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