

Charles Bartlett Oral History Interview – JFK #1, 1/6/1965
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Biographical Note

Bartlett, Washington correspondent for the *Chattanooga Times* from 1948 to 1962, columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*, and personal friend of John F. Kennedy (JFK), discusses his role in introducing Jacqueline Bouvier to JFK, JFK's relationship with Lyndon Baines Johnson, and JFK's Cabinet appointments, among other issues.

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Charles Bartlett – JFK #1

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First of Two Oral History Interviews

With

Charles Bartlett

January 6, 1965
Washington, D.C.

By Fred Holborn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLBORN: I think as we move in on this interview, Charlie, I think probably the easiest is to start in the most general way. Perhaps you can recollect first when was it, what moment that you first were conscious of Jack Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. Was it through a personal meeting or had you known about him before you ever met?

BARTLETT: Well, I hadn't really known him at all or known much about him. The Kennedy clan was rather famous down in Florida. My family lived in this little place called Hobe Sound, thirty miles north of Palm Beach. It was a rather rowdy fame that the clan

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enjoyed at this point. But the children were known generally. But I really didn't meet any of them until after the War, and then I did meet John Kennedy in Palm Beach.

HOLBORN: This was before he was a congressman or after?

BARTLETT: He just had committed himself to run for Congress, and he was about to go up to Boston and begin the campaign. It was the winter of 1956.

HOLBORN: No, '46.

BARTLETT: Excuse me, '46.

HOLBORN: Just before he began the primary against....

BARTLETT: The night I met him we were sitting in a night club called The Patio. And some of the Palm Beach figures would come up and pat him on the back and say, "Jack, I'm so glad you're running for Congress." I remember him saying, "In only a year or so they'll be saying I'm the worst son of a bitch that ever lived." But he was very clear about his decision to go into Congress. He said that he was giving up the newspaper business; that he felt that

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it was slightly frustrating; that you didn't really get much done in the newspaper business; that if you really wanted to accomplish anything you had to become a politician; and that while he had enjoyed his days in the Hearst stable, why he thought that perhaps this wasn't the answer for him. It was a very interesting discussion because I was just at that point going into the newspaper business myself.

HOLBORN: So you think it was not an accidental decision? I mean that, if that opportunity hadn't arisen in 1946 that he still probably would have ended up in politics?

BARTLETT: Well, it seemed to me that if he.... Sometimes you read that he was a reluctant figure being dragooned into politics by his father [Joseph P. Kennedy]. I really didn't get that impression at all. I gathered that it was a wholesome, full-blown wish on his own part.

HOLBORN: At that time did he feel a sense of organization,

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of absorption in this? Did he expect to win...

BARTLETT: He wasn't really--he hadn't faced up to it yet. I don't think he...

HOLBORN: Or did he look at it as sort of a gamble that was worth trying?

BARTLETT: At this point--this was very early winter--he was just gathering his resources, and he was getting ready, talking about it. Then I went to Chattanooga, so I really didn't see him again until I came to Washington in January of 1948, which was the beginning of his second term. I think at that

point Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] had moved down and was keeping house for him, and we had some very pleasant evenings. He was very relaxed as a congressman. I remember him in his office; he took a rather, almost a diffident approach to it. He had that wonderful secretary--was it Mary Gallagher [Mary Barelli Gallagher]?

HOLBORN: Mary Gallagher, yes.

BARTLETT: And Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]. He always had a golf club in the corner of his office, and he'd stand and sort of swing the club and discuss the affairs of the day.

HOLBORN: He always kept that golf club at his office, in the

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Senate, too.

BARTLETT: Oh, did he? In the Senate too? I didn't remember it in the Senate. I guess he used it less when he got into the Senate because he was busier. But in the House he didn't feel busy. You never felt that he was really enjoying himself. He went off every weekend, usually to Florida or Hyannis Port. You didn't feel that he was really seized by the House.

HOLBORN: Do you recall in 1948 and '49, did he have any sense of the course he might follow? Did he ever talk about running for the Senate at that time?

BARTLETT: He really didn't, not to me. He was obviously looking for a situation—and of course later on he started making those frequent trips to Massachusetts. But at this point he seemed to be just waiting for his chance. He didn't really talk much about it. But it was quite clear that he didn't intend to try for seniority in the House of Representatives.

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HOLBORN: What kind of personal relations did you observe that he had with other congressmen?

BARTLETT: Well, it was rather interesting. He took a sort of an observer's view of the House really. I mean I don't think that he ever felt any enormous—at that stage, I don't think that he felt an enormous affinity. He wasn't a member of the, sort of House team. He didn't have that sort of avuncular regard for Sam Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn]. I think that he was sort of like a young man sort of looking at the seniors. And he did it with a good deal of humor and with some very good insight. But he looked at it more or less as an outsider it always seemed to me.

HOLBORN: Well, I can remember I was an undergraduate at Harvard then, I guess, and the first time I ever heard him was at a fairly small group run by a professor. And he gave sort of a clinical description of the House. He took it apart as a....

BARTLETT: Was that the evening that blew into such a storm?

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HOLBORN: That was one year later. I also was at that. But that was as a graduate student, you know.

BARTLETT: Well, I think he didn't really--he just really wasn't seized by it. I remember he told me that one thing he liked about George Smathers [George Armistead Smathers]—he said he liked George Smathers because he really didn't give a damn. I think he found that rather refreshing. I think that all these sort of hustling freshmen—that just wasn't his temperament.

HOLBORN: Did he ever give you the sense of sort of having any kind of political philosophy at the time?

BARTLETT: I think he was sort of testing it out. I think he used to talk about voting more liberally than he talked. I think that he was more interested really in the technique of survival than he was really in the political philosophy. He didn't feel strongly on issues, but as sort of an overall. He certainly never regarded himself in those days, he wouldn't have identified himself as

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a liberal, I don't think.

HOLBORN: Who around him did he seek advice from in those days?

BARTLETT: It looked like from what I could see, it was rather a casual operation. I really am not aware of any great friendships that he made in the House except George Smathers. Do you know of any?

HOLBORN: No. I guess in those days he knew Henry Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] moderately well.

BARTLETT: Yes, yes. There was something to that one too. No, it wasn't a..... He was very much a loner in the House, I would say. Of course, he usually had his lunch in his office; George Thomas would bring it over from Georgetown. As I say, he went away every weekend. I remember he was very amusing

about..... Langdon Marvin was around; he used to joke about having Langdon Marvin in the basement chained to a desk writing bills for him. And Langdon had a lot of aviation bills which he would bring to....

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HOLBORN: These were the subsidy bills.

BARTLETT: On the airplane subsidy. Langdon was very much involved with that. And looking back on it, that and there was some business about how you pick your candidates for Annapolis and West Point. But I don't identify him with any great issues at that time. He was on the Labor Committee, but he didn't really talk about it to me very much. He obviously was part of the Taft [Robert Alphonso Taft]-Hartley [Fred Allan Hartley, Jr.] deliberations, but I don't think he was enormously challenged by very much that he found over there.

HOLBORN: At what point do you think, in his mind, plans began to accelerate? At what time did he first even mention running for the Senate?

BARTLETT: Well, I think when he moved into the Senate then I...

HOLBORN: At what point, do you think, was it? Did he decide only on the brink of the campaign in the winter or fall of the previous year, or had he talked about

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the Senate at all a year and a half or two years previous?

BARTLETT: I think he got to the point where he just decided that he was going to..... As I remember, the way he expressed it to me was that he was either going to run for the Senate or get out of politics. He'd really had the House.

HOLBORN: Well, there was a slight possibility for governor at one time, too, wasn't there?

BARTLETT: He never discussed the governor thing with me at all. But when this thing came along, why, he seemed completely ready. And with him it was an uphill effort, but he was ready to risk it.

HOLBORN: Did you see him much during that campaign?

BARTLETT: Well, I did. It was sort of an intermittent thing. I went up there a couple of times. I came in once with the [Adlai E. Stevenson] train.

There was a great rhubarb because there was a question of which of the girls would be allowed to go to Pittsfield and meet Adlai's train. And Mr.

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Kennedy selected Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] as the most decorous and restrained of the girls, and Eunice was furious because she had to stay in Boston.

HOLBORN: And did you see him as a possible winner or as a probable winner?

BARTLETT: I remember we arrived and that night fifteen minutes of very good television time had been laid out with Doris Fleeson, who came in on the train. And Mr. Kennedy, I guess, always had a very good relationship with Doris Fleeson, which I don't think was ever quite emulated by his son. So he had arranged for his old friend Doris to interview Jack on television. Doris was quite wound up. And Jack in those days was not an aggressive personality. He had sort of a politeness and a sort of hang-backishness, even on television. And Doris came out, and he asked her about the Stevenson campaign. She talked for six of the fifteen minutes about Stevenson and his campaign and then turned to him and said, "Now, Jack, we

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think we have two pretty good senators from Massachusetts. Why are you running?" And when he'd gotten over that hump, she asked him where he stood on McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]. And I've sort of forgotten his answer. But this was a great program.

HOLBORN: But when you observed the campaign, such as you did, did you see him as a likely, possible winner or as a probable winner, in your own mind?

BARTLETT: It was a funny thing about him. As long as I knew him, you always had a feeling that he never really thought much about whether he was going to win. It was a funny thing. I can remember going up when he was just starting that campaign and taking a trip with him when he was going around the state talking about his travels to the Far East. And he had the pointer and the..... And really, when you think of what emerged only nine years later, it really is fantastic because, I mean, he talked very rapidly, and he was rather shy, and very unemphatic about the

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thing; he was extremely pertinent and extremely bright and extremely capable and everything. But it's a remarkable thing that this very forceful national leader really developed in nine short years from that point. You just had that feeling. He didn't talk much about whether he was going to win or not, you know. He didn't seem gripped by it. He always

seemed to me to have an amazing confidence in his own political races--up to the presidency, of course, which was a sweater. Were you in that campaign? Do you remember that?

HOLBORN: No, I wasn't really in it. No. That was my hardest year of graduate school.

BARTLETT: You just never thought--I thought of that during Bobby's [Robert F. Kennedy] race last year when there was some question, you know, how it was going to come out. I must say with Jack it never occurred to me whether he was going to win or not. You just sort of assumed it.

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HOLBORN: Did he have any feeling about Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge]? Did he have any grudges or was it just something...

BARTLETT: No, I never..... The only complaint I remember his making in that race was something about John Lodge's [John Davis Lodge] wife, the Italian lady [Francesca Braggiotti], came up and made a rather bitter speech in Italian which annoyed him. That was the only complaint that he voiced to me about that campaign. I remember all the excitement. Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]--I used to laugh--Frank Morrissey was all over the picture. I remember Frank telling about how the Italians were going to decorate Henry Cabot Lodge with some kind of a special thing, so they decided they'd better have one for Jack. The man bringing Cabot Lodge's decoration was coming down on the train from Montreal, and they hijacked him off of the train so that Jack would get his decoration first. But he used to sit in that car--I must say, he always had a sort of stoic, sociable quality

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about it. He'd drive all over that damn state. With that back it must have hurt like hell, and he'd sit there with that coat collar up and drive through those cold Massachusetts evenings.

HOLBORN: You think you have a sense of this being well organized? Was it really that organized?

BARTLETT: Well, I think it was. Particularly towards the end you got an enormous sense of the organization. The headquarters was a very lively place. Bobby was all over, and you could hear Bobby in the background saying, "But, now, Dad." And it was very effective, you know. But I wasn't that close, I came in as an itinerant newspaper man, and I'd stay for a day or two and then leave. I took a trip with him down to Fall River. But he didn't seem very sweaty about it. Particularly at the end he didn't seem too gripped by the possibility that he might be defeated.

HOLBORN: Now, did you find him at all changed as a senator from a

congressman?

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BARTLETT: Yes, I did. It was a rather interesting change because one of the things that he used to enjoy in the House days was he used to enjoy kidding about the personalities on the scene, and there used to be a lot of jokes about different personalities from Sam Rayburn down, and even some sort of gossiping about the foibles of some of the senior statesmen in Congress. But I must say that after he got into the Senate, then he seemed to me to be much more totally involved. I mean sort of the attitude of a slightly passive viewer of the scene had completely gone, and he was involved. And I think he immediately stopped--I think at some point along in there he must have decided that it was not constant with his interest to really talk about anybody because I never really heard him say anything critically of anyone again after he got in the Senate. I mean, when he was mad at somebody, he'd express it, but

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he never really just engaged in idle sort of knocks against people after that time. He became a much more engaged figure.

HOLBORN: I know, for example, from the very beginning he seemed to take his relationship to Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] very seriously. I mean he was genuinely deferential, really did work in harness.

BARTLETT: I think that a very deep sense of humility.... I think that his acceptance by the Harvard community meant a lot to him at that point, I think the fact that he had finally made some sort of inroads into the intellectual group; I think that all of these things sort of made him feel more valid in his own judgment. I think that he got much more sense of his own part in the thing. I think he was humbled. Many people when they go from the House to the Senate, as you know, react with an enormously swelled head. You get that very often

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with people. It's always very dismaying when it happens to be a friend. But I think that with Jack Kennedy there was none of that. He never changed, even when he moved into the White House really, in that respect. But he became a much more serious fellow right away.

HOLBORN: He didn't feel any restlessness there at the beginning?

BARTLETT: I don't think so. He really didn't. I think he was very flattered by the Senate. I think that the only unpleasant thing was losing Mary Gallagher when she said she just didn't want to go and be part of a large staff. No, he didn't show any restlessness.

HOLBORN: Well, now, it was the first year also that of course he got married. Whether historical fact or myth, you were credited very often with having been the architect

BARTLETT: That may not be the word, but I think the fact is....

HOLBORN: What is the real story here?

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BARTLETT: The fact is that back in..... I first knew Jackie Bouvier [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]--I used to see her up in Southampton, Easthampton, actually. She used to go up and visit with her father in the summer, and then I knew her down here. She always had these sort of English beaus and I must say they were not up to her. She was an enormously attractive girl. And I don't know why--I guess he'd never met her. She was much younger than I was, but I did conceive the idea of introducing them really very early. It's rather amazing. My brother got married in 1948, and I can really remember at that wedding in Long Island trying to get Jackie Bouvier across this great crowd over to meet John Kennedy. Actually, it was rather funny because I got her about half way across and she got involved in--I introduced her to Gene Tunney who was a friend of my father [Valentine C. Bartlett] who was there--she got involved in a conversation with him. And by the time I got her across, why, he'd left. So

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it didn't work then and it really wasn't until after I was married, it was two years later, in 1950, before we introduced them. But it was always in my mind and I think it was a very good concept.

HOLBORN: You mean you introduced them here in Washington?

BARTLETT: Well, then finally, yes. We introduced them at a dinner in the spring. We had a tiny little house in Georgetown and they both came, and a couple of other people. I remember Jeff and Pat Roche from New York, about six people. Jackie was, I guess, leaving for Europe very shortly, and after the dinner, why, I walked her out to the car, and Jack Kennedy came sort of tailing after, and he was muttering shyly about, "Shall we go someplace and have a drink?" And Jackie at that stage noticed in the back seat that some man had--a young friend, had been walking along the street and he'd gotten in her car, and crawled into the back seat and was

[-20-]

waiting there. So she was forced to tell the Senator that she couldn't join him for a drink.

HOLBORN: So at what point do you think they really decided to get married?

BARTLETT: Well, this was an awkward time actually because, as I said, she was going to Europe and he was just getting involved in the campaign. He really wasn't a Senator then, that's right, he was just getting involved in his campaign. And he was really absent from Washington for most of the next year and she was absent for part of it, so there really wasn't much hope. The credit for the next phase really belongs to Martha [Josephine Martha Buck Bartlett] because Jackie was engaged to a fellow whom we didn't think much of. He was a nice fellow, but he didn't seem to be worthy of her hand. So Martha urged Jackie to invite--she needed an extra man for some party she was having I guess her fiancé couldn't come down for this party, she needed an extra man--so Martha urged

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her to invite the Senator-elect, which she did. So I think it was fortunate that Martha applied that pressure. This was the beginning of really the serious courtship which went on to the priest. This was in December when finally they, yes, in December he came down and I guess from that point on, the next thing her engagement was broken some time during the winter. And by the spring we were happy to feel that this thing was pretty well moving along. And of course they got married in September.

HOLBORN: And then you were an usher in the wedding?

BARTLETT: Yes, a very famous wedding, front page of the *New York Times*.

HOLBORN: It is interesting that among the ushers only one of them was really a political friendship.

BARTLETT: Yes, which was...

HOLBORN: George Smathers.

BARTLETT: George Smathers, yes. It was a curious group. I must say that I think the President's circle

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of friends, it's really an amazing story in itself when you think of the variety of the personalities and the fact that very few of them really had much in common with each other. It was really a reflection of the fact that he was a many faceted man. The friends why, you know, only four or five of them were close friends of mine. They've become friends over the years, but there was a very diverse....

HOLBORN: And fairly compartmentalized, though.

BARTLETT: And he kept them pretty well compartmentalized. There was very little sort of cross.... Yes, that's right. That's right.

HOLBORN: And he lost relatively few friends considering he was a politician.

BARTLETT: Yes, I don't think he--I really don't know of any friend that he had that I considered a close friend who really was his friend that... I mean it was a constant thing. It was an unusual relationship. A friend's relationship

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with John Kennedy was an unusual thing, particularly in the years when he was moving around so much as a congressman. You didn't see that much of him. It wasn't as if--he'd be gone for long periods. He wasn't a cozy friend in the sense that he wasn't somebody that you'd sort of slop around with on Sunday. It was always a sort of a--you know, you'd arrange to take a walk, you'd arrange to do something. You'd go to his house for dinner. It was always something that had been laid down, you know. He divided his time in his own way.

HOLBORN: He never really broke with people in the way most politicians do.

BARTLETT: Yes, he didn't break with them. He never even really--I mean I think later in the years when he became President there were times when he would get annoyed at me, I felt, for some comment that I was making about his operation. But I must say that he never really, or at least he rarely showed it. Sometimes he would,

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once or twice he did. But he rarely showed it; he kept his reactions pretty well to himself. The only reaction that he would inevitably show to a friend was if a friend was really boring him.

HOLBORN: That's boredom. Boredom was the worst sin.

BARTLETT: Yes, that was the one thing that he would not take much of.

HOLBORN: Was he still in those years a practical joker at all?

BARTLETT: No, I didn't see much of practical jokes, but a wonderful sense of humor. And I must say that when he and Eunice had that house in Georgetown, we really had some very funny evenings. Eunice had sort of her own varied assortment of friends, but there were really some....

HOLBORN: Did you see him at all when he was in Florida while he was recovering from his operation and then in the...

BARTLETT: Well, after he had the operation, I saw him up

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in New York. And then I saw a lot of him when he came down and was recuperating at the Auchincloss' house here, and when he was writing his book. And it made me a very vehement figure when the charge was later made that he had not written this book because I can remember him lying in that room. And I used to go up there, and that board on his.... And writing almost upside down. It seemed to me that was one of the weirdest charges that's been made.

HOLBORN: As you recall, how did he come to the decision to write this book?

BARTLETT: Well I think he was very impressed by the.... As you remember, just that spring it looked like he was going to have to vote on the McCarthy thing and he did have two speeches ready, I remember. I guess you were there then.

HOLBORN: No. I hadn't come yet.

BARTLETT: In other words, he had to wrestle with himself. He never committed himself to me as to how he would have

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voted. I always suspected that he would have voted to censure Joe McCarthy, but he certainly was pleased I think that he didn't have to take that burden. I always thought that the criticism that was leveled against him for being happy that he didn't have to take a vote which would cost him a lot of skin in Massachusetts was rather ludicrous. And I think at this point he was impressed by the fact that there are moments in a senator's life, and I suppose as he lay there.... I mean his mind was always pertinent. I think this was one of his great qualities was never irrelevant. And I think that the whole concept of what were the really gutty decisions that have been made by men with seats in the Senate sort of fascinated him. So when he had this time, I suppose it was natural that he would turn that way.

HOLBORN: I would think that illustrates, too, that he had a completely different sense of the Senate as

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an institution as opposed to the House. In the Senate he had a feeling of an institutional continuity, of being a part of something.

BARTLETT: That's what he expected, and the Senate impressed him obviously....

HOLBORN: I think it was also one of the things with Harvard in his case. It had some institutional meaning to him.

BARTLETT: Yes, that's right. Deeply. When he lost that race, I think he—that was one election that he did lose, that first election to the...

HOLBORN: Board election, yes.

BARTLETT: Overseers. I mean I had the feeling at the time that this had...

HOLBORN: I know, think it was a real blow. It was just after he had come back in business after the....

BARTLETT: Yes. I think he was very sorry over that and very regretful and very proud when he finally did get on. I think he always enjoyed his role at Harvard. No, that's right.

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HOLBORN: So far as you could observe it, what were his relations or the influence of his father after he was a senator?

BARTLETT: Well, of course he was such an independent fellow that I think anybody that ever tried to claim that anybody dominated him would have a hard time proving it. He was extremely independent and really a fairly elusive fellow in that I don't think that he ever really spent that much time with any individual over a long period. As you say his relations were compartmentalized. But I was never aware really, particularly after he got into the Senate.... He was really on his own course. I remember the first time he went on "Meet the Press." It was rather exciting. He was in the House. And I remember on the Sunday before in the afternoon we sat down and had sort of a skull session, passing the questions which might come up. And at this point, his thoughts were clearly his own. Any

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similarities to his father's came to the fact that he did have a very practical mind, too, and then he had that same quality of judgment that distinguishes his father.

HOLBORN: Now, to take the first half of the Senate. We'll finish up with the first half of the Senate period then.... Did he talk to you much about the

decision to run for the vice presidency?

BARTLETT: Well, we talked about it. He told me that Adlai Stevenson had come down to Hyannis Port at that time and that Adlai was sort of holding out a little bit. He was obviously exhilarated by it. And I suggested that Adlai might want him just because he'd want some dough from his old man. I remember that he was aware of that possibility. I think that he was also aware that it was probably not a very rewarding role in 1956. And I can remember in Chicago I don't think that.... The way Stevenson laid that challenge on the floor I think was what really

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challenged him. I think at that point he decided that this was going to move. And of course everybody was all around ready to move. Sarge [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.] was there. I remember the whole family was milling around ready to go. It was like a competition As soon as the competition arose, why, then he lost his reluctance he really went for it. I was amazed that he seemed to be extremely disappointed afterwards. I was really amazed because I hadn't been that aware before that he really wanted it that much.

HOLBORN: Did he see pretty quickly how he could use this defeat to his advantage? Do you think he sensed that fairly quickly?

BARTLETT: I think that when those tapes came in and the impact he made became apparent, he realized he had made a breakthrough. But I should recall that it was rather amusing that night. We walked back to his hotel room. I guess I ran into him coming out of the stadium and came

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back with him from the stadium after Stevenson had thrown down the challenge. And the machinery was beginning to accelerate and he was obviously quite excited. I said, "Look, there's Carmine DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio]. You ought to go and see what you can do about him, he might be able to help you." I wish I had the movies of this scene because it's rather ironic as history worked out because he went up--this rather slight figure and DeSapio's a rather big fellow--and the reporters were all sort of around DeSapio, and they completely ignored Kennedy. But he went up and shyly said, "Excuse me, Mr. DeSapio, but my name is John Kennedy from Massachusetts, and I wondered if I could have a few words with you?" That was the beginning. As I remember, he got a pretty good chunk of the New York vote.

HOLBORN: Yes. He got most of it.

BARTLETT: Yes, he got most of it. But that was the beginning.

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Then I rode out the next day with Jackie to the amphitheater. She was, of course, exhausted because she'd been up all night, which turned out to have been a mistake--the loss of the baby. But it was never quite clear to me why he felt so badly that he lost the nomination. I never really understood that. And then he went abroad, and I didn't see him for awhile.

HOLBORN: But you did have a real sense of letdown? That he felt....

BARTLETT: I did after that thing, yes. I did, yes. I think it was just excitement, really, more than anything.

HOLBORN: I was out of the country then, but I met Teddy [Edward Moore Kennedy] about three weeks before the Convention. He called once. He seemed to be looking at it again rather clinically, the pros and the cons. Really, he wasn't emotionally very much involved in it, except somewhat surprised by the amount of interest that it had stirred up. He had gotten on the cover of *Newsweek*, I believe.

BARTLETT: You mean after the thing?

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HOLBORN: No, just before.

BARTLETT: Oh, just before, yes. I suppose as he said later, you know these fellows all.... And then there was some question about whether George Romney [George W. Romney] would run for the presidency in 1964. He was always cited as inexperienced. This thing seizes you at some point. You get....

HOLBORN: To jump in time, do you think, however, that he would have held adamantly to this view that had he lost the nomination in 1960, not run for vice president?

BARTLETT: In 1960?

HOLBORN: Yes. Would he have refused the vice presidency or been able to turn it down?

BARTLETT: Of course that makes it a good question because you don't know. My impression certainly is that he wouldn't, wasn't yours? I would have bet heavily that he wouldn't. But as you say, you don't know. No, I think by 1960--I think he felt he'd gone out far enough so that he wasn't going to do that number two thing, don't you?

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HOLBORN: Yet, he was able to get Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. That's funny. I mean he was able to convince himself that he could get Johnson.

BARTLETT: Yes. Of course my version of that is slightly different than the historic version. Do you want to get into that now?

HOLBORN: Well, no, we better.... Now, subsequent to the election in 1956, in which he was very active as an itinerant speaker, did he immediately talk to you about possibilities in 1960? Was he of mixed mind or did this happen almost immediately?

BARTLETT: No, I think he was excited by it. The he came back and, as you say, got a lot of recognition. And I remember the Convention in Chicago. I don't think anybody failed to recognize that John Kennedy had emerged as a figure at this point. And then I think that his motor was racing, I would say, in 1957. It was particularly evident to me because I was so much against it. I don't

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know how many of us there were, but I was very much opposed to his running for the thing in 1960. I said very often, and it became quite a bone between us, that I thought if he waited eight years that it would be wiser. His position always was, "Well who knows what's going to be there in eight years? And the fact is there is nothing there in 1960. This is really the time." But I must say that he did say that he would not make any final decision until after his Senate race.... But I don't think there was every really any question in his mind through 1957 that he was going to run for the presidency.

HOLBORN: Yes. I came to work for him in 1957, and certainly his motor was racing quite hard then. It was the summer when he went down to Georgia and Arkansas and all over. But then he kept saying, "We have to wait until '58." And then the first week that Congress came back in '59, we went down

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and had one of his oyster stews at the railroad station. And he wiped his brow and he said, "The things that might have happened didn't happen. There wasn't a new governor elected (he thought it might be Dilworth [Richardson Dilworth]), and Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] wasn't elected."

BARTLETT: Oh, that's right. He always claimed that if Dilworth could have been elected governor in 1958, that he could have been the Democratic

nominee and probably the President. He based it on the fact that Dilworth was an extremely good looking fellow with a good personality who had the aristocratic background and a large state. Yes, he regarded Dilworth as a strong prospect.... But I used to try to frighten him off all the way through 1959. I'd tell him that Frank Pace was going to be the nominee. I must say that until about December of '59, I was very much opposed.

HOLBORN: What were your grounds?

BARTLETT: Well, it's just that I thought he was too damned

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young. I must say the fact that he seemed to be the youngest man that ever ran for president along with being the second Catholic was just taking on too much of a handicap, he'd end up being another young man who didn't make it. So I was very dubious. Maybe I was right, as it turns out. He argued that 1964 was no good because he would be up for re-election.

HOLBORN: Yes, his term would have been up this year, '64.

BARTLETT: '64 wasn't a good year. '68 was the one that I was talking about.

HOLBORN: Now that of course, was, one of these accidents of timing that he was able to get re-elected in '58 and not have to face....

BARTLETT: At the same time, yes. He didn't pull back from it, really, did he, those last three years before the race.

HOLBORN: No, and even in the campaign, even in the very last weeks of the campaign of '58 in Massachusetts, he was still taking a couple of days off and going to Iowa

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and to New York, New Jersey.

BARTLETT: I don't think anybody realizes really how much of a job that was--I mean, those weeks that he put in, and that travel was fantastic, and going into these towns where he really didn't know many people and there was no great Kennedy organization. He was traveling most of the time alone or with Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. You probably traveled with him some. It wasn't very lavish. It really wasn't until much later that his father got the *Caroline*. But he traveled a long road. This was, of course, part of his strength.

HOLBORN: The *Caroline* probably really deserves one of the medals for that campaign because it gave him a flexibility which....

BARTLETT: Oh, he loved it. He made no bones about it. He used to say to me, "I could never see anybody running for the presidency without an airplane." I told him about poor Estes Kefauver taking the night coach from Boston to Minnesota when those two primaries

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were going on simultaneously, and he said, "Gosh, I can't see how any man would run for president, if he could get any money at all together, and not have a private plane. To me it's the most important thing in the world." And even then it was no joy. I remember spending weekends traveling with him in that plane and the vibrations when you got through--I was tired for days after it.

HOLBORN: It was a pretty noisy plane really.

BARTLETT: Yes. I think that the human body is tired more by that vibration than you realize. But he never complained, I'll say that. He was very even dispositioned. He'd take those naps, as you say, eat those stews and cream of tomato soup. He was completely intent upon his pursuit of those delegates.

HOLBORN: At what point, in your own mind, did you think that he probably had the nomination?

BARTLETT: Well, I remember he'd said to me.... I said I was going to write a story about the thing for the end of

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year 1959. He said, "Why don't you have some guts and predict that I will be nominated?" I thought about that for a long time and didn't quite have enough guts to predict flatly that he would be nominated. But I did predict that he was the most likely to be nominated. And at that point, I must say, having traveled with him through Illinois and having observed the way the people were reacting to him.... There was a long period in which I didn't go out because I, as I say, I'd been rather opposed to the whole project. But when I did go out in November of 1959 and discovered the way he was going over, and the way that his personality—I mean the way his speaking style had improved. I'd seen him make those tub-thumpers to the crowds in Boston, and I'd seen him, of course, make those rather fast Senate speeches. But he really had developed style as a political campaigner by this point. I mean to me one of the remarkable things through this

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whole period, the very miraculous thing, is not the fact that Jack Kennedy went from the Congress to the White House in those years, but it was this tremendous development of a human being, the way his whole being responded to the challenge. When he had to become a good speaker, he became it. I mean he wasn't a great politician. I can remember a mutual friend of his and mine who was also a senator, complaining to Martha, I think, one night about how diffident Jack was and that he didn't exert himself enough as a politician to really be good. But all these strengths developed because he wanted this thing, and he went after it.

I can remember that December.... He had an old friend, Nancy Coleman, whose name was Tenney and her father, they lived next door to the Kennedys in Hyannis. They had a Kennedy Ball, sort of a charity thing up in New York--I think it was in mid-December. And we went up. I was dancing with Nancy, who is an old friend. And she said hello--we stopped; we saw Jack wasn't dancing--and she sort of

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tickled him. She said, "Now, Jack, you don't want to be president." And he looked at her rather coldly and said, "Nancy. I not only want to be, but I am going to be." And he meant it. This sort of evoked an amazing quality, really. What the situation needed, he summoned.

HOLBORN: Did he talk to you at all about the handling of the religious issue in those early days at all?

BARTLETT: Yes. And then there was the book, and of course all the things you fellows were doing, those studies of Catholics. The study was in 1956.

HOLBORN That started in '56 already.

BARTLETT: Then the study was adapted to new circumstances. There was no obstacle that seemed to really preoccupy him. Didn't you have the feeling he was sort of suddenly just going after something, and the religious problem was part of it. And there were all kinds of problems, but he just didn't....

HOLBORN: No, I think the religious problem always worried people around him more than it worried himself.

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BARTLETT: Yes. It didn't seem to be a real obsession with him.

HOLBORN: The only time I saw him really excited about that was when the birth control issue first came up with Reston [James B. Reston], who had a big column and sort of challenged him.

BARTLETT: Yes. The birth control thing sort of threw him off a little bit because the common sense of it appealed to him so much. That's right. I was

here one night when Cord Meyer [Cord Meyer, Jr.] brought it up as a problem that he would have to face as a candidate. This was I guess sometime in 1959. And he acknowledged it.... But it was obviously something that he didn't have an answer to.

HOLBORN: That and I think the McCarthy issue since it involved his family and it seemed a great obligation.

BARTLETT: The McCarthy issue wasn't very alive in 1959.

HOLBORN: No, this was the early part of the decade. In the sixties it stopped.

BARTLETT: No, no. I don't think he ever was genuinely sheepish about the McCarthy thing. I think he just.... There was some business about Furcolo [John Foster Furcolo] in that 1954 thing. What was that about the thing

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they were objecting to? Did he get mad at Furcolo? Furcolo kept him waiting or something.

HOLBORN: Yes. It was before he had that operation and he was going in the hospital.

BARTLETT: That didn't involve the McCarthy thing.

HOLBORN: As a matter of fact he supported Saltonstall then. No, that didn't involve McCarthy.

BARTLETT: He supported Saltonstall? Yes.

HOLBORN: Well, he didn't come out openly for him, but he failed to support Furcolo, as a result Saltonstall was the beneficiary.

BARTLETT: Actually, I would say that my impression was that of all those politicians in his own party in Massachusetts that he never really took any of them too seriously, did he? I'd say that he had a regard for Salty, but most of them he really didn't....

HOLBORN: He liked several of the Republicans without really.... I mean he got along quite well with Herter [Christian A. Herter] and

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Saltonstall and a couple of others.

BARTLETT: And George Lodge [George Cabot Lodge], of course, was a friend, somewhat.

HOLBORN: Since you've already raised it by allusion before....

BARTLETT: Another thing, I think would be interesting before we get.... I was with him on one rather significant thing which was really--well, perhaps there are two rather interesting things. I remember West Virginia. I remember one rather illuminating story going out to, I think, one of his first trips to Wisconsin for that primary. And I went over there. I was going to fly out with him. The three of us had dinner. I left Martha at home and went over there to have dinner. We were going to go out to the plane from his house. We had a very pleasant dinner. Afterwards it was time to go, and he said, "Shall I wear this blue overcoat (the normal one that he wore) or shall I wear this?" And he held up a sort of brown herringbone, a sporty looking thing. I said "Why don't you wear that herringbone? It looks more like

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Wisconsin." And he said, "Are you trying to change my personality?" I remember trying to get him to wear a hat. It was as cold as the devil up in Wisconsin. I got him one of those fur hats with the flaps on it. I tried to get him to wear that, and he wouldn't. He made no adjustment to the local scene.

HOLBORN: Never in dress at all, never. He had a brief flirtation with a vest when he became president.

BARTLETT: But he really didn't change, I agree. But then West Virginia, of course, to me was a very.... That really was a marvelously dramatic thing. I remember flying with him in the middle of that thing when they had.... And those polls, Lou Harris' [Louis Harris] polls were running so much against him. I still have some notes: his voice was gone, and he could only write those notes. And I have some wonderful notes that he wrote on that plane. I remember one, "I'd give my right testicle to win this one."

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I think that was a campaign that took it all. I mean that took all the qualities that he had and all the fight and everything else. It was a very dramatic thing.

HOLBORN: You brought this up by way of allusion since you do have a personal and perhaps a unique interpretation of his decision on the vice presidency. Why don't you tell a little about that? Any discussions he may have had with you about the vice presidency anytime during that year.

BARTLETT: Well, not for him. But it was very clear to me from my dealings with

the rest of your camp as a newspaperman in the convention period that Stu Symington [W. Stuart Symington] was the choice and that that was it. I even had sent a story to Chattanooga saying that Stu Symington would be the running mate if John Kennedy were nominated.
My experience with the thing--I didn't really discuss it with him during that period before his nomination, but I can remember

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I went out with Bobby that night Johnson was picked to the house in Beverly Hills that Mr. Kennedy had rented. And it was quite clear then that this day had not been glorious for him, that he was rather beaten down by it. And just in discussing the whole thing that night and discussing it subsequently, he said, "I hear your editor is mad because you thought that Stu Symington was going to be the nominee." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, you can tell him that I did, too." And I remember one other time he said, "I didn't offer the vice presidency to Lyndon." He said, "I really just held it out to here."

The picture I derived from that evening was that they told him this was a gesture that he had to make and that he went down and made the gesture, thinking he'd get it over with early in the morning. As I understand, Torby Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald] put in the telephone call and called Johnson. And then Jack was going to go

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down and make the offer and then go on about his business. And then Lyndon said yes. And Jack at that point, of course, was completely hooked. He had to go on and really urge it. Of course he got more and more involved. And then he went upstairs. And Bobby came down with the unpleasant job of trying to get Lyndon off the hook. And that's where the rough stuff started. And that's the picture that I have.

HOLBORN: Your feeling is that the famous encounter between Rayburn and Bobby, that Bobby really was the candidate's envoy.

BARTLETT: My feeling is that Bobby said that he would not have done that on his own. I think Bobby was completely--I don't think Bobby had any strong feeling about Stu Symington. I think just that was the way it was in their mutual mind. And I remember that night we were out there, Bobby in the car communicating with Hy Raskin [Hyman B. Raskin], and Jack was reading the paper, sort of stretched out on

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the tonneau of this car that we had arrived in. And Mr. Kennedy was standing in the doorway of this stucco mansion with his smoking jacket on and slippers. And the whole scene was rather downcast, considering this was the day after a great Kennedy triumph. And I

remember old Mr. Kennedy saying, "Don't worry, Jack, in two weeks, they'll be saying it's the smartest thing you ever did." These were rather prophetic words, actually.

HOLBORN: But, if your story is correct, I think one of the reasons perhaps why people are misled is because he did adjust himself to this decision or happening very quickly. And coming back from Los Angeles to Boston he was already telling newsmen, "Look what states I might be able to carry."

BARTLETT: I think he made the adjustment very quickly and I think that he never discussed it. He used to discuss it occasionally with me, but I have since understood that there were very few people that really were involved in that thing and perhaps that....

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Anyhow, it's worked out so well that there's no reason to regret it.

HOLBORN: How would you...

BARTLETT: The feeling, I think, that permeated that household this night was that Lyndon on this ticket did not represent the sort of message that John Kennedy wanted to bring to America. I mean what he was offering was youth and a sort of idealism, and this sort battle-scarred figure from Texas who was the great manipulator really didn't fit the picture. I think this was the rough part. And I don't think he was looking at it as a liberal who was upset about the natural gas vote or anything like that. I think it was just that he'd wanted to bring something a little bit more shiny faced onto the ticket.

HOLBORN: It's part of the common currency now, there are frequent quotations, real or contrived, that Kennedy is supposed to have told many people that

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were he not to be candidate, Johnson would be the next best candidate. Do you think this was really so? Did he have a conviction about this?

BARTLETT: I would say that it is possible that he might have said that to Joe Alsop [Joseph Alsop] whom he knew was very close to Johnson. I mean that he would say that. He did not ever say that to me.

HOLBORN: What sense did you get about that relationship in the late Senate period and in the period of the campaign?

BARTLETT: Well, my impression in the Senate days was that he was rather pleased

to find that he had a rather enjoyable personal currency with Johnson.

He used to tell me stories of their conversations. And he regarded the majority leader as a rather fascinating figure. He was fascinated by all the manipulations. He was rather intrigued by Bobby Baker [Robert G. Baker] bustling around. It was an intriguing thing in those days. I never had any sense of enormous regard for Lyndon Johnson.

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I think all of those sort of southern patriarchs, I think they interested him enormously.

I remember when Harry Byrd [Harry F. Byrd] gave him his little room off the Senate floor after his back operation in 1953--It was a beautiful room--I remember he was rather pleased with it, and he could go there and rest when his back got tired. And I remember him saying that Byrd used to come up to him every few days and say, "Is your back feeling better?" I think he had a sense that this was a rather cold-blooded world, and there wasn't much sentiment in it. And I think that it always interested him. Of course, it was rather useful to him to be part of this leadership. I don't think that he ever thought of Lyndon as a dangerous rival.... It became clear after Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had been dropped that Lyndon was the obstacle. But I don't think he was ever awed by Lyndon as an obstacle because I think

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he recognized the difference between his own relationship with these people that he'd been visiting around the country--the actual delegates--and Lyndon's. He never seemed to me really terrified of Lyndon's competition. He recognized him as someone who had to be dealt with and I think his attitude was very well expressed in that public encounter they had. He was relaxed and rather humorous and Lyndon was.... And of course the Johnson people did get awfully mean at the end. Bobby Baker was in a very emotional state in Los Angeles. India Edwards was going around saying rather mean things about Jack's health and the fact that he had--I've forgotten what she accused him of having. And then there was some business about his father. They used everything. It was a very mean thing. I think that was one reason why it really never occurred to him that Lyndon would accept the thing.

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But I am convinced that when he went down there, he didn't think that there was a reason in the world to believe that Lyndon would accept the thing. So, therefore, since he never really seriously felt that he would accept it, I suppose it's unfair to say whether he really would have wanted him if he thought he had accepted it. He never thought of it in that light, so we don't know if he'd just been sitting down cold-bloodedly working it out in his mind two days before, he would have come up with Lyndon. But I mean I think his own conviction was that Lyndon would never take the vice presidency.

HOLBORN: But there again, despite this rather rough campaign, at least for the last two or three weeks before the Convention, they never really reached

the point of a break. The repair job was not...

BARTLETT: The repair job was very quick. But I think there was quite a strain in there at the end there.

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It had gotten extremely mean at the end, and the whole business about the debate—it wasn't a break because politicians don't break. I'm sure that the late President used to say to you that there are no lasting friendships in politics; there are temporary alliances and temporary hostilities, and the friend yesterday is the enemy today and vice versa. I think this was his philosophy in politics. I never heard him really harbor any grievances, he didn't really nurse his grievances.

HOLBORN: But he was really remarkably lucky in this business not only did he have a repair job to do with Johnson but he then appointed practically every Stevensonian to a job except perhaps Stevenson himself...

BARTLETT: Well, that was rather interesting. That was a point that might be contributed to the thing because I think that coming out of Chicago in early June—this was after he'd won in West Virginia,

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and he was making a sweep through the country—he said, "I never would make Adlai Stevenson really, I don't think I ever would make, if I should become President of the United States, I don't think I'd ever make Adlai Stevenson my Secretary of State because he's handled me so badly in this thing." He said, "I went to him and I said 'Now, Governor, I'd like very much to have you support me. I understood that you would support me after Hubert Humphrey was out, and now I need your support. I'd like very much to have it.'" And he said that Adlai told him that he just couldn't do it because Johnson was running and if he were elected, Adlai said, "If you are elected, you will need somebody to be a liaison between you and Johnson because he's very mad at you, and, therefore, this would be the role that I would take. So, therefore, I think it's important for me to stay in a position of neutrality at this point."

Well, as

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John Kennedy said to me, "I'm turned down ten times a day by people around the country. People do it, and it doesn't really bother me. But this bothered me because it was such a silly idea to think of Adlai Stevenson as a liaison between me and Johnson." And he said, "If he couldn't come up with a better one than that he certainly wouldn't make a very good Secretary of State."

HOLBORN: This was about a month before the Convention?

BARTLETT: This was in early June, yes.

HOLBORN: And they met in Chicago on a stopover?

BARTLETT: There were quite a few appointments that were decided on that trip. I remember we went up to.... Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams] was turning his delegation over. I remember as we left there, John Kennedy was very upset by the sort of rough manner in which the whole thing had been handled. Soapy did a very poor job. Doris Fleeson--there was quite a large press group there. And it was a rather significant thing. Soapy showed very little poise, and I remember that

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Jack Kennedy was very impressed with the fact that here's somebody who had been governor for six terms and he really hadn't learned better how to deal with the press.

HOLBORN: Do you think he thought much during the campaign about how he would put a government together? Did this weigh on him much then?

BARTLETT: I think he was really.... That was I think one of his great qualities, that he had that sense of the job--what is the challenge? He was counting delegates as long as it was necessary to count delegates. He did that superbly, and he followed the details. And then when it was necessary to think in terms of the election, why, he took those steps. I remember right after we all got back here for that weird August session, I remember he came out here for dinner with John Cooper. And at this point he was thinking very practical. I think this was one of his great, great qualities was that he

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had an enormous sense of priorities. He kept his thinking from ever getting very fuzzy or beside the point. I mean he really always had that, even in his youth. I mean anything really that was not pertinent bored him.

HOLBORN: In contrast to '52 did you ever during this campaign in 1960, this close, did you ever think about his winning or his losing?

BARTLETT: No, I really didn't. I don't know why. I remember the only shock I ever really had was going out to some newspapermen's party, and Herb Klein [Herbert G. Klein] and a couple of the Republican team were there, quite a few of them—oh, Bob Merriam [Robert E. Merriam] from Chicago, they were both in the White House--and they were just laughing at me, you know, at what a beating my friend was going to take and, you know, how appalling it was going to be. I

remember being really shocked because it hadn't occurred to me that it really was that uphill. But I had such a moderate regard of Dick Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] and such a high

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regard of Jack Kennedy that I really never had...

HOLBORN: What do you feel...

BARTLETT: And then the last day when Gallup [George H. Gallup, Sr.] started shrinking that margin, he was rather stiffened by that. But he had had those enormous crowds in Philadelphia and those enormous ones all through New York. It was hard to believe that anybody who could elicit that kind of enthusiasm could lose an election.

HOLBORN: Yes. Of course, the campaign ended in sort of the easiest territory.

BARTLETT: Yes, this was where the votes were, there's no question about it. I also had gone through Ohio with Nixon, and you could see that they were doing this great organizational job there. But Nixon was faltering so badly as a personality that I couldn't believe that people really would go for him.

HOLBORN: Did Kennedy ever talk to you about Nixon as a human being?

BARTLETT: I don't think he had much feeling for Nixon.

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Through the years I'd sort of seen them together at different occasions, parties and that kind of thing around Georgetown, and it was always, "Hello, Dick." But I never had the feeling that he ever had any regard for Nixon.

HOLBORN: Though they were in a curious way brought together so often in their careers.

BARTLETT: Well, they were about the same age. They'd been in Congress at the same time. I don't think he ever had anything against Nixon particularly, but I don't think he ever had any particular regard for him. I never heard him express any admiration for Dick Nixon.

HOLBORN: They had offices opposite each other, the same committee in the House. It was one of these odd...

BARTLETT: Yes, it was odd, yes, yes.

HOLBORN: Well, before we move over to the presidential, do you think on the whole that Kennedy used his period in the Senate well? As you were observing it, as a Senator did he exploit it to the best?

BARTLETT: I think he did. As you know there was a period when the thing

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didn't.... It seemed to me the climax of his Senate career was that investigation into labor reform. I think one story I ought to tell that would seem to me very characteristic and a very important insight into him was when Bobby and I had gotten together on this Talbott [Harold E. Talbott] thing. And finally Talbott resigned from office after all these revelations. And I remember having lunch with him, I guess a day or so later, and he said, "Listen, I know this is great for you and Bobby, and that's fine. But I really hate to see a guy get it that way." And this was a side of his nature. They always talk of him as being rather tough; he really wasn't; he was really a very gentle fellow; he hated to see anybody hurt; he did not like to see anybody hurt.

HOLBORN: He at least didn't like him to fall hard. In one sense he was indebted to Lyndon Johnson, and that was probably in terms of getting visibility; getting on the Foreign Relations Committee was also a big help, combined with the labor investigative work.

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BARTLETT: I don't think he ever understood why he got on the Foreign Relations Committee. He regarded this as one of the products of that sort of magical system that Lyndon Johnson had. He was amazed, I think, when he ended up on that committee. What year was that?

HOLBORN: January, 1957.

BARTLETT: '57, yes. I guess in those days those committee assignments used to have surprises for everybody. My impression--for some reason, of all the aspects of the Senate, I think his work in that Senate committee seemed to him a more vivid aspect of his Senate life than the Foreign Relations Committee.

HOLBORN: Yes, oh yes. It took a lot more concentrated work, a lot more preparation. It had more continuity; it took many, many months.

BARTLETT: Yes, it's funny because I think at the beginning.... He was on that Government Operations Committee at the beginning, wasn't he?

HOLBORN: Yes.

BARTLETT: And I can remember he was slightly embarrassed.... The reason that Bobby got the job, I guess, was because of his father's friendship with Joe McCarthy. At the beginning I think he was rather embarrassed that Bobby, I think, was going to be a member of the staff on the committee on which he sat. And then I think because it turned out to be very fortuitous it was an enormous....

HOLBORN: But there are these accidents, of course. Not only was there McCarthy, but McClellan [John L. McClellan], had been on the Hoover [Herbert Clark Hoover] Commission, both with Father, with Fathers.

BARTLETT: Yes, with the Father. Yes. And there really was an amazing series of coincidences, wasn't there? I remember Bobby down at the Hoover Commission. That was very interesting work, too.

HOLBORN: Well, I guess election night you were down in Tennessee, weren't you?

BARTLETT: Down in Chattanooga, yes.

HOLBORN: When did you first see the President-elect?

BARTLETT: I called the next day and talked to Mr. Kennedy, and he informed me that from now on to refer to his son as the President or

Mr. President, and he was obviously in a very good mood. He said that Jack was out playing touch football. I saw him down in Florida about a week or so later, I guess, down in Palm Beach. He was in great form. So I saw him quite a bit down there. For about a week I was down. Stu Symington was around and that fellow from Miami that committed suicide later, Ambassador to Ireland [Edward Grant Stockdale]. George Smathers was around.

HOLBORN: And did he have a sense of leadership?

BARTLETT: I remember he told me a funny story that he was playing golf—Lyndon Johnson had been down, and Sam Rayburn, and they'd all played golf. And Lyndon said to him, "Do you realize that if we both died that little bugger would be president?" I must say I think those were very happy days for him. He was tired. And I remember he said, "From now on I'm really going to take care of myself." He took naps even then right after lunch. He was really on top of the world.

HOLBORN: Had he shifted gears already and did he....

BARTLETT: He was talking about where he was going to put people. His concentration was completely on his appointments, finding a new Secretary of the Treasury.

HOLBORN: Well, let's take a couple of those appointments he made then. How do you think he finally reached the decision that he did and what kind of advice did you give him?

BARTLETT: We talked about, you know, what Bobby.... I think this was a great concern was what Bobby.... I always had the feeling that the decision on Bobby was not made by the President-elect, but I think by his father. I think that he took his father's position on it. I never had the feeling that Bobby had any great burning desire to be Attorney General, that this was really almost forced upon him.

HOLBORN: Of course, there again there was an accidental feature in that it had been turned down by Ribicoff [Abraham Alexander Ribicoff] who might have had it if he...

BARTLETT: It was offered to Ribicoff--very sure. I really

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don't think--it was just an impression there wasn't anything said--I don't think that the President-elect ever really felt as strongly about Abe Ribicoff again. I think he felt that his reasons for turning it down were wrong. It was a desire to avoid an unpopular rule.

HOLBORN: Well, one that you were particularly close to--was it the Secretary of the Treasury?

BARTLETT: It was interesting to try figure out if there wasn't somebody who could be found. As his father pointed out, there weren't any Democrats who knew much about money. The only one I came up with was this banker called Kennedy [David M. Kennedy] from Chicago who everybody said was extremely good. But the President said we couldn't have any more Kennedys in the show. He said it would be too hard to explain that this wasn't related. But that was the one that I was particularly interested in.

HOLBORN: But it never got anywhere? I mean did he...

BARTLETT: Well, he just kept looking around. And this

Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] thing emerged. I've forgotten. I think that if Henry Alexander.... The reason I was in was because I had a candidate, that was it. Henry Alexander had been way back my candidate. And through a friend, Hal Korda, I arranged a meeting with Henry Alexander and the Senator up in New York. And they all had breakfast together or something. And Henry Alexander brought some of the big boys from U.S. Steel, some of the big corporate names. And they had a rather long, and I gathered, meeting that went very well. But Henry Alexander never quite signed on. I don't know he must have been under great pressure at the bank, I think, or something. But Kennedy had a sort of a feeling about him, and I think he would have taken Henry Alexander if he'd been a little bit....

But Alexander actually went to the point of ending up on some sort of a team for Nixon. So by the time the election was over, he was pretty dead. In fact, Kennedy, I think said to me--the President-elect said to me that if he hadn't,

"It wasn't important that he didn't support me. If he hadn't gone to the extreme of putting his name on that list," he said, "I still think I would have taken him" So that was out. So I tried to help through.... Martha's father knew a lot of these major business figures and so on, and he was trying to see what he could pull up, too. It was very hard going, very hard going.

HOLBORN: At the time did you feel it was a political mistake for him to make the decision he did?

BARTLETT: On Dillon?

HOLBORN: Yes.

BARTLETT: I didn't know. At that point I hadn't really enormously admired Dillon as a member of the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration. He always seemed to me rather stiff. I mean I didn't know of his internal workings, which there's no question he's a very able man. But as a personality, he seemed to me rather stiff. So I wasn't enthusiastic about it, but I didn't have any strong feeling against him.

HOLBORN: And how do you think he came to his decision on Secretary of State? Was this a process of elimination?

BARTLETT: I don't know. You and Rostow [Walt Whitman Rostow] had lunch that day, do you remember? You ate lunch with Rostow. And Rostow

claimed to be more in on it than I guess he really was, didn't he? But there was a lot of talk at that point. That's right. He left that day for Florida with two names, didn't he? Bruce [David K.E. Bruce] and.... He didn't discuss that with me.

HOLBORN: Did he at that time express to you any worry about getting Southern support, people from the South? Was he concerned about that?

BARTLETT: Only one, Hodges [Luther H. Hodges]. I remember he came back from Raleigh during the campaign. He'd been campaigning down there on a Saturday, and he flew back. On Sunday he called up and said he'd like to take a walk. And so he came out here. And he was telling me that he really felt very

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warmly about his visit to North Carolina. And about Hodges, he said that he was very impressed by Hodges and he said, "If I were elected I'd like to have him in my Cabinet." That really was the first one that.... And then Udall [Stewart L. Udall], I pushed Udall at him quite hard because I was afraid they'd get a sinister.... I wasn't very much for Clinton Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] as a Secretary of Interior, and I guess he was being pushed pretty hard. I must say I admired the President for that one. I really thought that was a good choice.

HOLBORN: Had you ever heard or known of McNamara [Robert S. McNamara]?

BARTLETT: No. But I remember one rather funny evening when Sarge brought Dave Bell [David E. Bell] in. And Bell, I must say, had that poise that he has. That rather even manner. Sarge was obviously excited about him, and Dave Bell handled himself very well. Kennedy was joking after dinner about where he was going to put--he wanted to

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put Teno Roncalio on the Canadian Border Commission. He said, "That's a wonderful job. (He was very fond of Teno.) He said, "That's a wonderful job. He gets all that pay, and he doesn't have to do anything." And Bell, I remember, leaned forward and said, "If it's that kind of a job, why don't we abolish it?" I realized then that he'd make a good Budget Director.

You see, the original idea that he talked of first of keeping Tom Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] in the Defense Department and putting Bobby in as Deputy Secretary of Defense, which would have been actually a marvelous job for Bobby. And I was very enthusiastic about that because I thought by exerting some of the President's influence over there he could reel the Pentagon. But then Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence], as I understood it, objected to anything that would build up Tom Gates because he was afraid he'd run for

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governor. And it was at this point that Sarge came up with McNamara. And I remember after that meeting he said, "The Bobby thing is out. This is such a strong man that you just couldn't put him and Bobby together." And that was the end of that. And then the Justice Department thing....

HOLBORN: But the two of them did become terribly close--McNamara and Bobby.

BARTLETT: It was very interesting. I think he was probably right that they would have had a hard time working, Bobby under him.

HOLBORN: But he seemed to get quite a lot of fun out of putting a government together.

BARTLETT: He did. I think he enjoyed it. I think he loved sitting down in Florida with the press.... I would say from this point on, certainly from election day to the Bay of Pigs, was probably the happiest period of life. I think he really loved the whole thing,

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the excitement, the press. The whole thing was just enormous to him and he really.... I think that was the happiest I saw him.

HOLBORN: Did you ever have a feeling that there was anything in the notion of putting Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] in as Secretary of State?

BARTLETT: I did, yes. I think his instinct would have been to take Fullbright as Secretary of State. I think Bobby was obviously against it. I think he rather liked the idea of Fullbright, but he moved away from it.

HOLBORN: So you think that was a close thing?

BARTLETT: I think that that would have--yes. I'm not sure, looking back, that it wouldn't have been a good thing. There was the problem of the race thing--I suppose that was a factor in his decision. But I always had the feeling that that was the one that was his personal choice.

HOLBORN: Did you have the sense that he was under much pressure at

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that time from Johnson to take care of his needs?

BARTLETT: I guess Johnson had a large staff. I remember he did tell me that

Johnson had a million dollars worth of staff that he was bringing down here to find places for in the government. I think he was rather impressed by the size of the staff, the number of people that were on the Johnson payroll. But he really never complained. His attitude, as he expressed it to me, about Johnson was very interesting in this period because I think he was deeply solicitous. I think he wanted Johnson to be happy in his role. Of course, I think he wanted everybody to be happy in his role. He had that wonderful sense of, you know, wanting really to wish the best for everybody. And I think he realized what a miserable job Johnson was heading into. I can remember one time Liz Carpenter [Elizabeth S. Carpenter] called me up and said--this was after, you know, maybe a year--and said, "I wish you'd ask the President to call Lyndon

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once in a while because he's awfully lonely up here. He needs something to stimulate him. And maybe the President could call once in a while and ask for his advice on some of these problems because he really isn't doing so." So I mentioned this to the President. And he said, "Gosh, Charlie, I really mean to do that. It's on my mind. I feel so sorry for Lyndon up there. That's a terrible job for anybody and particularly for a man like that." He said, "But you know, when you get into these problems, you really are not interested, you never even think of talking to anybody about them who hasn't read the cables." And, he said, "Lyndon hasn't read the cables." I think it was on his mind.

HOLBORN: He did open the doors to him as far as attending any meeting he wanted to attend.

BARTLETT: Yes.

HOLBORN: Any social events he wanted to...

BARTLETT: Yes, he seemed to be making every effort to.

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I remember when they had those family dances, Lyndon would and sit next to Mrs. Kennedy. The relationship, it was one of those confusing political relationships. I think the President got an enormous--I think he got a kick out of Lyndon.

They say that President Johnson has no sense of humor, but I must say in the quotations--when he did say a funny thing, very often President Kennedy would mention it to me. And they were quite funny. There's a very good line, as that capsule was about to go off with John Glenn in it, do you remember that? And they were all in the President's office, and this great tension was building up waiting for this thing to get off the ground. Johnson leaned over to Kennedy and said, "If Glenn were only a Negro." [Laughter] He also said that day, I remember the President told me that Johnson said, "Well, if this thing doesn't work, everybody in the world will know that I'm the head of the space program." He said, "If it

works, nobody will know it." [Laughter] I never really heard him make a severe criticism of Lyndon Johnson except on two points. I think that he felt that Johnson lacked subtlety, and I think that he didn't always feel that Johnson told the specific truth.

HOLBORN: But I agree with you in the sort of fascination he had with Johnson. And the humor, Johnson's best as a mimic. Kennedy liked mimicry.

BARTLETT: There was a sort of a sardonic quality in the Johnson humor which he liked, yes. He enjoyed Lyndon's quotes. He used to sort of....

HOLBORN: He'd sometimes almost try to elicit a humorous story out of him for the sake of seeing what would come out.

BARTLETT: It was an interesting relationship. I think there was a lot of--there was respect there.

HOLBORN: It's something that's never really been written about. There were articles about the Vice President and articles about Kennedy, but nothing

ever really came out about them.

BARTLETT: I think he was disappointed that Johnson would not get involved in the congressional thing. I've since learned that Johnson disapproved heartily of the way he and his people were handling the congressional thing and didn't want to get mixed up in that. And I think this chafed him that Lyndon was pulling away on that score.

HOLBORN: Yes, I think this bothered him, particularly on a couple of ones the first year, I remember.

BARTLETT: Yes, don't remember whether Johnson got into the Rules vote or not, but there were a couple that he just absolutely refused to have anything to do with.

HOLBORN: Well, this partly, of course, due perhaps also to Johnson's bruising at the beginning of that caucus.

BARTLETT: Yes, the caucus and Albert Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.], yes.

HOLBORN: Which he over reacted to.

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BARTLETT: But it certainly was not a bad relationship, I imagine, as relationships go between presidents and vice presidents. You can see all the strains that do creep into the thing--it's a very difficult thing. I think that once in awhile he'd say, "Where's Lyndon? I wonder where Lyndon is anyway. I haven't heard about him for weeks." And this would be one of the periods when the Vice President was laying low down in Texas or something like that.

HOLBORN: Well, what recollections do you have of the very first days of the White House? When did you first see him in the White House?

BARTLETT: I forget, what day was the Inaugural?

HOLBORN: On a Friday I think.

BARTLETT: Oh yes. The first time I saw him in the White House was on a Monday night after the Inauguration. Martha and I went over there for dinner. We had dinner in the downstairs dining room. I remember

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he took off his coat. He was awful hot--those windows were sealed. He couldn't get used to that. I must say that was one of the.... I remember him that night I think happily and in a mood that I don't think I'll ever forget because it was a marvelous thing because he wasn't just happy because, "Here I am, Jack Kennedy sitting in the White House." It was a marvelous thing because, "Here I and I can do all these things and I can really...." He was just burning with the things he could do. It really was exciting. He talked about the thing, and then we took a walk. The White House intrigued him. The whole thing was fascinating. But it wasn't in just a personal sense, it was...

HOLBORN: Was that the night he went and visited the Executive Office Building?

BARTLETT: Yes, we walked over to the Executive Office Building and ran into Walt Rostow. We walked through the Mail Room. I took him up and showed him where

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Eisenhower used to have his press conferences. We talked about his press conferences. I think this was the next challenge that was sort of on his mind then. I think he was going to have one in a few days. He was just talking all the time--you know, this business about

Lafayette Square. And Jackie was alive with this, too. And she'd had some rather famous musician in that day for tea or something. But the whole thing was a complete concentration on what could be done from this post, and just an enormous desire to make the most of the time.

I remember then he showed me Lincoln's [Abraham Lincoln] bedroom. He loved that. I said, "Did you have any strange dreams the first night that you slept in it?" And he said, "No. I just jumped in and hung on." [Laughter] But he was.... There was an enormous amount of zest and really an enormous amount of goodness in his spirit then. He really was challenged by the opportunity to do something for the country, and he wanted

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this whole business of the White House being the best--I mean, was all this sort of forming in his mind.

HOLBORN: How did you stay in touch with him while he was in the White House? I mean apart from visits and so on.

BARTLETT: If I had anything I'd call him through Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]. It was tough. It was a funny position being in my role as a newspaperman who's sort of on the fringe of the government and a friend of the President because people would come with these things, some of them fairly valid. And you'd build up a sort of list of things; people had claimed that they had a right to a job or something like that. So you always seemed to have a sort of a.... I mean it really was quite time consuming. It was very difficult for me to keep up with my work in those days. You'd build up these, you know, these petitions of people--as a conveyor.

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HOLBORN: You mean you'd have callers and visitors of people you just didn't even know?

BARTLETT: They were people that knew me and that had known both of us—some guy from Boston that had gotten mistreated by Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] or something like that. [Laughter] There were quite a few of those. And I remember there was one fellow that had let him down once when Torby MacDonald had struck some man in a night club in New York and on his back swing, why, he'd broken some lady's nose. [Laughter] And the story had gotten into the *Journal American* because he was running for Congress. And I remember this one fellow that was working for the Hearst Paper, Jeff Roche, that Jack knew, Jack called him and asked him to kill the story, and Jeff was rather adamant about the fact that that was an important piece of public information which he was going to write. [Laughter]

When Jeff Roche applied for a job, I remember I

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didn't know quite how to handle that play. I said, "What do you want to do about it?" Jeff wanted to work in the USIA [United States Information Agency] or something, and Jack said, "I'll have to check with Torby to see if he's forgiven him yet." So he called back in about thirty minutes and said, "All right. Torby says it's all right, so go ahead." Jeff never quite made it though. He didn't get part of the examination. He didn't get by the panel over at the USIA. But it was all that kind of thing.

And I used to send him memos. And if I saw something, you know, it was through Mrs. Lincoln. I guess Mrs. Lincoln's collection of memos at the end of every day was rather sizeable. But I think he read them. You always had the feeling that he read them.

HOLBORN: Well, anything out of that box got read somehow. It might sometimes wait till the weekend, but.... That was her good quality, Mrs. Lincoln she didn't withhold things

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from him.

BARTLETT: Yes, he always read them. And he sort of leaned towards that side of the office, you had the feeling. I've been amazed since the thing. I always thought of Kenny O'Donnell as the access to the President, but almost everybody I've ever talked to went through Mrs. Lincoln. I've since come to wonder who went through...

HOLBORN: There were definitely two entries.

BARTLETT: Who went through Kenny. They must have been real strangers.

HOLBORN: Well, there was always a little bit of tension in this situation, but nobody wanted a showdown.

BARTLETT: They must have been furious.

HOLBORN: But it was something on which nobody felt they could have a showdown.

BARTLETT: Mrs. Lincoln even one day got me in there with five Armenian musicians [Laughter] who were over from Russia. She would have gotten anybody in that office.

HOLBORN: They had quite different attitudes. Mrs. Lincoln felt that, within limits, the

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President liked diversion or a change of pace, and Kenny felt his job was largely a protective one.

BARTLETT: And was hovering, grim-faced, yes.

HOLBORN: I think that other doorway is one of the important things in how people saw Kennedy or who saw him.

BARTLETT: Yes, but I've been amazed that Cabinet members--I think Douglas Dillon told me that he used the Evelyn Lincoln entrance. I'm not sure about McNamara, but...

HOLBORN: I don't think he did. But Dillon certainly did. And several congressmen used it.

BARTLETT: Learned about it?

HOLBORN: Yes.

BARTLETT: I think the word was getting around quite a bit.

HOLBORN: In the end she was almost overburdened with it. All the mail was addressed to her. [Laughter]

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But he helped to create this thing. I know to two or three newsmen, he said "If you ever have a problem, you call Mrs. Lincoln."

BARTLETT: Everybody got that. Yes, she was tremendous. I think he rather enjoyed it, too.

HOLBORN: Actually, there was a third problem because there were people who catapulted over Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger], too.

BARTLETT: Oh, direct?

HOLBORN: To Mrs. Lincoln and...

BARTLETT: And Pierre didn't like it, no.

HOLBORN: Pierre felt that he wasn't getting review powers on who came in from the West Lobby.

BARTLETT: Oh, is that right? It was my sense this changed noticeably. I can remember that night that we took the walk--that Monday night after he'd gotten into the White House--and we ran into Walt Rostow. And I remember he said, "Now, Walt want to talk to you and I want you

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to be certain that you see me. And I want you to make an appointment right now for every Thursday afternoon." And I think at this point why he was really anxious not to become the prisoner. This was very much on his mind. A lot of that was cut out I guess after the Bay of Pigs. He decided to see less people and concentrate more.

HOLBORN: The last year was breeding a change again.

BARTLETT: Getting back to the looseness?

HOLBORN: In the last weeks, I mean, there was already a sense of the next campaign, too.

BARTLETT: Yes, yes.

HOLBORN: Loosening up and a lot of public groups started coming in.

BARTLETT: His mind at this point, certainly at the end, his mind was completely on the campaign.

HOLBORN: Just been about a month or five weeks when it had really begun to seize him again.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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of CHARLES BARTLETT

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Charles Bartlett – JFK #2

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Second of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Charles Bartlett

February 20, 1965
Washington, D.C.

By Fred Holborn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLBORN: I think, Charlie, we might begin today by going in a little greater detail into a couple of the episodes in which you personally were particularly involved. Of those of a more official character in President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] life, there are two particularly that come to people's minds, to our minds. The first, in 1962, the so-called steel crisis, and then secondly, later that year, in the retrospect of the President's handling of the second Cuban crisis.

Beginning with the steel crisis,

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why don't you just in your own words, in your own way, tell us how you were a part of that, how you saw that whole episode?

BARTLETT: Well, my part in the steel situation was caused by the fact that I had a very close friend, Hal Korda, who was a New York businessman who had no business association with the United States Steel Company but for some reason was closely involved with the people that worked up there, with Tyson [Robert C. Tyson], and even with Roger Blough [Roger M. Blough]. As a matter of fact, back in 1960 at my request Korda had arranged for John Kennedy to sit down with Roger Blough and Henry Alexander. At that time I was very hopeful that Henry Alexander might be

the President's Secretary of the Treasury and had Korda, who was a great friend of Henry Alexander's, introduce him and they all had breakfast together up in New York.

Korda called me about four days before the steel price rise. Of course I'd been into some of it, when I was over at the White

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House I used to see the President conferring with Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg]. I remember one day in which they were working very hard to get Dave McDonald [David J. McDonald] to relax some of his demands. And I had been very impressed by the earnestness with which both Mr. Goldberg and the President were really trying to live up to their part of the role to negotiate a reasonable compromise of these differences. And particularly that Sunday when I saw them both working over Dave McDonald by long distance telephone to Florida, I realized that they were making a very sincere effort in behalf of the company. It wasn't just a question of holding the price line, but they were also trying to hold the wage demand.

But on this day Korda called me--it was a Friday--and Korda called me from New York and said that he had gotten a sniff around the Steel headquarters that the boys were going to raise their prices. And this was, of

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course, in April. It was very recently after the whole new pact had been signed, and it was rather surprising news to me. And I conveyed it immediately to the President. He said, "I'll check and call you right back," which he did. He apparently called Arthur Goldberg, because he called me a few minutes later and said that Goldberg couldn't find any sign of it, that there was no sign. I think Korda called again saying that he was pretty sure--the same day--that this was in the wind. But again Goldberg couldn't find any sign. And as far as I know, and I think the President told me that, this was the only warning of any kind that he had.

But I was up in Boston on, I guess it was a Tuesday night when the steel price thing was announced. In fact I was with Teddy Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy], and we stopped by the *Boston Globe*; Tom Winship told us about it. But then we had this.... So when I got back to Washington, why, the

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President was in all these meetings, and I didn't really talk to him until Wednesday night. Well, before he went on television, before he went on that press conference--that was on a Wednesday, I believe...

HOLBORN: Wednesday afternoon, yes.

BARTLETT: Wednesday afternoon. He called me that morning and asked whether I thought he should take a stiff or a conciliatory line. I said I didn't think he should do too much of either. I thought that just to play it rather straight and sort of suggest that various agencies of government might be interested in the

implications of this thing; try to scare them a little bit, but not overdo. Obviously, he went much stronger than that because I had a call from Korda about an hour after the President's press conference, and Korda had watched the thing with Blough and with Tyson at the Steel headquarters in New York. And

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he said that he thought the President had really thrown a scare into them with this thing.

That night I was having a dinner here--it was a stag dinner in honor of Arthur Krock. We had several young newspaper men, and we were all sitting around Mr. Krock trying to learn how to be great newspapermen. Korda called from New York about 11 o'clock and said that he thought that Tyson and Blough were ready to make peace with the President. He thought that they were so anxious to make peace that they would even be willing to rescind the price increase. I said that was very exciting, and I called the President immediately, but he was entertaining the Shah of Iran [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi] and the dinner hadn't broken. So the operator said she'd have him call me as soon as he could get clear, which he did about a quarter of 12.

So his immediate reaction--I think this is the point that impressed me when I later saw how the business

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circles accused him of being intrinsically hostile to business. His immediate reaction was, "Well, gosh, if there's any way of making peace in this thing, let's make peace." I mean I've heard him say at that time, "My father [Joseph P. Kennedy] always told me that businessmen were bastards." And I guess he was saying it to everybody around the White House. And I think he was damned mad. But I mean that really wasn't the point of the thing. The point of it was when this opportunity came to make some peace, why, he jumped at it. So I got on the phone to Korda to say that the President was interested and would be very cooperative.

HOLBORN: Did he ask you to call?

BARTLETT: Oh, yes, the President asked me to convey this message back to them. Of course, it was the first gesture of cooperation. He said, "It would be useful if we could avert this debate between Tyson and Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] that is

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scheduled for television tomorrow morning." Martin Agronsky had gotten a hold of Heller, and they'd worked out this, that one was going to be in New York and one was going to be in Washington; they were going to debate the price increase on television on the "Today" show. Korda said if the President could get Heller not to go, well, then Tyson wouldn't go and then the whole thing would be called off.

Well, this sounded easy. I called the President, and he said he'd do it, but it was very hard because Heller was rather eager to debate. And Tyson was frightened that Heller would slip on and scoop him and get all the time. So they were very wary. And of course NBC [National Broadcasting Company] tried to make them increasingly wary when they saw they were attempting to get out of it. Heller finally agreed, but the next morning he was called by Martin Agronsky who said that Tyson was on his way to the studio. At this point

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this was about 7 in the morning--Heller called me and started shooting towards the studio. And they almost roped them in, but, as I gather what happened in New York, Tyson ended up in a drugstore across from the studio, ready to go on if Heller should show his face. They weren't trusting each other at all.

But at that point, why then Korda said that he thought the best thing would be for them to come down here. Tyson wanted to come down and perhaps negotiate with someone. And so the President said that he would be glad to arrange for Goldberg to meet with whoever came down. So I arranged for them to get a room in the Carlton Hotel. They were going to fly down, and they were going to meet at 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. But I think they finally went over to the Mayflower because they didn't like the room that they got there. And they met for several hours.

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HOLBORN: Who was "they"?

BARTLETT: Well, as I understood, it was Tyson, Goldberg--and I think that may have been all.

HOLBORN: Was Clark Clifford [Clark McAdams Clifford] a part of that?

BARTLETT: No, not at all. So then about 7 o'clock at night or perhaps a few minutes after 7, Korda called and said that the meetings with Goldberg had not produced anything and that they were about to fly back to New York; but that Tyson had the feeling that if he had the opportunity to see the President, that he might be able to create some understanding. So I called the President on this, and he said that he had to go to the Iranian Embassy. I don't think he wanted really to get involved anyway.

But he said that since the relationship, since the dealings with Goldberg seemed to have run the string, he would like to have Clark Clifford talk to Mr. Tyson before he went back to New York. So he asked me if I

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would get a hold of Clark, which I did. And Clifford, as I understand it, he seemed to be keyed in, so I gathered that the President had perhaps discussed the thing with him earlier in

the day. But it was interesting that the President thought of Clifford in this moment because, I guess on the previous night in talking to me, he said, "This thing would never have happened if United States Steel had had in their employ a lawyer like Clifford who understood the workings of a politician's mind and understood the position that the politicians had to protect."

Clifford agreed to meet, and we had a long discussion about where they should meet, and there didn't seem to be any ideal place because it was obvious that it should be rather secret. And finally we agreed that they would meet in the United States Steel plane which was parked at the Butler Terminal at National

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Airport. That is where, as I understand, the Steel people served dinner. And from that meeting came an arrangement to meet the next day in New York. The next day the President had Clifford and Goldberg go up to New York and meet with the larger group of the United States Steel people.

One of the interesting aspects of that meeting was that after the price line broke in Chicago, Block [Joseph L. Block] and Bethlehem broke the price line and rescinded their increases, why, the Steel people had no way of getting a hold of Roger Blough to tell him because Blough, when he went into this conference with Goldberg and Clifford, left word at his office that he didn't want to be disturbed by anyone in the world, there was nothing that should bother him. So these people didn't dare call to tell him that their game was up. So they had Korda call me to ask if I could get word through to Clifford to tell Blough that it was all over. So I finally got the President. The President was just taking off.

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He was going down to inspect some troops off Norfolk, and he was taking off on the plane, and he said, "All right, you call him." I was trying to get him to do it. But he said, "You call him and tell him!" So I finally was able to reach Clark Clifford in New York, and he got the word. But it was a very interesting episode.

Then after that I dealt with the President when he was trying to put his speech together for the Chamber of Commerce group, I guess it was a few days later. And it seemed so unkind, as I watched him work over that speech and discussed it with him, the allegations of business that he was out to gut them or was out in any way to cut their throat. There certainly was a moment when there was a desire to punish United States Steel for what really seemed, from the White House view, to be an act of extreme perfidy. And

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I think the President really was interested in all the possible ways of applying punishment. I think that those were examined rather carefully by McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], by Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy].

Of course, perhaps I should tell the story that he told me of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] men who woke President Homer [Arthur Bartlett Homer] up in Bethlehem.

I mean that was--this fellow was told to get this information from Mr. Homer. He talked to the newspaperman in Bethlehem who remembered having been told by Homer something about the price increase. They were trying to establish a conspiracy. And he talked to him, and by the time he got through with him it was about 10 o'clock. So he got to Mr. Homer's house a little after 10 and Mr. Homer was out to dinner and didn't get back until 12 o'clock. So, therefore, the interview couldn't take place until sometime after midnight. But this became the great midnight raid of the FBI, which was highly overdone.

I think the

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President's sort of antagonism in the thing was really--I think Bobby did see a conspiracy case in the thing. I think Bobby was very intent on prosecuting it. I think that the President, you know, was less intent in every direction. He just wanted to get the thing solved. He said to me, and said to me several times in this period, that he believed that if Blough had only been smart enough to wait until summer he could have had his price increase and there would have been no trouble; it was just the juxtaposition of the increase with this settlement. And I think that he felt that U.S. Steel, which had not raised its prices since 1958, I believe, was entitled to an increase. The President was very un-doctrinaire in all of his conversations with me on this whole point.

I think that in that speech which went over so badly at the Chamber of Commerce, I think he attempted to

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say that he had no axe for business. But like these sort of madnesses that develop, I think this fixation of that spring that Kennedy was somehow out to cut the throats of business just spread, and there was nothing that any human being could have done, including the President, to stop it. Of course when he went up to Yale, I personally felt and told him I thought that speech at Yale was a mistake because I didn't think it was necessary to go over this ground again or to even introduce any new thoughts because at this point the business community wasn't thinking; it was in an emotional grip.

HOLBORN: It was probably too close in time to the event.

BARTLETT: Well, it was. I mean the stock market had gone off, so they all felt poor, and then this speech at Yale which was written in some rather original language and rather original approach, I thought that was mistake. But I don't think the

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President did anything in that whole period that he really didn't have to do. The only thing that anybody could criticize him for was taking a rather fierce position in that press conference. But fierceness is a relative thing.

HOLBORN: Do you think that as a result of your original clue which you sent him on the weekend previous that he had some premonition why Blough was coming in to see him that Tuesday?

BARTLETT: I would think that by the time...

HOLBORN: The general view is that he was taken totally by surprise, but you think that, though Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] may not have known, the President did.

BARTLETT: I think that that was the only warning he had because he did tell me that later. And the fact that Goldberg could find nothing there, I think he put it out of his mind at that point because I must say that when I heard about it in Boston, why, you know, that was three or four days later, and he sort of had forgotten, and this thing comes back. I don't know whether....

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But I know he didn't get any other advance warnings.

HOLBORN: But you had no sense in the days afterwards that he had any sense of personal grievance about this?

BARTLETT: No, I think he felt very badly about the whole thing. I admired him enormously in this thing because I felt that he was so even and so balanced, and I thought that he was taking such particular care to be fair, you know, not to be rigid.

HOLBORN: Well, leaving aside people like Mr. Homer, but the people that you were closest to, Mr. Korda and, through him, Mr. Tyson and Blough, did they feel that they had been mistreated in their negotiations? Did they feel a strong sense of personal grievance?

BARTLETT: No, I really don't--my impression, of course, you never know with, these fellows because.... As I say, Korda's not a steel man; Korda's just somebody

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who knows these guys. But the feeling I got was that.... Then actually Blough came down and had dinner with a group of newspapermen sometime after, and at that point he made the rather poignant observation that there is no good time to raise the price of steel. And I think that they were sort of trapped and that they were trying to find a way out of the trap, and they sprung this, and it didn't work, and then they realized that they'd made a mistake. I think that

Blough was very big about the thing. I don't believe that he ever nursed any grudge against Kennedy. I think it was a failure of communication; it was a failure of understanding; it was the failure of a businessman to understand the problems of a President. I think that in those terms it was very sad because, as the President said to me, the thing could have been so easily avoided.

HOLBORN: Moving from this into the wider subject, what do

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you really feel was President Kennedy's view of the business community and of businessmen as politicians and businessmen as public servants in government? Did he ever speak to you about this?

BARTLETT: Well, he did, because I must say that I thought that one of the things that I particularly hoped I would be helpful in was this role of sort of keeping him in touch with business. I don't think that President Kennedy had an enormously high opinion of most businessmen.

I think that he was very impressed by Henry Alexander, for example, when he met him up there. I remember that he said to me--Henry Alexander went the other way finally, became the head of a volunteer committee for Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon]--but I remember that he said to me that if Henry Alexander had, it wasn't even necessary that he would have supported him, but if he only had not gotten on the

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letterhead of that Nixon committee, he said he could have made him his Secretary of the Treasury. I think Alexander was the kind of guy that appealed to him.

Of course, we know that he had an enormous feeling for Robert Lovett [Robert A. Lovett] and respect. Of course, Lovett is also a government man, as well as a businessman. But I don't think there were too many businessmen. I remember one time he said to me, "Gosh, I just don't see how Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] sat around evening after evening with all those businessmen." I think that basically they seemed to him rather ponderous and rather dull.

HOLBORN: It was a sense of boredom as much as ideology, then.

BARTLETT: Yes, it wasn't ideology. I think he had an enormous sense of their selfishness, but I think he was willing to grant them that. But I think he didn't really crave their company. I think this may have been one of the

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problems. And yet he used to.... I remember Henry Ford [Henry Ford II] used to come down and have dinner with him before he was President. I can remember going to his house on several of those occasions. And there was Tom Watson [Thomas J. Watson, Jr.]. But basically I don't think it was a breed that fascinated him.

HOLBORN: But not a really--it's not a question of, it's important.... I mean it's not really, in your mind, that it was an ideological difference.

BARTLETT: No, it wasn't a rigidity. It wasn't a rigidity at all.

HOLBORN: It was a personality type.

BARTLETT: And I think he was wedded from the moment that he got into the White House, to the whole idea of trying to do what Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] actually has done, which is to try to unify the country. I think he really wanted that, and I think that this was very much in his mind.

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HOLBORN: What did Kennedy learn from this crisis as against what Blough....

BARTLETT: As against what Blough learned, huh?

HOLBORN: Do you think it changed his conduct of the office at all, subsequently?

BARTLETT: No, I think it, I think it--he kept his contacts. No, I really don't. I can't look at any change in his philosophy as a result of this thing. I think he regarded the damned thing as a tragic error; you know; it was just a misunderstanding which really needn't have happened. I did observe, and he never said anything to me, that when Goldberg went on the Supreme Court and Willard Wirtz [William Willard Wirtz] came in--and Wirtz, of course, represented a much more passive approach toward these labor problems and did not seek to involve the President--I noticed that he accepted that. He never complained about it. He never seemed to me to sort of miss the days in which he

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was exerting a more trenchant role.

HOLBORN: Well, in a way, that never really got tested under Wirtz. There was never a serious, major strike. It all happened just after...

BARTLETT: That's right. But he never showed any sign to me of feeling that--he never gave me any reaction to the marked change, really, that Wirtz

brought into that department, into the whole labor relations of the Administration.

HOLBORN: On the other side, did he ever make any general comments of labor leadership, with whom he had to work much more closely, particularly when he was running for the presidency?

BARTLETT: No, the only funny story, I remember the night that he was nominated Bobby said that he'd answered the telephone. He was out at his father's house in Bel Air, and he answered the telephone and he turned and said, "George

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Meany wants to come out." And Bobby said, "You mean to see Dad?" He said, "No, to see me." [Laughter] No, he never showed any particular--I never had any enormous sense.... I always had the feeling that he enjoyed Goldberg and was sort of slightly exasperated by him, but had an enormous respect for his intelligence. I had a feeling that with him I think most of these labor leaders were sort of like the business leaders. They were just to be dealt with. I think he viewed them sort of as objects in a game, and not as adversaries or as allies. As you know, his old attitude toward labor's role in politics was very negative. He never felt very strongly about labor's ability to deliver in an election. But I think the fact that they did contribute to that narrow victory in 1960, I never heard him say that after he got into the White House.

HOLBORN: Somehow, he always, as President, seemed to do

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very well before labor conventions. It was an audience he began to find easier and easier to talk to. It is true, though, isn't it, that even in 1962 he did recoup quite a lot of ground with business. It was also the year, after all, of the Trade bill in which he managed that summer to get...

BARTLETT: Well, of course, the tax bill I think was the thing, remember, and then he had that enormous test on the tax thing. And I thought he handled that extremely coolly, where you had all these sort of investment types in New York say that unless we had a tax cut before Congress adjourned, we would have a recession before the first of the year. And I must say that I don't think he was ever given the credit that he deserved for staying cool in that situation. I think his coolness was prompted by the realization that it would be damned hard to get a tax bill out of Congress between August and

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October. But he certainly stayed cool, and he was right, the economy didn't buckle. I think this was one of his great tests.

I have an interesting memorandum that Walter Heller gave me about that time. This was when we were getting ready for the tax cut, maybe it was a little after this, and you're getting ready to go into this big, two stage tax cut. And Heller wrote a memorandum to the President. He urged the President to go through some kind of a show of economy, to make some dramatic gesture towards economy, something that would impress the business leadership that he really wanted to pare government expenses. Heller made the very logical, cool point that this would make it easier for the businessmen to sign on to the tax cut, that they wanted some reason to sign on; they were looking for an excuse; they were all for it; and if he would

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just do this, go through some gesture, fire some people, no matter how superficial it was, it would have a very valuable effect in rallying the business sentiment.

Well, Heller told me at the time that Kennedy had rejected this idea, rejected it flatly because he didn't like that kind of sort of showiness. It would have been a sort of a medicine man pitch, and Kennedy was, as you know, not a medicine man. And it was rather amusing because I'm sure it was on the basis of a copy of that same memorandum that President Johnson began his lights out campaign some time later. And it worked very well.

HOLBORN: Yes. Again, now we get speculative, but in November of 1963 President Kennedy was about to make a decision as to whether or not to break the magic barrier of 100 billion. Do you think he would have tried to keep it

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under 100 or do you think this really, again, was not a matter of grave importance, symbolic importance to him?

BARTLETT: He liked those Keynesian [John Maynard Keynes] budgets, I think. He used to say to me, he said that "Everybody talks about our deficit; everybody wants us to cut spending." He said, "They don't seem to understand that that deficit, that that spending is what's keeping this economy pumped up." He said, "I love that deficit," he used to say. And I think he would have probably done whatever it took to keep the economy floating. He was very wedded to the Keynesian economic theory, in my opinion.

HOLBORN: He learned his Harvard economics after he left Harvard.

BARTLETT: He did. He learned them here, you know. Did we go through that? Did we go through the courses we used to have in economics? I guess we did.

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HOLBORN: Yes, you mentioned those in the.... What reactions did the President give to you about the role Walter Heller played during the time he was in office?

BARTLETT: Well, I think he liked Walter Heller. Of course, he had great regard for Walter, and I think he.... Then we had more problems during the steel thing. There was another television debate scheduled for the next day-- I forgot to include that--and we had a hell of a time getting that one called off because by this time Heller was rather anxious to get on and express his viewpoint. And so Kennedy wouldn't call him up again and tell him to get off. He said, "You do it, Charlie." And I'm sure that Walter Heller was a little surprised to be called in the middle of the night by a newspaperman and be told he mustn't go on television in the morning. But he didn't.

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Of course, Kennedy, I think, enjoyed Heller; I think he enjoyed Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon]; I think he had great respect for both of them. And the fact that their views conflicted many times, I think it made him probably enjoy them more. I mean, to me this was one of the most unique features, and probably one of the most remarkable features of his Administration, was this consensus that operated so well for the good of all the country in economic spheres. And out of this thing he was the sort of the balance wheel, and out of it came some extremely good judgments, which kept the economy on an even keel for well past his death. I think that the...

HOLBORN: Somehow it didn't sour into feuding, either.

BARTLETT: I must say it didn't. Of course, I think that Heller and Dillon are uniquely able men, and, you know, I don't think that either

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of them are vindictive. I think they both dealt with these things in a very enlightened way. I've never had any sense of bitterness between them.

HOLBORN: Did he look upon Roosa [Robert V. Roosa] as the principal advisor or was he more in the back room as far as he was concerned?

BARTLETT: Well, I don't have any direct impression of this from him. My impression as a newspaperman is that Roosa was in most of those meetings. He never mentioned Roosa to me.

HOLBORN: Well, we can turn then to the later part of this same year. Where, I

guess, your testimony to history becomes particularly important was the debate that arose out of the article which you and Stewart Alsop wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post* subsequent to the Cuban crisis. Here again, it's probably better if you develop this your own way.

BARTLETT: Well, this is one of those amazing episodes that begins rather simply on the day that

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Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] threw in the towel after the Cuban missile crisis. I had for some reason seen more than usual of the President during the week before. I think the pressure of this period made him desire more to have friends around. I think I was over there for dinner three times in the week, or something like that, or more for just small groups which he would break up about 9:30 and go back to the cables. But I think he did feel the need for a little bit of relief from the pressure of this thing. So I had seen a little of it from his viewpoint and had been struck by the coolness with which he sort of bore it.

I remember one night, it was after the.... As we had dinner, why, he had just gotten word from the Navy that the Russian ships were standing off, that they weren't trying to come through his blockade. And

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this looked like pretty good news, and I kept saying, "Why, I should think you'd feel like really celebrating." And he said, "Well, you don't want to celebrate in this game this early," he said, "because anything can happen." And as I was going to bed--we'd left the White House. I think we stopped at Bill Walton's for a night cap. And then I was getting into bed about 11:30, and the phone rang from the White House. The President said, "You'd be interested to know I got a cable from our friend, and he says that those ships (of course, he was referring to Khrushchev) are coming through, they're coming through tomorrow. So it was on that kind of a note that he had to go to sleep.

But I must say that the President's coolness and temper were never more evident than they were that week. He kept a very balanced.... He

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was enormous. I remember the first time that I was aware of the damned missile crisis, in retrospect, was coming back from New Haven on the preceding Wednesday. I'd been very impressed by something that.... I'd had lunch with Thomas Mann [Thomas Clifton Mann], who was then the Ambassador to Mexico, and he had some theory about dealing with the businessmen in Mexico City and he wanted the President's support. And he'd come to me.

So I was on this press plane. Well, I was on the President's plane. I was actually one of the pool reporters coming back from the campaign trip to Connecticut, and he had me come back into the compartment. And I was talking to the President. I guess Kenny and

O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and the group was there, the political group, Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger]. We talked for a while about the campaign and so forth, and then I said, "This Mann thing," I said, "I'd like very much to have you see this Ambassador

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Mann from Mexico while he's up here. He's got some very interesting ideas." And just the mention of Mexico--it was an amazing thing. The sort of buoyancy of having been out in the fresh air and campaigned with cheering crowds and all that, the buoyancy just left him and he almost--his shoulders sort of caved, his face took on lines and he said, "Boy, Charlie, do I have problems down in that region." And his whole face.... And that was, as I look back on it, of course that was the--he'd just learned that the day before...

HOLBORN: That morning.

BARTLETT: That morning I guess, yes. So, after this denouncement, I guess we all went over to a Rusk [Dean Rusk] press conference in the State Department. I was rather excited by this thing. And I ran into Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan]. And somewhere in my mind the idea of sort of doing this great chapter in the Kennedy Administration had already

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occurred; that this was a great story; it should be told, well, and the fact that I had seen a certain amount of the President during the week, and I had been following it awfully closely, and I'd seen Bobby and so forth. I thought that maybe I ought to do it. And Dungan sort of delayed(?) me. I said, "This wouldn't be a bad article to write." I said, "It would be a good magazine article because the President certainly looks good from everything I know." And he said, "Yes," he said, "I think somebody's already started." He said, "I think they've already decided they're going to give it to somebody." I didn't pay much attention to that. But then I talked to Stewart Alsop the next day, and he thought it was a good idea. And so we said we'd do it.

I was over there for dinner, I think that night, Monday or Tuesday night, and I said to the President that I was going to do

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this thing. He said, "Well, I understand there are some others also." And he said, very clearly intending to notify me that he had no intention of being a source for my article, he said, "My role, I've decided, in all these articles will be not to talk to the writers who are doing them."

He said, "After all, I would just be putting credit on myself." And I think that that was a.... He said, "There's no point in sitting around patting myself on the back." So from that point I never had any inclination to go to him on any point of the article. It seemed to me he's made it very clear he didn't want to be a part of my article or anybody else's.

But when we did run into this story about Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] having proposed to give up the Guantanamo Naval Base, plus the missiles in Turkey, plus the missiles in Italy, having proposed this at an NSC [National Security Council] meeting, or at least at a meeting of the

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Ex Comm [Executive Committee], why, I was fascinated by it. And we checked it out very quickly, and as you know, there were seventeen people. We first heard of it from somebody who was not in the meeting who had learned it from somebody who was. We checked it, and it checked out very quickly. There were sixteen people there. Most of them did not like Adlai Stevenson, and most of them were very happy to verify it. And I think that most of them had been rather shocked by the proposal as it came out.

So, I did, in the course of another dinner at the White House, with the President, say that this was one piece of information that we had picked up. I guess it was down in Middleburg. And he had that sort of wary look, you know, but he said, "Did you hear about that?" I said, "Yes, we got it." He said, "Are you going to put it in the

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article?" I said, "Yes." He sort of shook his head. That was the only real comment that he made. My own guess, knowing him well, would be that he was not too displeased that this had turned up. I don't think at that point that he or I had any idea that this thing would be linked to him or that it would be a gesture of rebuff to Adlai. I think, my impression was, that he had been rather shocked when Adlai had proposed this in the meeting and, you know, felt that it was a part of the history of the thing.

But anyway, the article was prepared, and I guess that when Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] came running into his office on the Saturday before the magazine came out with the article in his hand, I guess he was then aware that it was going to be a major contretemps. Because I was in New York--I was in Far Hills, New Jersey, on that Sunday night, and he telephoned me, and he said that

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he hoped that it wasn't going to be too rough. At this point he knew it was going to happen.

On that Sunday night before the article came out, I talked to the President. I guess he called me. I was up in New Jersey with my wife's [Josephine Martha Buck Bartlett] parents. And we were talking about the thing. He was obviously then aware that there was going to be some excitement. And later that evening I happened to talk to Joe Alsop, who was in Washington, on the telephone. And Joe told me that he was writing an article that would say that it had been the President's desire to get rid of Adlai and that this might be the occasion on which Adlai might go out of the Cabinet. I said that I didn't think that it was the President's desire to get rid of Adlai. And he said he was absolutely certain that it was, that he had never liked Adlai, and that he had had enough of him.

So I called the President to tell him that Joe was

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writing this article. He was really shocked because he really did not want to get rid of Adlai for many reasons. I don't think that he had anybody else he particularly wanted to send up to the United Nations; I think he had a respect for Adlai Stevenson; I think that with all the limitations that we know are part of Adlai, I think he was very unanxious to take on the wrath of all of Adlai's supporters. I think this probably left him very anxious to keep Adlai in the Cabinet until after the election.

So I kept calling back. And I'd called Joe, and I'd say, "Now, Joe, this isn't true. I can tell you with some assurance now, this isn't true. You really better not write it." And Joe kept getting furious at me and he'd say, "That's balderdash, Charlie. Don't give me that twaddle." So then I'd called the President and say, "Look, I can't do anything with him. You better give him

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somebody who's an official to get a hold of him." And I think later the President had McGeorge Bundy get hold of Joe and persuade him that the whole thing was not really a scheme to get rid of Adlai.

But it made me feel very sad, this thing, because it blew high. It would have been easy for me after we'd gotten this information about Adlai to take my name off the article. And, in retrospect, that is exactly what I would have done because I think that it created a very hot two weeks for the President, which, as he pointed out to me with some sardonic glee, this could have been the happiest two weeks of his life in the White House. I don't think it was because of this one thing. But I think that he then made an enormous effort over Adlai afterwards. I think he had Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] go up and spend some time with him at the United Nations. I think that relationship worked out all right. Before he

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died he told me that he expected Adlai to become his Ambassador in London after the election. And I think that might have been a good place for Adlai.

HOLBORN: But he never took you aside and said, "Look you've got this wrong or that wrong," or he never attempted to dispute the article in its content.

BARTLETT: No, I think his feeling was the article was accurate. I think he would have stood behind every aspect of the article.

HOLBORN: Because he did tend to do that even when he hadn't helped a person.

BARTLETT: Yes. No, like the rest of us, and certainly like me, I think he might have objected to the emphasis upon Adlai. I mean the whole picture

play and everything did suggest that the whole article was written to point out that Adlai had no backbone, which it really was not. And I always resented that.

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I thought the *Saturday Evening Post* did a very unfair job, treated me unfairly. In fact, I concluded then that I would not only never collaborate with anybody as long as President Kennedy was alive, but I would also never write an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* as long as Clay Blair [Clay Drewry Blair, Jr.] was editor because I thought it was very unfair.

HOLBORN: Well, a lot of it was the captioning right under the pictures.

BARTLETT: It was the way it was played and advertised and built up and that kind of thing. I was caught between a cross fire in the coming week because Stewart Alsop wanted me to go on--Stewart Alsop was out of the country, but he wanted us to answer back. He wanted to keep hitting back at Stevenson. And the President, of course, his best interest was to have me do nothing and say nothing. They put Stevenson on "Today," if you remember, and Stevenson bitterly attacked

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us both and said we were infants. So I had no choice except to refuse to go on "Today," and to say nothing. It was a very painful period even for me, I must say. There was no joy in it because it was particularly annoying to me as a newspaper man to have something that I knew was absolutely accurate and to be attacked for it. I must say that the fury of Adlai's supporters was keenly felt.

HOLBORN: Did you have a lot of visits, calls, letters? How did this all.... I mean, from Adlai's side, what kind of representations were made to you?

BARTLETT: Well, nothing. It was all done in the press and the television and Adlai himself. Some of his friends down here would get very vehement when I saw them, and it had a lot of ramifications. I must say that it was an amazing sort cause celebre because it really blew out of

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nothing. And finally after a month it died very slowly. It seemed painfully slowly to me. But it finally died, and I was glad to see it gone.

HOLBORN: Were there any other periods at which you felt that you performed for the President either as a listening post or as an intermediary where he either asked you to convey information to somebody or asked you to obtain information of any character?

BARTLETT: No. The only other thing I got involved in was unofficial and there were some public relations things which he asked me to do for him a couple of times. But the only business involving an official affair was after that junta had seized control in Cuba--I mean in Peru, excuse me, in Peru. And Fernando Berckemeyer; who had been a childhood friend of Mrs. Kennedy's and had known John Kennedy and knew me very well, called and asked if I would convey to the President his statement that he would not stay on as Ambassador

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if he did not feel that this new government was true blue, and Ambassador Berckemeyer said that his great loyalty was to the President and to Mrs. Kennedy and that he wanted him to know that. So I called him, and at that point the President said, "Well, why don't you tell him that we need this; he gave me three conditions that they had to meet for recognition. If they'll just do this, then we can give them the recognition they're seeking." So I conveyed that, and then Berckemeyer...

There were several calls back and forth. And I remember they were interpreted in the State Department to indicate a sort of intervention that some of the liberals who very much resented my part in it. And it was leaked into Drew Pearson, and there was quite a fuss made about it. But as far as I was concerned, it was a very casual thing because I knew very little about Peruvian politics or the

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junta. But actually they finally did get recognition. Drew Pearson once wrote that I told the Ambassador; the first time that he knew that they would get recognition was when he was told by me. I don't think that's true. I think all I did was to tell them that if they did certain things then the President would feel it was possible for him to recognize them.

HOLBORN: And was there ever an occasion, as also has been apparently claimed a couple places, that the President asked you to try to obtain signals from contacts in the Russian Embassy and those quarters?

BARTLETT: No, just that, of course, during the Cuban missile crisis this fellow Georgi Bolshakov [Georgi N. Bolshakov] came to me--and Georgi Bolshakov is Bobby Kennedy's great friend, as you remember--and came to me and asked.... The story was that after the Cuban missile crisis broke, after it broke in the public domain, Bobby Kennedy said to me, "Tell Georgi Bolshakov that

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I'm very disappointed in the Soviet Union." And so I called Bolshakov and asked him to have lunch and gave him this message. No, I gave him the message, and he said, "Well, would you have lunch with me?" So we had lunch. And he had a piece of paper in his pocket. It had obviously been ____ important.

This paper was something that apparently Khrushchev had dictated to him to tell the President. He had written it down as Khrushchev said it. It was his expression of greatest fondness that we will do anything to further the peace. It was all this hypocritical, sort of obviously attempting to divert Kennedy while those missiles were put into place. Georgi hadn't been able to deliver it through Bobby because Bobby was annoyed at the Russians because they'd been putting the troops into Cuba, and so he hadn't been able to see Bobby. So I conveyed this to the President. Of course, by this time the

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missile crisis was.... I think it had already been conveyed through other channels. I'm not sure.

HOLBORN: Do you accept the Scali [John Scali] episode as written?

BARTLETT: I don't know. The Russians tell me it's not true. The Russians tell me it's completely untrue. And I don't know.

HOLBORN: But you never heard it mentioned at the time of being a key?

BARTLETT: No, I never heard it mentioned. They make the point that if they had had any contact like that, they would have used me because they knew that I could get it to Kennedy. So I don't know.

HOLBORN: Well, now if we can move into somewhat different terrain. We kind of began this interview last time, and I think this should bring us into the presidential period. You were probably in as good a position as anybody to see Kennedy in off hours, Kennedy on vacation, Kennedy at relative repose on evenings and particularly on all the weekends which you spent with him. Can you describe a little

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bit what this was like, and do you accept the view that he had an absolute separation between his official life and his private life, or did one throughout these weekends feel that his presidential responsibilities--were they clearly visible at all times?

BARTLETT: The job was never very far from him, was it? I must say that you'd you'd go there for dinner, and he'd always say, "Get there at 7:30." Then you'd negotiate a little bit with Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], you'd find that if you arrived by a quarter of 8, you were going to still probably be a little bit early. And so you'd get up there, and George would put you in the Oval Room, and you'd generally sit there for ten minutes. Maybe Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] would come in. You'd talk with your wife. I got so that I'd generally bring a newspaper. And then

about eight o'clock, generally on the button, the President, having taken his swim, would swing in very jauntily.

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He'd always, almost always, be in a very good mood, and always became very interesting from the moment he arrived because he had that marvelous capacity of sort of keying things up. He was never flat, let's say. And we talked generally. We'd talk about articles that had been written. We'd talk about things that had occurred in the press, latest column by some columnist or some development. We'd talk about politics.

Generally our dinners were just tremendous. And in most of them, why, the President would talk about just general subjects of national interest most of the time. We would talk about politics. Mrs. Kennedy and Martha would talk. I must say it was great fun. And it was generally over very early. He'd go to bed and read, you know, by 10 or so. It wasn't a long thing. Sometimes there was a movie, but I noticed that he never really stayed in the movies, never watched them through.

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I think his back bothered him in the movies, and he'd get up and leave. But I think this complete change of pace he liked, even if only for an hour or two hours. And when he'd go back into the thing, there'd always be a guy lurking in the background with a brown envelope marked "Urgent--President's eyes only." But there was that tremendous sense of gaiety which I think was an enormous asset to him in the White House. And of course John-John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] and Jackie. And Jackie was great fun at those dinners because she could keep him gay and tease him a little bit. And it was fun.

HOLBORN: Did you ever talk about the election of '64? What did he foresee?

BARTLETT: We used to talk a lot about that. I always had the impression that he viewed George Romney [George W. Romney] as his stiffest. I don't think he ever thought he'd be lucky enough to get Barry

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Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] as his opponent. I think he had a sort of a sinister feeling that George Romney would be there. And I don't think he ever quite knew whether Romney would be tough or very easy. I think he felt that he'd be a sort of a surprise figure and that he could be damned tough. I think that George Romney worried him. I think what you felt in him as his life came to a close was you felt in him sort of a gathering tension towards the election.

HOLBORN: He really didn't think it was going to be so easy?

BARTLETT: I don't think he thought it was going to be easy at all. I think he liked

to hear that it was going to be easy. And I think that he recognized the logical reasons why it might be easy. But I don't think he was, he wasn't going to miss any bet. My golly, he had all of you fellows working on different aspects of the argumentation for the campaign. I think if he'd run, it would have been an extremely

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interesting campaign. I mean it would have been a debate. I think he would have debated Cuba. I think he would have debated these issues. It would have been a much more interesting campaign.

HOLBORN: Yes, and I gather he'd pretty much made a decision that he was not only willing to have debates but even possibly appear on things like "Meet the Press" or that style of...

BARTLETT: Probably, yes. Well, I don't think he would have--he would have done it much differently than Johnson. I think he would have just.... I'm not sure he was happy that he was committed to that debate. I sort of got the impression that he sort of wished he hadn't so quickly committed himself to debate as President. That was my impression.

HOLBORN: But, he felt it was irreversible.

BARTLETT: Well, yes. He had no thought of getting out of it. He knew he was committed to a debate.

HOLBORN: Now, unlike Truman [Harry S. Truman] or Johnson he seemed to like

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to get away from the White House. Did you have a strong sense of this?

BARTLETT: He loved those weekends, yes. He loved those, the helicopter and the whole change of scene. I must say that on the weekends, he spent a few weekends there, and on a couple of them I was down. We took a long walk one weekend. One of them was rather interesting because we took a walk--he was all alone, I don't know where Jackie was--but we took a walk. It was a beautiful spring day. It was the last year of his life. And we walked all over, first around the White House and then he had the car take us to the air museum. And he went through all the air exhibits. And then he had the car take us down to the Mall. We walked down that long reflecting pool towards Lincoln's [Abraham Lincoln] monument. I said, "Let's go up and see Lincoln's monument." By this time this crowd was sort of gathering around. And he

was very resisting; he had no anxiety to go up there. He said, "No, we're not going to do that."

Then we got into the car, and we drove over to Arlington Cemetery. It really was rather amazing because we wandered all through that, where those stones are at the top of the hill. We didn't go down to of the part of the hill where he was buried. We walked sort of up around, into the Lee Mansion. And he'd never been there, nor had I. We really went through it all. There were some very nice fellows from the Park Service who showed us through it. And he said, "Wouldn't this be a fine place to have the White House?" And we discussed that day where he was going to be buried. He said, guess I'll have to go back to Boston." And I remember arguing for the National Cemetery. But we left it sort of up in the air.

But this trip was very much in my mind the night that he was killed when Bob McNamara was bold enough--I'm

not sure that I ever would have been bold enough to try to suggest to the family where the President should be buried. But Bob McNamara had urged that he be buried at Arlington. And as soon as I heard Bob say this, why, then I, of course, jumped in with this thing and I did say that it is such a beautiful place, and it was something that he loved and was part of the heritage that he loved. So I must say that I've always been grateful to Mrs. Kennedy for making the decision to bury the President because I think the country's going to be richer for it.

HOLBORN: In a curious way, though he liked to get away from the place, he did have some identity with Washington, too, which many presidents didn't.

BARTLETT: Well, he always went away. I mean even when he was a young congressman, he used to take that plane to Florida or to Hyannis Port on the weekends. He really had that soul. He liked to move. He loved Florida. He loved Hyannis Port. I don't

think he loved Middleburg. One time when they were putting in the foundations of that new house in Middleburg he said, "Can you imagine me ending up in a place like this?" I think he felt that was pretty deadly. But he liked Camp David. He loved Camp David. And I must say that it was very good for him. It was relaxing. He'd sit up on the.... Have a drink before lunch and talk. And he might take a walk in the afternoon or he'd play a little golf or do something. And then he'd take a nap and have dinner. And I think those weekends really did a lot to restore him. Then by Sunday afternoon when he was getting ready for that helicopter, why, then the whole thing sort of came back and papers started bustling around again and so on.

HOLBORN: And he liked to use the time traveling to do work.

BARTLETT: Yes, as soon as he got on the helicopter, they'd always hand him a sheet of paper, and he'd be signing and reading papers all the way out when he was flying, yes.

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HOLBORN: Your mention of this trip to the Mall and Arlington Cemetery, were there any other occasions where overtones or premonitions of death...

BARTLETT: He talked about it several times with me. I suppose any president would because it's obviously one of the hazards in which he lives. But we had a talk about it in September before he was shot, I remember, up on the boat off Hyannis Port. It just was interesting that we would discuss it at some length. I mean, you know, what Lyndon would be like as President....

But of course he had that kind of mind that he always talking about all the eventualities. I mean on that same afternoon he talked about what he was going to do when he got out of the presidency. He said he thought now he'd like to be Ambassador to Italy if a friendly regime were put in. He thought that would be a good place because Jackie would like it,

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because he would be out of the country and, therefore, the man who took the presidency wouldn't be in his way. So, I mean, I don't think the fact--perhaps it wasn't a premonition. I do remember one time down in Middleburg we were driving along a back country road, and a car shot by the Secret Service car and us. And he was shaken a little bit by this car going by. And he said, "The secret service should have stopped that car." And then he disliked the fact that he was showing concern and he said, "Charlie, that man might have shot you." But the thing obviously was on his mind. You certainly couldn't say that there was any premonition or any nightmares.

HOLBORN: And what do you think he might have done after the presidency when it came right down to...

BARTLETT: When you got down to it? I don't know. I think that ambassador thing interested me because it

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might have been an answer. I don't know. At first it used to depress him. But I felt that this time when we discussed it, the last time we discussed it, I felt it depressed him less. I think he used to worry about, you know, what it was going to be like. I think that he loved the presidency. He loved it so much. And he never made any bones about how much, you know-

-he loved the comforts of it. He loved the whole thing. He loved the people that were around him. He really loved it. I don't think he was looking forward to it. I remember once he said, "I'm going to use my allowance when I leave here to bring those telephone operators with me." He loved those telephone operators. He said, "I'm going to use my money to bring those telephone operators with me. Of course," he said, "then nobody will want to talk to me," he said, "but at least I'll have them." [Laughter]

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HOLBORN: You don't think, as many have argued, that he would have become a publisher or...

BARTLETT: No, no.

HOLBORN: It did not really appeal that much to him.

BARTLETT: The best line I always like was one Sunday Jackie brought it up, and she was sort of being very funny about it. She said, "What are you going to do Jack?" She said, "I don't want to be the wife of a headmaster of a girl's school." And the whole conversation was rather annoying to him for some reason. It was a gloomy Sunday. I remember he said, "Well now, let's not worry Jackie." He said, "Something will turn up." [Laughter] I suspect he might have ended up in Congress again even though he had no great, enormous regard for that. I just have a feeling that to be out of tradition would appeal to him.

HOLBORN: It would appeal to his historic sense at least.

BARTLETT: Yes, and I think he might have done something like that.

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HOLBORN: And, talking to you, what did he foresee for Bobby and Teddy?

BARTLETT: Well, the Teddy thing he never discussed except when the question of his running in Massachusetts was up. I don't think that at first he was enormously enthusiastic about that. His point was that, "The House of Representatives was good enough for me, I don't quite see why Teddy has to come in as Senator." I always had the feeling that this was something he accepted as his father's wish and that was all. He just had to live with it. I think the Bobby thing--what he used to say was.... We used to talk about it quite a lot. "Who do you think will be the nominee in '68?" He'd always say it this way, "Who do you think will be the nominee in '68, Bobby?"

But of course, one of the fascinating things to me is the question of his relationship with Lyndon Johnson.

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I'd love to understand that more because I really.... I think it was a very ambivalent relationship. I think he rather enjoyed Johnson. I think he enjoyed Johnson's sense of humor. He enjoyed those rather sardonic jokes of Johnson's. I think he sort of enjoyed Johnson as a personality. I think he felt awfully sorry for Johnson. I remember Liz Carpenter [Elizabeth S. Carpenter] called me and said, "Couldn't you get him to call the Vice President and ask him more opinions about things because he feels awfully lonely up here." I told this to the President, and he said, "God, I wish I could remember." He said "I feel so sorry for that guy." He said, "You know, when you get into an exciting one or when you get into a hot one, you just don't think to call people who haven't read the cables." I think this was his feeling. He never could quite bring Johnson into things in which he was not really very deeply grounded. I just don't know what....

One time I asked him if he was

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going to drop Johnson--I guess this was in about 1961--if he would drop Johnson and take another running mate in 1964. And he turned on me with considerable fury and said, "Absolutely not." He said, "That would be a crazy thing to do." He said he'd just lose Texas. I'm convinced that they had absolutely no mind to that they'd have to have found enormously incriminating things on Johnson to induce the President to change him. I think they'd have to have found him stealing personally or something almost indictable before Kennedy would have dropped him off the ticket. I think his strong mood was to go into the 1964 election with the exact same team that he had. I don't think that he wanted to change one section.

HOLBORN: No, he seemed to look upon the Cabinet as an almost permanent institution with a few exceptions.

BARTLETT: Yes. I don't think he ever.... All these whispers that used to come out of the White House about

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getting rid of people and so-and-so was going to resign—except the Day [J. Edward Day] thing, he never discussed the Day thing with me so I don't know what the mechanics of that were—I always had the feeling that this was much more the Mafia than it was the President.

HOLBORN: I think this was particularly true after Cuba because he found a sort of collegiality in this group that had worked even with differences among them.

BARTLETT: Yes. I remember he said after the Cuban Missile Crisis that were three men on that Ex Comm that he would be glad to see become president

of the United States: McNamara, Dillon, and his brother Bobby. He said that a couple of times, and it was clear that those three men of the group that had met impressed him the most.

HOLBORN: To return to a remark that President Kennedy made about then Vice President Johnson about the difficulty of using people that don't read the cables, the criticism that you often hear now

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about Kennedy is that he read the cables too much and too closely, and he put a disproportionate effort, particularly in the last year and a half, on foreign policy. Do you accept this criticism? Do you think there was under the circumstances a right balance between domestic and foreign policy? Was he trying to be his own desk officer on the Congo or Cuba or Peru, or whatever it may have been, too much?

BARTLETT: I wouldn't presume to judge it because.... My inclination would be to accept his sense of proprieties. I remember he did say to me that, "As far as I'm concerned 90 percent of the domestic problems are in the hands of Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman]." He said, "If Mike Feldman's a crook, we're all in jail." And I think he felt that he did want to give his time to these foreign problems, and I think that particularly the ones that were aggravating to the country. But I think it

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was instinctive with him. I don't think.... I don't know whether he took too much time or not. He certainly immersed himself in every issue, read every.... And he knew it. He knew it cold.

HOLBORN: He never gave to you the impression that he felt that he had to neglect a problem that he ought to be on top of.

BARTLETT: No. No, I don't feel that because I think the economy was big, and I think he spent a lot of time on that. And I think these various domestic programs, I don't think he felt he was omitting anything that he should be doing. I really don't.

HOLBORN: And did he ever react to you to the rather heavy criticism that he had--I guess it was particularly true of his second year in office--that he somehow was neglecting the public educator, particularly the criticism from the liberals in the Senate, after the steel crisis particularly, that he

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behaved better to his enemies than to his friends?

BARTLETT: Well, I think the business which has always been put forward by, particularly I guess by Scotty Reston [James B. Reston], that he should educate the people more, I think Walter Lippman was also heavy in this, I think this chafed him. But I never heard his answer to it, I never quite understood his answer to it except he did have the feeling for a man to go on television continually and stand before those microphones was not a valuable exercise. I think he had a feeling that this was something.... He had strong desire to reserve his appeals to the people for those occasions on which he felt they would really be necessary. I don't think he wanted to use them lightly or sort of blow his credibility with the people or anything. I think he was saving it for the times when he really needed it.

HOLBORN: Yes, he did feel apparently that over-accessibility to people doesn't win you friends either.

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BARTLETT: I don't think he.... He didn't use the White House in the way it is used under the present Administration. I think he realized that it, you know, wears off; that if you do too much of it, it wears off. I was there at some splendid small dinners with senators whom he liked, but I'm not sure he ever invited any senators he didn't like to private dinners. I think that he had them to lunch or something like that.

I think the luncheons with publishers around the country, those were rather interesting. I think he did enjoy those. He enjoyed meeting with those fellows, even when Mr. Deale [Edward M. Deale] told him he wished he would spend so much time riding Caroline's tricycle. I think he got a big kick out of it. He got a big kick out of the Missouri publisher who got so drunk, was drunk all through lunch, and then as he left the White House, the President heard him

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ask one of the butlers, he said, "Do you know where I can get a drink?" [Laughter] I think he regarded those as time well spent. It would have been interesting to see how many editorial endorsements they would have brought him. I actually had argued with him that he would have better spent his time having editors to lunch, that the editors were more influential in the papers than the publishers and more responsive to his kind of thinking. And I think maybe I was right; I think these publishers might have drunk his wine and then gone back and endorsed his opponent.

HOLBORN: Well, I think, Charlie, by way of conclusion here, I think, particularly in your case, I think most properly you might want a few final thoughts about simply what Jack Kennedy, President Kennedy was like as a personal friend, the way you knew him first and the way you really knew him at the end.

BARTLETT: Of course, I think the marvelous quality he had

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as a friend was his enormous sort of lift that he gave. It was that personal lift that I think so many of us felt. And this was a marvelous thing. It was just marvelous to know it was there.

And it was great fun to go up and spend a long dreary day in the damn Capitol and have five minutes with Jack Kennedy whether he was in the House or in the Senate. It was always a sort of a very pertinent lift. He had that buoyancy and that gaiety, which was a tremendous thing. And I must say that it was a unique quality.

And, of course, as a friend he did this, he was marvelously sort of constructive about his friends and certainly about me. I was a very happy correspondent for the *Chattanooga Times*, and yet I think that one of the stimuli, that I felt to go on--I'm not riddled with ambition—but one of the stimuli was Kennedy's saying, "It's a shame to keep writing that stuff

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and sending it down to die in Chattanooga. And this was his practical exhortation. And when I did decide in 1959 that I would try to syndicate my stuff, why, he was very, awfully nice. He introduced me to the publisher of the *New Bedford Standard Times*, Mr. Basil Brewer whose paper is still a client of mine. And he had that constructive interest in his friends, and he said, "What are you doing?" Even when he was completely bound up in all these problems he had in the White House, he always was sort of testing to see what somebody like myself that he knew whose progress had some interest to him and what direction he was going in. And this was really a great thing in a friend because it was a spur. And it was often helpful.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

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