

THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

Interview #8

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RITCHIE: I wanted to talk today about the 1960s. In January 1961 the Kennedy administration took over, and many of the people who took high positions in the administration had been on Capitol Hill just months earlier on Kennedy's staff and associated with his senatorial career. I wondered what was the relationship between the Kennedy administration and the Hill, given the fact that so many of these people had just left Capitol Hill?

ELSON: I thought it was very good, among staff people, because we knew a lot of them that went downtown, and went to various departments, and were number one people for cabinet members, and assistants. Actually, I think Kennedy deliberately tried doing that, because he knew his problems were going to be with a Congress that he was going to have difficulties with. They set up one of the best liaison operations that any president probably had up until that time. I thought it was very beneficial. At least you were talking in the same language.

Down in the White House, I think I mentioned before, my favorite White House staff person was Kenny O'Donnell. The reason I thought he was so good was first of all he was so close to the president, he was part of the "Irish Mafia" who had come up with him and were extremely close. But he could make decisions, he knew the president so well, and he would give you a yes and a no, it was none of this "I'll get back to you." He would make the decision and you knew it was final, there was no point trying to go over his head or around him, because he guarded the palace door.

Now, some of Kennedy's cabinet members came out of the ivy league, guys like [Robert] McNamara, who I think were totally overrated, and some of the whiz-kids. Speaking of the ivy league crowd whom he surrounded himself with, I'm always reminded of [Dean] Acheson's book, *Present at the Creation*. I'm not even sure you have to read the book. All you have to do is open it to all the pictures in the middle, and you'll find going back to Roosevelt and before Roosevelt the same damn people, they're just changing hats. There's Dulles and Rostow, you know you can name them

all. When it's a Republican administration it's the same, they just change hats, they all came from the ivy league. Maybe Barry Goldwater was right, we should have cut off the northeast and floated it out into the Atlantic.

But getting back to your question, Kennedy did have problems with the Congress, the way it was set up, and winning a very close election that was questionable. So I think it was very helpful to have a lot of people that had Hill experience as liaisons, because they didn't have to get broken in. They had to learn a little about the bureaucracy down there, and how it worked, and ferreting out who within there they could work with themselves. Up until recently I always had a very high regard for the civil service and the type of talent we've had in our government. I think we've been very fortunate over the years to have some real dedicated public servants. They weren't using it as stepping stones. Thought I also felt that a president was entitled to name as many people as possible in positions of policy-making. At one time I even thought they ought to be able to go down to GS-15 and make changes at that level, just to get control of the government and put it in the direction they're going. There are so few Schedule Cs or presidential appointments anymore, in the vastness of our government, that it's hard for any president to get a handle on it coming in new.

I thought all in all it was very beneficial for him in getting a good start. I personally liked working with them. I'm trying to remember when Mike Manatos went down there. He covered the Senate for the White House. Mike was very good. Larry O'Brien, of course, headed up the operation. Larry, everyone liked him and felt he was honest, straightforward, but very politically savvy too. I know Senator Hayden was very high on him.

But again, people forget that that was the first time there was a change from a Republican administration to a Democratic administration since 1933. In that whole first year of 1961, the great thing that I loved about President Kennedy and all of them, they moved their people into these positions whether they were qualified or not. They made changes rapidly. I think that was very wise on their part to make these moves, move people in quickly. Unlike Nixon, he took forever to make changes. It was a smart move from lots of standpoints. It made it easier on getting control of the government. It also made it easier on not having these hassles where they let incumbents start positioning themselves to stay on, and go to their friends in Congress

that they'd been working with during the Eisenhower years. So I give them a great deal of credit for moving rapidly in those early months of 1961, and taking care of the people who supported them during the campaign.

President Kennedy, at least so far as I could see from the Senate in those early days, knew he was going to have difficulty with the Congress just because of the issues, the close election, and then he really wasn't one of the club, in the sense that he did anything up here. Everyone always knew he was running for the presidency and he really didn't take the Senate that seriously as an end in itself. I think he would have been a great senator if he had wanted to stay around. But you knew that that was not where he wanted to be [laughs].

So I give them high marks for moving quickly. I would recommend highly to any president, Republican or Democrat, that during that transitional phase they get ready to move as quickly as they can, and put people in and get this thing under control. If they have to move them later, which the Kennedy administration did, because they were the wrong pegs in the wrong holes, they eventually got around to it. But they had their thing pretty much in place by summer, as I recall. Of course, there were always other things coming up, ambassadorial positions, and there were a lot more patronage positions than in the states, there were customs collectors, and Internal Revenue, some of those were still that way, and your agriculture stabilization committees, you had them all through the government. I remember looking at the "plumb" book—the first thing you do is look at that. But I know in Senator Hayden's case, eventually we took care of everyone on the Arizona delegation who helped Kennedy get the Democratic nomination.

Then I mentioned Kennedy's respect for his elders, and the Maggie-Hayden dinner we put on that fall in his first year. Those were the only fundraisers that he went to that year, mainly because it was the 25th and 50th anniversaries. So that first year, nothing was really happening. I can't recall any real important legislation that first year that moved anywhere. We had the appropriations and we had a lot of foreign affairs and things going on. But I thought they did a good job in getting themselves set up that first year.

RITCHIE: You had mentioned Kennedy's respect for his elders, and I was reading Ted Sorenson's book, *Kennedy*, where he attributed Kennedy's problems in Congress to a generational one, that there were two generations of politicians, an older group in Congress and the younger group in the administration. He thought that there was some sort of generational conflict there.

ELSON: I don't agree. Maybe when you looked at both sides of the Hill, the House and the Senate, and of course in those days the South was pretty much dominated by the Democratic party, and you had chairmen through the seniority system rising up through the ranks. But I really don't feel that way, and I don't think that was quite true.

For instance, I think at that time I was the oldest staff member by age on Senator Hayden's staff, except for one person. He surrounded himself with young people because he liked young ideas (though he had seen most everything already). He liked having young ideas and you could go in and argue with him. If you had just walked into Carl Hayden's office during those early '60s, and during the Kennedy administration particularly, you would hear shouting, yelling, screaming of staff members arguing with each other. They could in—they didn't yell at the senator, of course—but he loved having ideas thrown off of him. And he always penetrated through all our BS and got right down to the heart of the matter. Most of the time our ideas weren't so off the wall, they'd been tested before, and they weren't as original as we thought they were.

But when I look at what you would call the older men around, I don't think there was such a generational gap. I think there was a lot of times a false knock of some of our southern friends. For instance, Judge [Howard] Smith over on the House Rules Committee. Everyone used to malign him about no civil rights bill, no liberal legislation, and then you'd find out that half the people—you know, a chairman of some committee who might be a liberal, I don't care who it was, who would report out a bill out of the committee with big fanfare, knowing that the Judge and the Rules Committee were going to kill it. In fact they'd go behind the scenes and say, "Jesus, don't let this thing go anywhere!" And poor Judge Smith took all of that heat, I think a lot of it unfairly, although he certainly had his strong southern views too. But there were a lot of things you knew were going to die and never move out of committee, and

over here if the Policy Committee didn't schedule it, or if Lyndon didn't want it to move, it wouldn't go anywhere.

I didn't feel that there was a generation gap, particularly after that class of '58 came in. I just don't feel there was that big a gap. I think there was a good overall range. Just take Carl Hayden, who had been in Congress since 1912. That's a lot of time.

RITCHIE: He'd been in Congress longer than Kennedy had been alive.

ELSON: Yeah. But maybe it's because of the man I was working for at the time that I didn't feel that way, because he had such young ideas. Of course there were some old timers among the AAs. I was always younger than most AAs, but after a while age didn't mean a hell of a lot. I found that most of the senior members around here, a lot of their staff people were young. They surrounded themselves with young people, or brought them in, and they went back home and got involved in politics. I watched Maggie and Scoop—Scoop Jackson and Magnuson—my God, particularly Scoop. I don't know how many people he ran through his office that went back and ran for Congress and were elected. Now you've got the Speaker of the House who started there. In fact I remember working with Tom [Foley] when he was just a lawyer working for Scoop around the corner from our office. So you had a lot of young people. I guess I'm the wrong person to talk to about that, because though I think the average age of an A was at least ten years older than I was, probably. I never felt it.

The thing that I felt then, that might not be true today as much, was that the staff people who came up here and worked here, they really did believe in public service. They were here because they believed in the system, in the legislative branch. They weren't here necessarily using it as a stepping stone or to make more money. They really believed in the governmental process, so you really met some able guys who were around as staff members, and because it was a smaller group, you got to know them a lot better, who you could trust and whose word was good. Of course, in my mind, the only thing you have in politics is your word. If that's no good, you can get all the signed written documents you want but it's not worth the paper it's written on if you haven't given your word on something. That was how I learned politics, and that was

certainly the most important thing in Carl Hayden's career. If you ever got his word, you could not jar him loose, even though I tried.

RITCHIE: What was your impression of Lyndon Johnson during the period that he was vice president. Did he have a real function in that administration?

ELSON: Yeah, I think he did with the president. I know that Bobby had his terrible dislike for him, and would like to keep him out. So did a lot of their inner circle, some of the Irish Mafia. But I know that with Lyndon's great knowledge of how things worked, that the president relied a lot on his advice and the way he could deal with some of the older members. But you could feel the tension between the Johnson people and the Kennedy people, which wasn't necessarily unexpected or unnatural after their fight for the nomination. I just don't see how a majority leader can run for the office of the presidency from that position. It's almost an impossible task, particularly the rules have changed in the Democratic party as far as the primaries and all. When you had a convention that meant something, where you could get by the first ballot and get really into a convention where the delegates were making some selections, that might have been possible. But in today's world I just don't see how a leader in this body, even a minority leader, could do it. I think it's just impossible to expend the time and effort to do it.

But Lyndon as vice president, knowing what I think I know about that man, I'm sure that being number two was never his idea of a comfortable place to be. I wonder what would have happened if Kennedy had lived and there had been a second term, and then after that what would have happened, because Lyndon still had a lot of friends who had a lot of great respect for his talents and abilities. How that would have all worked out, it would have been interesting to see. But [Lee Harvey] Oswald took care of that.

RITCHIE: Did Johnson intervene with Hayden at all during the Kennedy years? Did he try to lobby for the administration?

ELSON: Oh, I think on some appropriations matters, some defense things like that during '62, I'm trying to think what the hell that was. But not really. They saw each other all the time, but outside of some national security matters, or on some

projects that he still might have been interested in, it was all very quiet. But I don't recall any big lobbying that he did on the senator for their programs. On a lot of those things the timing was all wrong, it wasn't the right time for moving some of the things that Kennedy wanted to move, some of the programs that they had in mind. For instance, like on the Peace Corps, the senator supported it anyhow. He was a believer in that sort of thing, so I don't know that they needed to lobby Carl Hayden very hard on too much to begin with.

From his position as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and representing the nation more than his state or region, he really, regardless of whoever the president was, unless it was an issue he felt very strongly about and disagreed with the president, he would support his president, certainly in foreign policy on most all matters, and did during the Eisenhower administration, and the Truman administration before that.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you about foreign policy, because it seemed as if the real thrust of the Kennedy administration was in foreign policy. How did Hayden relate to foreign policy issues? Did they interest him and at and did he get involved in them?

ELSON: I may have indirectly referred to his interest. He had always been interested in foreign policy. He was never out in front because he never served on any of those legislative committees, though he was on the subcommittees that handled all those appropriations. For instance, he was a strong believer in the foreign aid program. As I think I mentioned, he always rallied the votes in his own committee to get that bill out, from the inception of the foreign aid program, even for Eisenhower. P.L. 480 ["Food for Peace"] and all the other programs, he had a great interest in. This was why he believed in having his staff members and his committee members travel. Of course, in those days the counterpart funds were available, which made it pretty inexpensive, really, because they were funds that we couldn't use anyhow except in the host country.

He always had these views. For instance, going back—the Philippine government—it was his study back in the '20s that led to their independence, so they always thought that he was a great man. He didn't travel much, though I did get him to travel after his reelection in '62. In '63 we went to the Paris Air Show and ended up going to Pope John XXIII's funeral, which I could tell a story about that. He was an internationalists

really. He believed in free trade. I think I mentioned too about how the mining interests would play Arizona. If the price was not right here, or the unions got too strong, they'd start exploring their foreign holdings in South America or Africa. Then they would want "peril point" protection and all that. But he was really a free trader at heart. He had a big interest in international affairs and was also strong on defense. So they never had any problems with him there, even going back prior to World War II when Marshall was getting ready for war. He knew World War II was coming along, from his trips to Manchuria and Japan back in the early '30s. He could see that coming. When they had the secret hearings before the Appropriations Committee he was doing all he could to get the money to get us ready.

It's that part of Carl Hayden that no one knows about, because he never made big issues out of them. Take the Bricker Amendment. You remember all that? Well, he took a strong lead in fighting that. I remember when I first came back I spent lots of time working on that. Behind the scenes he really took a big interest in beating the Bricker Amendment. Again, never with any fanfare or headlines. But I would say he always had this big interest. He was a big man. He had big visions and foresaw a lot of things coming, but recognized also the limitations of what you could do in a nuclear age.

But President Kennedy had no problem whatsoever in getting his help on appropriations matters in the foreign policy area. I can't think of a thing where he didn't support him.

RITCHIE: What was the story on the trip to the pope's funeral?

ELSON: Well, I talked him into going to Paris. Mrs. Hayden had died back in '61, so after his election I said, "Senator, there's no reason why you couldn't go. You haven't been to Europe for a long time." So we went to the Paris Air Show, and we used Air Force Two. It was the senator, myself, an escort officer, from the Senate side—he was the only senator. From the House side, Eddie Hebert, who was chairman of the Armed Services Committee headed up the delegation, and there must have been ten or twelve members besides Eddie Hebert going.

We went to Paris, and he hadn't been to Paris in God knows how long. I'll never forget when we checked in. We arrived in Paris and the weather was bad. We checked into the hotel, it's the one near the American embassy, it wasn't the Georges Cinq, an old, beautiful hotel, and we had a suite together, the senator and I. Well, I was getting him checked in, and the senator excused himself. I remember going upstairs, and looking down into the lobby and all of a sudden I see Carl Hayden going out the door of the hotel. The escort officer wasn't with him, no one's with him, he just goes. He's eighty-five years old, and he disappears! We couldn't find him—well, he didn't come back till almost dinnertime. It was late, and I had the escort officer looking all over. He just disappeared in Paris, and here the guy probably hadn't been there in fifty years, or I don't know when it was. Well, it turns out the old son of a gun had an old girl friend over there [laughs], and he went off the first thing to see her. I didn't find that out until later.

The next day we were supposed to go out for the fly over and the air show. Well, the next day it was socked in again. Europe can really get socked in with weather. So we got some briefings and then we went out to dinner that next night, at a place over on the Left Bank I used to know, because I fought Korea so valiantly over there. There was only three of us there, the senator, the escort officer, and of course me. About nine or ten o'clock, because we were always eating late, the senator would say to the escort officer, "Why don't you go check on the weather for tomorrow, because I don't want to sit around on my tail." The escort officer went and checked, he was a guy by the name of Bill Reynolds, and he came back and said, "Senator the weather report is they're going to have to cancel the fly over again."

The senator said, "Well, can we lay on a trip to Berlin? I'd like to go get briefed on the situation in Berlin." So here when the escort officer and I thought we could go out and have some fun, at ten o'clock at night we're laying on a trip to go to Berlin. At eight o'clock the next morning, Hebert and a bunch of the other members went along with us to Berlin. We got a briefing on the situation there, went to the Wall, did all that, and came back to Paris late that evening. And again went out to dinner, and sitting in another little restaurant, Carl Hayden suggested to the colonel that he go check on the weather again. Sure enough, he came back with the same report.

The senator said, "You know what I'd really like to do? I think we just ought forget this damn air show. I don't know that they'll ever have a fly over," which turned out to be pretty much true. He said, "I'd like to go to Spain, to Madrid, and check out the SAC base down there." So the next morning we left. On this trip there was only the senator, the escort officer, and myself, the rest of the members stayed in Paris. About the time we arrived in Madrid, Pope John XXIII died. The senator thought about it, and when we learned who the delegation was, coming over to represent the United States, led by the vice president, and the president of Notre Dame, and the former postmaster general during Roosevelt's administration. . . .

RITCHIE: Farley?

ELSON: Jim Farley was coming over. There were four including Lyndon Johnson. So the senator called Lyndon and said, "Well, we're here and we need a ride back to the United States, so we'll meet you in Rome at the pope's funeral." We arranged to stay at the same hotel. We tooled over about the same time Lyndon and the delegation were arriving, and we were all staying at this hotel on top of mountain, the Vatican owned the hotel, a beautiful place. The next day is the funeral.

The senator and I went as part of the unofficial delegation. I'd been to Rome a number of times prior to that, but I had never seen Rome that way. They obviously loved that man. There was total silence, and that's a city where everyone just sits on the horn and traffic's just crazy. But there was such reverence for him it was just quiet as hell. Really unusual.

When they picked us up in the limousine to take us to the Vatican, where they were having the high mass, when we driving into the back there were two or three black limousines. I remember, and so does the senator, that as we were driving into the courtyard behind St. Peters, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen was walking across that courtyard. There was almost a collision of all these limousines when we saw this gorgeous woman, black hair, all dressed in black, best-built woman I've ever seen. Everyone just drooling, and here we were going to the pope's funeral! [laughs] And she walks down there with the tight outfit on, and everyone just stopped, the whole [expletive] procession of crazy Americans. Anyhow, she disappears, thank God, and we're taken into the church.

Here's Pope John laid out in the middle, tilted up. The College of Cardinals are on both sides of the nave, first row, and we're sitting right behind them. I don't know whether you recall, but this was the first live satellite television broadcast that was being carried all over the damn world. Well, a high mass is a pretty long event, and it's going on, and on, and I could see the cameras way up high, one up there and one over there. And pretty soon Carl Hayden, because we had covered all this distance and hadn't had a lot of sleep, he starts dozing. His head falls down. Every time I'd see his chin drop, I'd punch him in the rib with my elbow. He'd straighten up. I did it about three times I guess, and the ceremony was still droning on. About the fourth time it happened, he really got upset. What I was concerned about, of course, was this was being broadcast all over the world and there's Carl Hayden sound asleep, and the image that would have, here's this senile old man or something like that.

This last time when I punched him he put his hand across his mouth and leaned over to me and spoke rather loudly, even though they were chanting and all this other stuff is going on. I always knew I was in some sort of trouble with him when he called me "son" instead of Roy. He said, "Son, if you do that one more time, I'm not sure there's any way you'll ever get back to the United States. And secondly, if you were as bright and observant as you think you are you, you would notice that half the College of Cardinals are also sleeping." [laughs] And I looked around, and sure enough "z's" all over the place! I said, oh, the hell with it. I think the average age of the cardinals then was something like seventy-six, and they were all asleep. And I guess those early cameras really weren't focusing in, they were just catching the whole scene, so you wouldn't have caught it anyhow. I quit worrying about it.

After that, we flew back with Lyndon and the rest of them, stopping in Ireland on the way back. I think we covered something like six or seven countries in seven days. I think we were only gone a week, but it was a hell of a trip, and a very historical one. I was really impressed. Then right after that, I think that's when I started reading a lot of Pope John's writings. I took a big interest in him then because I was really impressed with the way Rome, which is such a great city, reacted to him. Anyhow, that's the story about Carl Hayden and the College of Cardinals.

RITCHIE: That's great! One other question about the Kennedy administration. That was when Mansfield took over as leader, and there was a lot of criticism of

Mansfield, especially by 1963. Senators were complaining that he just wasn't providing enough leadership. What was your impression, and what was Senator Hayden's impression of Mike Mansfield as majority leader at that time?

ELSON: Carl Hayden was very fond of Mike Mansfield. He thought he was a very fine man and supported him for the leadership position. I think, as we discussed earlier, Mansfield encountered an entirely different situation than Lyndon had up until 1960. That new class had come in, and I think we picked up some others in '60, so there was this younger group who were the first real television generation. And his whole philosophy was different. But I never heard Carl Hayden criticize his leadership. Privately, on a couple of occasions he did indicate that he thought that he was giving members too much room to do their thing. Of course, Mansfield was on the Appropriations Committee with him and they had worked together and he had a great respect for him, but he heard all the criticism. I think he shared some of it, but also recognized that it was a different environment, and also knew that probably not much was going to happen domestically, outside of certain programs nothing really big.

I'm trying to make sure I'm speaking about him and not about my own reactions, because I thought a lot of time it was frustrating because committees were sort of running away with things. I'm trying to think whether that was more me or part of that was the senator. I think he felt that there was Lyndon overlooking Mansfield's shoulder, being vice president and still playing some of his game. Of course, about that time didn't we have the Bobby Baker affair?

RITCHIE: In 1963.

ELSON: And that caused a lot of changes as a result of that. I think the senator felt that in time Mansfield would exert his leadership in a more forceful way, but with the way conditions were, and of course after the Baker incident and the changes that were made, then that played the opposite way because no one then wanted to ever have a Lyndon-Bobby type of arrangement again. So instead of letting him exert more leadership, circumstances and the majorities that he had to work with forced him to take maybe a little different position. I think they pointed that out in the leadership conference, the political circumstances sort of make the leader. He doesn't have unlimited power—he has a lot of power, but it depends on how he uses that to

determine what he can get done. Though Mansfield could be tough, he was not one who intimidated you or used all the wiles that Lyndon Johnson did to get things done. He was more of the persuasive type and wanted to "reason together." So he took a much more esoteric approach to the job than probably the circumstances might have warranted.

But I know Carl Hayden thought, particularly up until the Baker thing exploded, that it might take a little while for Mike to put his own stamp on the job. He also knew he had these nineteen, twenty some new members running around. It was a transitional period. It was a different period in the '60s.

RITCHIE: I get the sense, looking at those first couple of years from '61 to '63 that everybody felt that things were going slowly but they were going to pick up, that the administration would get its act together and Kennedy's second term would be different. And of course his term ended abruptly in '63. What impact did the assassination have at that stage?

ELSON: It had a tremendous impact. Kennedy had great political sense. He knew that he needed a second term for a lot of things, because he was gaining more and more support as time went on, and a more sympathetic Congress. People were saying that some of his programs, like the tax program in '62, spurred the economy again, they knew that he was really working at the job. But he also knew that he could have a tough reelection, it wasn't a foregone conclusion, and so he was gearing up for that.

When the assassination took place, everyone knows where they were on that day, November 22, I remember we were—and I should tell you, because I think this is historically important, the way Carl Hayden looked at that. We were down in the little cafeteria downstairs in the Russell Office Building having lunch, just a quick sandwich. He wanted to talk to me so I was down there with him when we got the word, so we went back to the office. Early on they were concerned that it might be a conspiracy, that the vice president might be next, and then the Speaker. Being in the chain of command to be president of the United States, eventually the Secret Service and all that came running around to Hayden's office. For a while they didn't know what the hell was happening, there was all that confusion.

Carl Hayden was an amazing man. Though it was a great shock, he remained calm, introspective you might say. When everyone was running around he was a center of calm. He didn't think that he was in any danger, though he went along with some of the security precautions. They installed telephones and put policemen outside the door and walked him home, and all that crap that came later. It probably was the next day after they knew that Oswald had done it and had used a rifle, there was this thing about the three shots. How could you possibly have pulled off three with a bolt-action gun in nine point seven seconds, or whatever it was. We were talking about it, and Carl Hayden said, "Christ, any decent marksman could do that, particularly at a target going away from him at just a couple of hundred yards. No doubt in my mind if a guy was halfway good he could do that without any trouble." Which I thought was rather fascinating. Then it dawned on me that Carl Hayden in open competition back in 1911 at Camp Perry had set a record by firing fifteen consecutive bulls-eyes with an open sight at nine hundred yards using a Springfield .03!

Also during those early days, I did ask him, I remember this conversation vividly, because it was in his office. I said, "Senator, what would you do if history propelled you into the presidency, because of [John] McCormack's death, and Lyndon had been shot, and you would have ended up being next in line?" He didn't hesitate one second. He said, "I would be sworn in. I would call a special session of the Congress. They would elect a new Speaker, and I would turn over the presidency to the new Speaker of the House of Representatives." Without hesitation. All I can remember saying to him was: "Christ, senator, at least give me a couple of days down there to get you into a style of living to which you want to become accustomed—or at least I do!" And he laughed, but he knew it was more serious than that. I think I wasn't quite that facetious. I said, "Don't bring it all to an end that quickly." But he knew exactly what he would do. I asked him why. He said, "First of all, I'm not up to it. I do not have the physical stamina to do that. And secondly, it should be the Speaker because at least it would have been an election of the House and he's closer to the people." I think that was the succession law at the time and he could have done that. He didn't hesitate one bit if that circumstance had visited him. That to me just showed what a great mind that was. And these conversations all happened within twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the assassination.

Then there was all the transition to Johnson, and some of the bitterness there. Actually, in death Kennedy probably got more done than he possibly could have staying alive as president, because Johnson utilized the momentum that the tragedy brought to bring about some great programs that really were needed. They weren't particularly new. I think if it had not been for the Vietnam War—and of course Kennedy did not help there, I think he helped accelerate the thing a great deal. I think he got conned by the Catholic Church on that one. They were always dominant, and I think he had a cardinal friend who was quite close to saying we ought to be sending boys over there.

But Johnson, only as Johnson could, utilized that and it became a Johnson-Kennedy program of great magnitude. It really made Kennedy—that's not the right thing to say, but the whole tragedy certainly made Kennedy into a martyr but it also left him a historic legacy of great proportion, as a result of what Lyndon did in following him, and the cooperation he got out of the Congress. It was amazing the things that happened after that. Jesus, things were going on all the time. The only thing I could think of that would be equivalent would be Roosevelt's First Hundred Days. Things were really moving around here in all fronts, just everywhere you turned, civil rights, domestic legislation. Things were popping. And it sort of revitalized everything, even in the tragedy. It really changed the whole complexion of things, from being sort of a lethargic time in a way, though you had the Cuban Missile Crisis and things like that, but things really started perking. And of course the tragedy was Lyndon's preoccupation with the war.

See, and Lyndon didn't do what Kennedy had done when he went into office. Of course, he came in a different way under changed circumstances. He didn't put in his people like he should have, after a reasonable period of time. He kept on a lot of the Kennedy people, and there was still a lot of resentment against Lyndon, still a lot of suspicion about what happened in Texas. I personally feel that though we had a member from Arizona on the Warren Commission, Wally Craig who was president of the American Bar Association at the time, and later we made a federal judge out there, I personally believe there was more to it than just Oswald and Ruby. That's my personal opinion. I've read a lot of the books, but I guess I don't quite trust our government, with all the funny things that happened. A great tragedy, but it made Lyndon Johnson and it made Kennedy, when you think about it.

"Roy L. Elson: Administrative Assistant to Senator Carl Hayden and Candidate for the United States Senate, 1955-1969," Oral History Interviews, April 27 to August 21, 1990, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.

And when you think about the two men, except for their affinity for women [laughs], they were quite different in many ways. Their upbringings were certainly different. But they were certainly men who enjoyed the finer things of life. Maybe we better stop there. [laughs]

End of Interview #8