

Stanley Fike Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 09/07/1967
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Fike, Executive director, Symington for President campaign (1960); administrative assistant to Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri (1952-1976), discusses JFK's time as a United States Senator and the 1956 Democratic National Convention, among other issues.

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Stanley Fike

Stanley Fike

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Stanley Fike – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

STANLEY FIKE

September 7, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: All right, Mr. Fike. Do you recall when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], or what your early impressions of him were when he came to the Senate?

FIKE: Larry, I believe I must have met him soon after I came to Washington with Senator Symington [Stuart Symington, II]. Well, I came shortly before the New Year's in 1953. And then when the senators were sworn in on the third of January of '53, as I remember, I must have met Senator Kennedy very soon thereafter. Senator Kennedy, of course, came in from the House of Representatives, but both he and Senator Symington had defeated incumbent Republicans. And they were of the freshman class of '53, which was a rather distinguished class, we thought. The relationship between the two senators was always cordial and friendly, but I would say they were never close friends during the early years that they served together in the Senate. They did serve on the Government Operations Committee [United States Senate Committee on Government Operations]. But Senator Kennedy served on the Subcommittee on Reorganization and, as I recall, was very active there; whereas Senator Symington served on the Investigations

Subcommittee with Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan], who was the ranking Democrat of the full committee as well as the Investigations

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Subcommittee at that time. Also serving with McClellan on the Subcommittee was Senator Jackson [Henry M. Jackson], who had seniority on that committee to Senator Symington. They were the three minority members of the Subcommittee of Permanent Investigations. So that although Kennedy and Symington served on the full Committee, much of the work was divided into the two subcommittees, and they really were not too close in that Committee.

HACKMAN: I was just thinking, the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] hearings would have come up in that period. Do you remember any connection between the two or any conversations with Kennedy or the people around him on Senator McCarthy?

FIKE: Well, Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] was the minority counsel for the Subcommittee, for the Democratic Side of the Subcommittee. He was, frankly, friendly to McCarthy. I think he probably had admiration for what McCarthy was trying to do in rooting out any subversive elements. I would doubt that he agreed all the time with McCarthy's methods; I'm sure he didn't. So we really knew Bobby Kennedy better than we did Jack Kennedy. And I've often heard Senator Symington mention the fact that in the early years in the Senate he knew Bobby much better than he did Jack. They were close friends. There was a mutual respect and admiration between Bobby Kennedy and Stuart Symington.

We saw Bobby in our office quite often during that time, particularly when the split developed in the summer of 1953 over the report filed by a Dr. Matthews [J.B. Matthews], who was then reporting for *Mercury* [*The American Mercury*] magazine, as I recall. McCarthy had hired Matthews as staff director. At about this time a magazine article came out in *Mercury* saying that the Protestant clergy was the heart of the communist conspiracy in the United States, or words to this effect. This was a real shocker to my boss when he saw it. And he immediately called Senator McClellan and said, "I just don't see how we can stand for this—a staff director, on this kind of basis, of the Subcommittee." Senator Symington and Senator Jackson immediately went to Senator

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McClellan's office, as I recall, and discussed this matter. They then asked for a meeting with Senator McCarthy. During the course of this meeting in a full Committee meeting, executive session, McCarthy refused to dismiss Matthews. So the three Democrats walked out off the Subcommittee. And they stayed off the Subcommittee from middle summer of 1953 until early 1954 when there were some rules changes, after which they went back on the Subcommittee.

Now during that period there was a great deal of talk about McCarthyism and concern about McCarthyism. And they would talk about rules for the committees, committee rules,

considerable discussion on this. At that time there weren't many members of the Senate who were speaking out against McCarthy. Senator Symington had some very strong feelings about it because he felt that McCarthy had much responsibility for the defeat of his long time close friend Senator Millard Tydings [Millard E. Tydings] in Maryland in 1950.

Then, too, in the 1952 campaign, McCarthy came to Missouri and campaigned against Symington. In a speech in St. Louis [St. Louis, Missouri], McCarthy charged Symington with being soft on communism. He based the charge on the fact that Bill Sentner, a known, self-admitted communist had been in charge of the union which represented the plant employees in the '38-40 period when Symington was President of the Emerson Electric Manufacturing Company, St. Louis. McCarthy charged Symington with being soft on communism because he had negotiated with Bill Sentner, and they'd met and talked together.

Some two weeks after McCarthy made the charge, Senator Bob Taft [Robert A. Taft] also came to Missouri to campaign against Symington and for the re-election of the incumbent, Senator Jim Kem [James P. Kem]. In St. Louis, at Kiel Auditorium, from the same platform where McCarthy had spoken, Taft said, "I hope that Jim Kem will be re-elected because Dwight Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] will need him. But Stuart Symington is a gentleman and a patriotic American," which was a wonderful tribute from a Republican of the stature of Bob Taft, who was then known as "Mr. Republican."

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Getting back to my story in '53, there was some work at that time on rules. Some of the members of the staff were working on possible rules changes. I sat in on some of the meetings of staff people. At this time Senator Lehman's [Herbert H. Lehman] administrative assistant, Julius Edelstein [Julius C.C. Edelstein], was very active in this work. Langdon West, administrative assistant then for Senator Tom Hennings [Thomas Carey Hennings, Jr.] of Missouri, was also active on it. And as I recall, I think Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] sat in on some of those meetings. West and Lehman's administrative assistant were much more old-timers in the Senate than Sorensen or I. Sorensen had gone to work for Senator Kennedy the same time I went for Senator Symington, officially on the staff. But Ted represented his boss in these meetings of assistants representing the quote, liberal, quote, senators. There were some suggested changes that we submitted to our bosses, but, actually, not very much came out of it. But when Democrats went back as the minority in the Investigating Subcommittee and started meeting with the Republicans again in January, as I recall, of 1954, they did make some rules changes, approved, of course, by full Committee. Bobby Kennedy worked with the minority, and he worked also with, I'm sure, the full Committee at that time. This latter was the only Committee on which both Symington and Kennedy served, and those contacts were not too intensive, not nearly to the extent as with McClellan and Jackson, for example, in the Subcommittee.

HACKMAN: Staying with the subject of McCarthy, do you have any memories at all of the period when the censure vote was up? Senator Kennedy's role at this period has always been sort of nebulous and people have talked about it back and forth.

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FIKE: Well, I think that this was the time that Senator Kennedy was absent quite a bit from the Senate. He was in the hospital and very critically ill at the time with his back problems. He was not there during the debate on the censure move in the fall. There had been some discussion earlier in the summer, as I recall it, about possible censure of Senator McCarthy. I don't remember that Senator Kennedy played any role in it at all. I do remember that Bob Kennedy sat on the Senate floor at times with Senator McCarthy, not over the censure, but when Senator McCarthy was talking about communist activities. At such times even though Bob Kennedy was responsible to the minority (the Democrats) and would normally sit and work with Senator McClellan or with Symington or Jackson as members of the minority. Bob did go over to the Republican side, and I'm sure, with the permission of Senator McClellan who was his actual boss as ranking minority member of the Committee at that time, would work with McCarthy. As I recall Bobby Kennedy was on the floor during the censure, but I don't remember that he took any part in it at all then. I was there for a number of the sessions, in and out of the Senate, but did not stay there all the time during the debate. Later on, the fact that Senator Kennedy, Jack Kennedy, hadn't taken a stand on the vote to censure Senator McCarthy was raised as an issue by some commentators against Jack Kennedy in his campaign for the president nomination but it apparently cost him very few if any delegates.

I remember during the Army-McCarthy hearings in the spring of 1954, we got a tremendous amount of mail in our office because, of course, Senator Symington was one of those in the hearings and clashed with McCarthy a number of times. As a result of some of those clashes, we'd get many thousand of letters, telegrams, and telephone calls from all over the country. And the great part of the pro-McCarthyism seemed to be in and around New York City, in Boston [Boston, Massachusetts], in California, and in Texas. There also were some strong anti-McCarthy letters from California, and from New York. But most of the mail we got from Massachusetts was very strong pro-McCarthy, and we just figured that Senator Kennedy was representing his state more. Kennedy not voting or declaring did not become an issue in 1954. We didn't

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give too much thought to it because he was away, very ill with his back problem. I don't even recall whether there were any other senators absent at that time or not who didn't declare themselves.

HACKMAN: Well, looking on ahead then at Senator Kennedy's role in the Senate as a whole, did you see any change in him from where you stood during the Senate years all the way through?

FIKE: Yes. In the first two or three years that he was there, of course, he was a junior senator; he was not very active on the floor. I'm trying to think. I remember vaguely, but very vaguely, when he made his maiden speech on

the floor, but I don't even remember now what it was about, but I remember that it got some comments. It may have been on the St. Lawrence Seaway, I'm not sure about that. But it was a well thought out, carefully prepared speech, and it was a policy statement, as I remember. I think it got considerable press, and it was well done. He was not too active on the floor, though, up until '56, really. After '56, it seemed to me that he was much more active, but he also was absent more on his campaigning, which was pretty active after the '56 Democratic National Convention in Chicago [Chicago, Illinois]. It was obvious that he was running for national office soon thereafter.

Bobby came in and talked to us immediately after the 1956 Convention, checked then on what the Missouri delegation had done in Chicago. I think there were two or three votes out of the Missouri delegation for Jack Kennedy, and he wanted the names of those who supported Jack Kennedy. The Kennedy people, led by Bobby, made contacts very soon thereafter and were working at it, not only in Missouri but all over the country. This was obvious. Of course, at the time, we did what you should never do; we underestimated our opposition. Although Senator Symington was not a declared candidate until 1960, he had been put up as a favorite son at the Chicago convention in 1956 and we expected him to be a candidate in 1960. We figured that probably Jack was determined not to come up and get beaten again for the vice presidential nomination, and that No. 2 was his real

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objective, although, of course, all the Kennedy people were talking about running for the presidency. We thought Jack couldn't make it and that he probably would settle for Vice President if it came to that.

HACKMAN: In what period was this? Let's say, how long were you under this impression?

FIKE: This was '57, '58, and early '59.

HACKMAN: Let's talk a little bit about the '56 Convention now. Senator...

FIKE: Larry, to go back a minute here, my early impressions of Senator Kennedy in the Senate, just a couple of comments: It seemed to me that he was a very pleasant gentleman; he was friendly, particularly to staff members. I don't know as he was as friendly as my boss was, who makes almost a fetish at times of knowing people's names and calling them by their first names, staff people, particularly, and being kind to them, elevator operators, and so forth. I don't mean that Jack Kennedy was not, but it seemed to me that his thoughts, as I think back, usually seemed to be more thoughts within himself, more introspective perhaps, thoughts elsewhere. He was always gracious though. I remember one time I'd taken my oldest daughter, Meg, to the Senate dining room for lunch. She must have been about fifteen or sixteen. We just happened to meet Senator Kennedy as we were going in the dining room and he was coming out, or vice versa, I don't remember. But anyway, I introduced her to him, and this was one of the highlights of her life at that time. She was very much impressed. I should have seen the handwriting on the wall

then as far as youth support was concerned because she still remembers this, although at that time, there was no talk about Jack Kennedy for President. This was pre-1956, and at that time I wasn't thinking about him for President. He was just very much a junior senator, a young man who, because of his health problem and his absences from the Senate, had not really played a leading role in any way.

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Nevertheless he was young enough so that he had the appeal for the young people which he always held and built up over the years, very much so.

My contacts in that time, as I mentioned a minute ago, were with Ted Sorensen some, but as an administrative assistant, more with Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.], Senator Kennedy's administrative assistant, and with Bobby Kennedy, who, although not on Kennedy's staff, was his brother. And, of course, the relationship was there, much more with Bobby Kennedy, actually, than either Reardon or Sorensen. Later on, when Myer Feldman, Mike Feldman, joined the Kennedy staff, we had quite a few more contacts with him, really, than with the others. I'd done some work with Mike when he was on the Banking and Currency Committee, gone to him for advice and so forth, just happened to. It was really a closer friendship, although Ted Sorensen and I knew each other. And then I remember in '58 after the '56 Convention, a young man from Missouri, Don Hadwiger [Don F. Hadwiger], a specialist in agriculture from Southwest Missouri State College, at Springfield, came to Washington as a congressional fellow. We'd corresponded with Don about working on our staff, but we had an agriculture man, staff man, and so, therefore, we did not take him on as congressional fellow. Instead, he went with Senator Kennedy. And, of course, this again was a handwriting on the wall, Kennedy's interest in this, very unusual for a Senator from Massachusetts.

His relationship with the boss, as I mentioned awhile ago, I think was always cordial and friendly. Perhaps they were thrown together somewhat because of the close personal friendship each one of them had with George Smathers [George A. Smathers].

HACKMAN: You were talking about his staff members. Did these people, Reardon, Sorensen, Feldman, strike you at that time as being particularly talented as members of a senator's staff, or not?

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FIKE: I didn't know Ted Sorensen too well. But Congressman Dick Bolling [Richard W. Bolling], who had known him over in the House—I think Ted had done some work for Paul Douglas [Paul H. Douglas] on the Joint Economic Committee....Dick Bolling, frankly, didn't have a very high opinion of Jack Kennedy as Congressman. It was my impression he thought Jack was too much a member of the Tuesday-Thursday club, that he didn't work at it, nice fellow, but just didn't work at his job of being a congressman here, more of a playboy. That was before he was married, of course. But he had told me that he thought Ted Sorensen was Jack Kennedy's greatest asset. Now, I don't know at what time that came along, but it must have been fairly soon because I

remember in 1957 at our Jackson Day Dinner at Springfield, Missouri, because of the national recognition Jack Kennedy had gotten at the National Convention in 1956 that folks in Springfield wanted Jack Kennedy as the speaker. And Senator Symington invited him to come down and introduced him there. And Ted Sorensen came out with Jack. And I remember that I was in the car with Governor Jim Blair [James T. Blair, Jr.], then, who'd just been elected, just gone into office in Missouri, and Ted Sorensen and I were going out to the Shrine Mosque where Jack Kennedy was going to speak. Jack and Senator Symington were together, I think. And I mentioned to Jim Blair that Dick Bolling thought that Ted Sorensen was the best assistant in Washington. So, this is a feeling I know that Dick had a long time, and because of that and our friendship and his conversation about Ted, I became increasingly interested in Ted. There was no question that he was relatively quiet, but obviously able. Ted Reardon and I had more contacts, as I mentioned, on administrative work, staff work, this kind of thing, employees and so forth, back and forth.

HACKMAN: While we're talking about this Jackson Day speech, how effective was Kennedy as a speaker at that point? Do you recall that speech, for instance?

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FIKE: Not very effective, Larry. We were disappointed, frankly. It was sort of a pedantic speech, you might say. He didn't really—you know, he was attractive, and people were interested in him because of, his television personality from the National Convention. It wasn't nearly as well done as his nominating speech for Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] had been. He looked as though he just didn't feel comfortable with his speech. It was all right, but it was not an outstanding speech at all. We'd had much better. Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], for example, did a much better job for us when he came out and spoke to them, really moved the crowd; whereas Jack Kennedy didn't establish an empathy with them at that time. Or at least, this was my opinion.

HACKMAN: Did you think he developed, then, over the period in the next few years to a great deal? Was this apparent?

FIKE: Yes, very definitely. Although I always felt that he was a liberal and for the right causes, as I understood them, from an intellectual commitment rather than a commitment of the heart until well along in the campaign. We heard him many times because, as we traveled, quite often the two candidates, Symington and Kennedy, would be on the same program. Jack would get off his quips and his wit, and usually was entertaining and never too long, attractive, and gracious, all the nice words. But I just didn't feel the commitment in him and, frankly, as it mounted and it looked as though he was a very serious contender in the primaries, I was worried about these things because if he did become President.... He was pretty far down on my list of the potentials that I thought should be President. This was my opinion until Jackson Day Dinner in Omaha on Friday night before the West Virginia and Nebraska primaries the following Tuesday.

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Symington was scheduled as the principal speaker in Omaha. We had some strong support in Nebraska, and this had been arranged. But the Kennedy people in Nebraska didn't want Symington to steal all the glory of being there, and also, there was that primary in Nebraska the following Tuesday. As I remember, it was May tenth, 1960. And this was the preceding—was it Friday night or Saturday night?—Saturday night, I guess, which would have been the seventh, May the seventh. Word was out that Kennedy had also been invited and was also going to speak there, although Symington had been billed as the principal speaker.

Kennedy came in, and, of course, he got a lot of the play from the crowd and had his entourage there. And he was allowed to come in and speak first. And that evening I got the feeling that the campaign in West Virginia had really done something to Jack. I don't think Wisconsin did it; I think West Virginia did. He got the feeling of commitment. And he spoke, as I recall, completely without notes that night, without a prepared speech. I don't even remember that he had a press release, or a text. If he did, he didn't follow it. But you could feel this commitment that he'd gotten out of West Virginia, contacting the people and see what real poverty was like—I think probably the first time in his life, or at least this was my impression as I sat there in the audience. And, of course, I was not pro-Kennedy. It was there in Omaha for the first time, that I really began to think to myself, "Well, now, maybe this fellow wouldn't be bad as a President."

I think my boss was sold on him as a possibility much sooner than I was. I had the feeling during this period that Jack Kennedy wanted to be President to put a Kennedy in the White House, that Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] wanted to be President because it'd give him a chance to be the operator of the greatest government on earth, and that Hubert Humphrey was running and wanted to be President just because he wanted to run, he liked to run. And I didn't doubt Hubert's commitment at all. I thought Symington wanted to be President because of what he thought he could do for the country, and I still believe that was true, at that time. I really had that feeling.

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But that night in Omaha, I thought, "Now this guy has really gotten a feel of what America is all about, what the problems are, and what he might be able to do as President." And he began to talk, along about this period, as I remember, much of what Symington talked about. That is, "Let's have an America that's first on land, first in the air, first in peace, and first in space," which had become Symington's standard theme approach in his talks all around the country. Up to that time, though, I'd thought that Jack Kennedy lacked that ring of conviction, deep conviction, I wanted to see in a president.

HACKMAN: You just mentioned that Senator Symington may have felt this way a little earlier than you did. Could you comment on that?

FIKE: Well, I think that he really became better acquainted with Jack during the presidential campaign, the pre-Convention campaign, I think, than he had at any other time, even in the Senate in the years from 1953 on. They'd had contacts, and they were friendly. But they had never really been close. But I think in the campaign they developed a closeness. I think that Jack Kennedy had Jimmy Symington [James W. Symington] in this years in the campaign—Jimmy had been in London, came back, and went to work with us early in '60, maybe late '59; quite often he would substitute for his dad when his dad couldn't be there, had to be some place else—would appear on the same program, speaking, Jimmy for his dad. I think Senator Kennedy and Jim Symington developed a great friendship, actually, although they were opponents. And Stuart Symington, the Senator, did the same thing, Larry. I think this developed right on through, so that I really think that Jack Kennedy would be Stuart Symington's number one choice outside of himself by the time the Convention came, although he and Humphrey had been close friends, worked together in the Senate much more closely on farm issues, things like this. And he and Johnson had been friends from way back when Symington was Assistant Secretary of War for Air, and Lyndon Johnson was a member of the House. They'd been a member of the Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] club.

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HACKMAN: You had just mentioned the farm issue. Can you recall what you felt about, and Senator Symington felt about, Kennedy's stand on the farm issue as it developed? Did it change considerably after '56 when he found out, maybe, at the '56 Convention that he didn't have much support from the farm states?

FIKE: Well, I think that this... We gave him the benefit of the doubt, felt that he'd been educated on this, had really gotten into it, studied it, and, of course, was looking beyond his own state of Massachusetts. We felt that price supports were the same type of support that labor unions had by ability to organize, or that business has in tariff, that the building industry does in the Federal Housing Administration, etc., etc., etc. The list is very long—of support programs that Jack Kennedy supported, as my boss did. And we just felt that he'd been sold a bill of goods by the Eastern theorists that lowering prices would reduce production, which we thought was exactly wrong. It did work exactly the opposite. As prices went down, farmers had to produce more, and therefore you had more surpluses and prices went down farther. This, I believe, was Don Hadwiger's position as he came back, and whether Don had anything to do with Senator Kennedy's thinking on this, I don't know. I really don't know how much, how closely he worked with Senator Kennedy. I've known him and kept in touch with Don since then. I had a letter from him just the other day. But we've never really talked about this phase of his career when he was with Senator Kennedy. I don't know that he actually saw much of him, really had a chance to talk to him.

I remember flying from Kansas City to Omaha after the Democratic presidential Convention in 1960. Kennedy had a text prepared for a speech he was going to make in Des Moines. We'd been to the Truman [Harry S. Truman] Library for the press conference out

there after the nomination. This was at the start of the campaign, really. Jackson was there, and Symington, and Lyndon Johnson was there, as I remember and....

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HACKMAN: President Truman.

FIKE: President Truman, that's right. All lined up there in the press conference. Not a very effective press conference, but it was a historic occasion anyway. And after that I flew on the *Caroline* with Symington and with Kennedy, of course, on up to Omaha. It's the first time that I'd been on the *Caroline*. But Senator Kennedy had his text prepared for the Des Moines speech, and he'd shown it to Senator Symington and asked for his comments. The Senator was concerned about one point in there where he talked about price supports for farmers and so forth. I went over it with him, and we suggested a little change of language. He told Senator Kennedy he thought he ought to change that on the farm situation, and he asked me to talk to Senator Kennedy, which I did, which he seemed to listen to, but, actually, he didn't change it. It really was not a major point and the release was already out. But the farm issue was never really close to him. Nevertheless, we did feel he changed his position on farm supports, in recognition, undoubtedly, both of the problem and of the political realities of the Midwest.

HACKMAN: Maybe we can go back, then, and talk about the '56 Convention that we kind of skipped over.

FIKE: I'm skipping around here.

HACKMAN: That's quite all right.

FIKE: One thing brings up another.

HACKMAN: What do you recall about the decision of the Missouri delegation to support Humphrey on the first ballot for the vice presidency? Senator Symington nominated Humphrey at that point.

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FIKE: That's right. The decision for Missouri to support Humphrey was primarily a farm decision. Humphrey had been in Missouri a number of times. He'd been in Missouri the preceding year, in 1955, and conducted a series of hearings in Jefferson City on the county farmers committee system, two days, starting about 9 o'clock in the morning running to 1 or 2 o'clock the next morning. We were there with Humphrey. He came out at the request of Senator Symington. Humphrey, of course, was also a member of the Government Operations Committee. And they'd worked very closely together on the farm program, and they were close on this and close friends. Humphrey had supported Symington's position very consistently on defense, and they

developed a close friendship. Humphrey'd been out and made a speech for us down in southeast Missouri at a big Democratic rally before the '56 Convention. And although he was too, quote, liberal, quote, for much of Missouri, many of the people of Missouri, they respected him, and among the Democrats, they thought he would be a good candidate.

In the delegation caucus at Chicago, which I did not attend since I wasn't a member of the delegation that year, it was discussed who they should support for Vice President. They were committed to Symington for President, of course. But then afterwards, for Vice President, leaders in the delegation asked Senator Symington, "Who are you going to be for?" He was not the chairman of the delegation; Tom Hennings was. Senator Symington later told me he had replied, "Well, I don't want to tell the delegation what they should do. That's up to them. They've supported me, and I appreciate, for President." But he said, "My choice for my vote would be Hubert Humphrey because I think he represents best what I think as far as Missouri is concerned, farm problems, specifically." So they went back with this to the delegation, and the delegation voted to go with Humphrey on the first ballot. They didn't make this a binding vote, as I recall. I think Kennedy had a couple of votes and Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] had a couple of votes on the first ballot. But Humphrey, I think, got about thirty out of thirty-four, something like this. I'd have to check back and see.

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HACKMAN: What was Senator Hennings' view on Humphrey at that time? Did he have his own favorite candidate on the first ballot other than Humphrey?

FIKE: Well, I think he probably voted—to the best of my knowledge, he voted for Kefauver. He and Kefauver had been close. And of course, he was running that year. He was going to be nominated for re-election as Senator, and the delegation had made him chairman for that reason. After it was clear that Humphrey wasn't going to make it—he got about ninety or a hundred votes on the first ballot, I think—the Missouri delegation, stayed with Humphrey actually, longer than Minnesota did. Missouri delegates came back and asked Symington who is your choice now? Senator Symington said, "Well, I personally like Jack Kennedy probably; I'm closer to him maybe than Kefauver." But, he said, "This is most important to our nominees in Missouri, and our ticket in Missouri, as to what the choice will do for Jim Blair (the nominee for Governor) and Tom Hennings for Senator." The farm issue came up then, that Kennedy would be a load on the ticket in Missouri because of his farm record. Also, the matter of religion came up, brought up, as I remember, by Catholic members of the delegation who remembered how badly Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith] had lost in Missouri in 1928.

HACKMAN: Maybe Richard Nacy [Richard R. Nacy] especially. Do you remember him?

FIKE: Well, Dick was always concerned about this. He remembered, of course, 1928 very well in Missouri and what a disaster that was. There were other Catholic leaders in the delegation who had some concern about it. I think

Dick probably was more realistic, or felt he was being more realistic, about that time; he's a strong Catholic. Although Hennings himself was not strong with the Missouri delegation—I mean, what he said seemed to make sense to them, not only as far as he was concerned but also as far as Jim Blair was concerned, and the rest of the state ticket, in which they were most interested. There was very little optimism, none at all, in fact, in the Missouri delegation about Stevenson winning in 1956. It was a feeling, “Well, he can't win, but he deserves another chance at it.”

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HACKMAN: After it became apparent that Humphrey would not get the nomination, had he urged Senator Symington, since Symington had supported him, to try to swing Humphrey support to Kefauver? I had heard that this had happened.

FIKE: No. I don't think so, not at all. Not at all. I think Humphrey probably....The farm issue was—I would say if it hadn't been for the farm issue that Kennedy would have gotten the vice presidential nomination in 1956. There was no enthusiasm among the pros, many of whom were delegates...

HACKMAN: In the Missouri delegation.

FIKE: ...in the Missouri delegation and, I think, in other delegations as well, for Kefauver. He had worked at it hard. And he later was a strong Symington supporter in 1960, although he was running for re-election himself that year and didn't take any public stand on it. But he was very much pro-Symington in '60, and some of his people in the past campaigns were among our strongest supports in '60. Not necessarily that he was directing them, but it just worked out that way.

HACKMAN: Do you recall who the people were in the delegation who were particularly supporting Senator Kennedy at that time for the vice presidency?

FIKE: Jim Aylward, Jr. [James P. Aylward, Jr.], of Kansas City, was a Kennedy vote, I'm sure; Ben Parnell of Branson, Missouri; and Ray Daniel of Springfield, I believe. They were three, as I recall. I probably have it in the files some place because Bobby Kennedy came and asked us immediately after the Convention who they were. They wanted to contact them and thank them, and so we did some checking on it. Jim Aylward, Jr., was one of those, I'm sure. Jim Aylward is a Catholic, but, in my opinion, that was not the reason he supported Kennedy at all. Jim is a relatively young man, and I just think he was attracted the same as Ben Parnell was. You know, he was their kind of a guy. Ray Daniel, I think the same. And Ray had a lot to do

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with—maybe Howard Hannah [J. Howard Hannah], I'm not sure whether Howard was a delegate or not. I think he was—I know he was. Howard was a delegate in '56, and I think Howard personally was for Kennedy then but was also close to Hennings so probably followed his lead.

HACKMAN: I had heard the name somewhere of Jim Reid [James T. Reid]. Do you recall that at all? I can't remember where I read it or saw it.

FIKE: I think so. I'd have to take a look back. Yes, I think he was. If this is of any real significance, I can try and check it out, Larry. Some of our delegates had half votes, others full votes.

HACKMAN: Okay. In '56, do you recall during the roll call when Rayburn recognized Missouri to cast their votes? There's always been some rumor about this to the effect that McCormack [John William McCormack] urged Rayburn to recognize Missouri because he thought they were for Kennedy. Do you remember anything about this at all? Or was there any possibility of that at all?

FIKE: No, I think Rayburn knew who Missouri was for. In '56, I was on the floor at that time, as I remember. I think Rayburn had known Hennings in the House, when Hennings was a member of the House, and this might have had something to do with it. I don't know. As I recall, Texas swung, didn't it, from....Didn't it go to Kefauver?

HACKMAN: I don't remember Texas particularly. I remember Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee were the three states that were recognized in a row by Rayburn after Kennedy, you know, was apparently—well, this great upsurge. Some people almost thought with a few more votes, he had it. And then Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee sort of broke the tide all of a sudden; they turned it away.

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FIKE: I think what happened at this point is that the pros, just like some of the pros in our delegation, said, "My Lord, this guy Kennedy, he's a nice guy and all that, but he just would really tear us down at this time." There was a great deal of concern about it on two scores, I think, in the Middle West: the farm issue and religion. No question about it.

HACKMAN: We'd talked earlier about the people in the delegation who were for Missouri and then...

FIKE: Who were for Kennedy in Missouri.

HACKMAN: Who were for Kennedy and then the follow-up that Bobby Kennedy made with some of these people. How did this develop, if you could carry this on from '56 on up through the next few years? Did they continue to work for support in Missouri, or was this ever open? Or how did this develop?

FIKE: I don't think so. I think they—well, immediately thereafter, the follow January or February or whatever Jackson Day was in Springfield that year, they wanted Jack Kennedy. I think because of this little pocket of support for him down in Southwest Missouri. I mean they were attracted to him for Vice President: Ben Parnell was a strong man for Symington for President, always was, he was one of our original supporters; Ray Daniel, who was a strong man for Symington for President. But he also liked Kennedy. There was a similarity between the two, actually, between Kennedy—a certain grace, I guess you would call it, that both of them have, and charm. They appealed to these fellows. And so they wanted Kennedy down at Jackson Day. It was also because he'd begun to build up national publicity, even then, as a result of the vice presidential thing.

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Bobby, as I remember it, and the Kennedy people, they wrote and thanked the Missouri people. But I don't think they ever organized, really, for Kennedy in Missouri. We stayed out of Massachusetts, and he stayed out of Missouri. There was never any public agreement to this effect. I'm sure they had some hard-core support in our delegation. We had some in the Massachusetts delegation. When the roll was being called and it was clear that Symington had no change at all in 1960, a member of the Massachusetts delegation came to me, and he said, "Stanley, I believe so strongly in Stuart Symington, that he's the best man for the presidency, I'm ready to vote for him if it will help him any. It will ruin my political career in Massachusetts." He was a member of the state legislature in Massachusetts. I told him how deeply we appreciated it, but this was a sacrifice that I thought would be really meaningless, and we would not appreciate it if anybody from the Missouri delegation went to Kennedy. I just didn't think it was right to take anybody from the Massachusetts delegation. But that didn't extend to any of the states around Missouri or to any of the states around Massachusetts either. We were doing our best in all those areas. And they were certainly doing their best, which turned out to be better than ours, in our neighboring areas in the Midwest.

HACKMAN: Switching to something a little different, as it became clear that Senator Symington was a possible candidate in '60, did you encounter any particular problems with the Eisenhower Administration? It's been said that the main candidates, in some specific instances, encountered problems with their programs specifically because they were candidates. Did that ever come up?

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FIKE: I don't think so, Larry. The Senator's position on defense was different than Eisenhower's. I think when Eisenhower became President, he was very worried that he'd be identified as a military President. My boss was critical of him for not taking the steps he thought he should have taken. He listened too much to Charlie Wison [Charles E. Wilson] in our opinion, in the boss' opinion. He and Eisenhower had been close personal friends before Eisenhower ran for the presidency, family friends. Eisenhower had stayed in his home, and he visited with Eisenhower. They'd been members of the Augusta National Golf Club and so forth. But Symington parted with him on the issues soon after he became President over the defense matter.

The first speech Symington made was, as I remember, on the intercontinental ballistic missile in the summer of '53. He pointed out the developments that had taken place and what we ought to be doing. And this, of course, was his committee—the Armed Services Committee. No, I don't think it, you know, after '56...He had the air power hearings, in '56. He did his darnedest to keep them from being political, too much so, I thought. You know, this worried him too much, that people would accuse him of being political on it. The book here, *Front Runner, Dark Horse*, makes this comment in there that at times he very seriously considered making a Sherman statement, "I will not run. I will not accept," just because he didn't want anybody to question his sincerity about his interest in this strength. He was also always concerned because some people—occasionally this was raised in the campaign in 1952 in Missouri, that he just came back to Missouri to run as a stepping stone to the presidency, that he really wasn't interested in Missouri, etc., etc. So that, actually, I think my Senator was oversensitive to this issue.

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HACKMAN: Okay. All right, looking to 1960, then, when did it first become apparent that Senator Symington was going to run for the presidency? And how did this develop?

FIKE: Well, of course, continually after he was the favorite son in 1956, we began to think, although we didn't make any plans until the late fifties—well, in '58, I guess, he accepted a few speaking engagements around for other senators, went into their states at the invitation of other senators, with their cooperation and so forth. And then in '59, of course, he did a great deal of it, starting in the spring and right on through that year.

In early '59 I'd been offered the nomination for Congress in the fourth district. We'd talked a little about the possibility of the presidency up to that time. This was after the congressman in the fourth district, George Christopher [George H. Christopher], died, as you may remember. I was offered support that I thought would have guaranteed my nomination. I was sure of it then, and I still am sure of it, that I would have gotten the nomination. Of course, the committee members who made the nomination knew that it was a Democratic district, and I was sure I would be elected. I was as certain as I could be of anything. This was of interest to me, but I thought I had a greater obligation to the country and so forth, that I could be of more service to Missouri nationally if I stayed on Symington's staff. I asked

him what he thought about it, and he said, "Stanley, this is up to you. This is your decision to make. You have to do it."

I was out in Missouri at the time when George Christopher died. And I called him and talked to him about it. Some of the people out there had offered me their support which would have guaranteed my nomination. I pretty much had made up my mind. I came on back on Sunday night. Monday morning, I remember, this would have been about the middle of January, latter part of January of '59, and so I went in, and I said, "Senator, do you plan to run for the presidency in 1960?" And he said, "Yes, Stanley, I do. I think I will. I think I've had the experience, and I think I could do a good job for the country." I said, "Well, if you think then, that I could help you on that, and maybe afterwards when you're

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elected, I'm going to say no on this congressional nomination." He got up and shook my hand, and there were almost tears in his eyes. It meant an awful lot to him, and it meant a lot to me. If I'd known how things were going to turn out, I probably would have done differently. But then I probably would have always thought, "Well, maybe I could have made the difference if I had stayed." Maybe I'd have made the difference if I'd gotten out, and they'd have gotten a good man in there. But those things you never know. But this was really, you know, this was really the cards on the table at that time as far as I was concerned, although we'd talked about it and thought about it some before. Of course, the favorite son thing in '56 when we were there, and afterwards he said, "Well, if I ever come to another Convention, I'm going to be organized next time." And so we were organized next time at the Convention, but we didn't have the votes, the commitments in advance. Kennedy had it sewed up by the time of the convention.

HACKMAN: Was he looking to other people for advice at this point? Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford] or other people?

FIKE: Clark Clifford always was one of his closest personal advisors, had been for starting back when Clark was at the White House, President Truman's counsel. Frankly, I don't know when they first got acquainted, maybe '46, '47, along in there. They've been close friends ever since, advised with Clark and Clark with him when he decided to run for the Senate in 1952. It's pretty accurately reported in the Martin [Ralph G. Martin] and Plant [Ed Plaut] book, *Front Runner, Dark Horse*.

HACKMAN: Do you recall what advice Clifford was giving him as far as the presidency?

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FIKE: Well, yes. The strategy was shaping up at that time: Let's not make anybody mad; let's just go ahead and go into these various states to help them and build a strong Democratic Party; we want a victory in 1960 for

the Democratic Party; we want a victory in 1960 for the Democratic Party, that's the most important thing of all; and not make any of the potential favorite sons unhappy, speak well of them when you go into the states; parry any questions that come up about you being a candidate; it never hurts anybody to have their friends think well of them, think that they were qualified for the job, but I am not a candidate. Of course, the news stories were that Symington was a candidate. We were covering a lot of territory, and I was building up a file all the time, but not a hard and fast organization. We didn't start asking people to organize for us until the late fall of '59. I was making notes, anybody who volunteered to help, "I'm for Symington, I like his looks. If there's anything I can do, let me know, Stanley." This type of thing. We were building up quite a correspondence file. More and more of my time was devoted to the presidential campaign.

HACKMAN: What about former President Truman? Was he consulted in the early period about what he thought?

FIKE: Yes, from time to time. His advice was very strong to stay out of the primaries. Clark Clifford felt the same way about it. We researched it, and both Clark and the President felt it was a mistake to go in the primaries. We shouldn't do it. It just wasn't necessary. A number of the other pros felt the same way about it. Clark, not necessarily an old pro; President Truman certainly was. Frank McKinney [Frank E. McKinney] of Indiana felt this way, former chairman of the National Committee; Bill Boyle [William M. Boyle, Jr.] of Missouri felt this way, it was a mistake to go into the primaries. And many others. Frank McKinney consulted from time to time with other political leaders, Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence],

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Bill Green [William J. Green, Jr.], Carmine DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio] and so forth. Frank had the idea that when it got down to time for the Convention that a number of men would get together, the leaders of the past years, and they would decide who was going to be the man. And Stuart Symington was the logical man for the job. Stewart Alsop did an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, January or February '59, set up the ten little Indians in a row, you know, and knocked them all down except he ended up with Symington as the tenth little Indian. He ended up his article with this: If this were a logical business, why, Symington would be the man; but politics isn't necessarily a logical business. That's a paraphrase, but it certainly was the idea of the article. And how true it was.

HACKMAN: As this thing developed over this period, what to you people appeared to be the main problems that Senator Symington would have to overcome? Not specifically in terms of opposition, but in terms of either his own stands, or his image, or things like this?

FIKE: Well, Larry, we thought his image was very good, and we didn't think he had any real problems, actually. We thought he was better known, really, than it developed later on that he was. He was known to the press and

known to the politicians over the country, the people who followed government, the people who were going to be the delegates, to the county chairmen around over the country. In the early polls, I think he led, as I remember—in former delegates, he led. And with the county committee chairmen, he led, and in most states over the Union, and had pockets of support all over the country. In '56 at the Chicago convention he had support from more different states in actual votes. Although we didn't get many votes, he had more support from different states than any other candidate except Adlai Stevenson, and Kefauver in the voting then. We'd felt we had a pocket of strength almost in every state.

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As time went on, I was building this file of people in each state who'd expressed interest and, for the most part, people who had some public background and activity, who had known him in the Air Force or in business before that, or when he was head of the RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation], done a good job of management, helped different states work out their problems and this sort of thing.

Cal Rampton [Calvin L. Rampton], now the Governor of Utah, wrote to us before the 1956 Convention. We didn't know him at all. He wrote to the Senator, and he said, "I'm for you for President. I want to help any way I can. Let me know." Well, the Senator wrote back, thanked him very kindly, you know, just didn't pay any attention to Cal at all. One of the girls on our staff, Margie Bledsoe, had known Cal when Cal was an administrative assistant in the House. She had been speaker of the "Little House" right after Jim Coleman [J. P. Coleman] of Mississippi. She was with your congressman, Bill Nelson [William L. Nelson] of Missouri, at that time back in the middle thirties. And then Cal Rampton, I think, was speaker the next year. So she knew him well. She said, "This is a good man. Give him some attention." She wasn't out in Chicago, but when Cal came in, I visited with him and talked to him. I think maybe the Senator shook hands with him, and that was about all. And Cal said, "I want to help any way I can." And he told me why he wanted to help and gave some details. And so when we were picking out who was going to do the nominating and the seconding, we picked Cal. The boss, you know, practically didn't know him, but he had a good story as to why he was for him because of what he'd done for Utah in developing a steel plant out there. This type of thing was true in many, many parts of the country. The state of Washington, a Boeing plant was kept in Washington because of Symington's interest and activity when he was Secretary of the Air Force, working with Magnuson [Warren G. Magnuson] and Scoop Jackson, who was then in the House. We had strong union support in the state of Washington. And so we just thought that these cards would all fall into place, and we'd have a beautiful picture, a winning hand. This was Clark Clifford's theme song in planning the strategy that, you know, all the other candidates couldn't make it for reasons A, B, C, and that Symington had none of these problems

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that they all had. Lyndon Johnson, too far South; Jack Kennedy, too young, and religion, of course; and Hubert Humphrey, too liberal, and so forth.

HACKMAN: Looking back at this thing, some people have said that one of Senator Symington's problems was with the press, and the image that the press promoted of being this one issue, the big bomber boy, as some people had labeled him. Did you feel at that time that was something you had to overcome, or could you go about it in any way?

FIKE: Well, he felt this. He had spoken, and we had speeches, and he had a voting record on many issues. I think the press built this up with some help, frankly. Of course, it was an issue, it was on a lot of people's minds. He got a lot more publicity on defense. It's always been a problem because they look to him as the authority in this field. Therefore, he doesn't get the coverage of other things that he talks about that he does on defense. He'd done as much on farm issues during '56, '57, '58, along in there, practically, as he did on defense. And of course, McCarthy. He got far more national publicity on that than he did on anything else. We'd go into city after city, and they'd come up and say, "I remember you in the Army-McCarthy hearings." There was tremendous publicity on that, and he took a very strong stand on it so that...I think, though, this "one issue" was built up, as part of a planned campaign to tear Symington down. We were not effective in counteracting it, but when he talked on this issue, making America strong, the crowds really ate it up.

Dave Lawrence, when he came out and spoke at Jackson Day in Springfield, Mo., in the spring of 1960, made a speech that could have been used in nominating Symington. I'm sure at that time Symington was his man, but we'd never asked for his support, you see. So far as I know, Symington had never sat down across the table and said, "Will you support me?" But it was just kind of an understanding.

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The speech that he made just couldn't have been more pro-Symington. And he told me this was the reason he'd written it, that he had Stuart Symington in mind. His press man, his speech writer, was a friend of mine, another Missourian, and very much pro-Symington. But we underestimated the value of the mass appeal that Kennedy had built up over this time.

HACKMAN: I think we're about to run out of tape. Why don't I run this off and turn it over.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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