

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN A. KENNEDY

Longtime personal friend of Harry S. Truman. Served as a captain (U.S. Naval Reserve) during World War II with responsibility for Naval liaison with the Truman Committee as well as with other Congressional committees and Government agencies. Later served as a personal assistant to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. As a newspaper publisher and radio -- TV executive supported Truman for reelection in 1948.

Gulf Stream, Florida
April 13, 1974
by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
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FUCHS: All right, Mr. Kennedy, I think that you have an interesting story about a shirt that Mr. Truman once gave you, I believe at Key West, Florida. Why don't we just start the interview with that, sir?

KENNEDY: That is correct. At the time of the 1948 campaign I owned and edited the San Diego *Journal*, a daily paper in San Diego, California. Mr. Truman was a good personal friend of

mine and a man whom I admired tremendously. I traveled with him on his campaign train on several occasions. On one such occasion, Mrs.

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Kennedy and I met him in Los Angeles where we spent a few days and then we went to San Diego with him on the campaign train, where the Democratic organization put on a big program for him. He was given a tour of the City, school children all came out, and he made a speech in what was then the baseball field.

I had toured the Middle West, particularly, on his campaign train, and when we left Chicago I stayed there. Later that evening I dined with Senator Scott Lucas and some other prominent Democrats.

Scott was telling me about the reactions of the farmers in Illinois. He said the same reactions applied to Iowa and several other states where they had a really great production of soybeans, and also, of course, corn, and other similar farm products, but they had no place to store them. That was due to the so-called "Slaughter"

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amendment which eliminated the appropriation for additional storage facilities. The result of that amendment was the Government could build no additional storage facilities.

Senator Lucas told me that if the campaign had at least two more weeks to go he felt that, contrary to all of the polls and the predictions of all of the commentators, Mr. Truman would win.

I was surprised at that, because everyone who seemed to think they knew politics and most of the experienced newspaper correspondents with whom I talked -- and I knew most of them because I had been a Washington correspondent from 1922 on -- were certain that Truman was through; after my own tours, I wasn't so sure.

So, I wrote a piece for my paper which was published a few days or a week before the election in which I said that I had a hunch President Truman was going to win because of the

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situation in the Middle West and in California.

Of course, on election night we were naturally thrilled, since our newspaper was the largest daily newspaper west of the Mississippi River that supported Mr. Truman for election.

We also were successful in having Truman's vote in California win out, due (according to the President in a later visit with me) to the fact that we cut down the normal Republican majority in San Diego County and also elected a Democratic Congressman instead of the then incumbent Republican Congressman.

Anyway, after he won, I had a call from either Matt Connelly or one of the Truman people at the White House that they were going to Key West and wouldn't I come along for sort of a victory celebration. I said I was honored and complimented and I'd be there. So, I worked out a date that I could make it. I don't remember

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what date that was now, but it was at the time that Admiral William D. Leahy, Speaker Sam Rayburn, a few Senators, Mr. John R. Steelman, and others were there.

Well, I got to Key West and I took a motel room because I knew they were short of sleeping space on the base itself. So that worked out very agreeably, and, when I called Matt Connelly, he said, "The Boss wants you to come over."

So, I went over about 11 a.m., something like that, maybe 11:30. I was wearing normal civilian clothes and I was a little bothered. I thought I should wear a tie although it was very warm and I did. As I was walking toward Truman's quarters, I ran into the President and Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House, who were coming up from the beach. Mr. Truman was wearing the much publicized and photographed, and you might say loud, sport shirt given to him by

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people in Miami, Florida who made them. He said, "John, you take that tie, coat and shirt off and put this one on." So, he actually took the shirt off his own back and put it on mine, and he said, "Now, this is a present for you."

I said, "Well, Mr. President, I'm very impressed with this, but I cannot accept it unless you, Margaret, Mrs. Truman, Admiral Leahy and all the people who will be here for dinner sign it. So it was autographed by all of them, probably 15 autographs on it. Of course, I was photographed in it with Senator Harley Kilgore, who was on the Truman Committee, and others; and so I took it back home to San Diego.

Later, naturally, pictures of me wearing it were plastered all over the papers because a lot of my friendly newspaper editors thought it was a lot of fun that Truman took the shirt

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off his back and gave it to me.

I had the shirt hanging in a closet with a cellophane cover on it in our summer apartment in La Jolla, California, and our energetic, but maybe not too bright cook and maid of all the work, unbeknownst to me, took it out and laundered it. It did launder out and made indistinguishable three or four of the signatures, but the signatures of President Truman, Margaret, Mrs. Truman, Admiral Leahy, Speaker Rayburn and several others are still on the shirt. There wasn't any use for me to raise Cain with the poor woman because she was so embarrassed when she found out what it was all about. She said she had wanted to remove those spots from the shirt, the spots being the ink of Mr. Truman's pen.

So, I hung the shirt up in our La Jolla apartment and it was there for quite a while. One time I was lunching with Dr. Leonard H. Carmichael, former Secretary (which means head)

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of the Smithsonian Institution, who at that time was Chief of Research, I think, at the National Geographic. He had seen this picture somewhere and said, "John, do you still have that shirt?" And I said sure I did.

He said, "Well, how come?"

"Well," I said, "I wrote to the Truman Library, offered it to them, and never got an answer. They may not have received my letter."

So he said, "Well, we would love to have it for the Smithsonian. Although I am not an employee there anymore, I'm on the Board." So he called up the head of the historical section of the Smithsonian, who said "yes" they wanted it very much. And so, in about May 1973 I made an appointment, went down to the Smithsonian with the shirt and some of the clippings about it and the shirt was accepted by the Smithsonian Institution. That is the story of

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the shirt.

FUCHS: That's very interesting.

When did you first become acquainted with Mr. Truman?

KENNEDY: I first became acquainted with Mr. Truman in the early 1930's just after his election as Senator from Missouri.

At that time I was in charge of Mr. Hearst's campaign against ratification by the Senate of our adherence to the World Court protocols. The American Legion had adopted resolutions against the United States joining the World Court and with Mr. Truman being such a staunch and active Legionnaire, I had hoped to get him on our side, so I called on him. We got along very famously but I couldn't get his vote.

Later when I was in the Navy as a personal assistant to Secretary of the Navy

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James V. Forrestal, I was involved in several of the activities of various committees in the Congress, and specifically the Truman Committee,

I wouldn't see Truman too frequently because in those days we were all very busy. And then I was absent a lot. I was in the Mediterranean theater and France and England, after we had freed France, part of Italy, and out as far as Bahrein in the Persian Gulf, on the oil problem.

After getting back from that, I had to go to the Pacific. I was away an awful lot in the latter part of the war, and so I didn't get to see the then Vice President. I was back, however, on the day that Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt died. I called on the Vice President and we had a very pleasant visit. Later I went on my tour to the Pacific and on the way out I went to hear his speech at the opening of the

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United Nations meeting in San Francisco; and, in fact, he insisted that I have a ticket to it, and tickets were very hard to get. I appreciated it, of course.

After I got back from the Pacific, a few weeks after V-J Day (and that I believe was in August) I was in the Secretary's office from then on until I left in November '46 and was demobilized.

While he was President I saw him quite frequently and, as I said earlier, I campaigned with him on his train.

FUCHS: To go back, when you were placed in charge of liaison to the Truman Committee from the Navy Department, were you then a personal assistant to Secretary Forrestal?

KENNEDY: No. No, I was one of the many functionaries that did things at the request or the order of

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the Secretary, but I didn't move into his office until after I came back from the Pacific. I think it was effective the first of September '45.

FUCHS: I see. Well now, how did you happen to go into the Navy originally?

KENNEDY: Oh, well, like any fellow, I had two kids in the service and I didn't want to be upstaged by them and I joined. In fact, Harry Butcher, who later became personal Navy Aide to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, urged me to join the Navy. We were poker-playing friends in Washington, even when I was operating my businesses in West Virginia and later in California. I was asked first to take over the War Production Board activities in West Virginia where I then had a paper which I gave up in 1940, when I was about to go in the service. I had delayed going in the

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service until I'd given a few months to this War Production Board job as chief of that state, and -- well, I was just called to active duty and assigned to Norfolk and then to the Philadelphia Navy Yard. This is now in '42. I went to Washington from Philadelphia for a temporary stay of a few days. I was at the Chevy Chase Club in Washington, in uniform, of course, as in wartime all officers were in uniform except when specifically ordered not to be; and I ran into Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Knox had been general manager of the Hearst papers when I worked for Mr. Hearst, and he had that booming, loud, Teddy Roosevelt yelling voice, happy and noisy. He said, "My God, look at what we've got in the Navy now. John, where are you on duty?"

"Well, I'm on duty in the Philadelphia Navy Yard."

"You were on duty in the Philadelphia Navy

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Yard; you're going to be on duty in Washington."

I said, "Oh, my God, Mr. Secretary, I don't want to be around Washington cluttering up things as people are cluttering up, including a lot of your Naval officers."

"Well, that's all the more reason we need you. So, I will have your orders changed tomorrow."

So, that's how I happened to get, first, more active into the top echelons of the Navy, even at that time as only a lieutenant commander. Later I was moved to commander and within a year I was made a captain, being at that time one of the few people of that rank in the Reserves who had not had Annapolis training.

FUCHS: Yes.

KENNEDY: That's about all I can offer on that question.

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FUCHS: What were your first duties when you went to Washington and into the Navy Department there?

KENNEDY: Well, actually, I think I was assigned to keep an eye on the Truman Committee, as well as several other things that Knox wanted.

FUCHS: That was your initial assignment?

KENNEDY: Yes. Truman was only one of them. Incidentally, when Matt Neeley was Senator from Fairmont, West Virginia, he decided to run for Governor and won. Senator Truman, Harley Kilgore, and two or three other Senators came down to Charleston to attend the inauguration, before dinner. His party, of course, was at the executive mansion. But I tipped off my senatorial friends that they were not going to get any booze, so I invited them up to our house for a cocktail and they came.

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And at that time Senator Kilgore and a couple of the others, including Senator Truman, felt that it was very necessary to have a Senate committee set up to check on any extravagances or monkey business that would go on in the war effort.

So, I told them some of my experiences as a newspaperman in covering the senatorial and congressional investigations after World War 1, including, of course, the indictment of Benedict Crowell and a lot of others. Some of them really never should have been indicted and they were cleared without even going to trial. But the present situation really warranted something being

set up as a watchdog. Well, these fellows got so interested that they made a sketchy draft of a proposed resolution for a Senate investigation of the war effort on the train trip back to Washington. I was on the train with them. I

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think we had a special car back to Washington.

FUCHS: Who all worked on that?

KENNEDY: Well, I'm saying there probably were other Senators who were along that were in on it, too; but I do remember Kilgore and Truman and -- I just don't remember others now.

FUCHS: Did you assist in that?

KENNEDY: No, I didn't assist in that, other than I told him I thought it was a good idea, and I may have sat around in there writing it in a parlor of this car, or I may not have; but I think I did.

But that was the start of the Truman Committee, coming from the inauguration of Senator Neeley as Governor of West Virginia.

Oh, Truman had been talking about it a lot before that, but the thing jelled at the

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time, over a little bourbon in the living room of our home the early evening of Mr. Neeley's being inaugurated Governor of West Virginia.

FUCHS: So, when you were assigned then to liaison to the Truman Committee and some other committees, I believe you brought in some other gentlemen to assist you.

KENNEDY: Yes, I brought in one, John Tolan, the son of a former Congressman from the Oakland area of California; and then he in turn got another chap who proved to be of great help, John Abbott, who also at that time was in California. I don't know where he is now.

FUCHS: Abbott is still in California. And you knew Tolan and asked for him?

KENNEDY: No, I'd met Tolan after he was commissioned in the Reserve. I was told about him, met him

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and was sold on his capacities as someone that could do excellent leg work and strategy in dealing with Congress because he had been doing that for his father for so long. I met Abbott through Tolan when we needed more help.

FUCHS: How did you conduct your liaison work, with the committee principally?

KENNEDY: Well, actually it worked mostly with the staff. Hugh Fulton was the Chief Counsel, as I recollect it, and a fellow by the name of Halley...

FUCHS: Rudolph Halley.

KENNEDY: Yes. He was second in command, and, of course, with the approval of Forrestal later, we adopted a policy of always trying to dig out the real facts for the committee. We followed the policy of openly giving the committee what they

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wanted. I might add, with an awful lot of tug of war from the big Navy brass; but both Knox and Forrestal insisted that we had to give whatever I'd dug up through the various parts of the Navy, and they had ordered the Navy to give me anything I wanted, which was quite a big order in those times.

FUCHS: At that time you were a captain?

KENNEDY: No, I was first a lieutenant commander, but that was only for a short time and then I was a commander. I think I became a captain in November of '43.

FUCHS: I see. This was in '42 when you went into the Navy liaison.

KENNEDY: That's right.

FUCHS: And did you have a title?

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KENNEDY: I don't remember.

FUCHS: This was put in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Why was that?

KENNEDY: Because it was under the vice-chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Horne. He had the production of all Navy procurement under his direction and that included, of course, liaison with different departments of the Navy. So, we helped out on that chore.

I suggested to Admiral Horne that our liaison setup should be separate from that done by the Judge Advocate General's office and that the heads of the different Navy departments and bureaus be so notified, hoping that it would create a camaraderie between the various areas of the Navy to facilitate the job we had to do.

FUCHS: Did the Navy bureaus go through your office, or did they conduct much of their own liaison?

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KENNEDY: No, all of that had to come through me. I remember when we wrote the directive that it all had to come through this particular unit of the naval operations setup.

FUCHS: Who did you deal with principally in the Navy then? Admiral Horne, I assume?

KENNEDY: Admiral Horne, plus the heads of all the bureaus, like Ordnance, Electronics, Ships, Aviation, Public Works -- that was Admiral Ben Moreel -- all of the different departments. I would work with them, because then I was always made a part of the Secretary's Monday morning meetings of the Chiefs of the various bureaus, as well as the Assistant and Under Secretary. And I'd work with the Assistant Secretary and the Under Secretary as well as with Mr. Forrestal's office, and with him if I felt it was necessary to call something to his attention.

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FUCHS: How did they conduct those meetings with the bureau chiefs and with yourself?

KENNEDY: Well, I was only listening because the Secretary wanted me to sit in to hear all that was planned, why it was being done, and if I could think of any reason why it could get us in trouble, you might say, I was urged to speak up. Sometimes I'd speak up in the meeting and other times I'd wait and tell either the Secretary or the bureau chief that I thought they were not handling this right from the standpoint of congressional and/or public relations.

FUCHS: Now did you have liaison with, besides the congressional committees, WPB, for instance?

KENNEDY: No, I don't think so. We may have had at one time when we first started; I believe we did have, but that was not the important part of our work.

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FUCHS: Were you acquainted with Donald Nelson?

KENNEDY: Yes, but mildly.

FUCHS: Were you in contact directly with any of the members of the Truman Committee or any of the staff of the Truman Committee, or did you just work through Tolan and Abbott?

KENNEDY: Oh, no. I dealt directly, if it was important, with Fulton and Halley and with Senator Truman, or the other members of the committee; whoever I felt should know about that particular problem. Because, after all, these men -- Senators Truman and Kilgore and the others -- were spending, I would say, more time on the work of the Truman Committee than on any other function they did in the Senate.

FUCHS: What were your impressions of Hugh Fulton?

KENNEDY: Well, he was an interesting fellow, like

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many others who came down from -- didn't he come from New York?

FUCHS: Yes, sir.

KENNEDY: From New York, they knew everything; a little hard to get them down to earth at times. They were not sufficiently thorough at the start, but later they became thorough and they would have their investigations, particularly of the War Department and the Navy. He was a very able fellow, and I would say offhand I got along with him very well.

Halley, his assistant, was likewise very able. He later went on to New York and even ran for Mayor of New York at one time. He didn't get very far.

FUCHS: Were you acquainted with Charles Patrick Clark who served for a time before Halley as an associate counsel?

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KENNEDY: I could have been. I don't remember. I just don't remember a lot of those things. I probably did.

FUCHS: Did you ever get down to the lower echelons, for instance, Harold Robinson who was an investigator?

KENNEDY: I probably did, but I just don't remember at the moment.

FUCHS: Robinson was a former FBI man.

KENNEDY: I think Robinson was the one that I admired so much as being a very able investigator and made no monkey business about facts. Of course, he was law-trained if he had been in the FBI, either law-trained or accounting-wise trained; probably both. I'm beginning to remember him, but after all this is quite a while ago.

FUCHS: Oh, certainly. Did you know Matthew Connelly

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then?

KENNEDY: Yes, I knew Matt very well. Later, of course, he took over as the President's secretary.

FUCHS: Appointment's Secretary. Did you consider him quite capable at the time?

KENNEDY: I considered him very capable and very honest in spite of his latex conviction; I didn't think it was terribly important. It was important to Matt, of course, but...

FUCHS: Yes, too bad, really.

KENNEDY: Yes.

FUCHS: There was an individual in the Army, a Julius Amberg. Were you acquainted with him?

KENNEDY: Oh, yes, I remember Amberg. I remember I met him and talked with him. In fact, Secretary

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Forrestal asked me to be helpful to Secretary of War Patterson. The three of us often lunched together in the Secretary of Navy's mess, and through him I met Amberg. Maybe I had met him before. And, as far as I remember, we worked out things very pleasantly.

FUCHS: He had a young lieutenant colonel, Arthur Wilson, who was made liaison officer to the committee. We haven't really had much on either of those gentlemen.

KENNEDY: I don't remember Wilson, although I probably met him.

FUCHS: Did you know Miles Knowles?

KENNEDY: Oh, yes. Yes, I knew Miles Knowles. He was from Michigan, I believe. Senator Ferguson was also down on that trip too, I think. No, I don't think he was because he was a Republican.

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But I wouldn't be surprised that Knowles was asked to be on the committee because of Ferguson; not that Ferguson asked for him, but I imagine the Army was trying to get people who would have some key to somebody. I know we always did.

FUCHS: A Donald Riddle, a scholar, wrote a book on the Truman Committee, and he stated "that the Navy usually gave the appearance of cooperation even while covering up and was able to mislead committee investigators. The intransigence of Army officers made it easier for the staff to track down what was wanted." He prefaced this by saying, "The Navy in general seemed more skillful in its relations with the committee than the Army." Do you have any comments on that?

KENNEDY: I don't want to blow my own horn. I would say that we were luckier. Although that author

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said we covered things up, I don't think that we did. We may have put it way down in the 103rd page of whatever evidence they wanted and if the Truman Committee dug, why, they'd find it; but, of course, Tolan always called it the "doctrine of apparent frankness."

FUCHS: Yes, I was interested in those "doctrines of committee appearances," that were quite humorous as well as having a lot of truth.

KENNEDY: Well, it was. The difference was, you see, that having covered Congress as much as I had, as a reporter in Washington from 1922 to 1935, I was probably a little more acquainted with congressional methods and what they really wanted. We always fed them some good dirt, too. Actually they helped us reform many things in the Navy as they did the Army. But the Army was a little more difficult, I would

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say, through lack of experience of their liaison people as well as the bureau chiefs and all of that. They didn't have the flair for helping out the Congressmen and Senators who needed that kind of treatment.

FUCHS: Do you recall the phrase "Paul Revereing" the investigation? I believe the sense of it was that they would get word ahead of time that a place was going to be investigated and take steps to see that things were shipshape.

KENNEDY: Well, naturally we were going to make things ship-shape, and tried to, and most generally were successful.

FUCHS: I think John Tolan mentioned this.

KENNEDY: Yes. Well, we did that an awful lot. The Army didn't quite catch the point, but if we were in the wrong -- I remember taking Halley

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up to New York in a situation. There was a fellow who was a lieutenant commander or commander, he was in the class of '32 Annapolis, and was in the Ordnance Department. He was a partner in a three name firm, the name of which I don't remember, that was doing efficiency engineering with contractors who would get behind or weren't doing their jobs right and all that sort of thing. I hesitate to call him by name, because I don't want to...

FUCHS: I can't either, right now. I think I know the investigation you mean.

KENNEDY: This officer went out to Chicago and sent back a recommendation to the Bureau of Ordnance, "Either get these people to straighten themselves up or deny them continuation of the contract." But then he'd send a copy of his memo to his firm and they in turn would then go to that firm and

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say, "We think we can clean up your programs." Well, here's a guy who's going to lose out, so, they'd hire his firm. There were any number of these.

So Halley brought up a subpoena and we went down to the New York office of this firm where this particular commander -- some Irish name as I recollect it -- would send his reports, unless he sent them to his Chicago office, I don't remember. But this particular one was New York. We subpoenaed their records and found out that he was getting his percentage of the cut, that is of

their engineering fees, and was getting it regularly, while he was in the employ of the Navy, as an officer of the Navy.

I helped him get the stuff and we went through it with him, much to the disgust of some of our Navy officers, particularly in New York. I know I recommended to the then Chief

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of Ordnance in the Navy that the questions asked by the Senate Committee be answered factually. I remember the Admiral that was in charge said, "Oh, that couldn't happen. We couldn't have a man that dishonest in the Navy because there's a placard glued to the wall of the clothes locker in the Naval Academy about honesty and so forth." I said, "Well, that might be dandy, but it didn't take with this fellow, Admiral."

"Well, I'm going to the Secretary," said the Admiral. He went to the Secretary and the Secretary upheld my position on it. We produced it and they had an open hearing of the Truman Committee and Mr. Truman said it was the worst example of (whatever he said is in the record) that he'd ever heard of and voted to send it over to the Department of Justice. The man and a couple of others were indicted. He was convicted, as I remember it. I suppose he served some time in

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jail; I don't know. The record would have to show that.

This is one example where we went to bat and made our own people dig up what we wanted, so that instead of covering up we were cleaning up our own trouble, which had a tremendous effect on all other bureaus. That's why we did it probably.

FUCHS: Was it ever necessary for you to go to a Truman Committee hearing?

KENNEDY: Oh, I'd go to ones like that one, or any other that was important. I'd generally try to go to a committee hearing, even if they were in private. Mr. Truman had a policy -- so far as I can recollect -- that we would have sort of an informal hearing, except probably the people wouldn't be sworn, to develop all the facts, because he did not want to harm the war effort;

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he was trying to help it. And even though some things should have probably been published, it wouldn't have been good policy at that time in the overall conduct of the war. Mr. Truman was very jealous of following that policy of holding things in so far as possible, as I remember it. So we would go to those hearings just to size up the problem or sometimes to guide our own top brass that were there. I might tell them, "Now that this has come out, you'd better tell them this other, too, that they're not asking for;" and we generally did.

FUCHS: Were you impressed with the way the committee hearings were handled?

KENNEDY: I was. I would say that they were handled very well in the main. I don't remember, there may have been things that we didn't like the way they were handled, but that's bound to happen

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you can't say a hundred percent that everything was perfect. I'd say they did a beautiful job.

FUCHS: Do you recall a General Frank Lowe, who was associated with the Truman Committee?

KENNEDY: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, he was a nice fellow, put it that way.

FUCHS: Never found out what he did?

KENNEDY: No, nor could anyone else.

FUCHS: I understand from John Tolan that he was an "executive" but they didn't quite know what he was executive of.

KENNEDY: Well, he somehow got in touch with Truman through World War I, because he'd come along, I remember, when they were going into the Canol oil pipeline situation.

FUCHS: You were acquainted with Forrestal then?

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KENNEDY: Oh, yes, but not before he became Under Secretary. I met him through Knox and from then on my dealings were practically always with Forrestal rather than Knox. If I wanted to see Knox, it was very easy. First of all, I knew him, and, secondly, Adlai Stevenson was his civilian assistant, much as I was later, although with a uniform on; and Adlai was an old friend.

Mrs. Kennedy's mother and father were friends of Adlai's mother and father, and her grandfather was a friend of Adlai's grandfather. So, there was a long friendship there. We're still very friendly with Adlai's sister. She's been down here visiting. And, of course, he was from Chicago and Knox pulled him in to handle a lot of things, which he did very well.

FUCHS: When was the last you were associated with Jim Forrestal? Did you see him anywhere up close

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to the time of his demise?

KENNEDY: I was in the Pacific in the spring and early summer of 1945 and after Japan's capitulation I was ordered back posthaste to become Forrestal's special assistant in his office. I returned at about the time of the signing of the Japanese surrender on the U.S.S. *Missouri*, which was September 2, 1945.

I got very close to Forrestal. I was in his office as I say, and I would be there early in the morning and late at night, and his regular aides would leave generally about 5 or so and I'd be there until 8 or 9 with him. He was a hard worker. We worked seven days a week. I insisted on having Sunday luncheon off to visit with my wife and young children.

About the first of September I took up my duties in Forrestal's office, remaining there until the summer of 1946, when I was asked to

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accompany Secretary Forrestal to the atom bomb tests at Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands, which actually was a blind in part, as President Truman had asked Forrestal to go on to China, taking me along as well as a couple of aides, to see whether we could help General George Marshall in salvaging his mission which had been instigated to get the Chinese Reds and Chiang Kai-shek into some sort of an agreement.

After we attended the bomb tests we proceeded to Peking, Chungking, Shanghai, and other areas of China. Soon after arriving in Peking we flew up to Chungking for the boss to have a session with General Marshall. We stayed there a few days, came back to Peking and Shanghai, but Mr. Forrestal and the rest of us thought the situation vis-a-vis Chiang Kai-shek and the Reds was impossible as the Communists had control over most of the country and had taken over large quantities of American supplies that

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we had furnished to Chiang Kai-shek.

We gave a final party for both groups in Shanghai and came back by way of Bangkok, Cairo, and several other stops. We stayed a while in Berlin with General Lucius D. Clay, which was a horrible sight because it had been damaged by both the British and American bombing and the Russian shelling.

Finally, it was decided our plane needed overhauling and we went to Sweden where our engineers felt the best work could be done as our own bases had been largely cut down in other countries. In that the color motion pictures of the atomic bomb test had been flown to Washington and sent on to Secretary Forrestal in London, he was asked to dinner by the King and Queen and the pictures were shown to the King and Queen of England in a private showing after the dinner.

I remained in Stockholm until the plane was

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made ready, later proceeding to London. We all spent a few more days there and then took off for the United States.

So, finally, in August or September I told the boss that I had five kids that had to go to college and prep school and, I just had to go home.

Well, he begged and pleaded and wanted me to come over as Under Secretary of the Department of Defense under him, and I appreciated the confidence and so forth, but told him that I just physically could not; that I had businesses that I hadn't paid any attention to, oh, since 1941, and I just had to go back to see whether we had a roof over our head financially, and produce enough dough to take my kids to prep school and college, which even then was expensive.

And so I was mustered out, but with an agreement that I would come back and give Forrestal three days a month. By now I'd bought

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a paper in California, the *San Diego Journal*. I would come back and Forrestal had this problem and that problem, mostly things that grew out of attacks on him by Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson. I knew Winchell fairly well and, I knew Pearson very well. I never dealt with them on these things.

And finally, when the boss was out of office and when he was in the hospital at Bethesda, Kate Foley, who had been his confidential secretary, called me and said that the boss wanted to see me. She said that he was in the hospital and she was down, I think, retired, living in Jacksonville, or in that area of Florida. Well, I already had a standing order by Forrestal that the Navy fly me back anytime I had to come back to Washington and, of course, pick me up wherever I was and bring me back to North Island in San Diego. I came on to

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Washington and he wanted to see me at the hospital and this was on the Saturday.

I got in on Friday. I was at the Mayflower Hotel. I called up the commandant of Bethesda Naval Hospital and he told me Mr. Forrestal's doctor was off for the weekend and would I wait until Monday when he would be back as they were apprehensive about his condition.

So, I said, "Well, that's all right, I can go down" -- our corporation's headquarters had been in West Virginia, Charleston, and under West Virginia laws I had to hold a stockholders' meeting of our corporation there once a year. Mrs. Kennedy and I were the only stockholders so we could meet in a phone booth or in a bathroom.

So, I got on a plane to go down and about halfway enroute to Charleston the Captain came back and said, "I've got a message for you,"

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and he told me that Forrestal had committed suicide. And I said, "Will you ask them to get me on the first plane back?" I also asked that a message be sent to the Navy to see if they had any Navy planes there -- well, they didn't have -- to get me right back to Washington, because Kate wanted me to come back to help select the people to be invited to the funeral. I got back that evening and Struve Hensel, who had been the civilian general counsel for the Office of Procurement, was there, and Johnny Ginrich, who had been the aide (is now, I believe, an Admiral or Vice Admiral) and several others, old friends of Forrestal's.

There had been quite a tug of war, as you probably realize, between Louis Johnson who was making out that he didn't want the job, but was working his tail off to get Truman to appoint him. In fact, I remember urging Truman

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not to appoint him because, I said, "Don't forget what happened to Roosevelt when Roosevelt had to kick him out of being Under Secretary of War. You'll have the same thing happen to you." And it did later.

But anyway, of course, we supplied our funeral list and I forget how we handled it. I took it over to Johnson's office and I said, "This is the list the family requests and we pared it down to the bone." We got nice seats and all that sort of thing, but we all resented that the arrangements were being made by Johnson and the people being invited by Johnson who had been his arch foe; well, arch foe of anyone who thought that he should not be Secretary of Defense to succeed Forrestal. So, that was that.

FUCHS: Did you ever see any indication of Forrestal's mental deterioration in your relationship with him?

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KENNEDY: Oh, yes, yes. When we were going to the July 1 atom bomb tests at Eniwetok he had in one footlocker a stock of serious books including *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as an example. He would pull out various books from the footlocker he had in the compartment across the aisle from his own sleeping quarters. One morning about 4 a.m. I walked up the corridor to the galley to get some coffee and found him deeply engrossed in reading *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and looking very morose. There were other occasions where he seemed to act rather queerly.

Forrestal was convinced that the Russians were very dangerous and were not to be trusted and all of that. Ambassador Harriman, who was in Moscow, came back on some chore to see Truman, and, of course, he knew Forrestal very

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well and he came in for lunch. Ambassador Harriman had a clipping of Stalin's speech in which Stalin said he saw no possibility of any accommodation with the West and that that was his basic policy. Well, as a result of it, Forrestal had copies made outside. He printed up something like 7,500 copies of this speech. He paid for the postage and the mailing and the little printing bill that was involved. He sent them out all over the country.

FUCHS: Going back to your original start in handling liaison with the Truman Committee, who, if anyone, was handling liaison in rather a formal way prior to your being asked to take over the assignment?

KENNEDY: I think it came under the Judge Advocate General's Office.

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FUCHS: Were they having some difficulty?

KENNEDY: I'm not sure of that. The only thing is that they decided to set it up independent of the Judge Advocate's Office. In fact, that was one of the conditions that I suggested.

FUCHS: You thought that placement of it in the Chief of Naval Operations office...

KENNEDY: Yes, but the Judge Advocate General was too Navy. In other words, just straight line Navy like the Army had their straight line Army setup, and I thought we could do a better job; apparently we did.

FUCHS: Are there any particular investigations that stand out in your memory, other than this one that you mentioned?

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KENNEDY: I would say that that was the outstanding one that I remember. I'm sure we had many others, but I just don't remember them.

FUCHS: There was something about Hunter's Point. Was that a shipyard?

KENNEDY: That's a shipyard in San Francisco. Yes, but I just don't remember what.

FUCHS: Is there anything about the Navy tank lighter program which stands out in your memory? Of course, I realize it was a long time ago and the details are pretty hard to remember.

KENNEDY: I remember there was a problem about the amphibious craft that Andy Higgins was building near New Orleans. Truman was sold on the Higgins' landing craft, I think it was. The Navy had

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dragged their feet on it and after investigations we got it straightened out and smoothed out. I don't remember the details now.

FUCHS: Did you know, by any chance, Eddie Locke, who served as liaison from WPB to the Truman Committee?

KENNEDY: Vaguely, I have a recollection of him. I just don't remember much about what their problems were.

FUCHS: He was pretty close to Donald Nelson, and he went to China with him and helped set up the Chinese WPB.

What about Admiral Horne? Was he an efficient man in your opinion?

KENNEDY: Very efficient, most able, probably was the tops of our whole production effort.

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FUCHS: Harry Vaughan. When did you become acquainted with him?

KENNEDY: He was at Truman's office.

FUCHS: Then he went into the Army but he came back before the war ended.

KENNEDY: But he was still in Truman's office, even in the Army. He was like I was, an officer, a civilian in a Navy suit. He was in an Army suit.

FUCHS: Do you think Forrestal's problem was largely overwork?

KENNEDY: Persistent overwork.

FUCHS: When you went at his call to Washington you said that the authorities, the doctors, at the Bethesda Naval were apprehensive about

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him. Why do you think they...

KENNEDY: I don't know why. I'd be guessing and I don't like to guess.

FUCHS: One writer has stated that your office acted as a sort of a buffer between the Truman Committee and the bureaus. Was that impressed upon you that you were acting as a buffer?

KENNEDY: Oh, I wouldn't know about that. I suppose in the view of some people we were, but we didn't think so and we didn't feel we acted that way. Let's put it that way.

FUCHS: You didn't think that buffering the bureaus was really...

KENNEDY: Well, the bureaus were just as happy to have things coordinated someplace, and so was the Truman Committee.

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FUCHS: Were you acquainted with John Tolan's father, who had been a Congressman?

KENNEDY: No.

FUCHS: He had the Tolan Committee on migration, I believe it was. I have heard it alluded to as being a House Committee that carried on functions somewhat similar to the Senate Committee that Mr. Truman had, but we've never looked into it.

KENNEDY: I probably have known of it, but the Lyndon Johnson committee would be the committee in the House that did more on Naval procurement and all of that. It was sort of an investigating committee, but it didn't function too much because the Truman Committee just did a better job.

FUCHS: At lunch you were saying you were not

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apprehensive about Mr. Truman's ability to carry out the functions of the President.

KENNEDY: I wasn't because I had a feeling that when he moved into some of these big things like the oil pipeline thing...

FUCHS: Canol.

KENNEDY: Canol project, or any of these other huge projects of the Navy, his mind expanded and his imagination was such that he could move you to a little corner grocery store or a conglomerate of Safeway, A&P, or anything else, all within focus of a very capable mind that seemed to function very well, very imaginative, not petty, except when you tackled, criticized his family.

FUCHS: You observed that.

KENNEDY: As Mr. Hume of the *Washington Post* found out.

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FUCHS: In other words, you didn't go along with the view that he was a small man of little ability, who was Pendergast's office boy.

KENNEDY: No, he wasn't. He did a good job, from what I've heard in later years, in Missouri. His procurement (we'll call it that), was of good quality and, so far as I've ever heard, other than from his enemies, no graft. He demanded real results for the money that he was spending of the people's tax dollar in his job of -- well, they called it County Judge, actually it was County Supervisor.

FUCHS: Yes, administrative officer, really, rather than judicial.

KENNEDY: Yes, that's right.

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FUCHS: It's amazing how many people still come to the Library wondering where he got his law degree. They've done away with that now in Jackson County.

KENNEDY: I understand so.

FUCHS: Did you see him occasionally other than this time in Key West after the '48 election?

KENNEDY: Oh, yes, practically every time I came to Washington I would see him and see him very frequently, and enjoyed him very much. I didn't bother him any more than I'd have to because I felt he was too busy with all of the projects that he had.

FUCHS: You were, of course, for him in 1948?

KENNEDY: Correct.

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FUCHS: And you saw that the lack of storage bins was working in his favor?

KENNEDY: Worked in his favor. In fact, I would say that very few of the newspaper correspondents and radio and television correspondents realized the importance of it at the time it was happening. And the farmers were very mad and they voted that way. Oh, there were many other factors in his election, but in the Middle West that was a very large contributing factor.

FUCHS: How did you view Thomas Dewey as a candidate?

KENNEDY: Well, as a very capable prosecutor. He had shown that and all of that. I just didn't know the man, so I don't know how good a job he would have done.

FUCHS: Okay. Are there any anecdotes other than the

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one about the shirt that you recall in connection with Mr. Truman? Any social occasions?

KENNEDY: Gee, I don't think of anything, do you Bruce?

MRS. KENNEDY: Well, I was trying to

KENNEDY: Oh, I remember one. In the campaign of '48, Ed Pauley, a Southern California oil man who was backing Truman had a supper party at the Ambassador Hotel. The next day they were coming on down to San Diego (that is, the Trumans were, not Pauley), and the Republicans had already, I think, held their convention, or if they hadn't they were soon going to. It was pretty well-known what their party platform was to be, urging this and that in the way of legislation.

So, I went up to the President. Clark Clifford was there and I am not sure who else. I think you were along, or were you?

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MRS. KENNEDY: No, not that time.

KENNEDY: No, that's right, you were not. So, I said, "Well, gee, Mr. President, why don't you call a special session of Congress after you are nominated in Philadelphia and call the Congress right back to enact" -- you see it was a Republican Congress which he had termed a do-nothing Congress -- "the things in their platform; and any good things you'd sign."

Well, before he had a chance to answer, Clark Clifford spoke up, "Why that would produce more investigations and all of that; have one everyday."

Truman spoke up and said, "I don't think so. They've got all the investigations on they can possibly have right now and I think that's a good idea." And nothing more was said about it.

Although I had press credentials for the

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Democratic convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1948, the White House asked me if I would arrange to take the train carrying the delegates from Southern California, who were to meet up with the train carrying the delegates from Northern California at, I believe, Ogden, Utah or Salt Lake City. The job given to me was to attempt to disrupt the efforts of Jimmy Roosevelt, who was working on the California delegation to have them back him for the Democratic nomination instead of backing Mr. Truman at the convention for which the train was enroute.

I carried out my assignment, got a drawing room or two well stocked with the necessary entertaining supplies and gradually went to work.

Jimmy Roosevelt was working hard to get the nomination for himself, riding on his father's

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coattails. I had a nice drawing room and maneuvered around with different people, because he was asking the Southern California delegates to enter the joining place -- which was in Utah, I think -- all committed to Roosevelt, and I worked the other side of the fence. And when Jack Shelley (I think that was his name) -- he was later a Congressman, but he was head of some union, maybe the head of the combined union setup in Northern California. Later I think he was Mayor, but I am not sure. Anyway, I talked to him about it and he had known that Roosevelt was trying to do this and we put the kibosh on it. Of course, Roosevelt was coming out with these -- I'm speaking of Jimmy -- unflattering things about Truman, so I got a hold of some friends one in the Salt Lake *Tribune* -- knew the publisher -- and they came out with an editorial.

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I don't remember the details now, but it messed up Jimmy Roosevelt's setup.

"Ep" Hoyt was the publisher of the Denver *Post*, and I remember he had a beautiful editorial on the front page alluding to Jimmy Roosevelt's efforts, trying to get the Democrats to turn down Truman and take him. And the editorial, among other things, said that this shouldn't even happen to a dog, a Missouri dog. By the time we got to Chicago, Roosevelt finally decided that he would not run. He already had headquarters set up in Philadelphia, and then he tried to help Henry Wallace.

Well, I dropped off the train someplace and went down to Washington, and I sat with the President while Barkley was making his keynote speech. I'm sure it was in the daytime and I said, "Well, Mr. President, there is your

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Vice Presidential candidate."

Well, of course, all of these fellows were hoping the lightning would strike them and they'd be the Vice Presidential candidate, and I repeated my urging Truman about -- by now the Republicans had held their convention -- calling Congress to special session when he accepted his nomination, pronto -- in a week or two. Have them vote their platform, which, of course, they wouldn't do.

FUCHS: You urged this on Truman again?

KENNEDY: Again, yes.

FUCHS: That's very interesting.

KENNEDY: And he indicated, without saying so, that he was seriously thinking about it. I didn't know at the time that Judge Rosenman was already down in Washington and was drafting part of Mr. Truman's speech along that line; and then when

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Truman came to Philadelphia -- he, of course, in the meantime indicated they wanted Barkley. I remember sitting with Truman out in the anteroom of the actual convention floor and it was hot and sultry. Not on the platform but in back of it. I told him I hoped he was going to, and he didn't say anything because he didn't want to announce what he was going to do, which is proper. Of course, we blasted Mr. Wallace out of the picture, or he blasted himself out, naturally; he didn't have any strength. But I was more or less just an observer. I was a California editor there on the job.

FUCHS: This is very interesting because scholars have been interested in who, of his advisers, gave Mr. Truman the idea -- unless he conceived it himself -- of calling Congress back for what he called, as you know, the "Turnip Session."

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KENNEDY: Well, I couldn't say that I was the only guy that did it. I wouldn't know. But when I talked to him in Los Angeles he didn't indicate -- well, he didn't indicate that he hadn't thought of it, either.

FUCHS: Yes.

KENNEDY: But I question that he had thought much about it because he would have talked to Clark Clifford who was his counsel at that time in the White House -- a very efficient and a very able (as has been demonstrated since) lawyer and technician in policy matters as well as others in Washington. And it was just a different approach that he had at the time.

FUCHS: Do you think Clark Clifford had ever mentioned that?

KENNEDY: Well, he was against it when I talked with

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the President in Los Angeles.

FUCHS: He thought it would cause investigations.

KENNEDY: More investigations, and Truman said, "Aah, they've got so many investigations now, what's one more. I don't see what they could investigate."

FUCHS: That's very interesting. Of course, Mr. Clifford has gotten credit for the strategy for the campaign based on the memorandum which perhaps you've read of in several books. I believe the first was Cabell Phillips' book, *The Truman Presidency*. The long memorandum outlined how the Democrats should conduct a campaign in 1948, and it's been said that Clifford was the author of that. Of course, that didn't go into this "Turnip Session;" it was on other factors that they should stress.

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KENNEDY: I don't know about that. I had very little to do with the campaign.

FUCHS: It's interesting that you were urging this on him, though. It's a good point. Did you see Mr. Truman after he was out of the White House?

KENNEDY: No, I did not. Oh, I might have seen him at some function, but I didn't go to see him -- he was a busy man and I had no reason to interrupt him. We'd pass Christmas cards and things like that, but I left him alone; he had too much to do himself.

FUCHS: Did you know Judge Oliver Carter, who, I believe, played a part in the campaign in California as a Truman booster?

KENNEDY: Played some part. I knew him, yes. Well, he was just one of many, many people. I wouldn't

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put him in the top echelon of anything.

FUCHS: No.

KENNEDY: He was made a Judge, because after all there weren't many people to recommend out there that had been on his side.

FUCHS: Well, unless there's something else you can add, I think that is about all I have.

KENNEDY: There was one other item that I remember which still makes interesting comment for the people of the country. Sometime in April or May 1948, I was visiting Mr. Truman in the Oval Office for a short time. Before going in I had noticed all the heads of the Jewish organizations who were urging Truman to recognize Israel (this, you will remember, was done

May 14, 1948). At that time the Democratic National Committee was in bad shape financially and did not even have enough cash to come up with a forthcoming

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nationwide speech on the radio networks, but Louis Johnson was able to get some loans or donations from some of the "fat cats." I kiddingly called the President's attention to the group of Jewish leaders who were on the day's scheduled visitors immediately after me. I said, "Well, Mr. President, are you going to recognize Israel as, of course, that is what this group who are following me in here are going to ask you."

He said, "Well, how many Arabs are there as registered voters in the United States?" I laughed and so did he, but my time was up. I said goodbye and told him I would see him on the campaign trail or at the convention.

If I can, I'll try to think of some more stories and tape them for you.

FUCHS: Well, thank you very much. I enjoyed it

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and appreciate your effort for the Library.

KENNEDY: You're welcome.

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