EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS EAGLETON

October 24, 2005
St. Louis, Missouri

Participants

James Sterling Young, chair
Janet Heininger
Paul Martin

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], Edward M. Kennedy Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS EAGLETON

October 24, 2005

Thomas Eagleton: [*conversation about interview ground rules*]

Janet Heininger: My stepmother wanted me to say hello to you, she's Margot Danis.

Eagleton: Oh really? Good friend, didn't she go to school with my wife?

Heininger: Marymount.

Eagleton: The Danis family is a very important family, they have lots of kids, there are lots of Danises floating around. Make a note for my wife.

Heininger: Also I wanted to tell you how much I miss Marcia Verville.

Eagleton: Oh, you knew Marcia?

Heininger: Very well.

Eagleton: I think about her. She was the best staff person I ever had. The cigarettes got her, but she'd walk around with a bunch of files, and this is appropriate to the Kennedys. She was the only one I knew who would face up to the Kennedy staffers, who were the most arrogant people in the world because they were Kennedy staffers, and she'd take on three of them. She'd say, "Eagleton won't go with that." They'd say, "Well, Teddy is the Chairman and he wants this." "Eagleton won't go with that; you tell Senator Kennedy Eagleton is opposed to that." Most people—God she was wonderful. Her daughter was going to come through St. Louis but something got screwed up, she was on the west coast and going to the east. Someday I'll see her, Alexandra [Verville].

Heininger: Dick says hello to you.

Eagleton: Dick Verville. You can put in your report the arrogance of Teddy Kennedy's staff.

James Sterling Young: Sure.

Eagleton: They were, and just because of Kennedy. Sometimes I think he hired a person or two out of his own pocket to add on—certainly in health, we'll get into that. But I think he hired an expert, at considerable money, who was an expert on healthcare, knew about hospitals and so on—

Young: Was that Larry Horowitz?

Eagleton: No, he I'm pretty sure was on the payroll, he was the one that Marcia devastated.

Young: I see.

Eagleton: He was the Ayatollah. God, he called the shots on that committee except for Marcia.

Heininger: There are four areas we want to cover. First, your initial impressions of Kennedy when you came to the Senate, so the early years. Were there issues on which you worked closely together? Issues on which you were opponents.

The second one is what Jim Murphy told me was the "Kennedy caucus," like that group sitting together on the floor. Tell us about the Kennedy caucus.

Eagleton: I don't remember that phrase—this was among staffers?

Heininger: No, Senators.

Eagleton: When Teddy had a bill and he was talking to all the committee members, he would talk to us in groups of three or four.

Young: Yes.

Eagleton: Okay.

Heininger: Was there any legislation on which that group of Senators, that group that you sat near, talked about? And what was Kennedy's role in that.

Eagleton: Okay, we're going to do these one at a time.

Young: Yes.

Heininger: And particularly, like the work that you did on the termination of funds for Vietnam, and what Kennedy's role had been in that debate over Vietnam.

Eagleton: You're featuring that as opposed to healthcare? Or are you going to get into healthcare?

Heininger: We want particularly, because you worked on that issue for termination of funds—

Eagleton: Healthcare.

Heininger: But also the termination of funds.

Young: Both.

Eagleton: I worked with others more than Teddy on the Vietnam War: [Walter] Mondale, [Harold] Hughes, [Alan] Cranston, [Frank] Church, [Jacob] Javits, [Claiborne] Pell.

Heininger: I know, and we'd like to hear about that because he'd had such a prominent role in stating a public—

Eagleton: But it was independent of the role that I was working on with other Senators.

Young: Right.

Eagleton: I'm trying to think of any connection I had with Teddy on the Vietnam War and nothing is coming to my head. I was working with a certain group, and Teddy was not part of that group. He might have been part of another group. Of course, we weren't antagonistic; we were driving down the same highway.

Heininger: Who did you work with on that?

Eagleton: On Vietnam?

Heininger: On Vietnam.

Eagleton: Claiborne Pell, Frank Church, Jake Javits, I can't think of any more, that's it. John Stennis, he is very important. Stennis and Javits were the most important. Mac [Charles] Mathias, that's about it, that was the group. Now, somebody in that group might have also been with Ted, I don't know. I know Teddy was strongly opposed to the war; I know he gave many speeches on the floor opposed to the Vietnam War. Because he's Teddy Kennedy, I know how up front he was on the Vietnam War. We were working with a different cluster that I just mentioned to you.

Heininger: Why that cluster and why was he not part of it?

Eagleton: It worked this way. In the early stages, I got there in January, well technically, December 1968 because [Edward] Long resigned, so I got a little head start on committee placement. The war was very much on in early '69. I was elected as a dove in a very close primary here in Missouri. You want my first contact with Kennedy on Vietnam? There was an earlier contact—

Heininger: Your initial impressions.

Eagleton: I remember the first time I met him, vividly remember, because I was at the Ramada Inn in Jefferson City, Missouri, and there was, I think, some kind of a, I guess it was the state convention or what have you. I'd gone to sleep. I was in my underwear and there was a knock on the door and it was Teddy and somebody with him, I don't recall. The person with him just left. I don't know whether he was a guard, so it was me in my underwear and Teddy. Teddy introduced

himself, we had a little chit-chat about something and he was there for his brother Robert [Kennedy], who was running for President as of the date of this meeting.

He said, "We'd surely appreciate your support. I'm out on the road for my brother," etc. I told him, "Look, I'm a candidate for the Senate, I've got to be cautious in what I do about the presidential race because I need the support of all kinds of people here in Missouri, but I'll be very frank to say my heart's with your brother. That's the way I'll have to leave it." He said fine, he understood that, etc. Nice to meet you. The whole thing took two or three minutes, very cordial meeting. That's that.

Heininger: When you then got into the Senate, what were your impressions of him in those early years in the Senate?

Eagleton: Well, my impression was, and I'll repeat it through this interview, that he was a very hard working guy, that his main interest was health care, that he had some domestic problems. That was CW—conventional wisdom. I emphasize healthcare—that healthcare was his "do or die" issue. I got on the committee, it was then called Labor and Public Welfare. I think it is now Health and Human Services or something like that. I was assigned to that committee. Pete [Harrison] Williams was the chairman. [James] Eastland was chairman of the Judiciary at that time, but Kennedy was very high up, obviously because of seniority.

He wanted to be in control of the issue. The issue was important to him. Other Senators, for the most part, let him be in control. Now, if someone had a significant amendment, if he and Larry Horowitz thought it was appropriate, fine. If they didn't think it was appropriate, Marcia would have told me in advance and I'd try to persuade him, and maybe I won on one and maybe lost on three. He was very much in control. He wanted to devise the strategy.

It was his bill, it was his "profile in courage," or his "legacy" is a better word. Those were some of my first impressions.

Heininger: Did they change? Did your impressions of him change in the years you were in the Senate? Did they change after the 1980 presidential election and Ted's run?

Eagleton: What year?

Heininger: Nineteen eighty when Ted ran? Did he change in the Senate?

Eagleton: Yes. He knew his "Presidential days" were over. He would devote his full time and energy to being a first-rate Senator, which he was.

Heininger: Right.

Eagleton: Pete Williams often deferred to Kennedy. Kennedy ran health and Pete Williams was always "ditto" with Kennedy on health. So his power expanded. Expanded not only on that committee but with everybody in the Senate. Now that doesn't mean that some people, like

Eastland and some others, were opposed to it, but they knew Kennedy was from the liberal point of view and that didn't change from day one to day thousand.

Heininger: Did you see any change in him after he ran for President in 1980?

Eagleton: This change, I would report. I think from '80 on—I left in '86—just that period, I think he became more relaxed. I think prior to '80 it was do, do, do, do. He had issues in Judiciary; I can't remember exactly. He was active there as well. I don't think he was ever frenetic. But he was uneven and urgent before 1980. I think after '80, to '86, that's all I know, he seemed to be less intense, but just as motivated.

Heininger: Let's go back to the Vietnam issue again. You sat with a group on the floor of liberals. You were elected as a dove. I remember the election, Tom Curtis, right?

Eagleton: Yes.

Heininger: So you came and he already had a profile on Vietnam.

Eagleton: Yes, it was the biggest issue in my primary. It wasn't the most popular because the American Legion and others in Missouri were still very hawkish. That disappeared over the years, but, it was a three-horse race for me and it was something like 34, 33, 32—very close.

Heininger: So when you got to the Senate, elected on this platform, and started to work on Vietnam, how did you get to the point of cutting off the funding? He had a profile on Vietnam, of speaking out against the war, but why wasn't he part of that process, that group you worked with?

Eagleton: I mostly remember Frank Church. He was on the Foreign Relations Committee; indeed, he was later on the de facto chairman because John Sparkman's health was deteriorating. So Church was ad hoc chairman and that's where the War Powers legislation was being considered. That was my fervent interest.

I don't know why Kennedy wasn't directly a part of that, but Church was running the group that I was in. Now, I must have talked to Kennedy. Church must have talked to Kennedy. We weren't at war; we were all following the same path. But the cluster I was in was different. I can't recall why there were two. I can't recall who was with Kennedy. I think it's an example of Kennedy's individualism. Because he had this overwhelming, brilliant staff that wanted him to be the point person on everything. The staff wanted the Kennedy stamp on everything, and his staff was pushing him: do this, do this, do this. Staff, as you know, is very important. A good staff makes you or breaks you.

His staff—they were very bright and very aggressive. Kennedy didn't like to sing in the choir, he liked to be the solo performer.

Heininger: You eventually got the funds cut off through an appropriations bill. Were you able to do that because the vehicle chosen was the appropriations bill rather than stand-alone legislation?

Eagleton: Yes, I wrote that in the Appropriations Committee. I just felt the timing was right. I hadn't discussed it with—I don't know if I discussed it with Church or not. Some debate was going on and I just felt that now was the time. Fritz and [Ernest] Hollings said, "Go with it," and so I wrote it out, "No money shall be used—" blah, blah, blah "—in Cambodia" or something like that.

Heininger: On this or any other bill?

Eagleton: All I remember is, I wrote it out on a piece of paper. It was the Defense Appropriations Bill. I thought it was an appropriate time.

Heininger: Brian Atwood told me that you didn't even talk to him before you did it, you were—

Eagleton: I think it was—sometimes you have a notion, pops in your head, and that's it. It was easy to write an amendment saying, "Funds are denied—" Most Senators don't write their own amendments because of the legal form, but this one was easy, and that's it.

Heininger: You were a junior Senator at that point—

Eagleton: Yes, very junior.

Heininger: Yet you were able to accomplish this piece of legislation that has been very important and gotten your name attached to it. In essence, you got the lead on this issue. This is so rare.

Eagleton: What?

Heininger: This is very rare for Senators to do this.

Eagleton: Yes, I'd say that. It never happened to me again. We didn't have any more wars until later.

Young: Can we go back to that group sitting together in the Senate, you named them, John Culver and others there—

Eagleton: Culver would be with Kennedy. Culver and Kennedy were very close. Culver wasn't in our group.

Young: Let's go through that group again, and what was the bond between you? Were you friends or just politically together, just describe—

Eagleton: We weren't adversarial; we were both doing the same thing. I'm just making this—it's fairly typical of Kennedy that he doesn't want to be the caboose on the train. He wants to be, if not the locomotive, he wants to be the coal car, very close to the locomotive, he doesn't want to be the tag-on. And he wasn't the tag-on on Vietnam, he was vigorously doing his own thing.

Culver idolized Kennedy, they were very close. Culver wasn't in our group. It's no big deal what group of Senators one is working with.

We had—Claiborne Pell was wonderful, wonderful old Claiborne, I miss him. Anybody who knew him would miss him. He might have been; he sort of floated around—no, he was in the Kennedy group. Kennedy overwhelmed. I think this is appropriate. Pell, in one of his campaigns, had said he was against the filibuster. So was I, so were a lot of other people. The liberals were against it. But now we Democrats are for it, that's how things change, but we were against it back then. An issue came up where we needed Pell's vote.

So Teddy and I, I was a personal friend and Pell's wife was a personal friend of my wife, and we'd gone to his home for weekends and we were, I think, pretty close friends. Kennedy was very close. So the two of us went to beat up on Pell, and he said, "Well, I said I was going to—" We said, "This is vital—" I don't know what the bill was "—for the whole country, you've got to do it," and he reluctantly went along. He couldn't—I don't know if he could have said no to me, but he certainly wouldn't say no to Kennedy. I don't know what the bill was.

Heininger: Were there others who couldn't say no to Kennedy?

Eagleton: He had some good Republican friends, [Barry] Goldwater for example, highly respected Kennedy, he really did. He respected his intensity, he respected the knowledge that he had, although Kennedy didn't always speak in complete sentences. Now he's speaking better, in complete sentences, but early on he'd have to edit his speech because there were a lot of incomplete sentences. Goldwater said to me, on the liberal side, Ted was clearly the best. I was a personal friend of Goldwater's and a very good friend of [Paul] Laxalt later. I don't know when Laxalt got there. Goldwater came to our house and things like that—a very likable guy. You think of him in terms of being an abominable extremist, but personally he was very likable, and greatly admired Kennedy.

Heininger: Tell us more about the relationship between Kennedy and Goldwater.

Eagleton: I don't know much more about it other than the fact that there was this mutual respect, one of the other. They both respected the other's candor and intensity of spirit. Goldwater was the first real Ayatollah of the right. Lyndon Johnson murdered him in the 1964 campaign, but he was the first to be the nominee of the right since [Herbert] Hoover, and didn't have much support from the old, liberal, [Thomas] Dewey-[Dwight] Eisenhower wing of the Republican Party. They sort of sat out that election. That's about all I can tell you about Goldwater and Kennedy.

Young: I believe Goldwater—maybe you know something about this—Goldwater s particularly expressed admiration for Kennedy's judicial appointments to judgeships and the criteria that Kennedy established, and Goldwater congratulated him on that.

Eagleton: That connection I think is more prevalent with Eastland, I can get into that if you want.

Young: By all means, do so.

Eagleton: In order to get something out of Judiciary or to block something from coming out of Judiciary, you had to go to Eastland for that period of time. I came to the Senate saying that I had a list in my mind. The nastiest man in the world was Jim Eastland, Ku Klux'er, what an awful person he must be. He had the finest "hideaway" special room, because Senators have, once you get up in years, they call them "hideaways," and you could go to them and have a drink while bills are being discussed ad nauseum on the floor, where it's very boring, especially in night sessions.

There was a group of us. Eastland liked arguments, so he invited Hollings and Harry Byrd, Jr., never Goldwater, I don't know why. And then there was me, Mondale, and [Gaylord] Nelson, but Mondale and I were sort of regulars. We didn't get drunk, it wasn't a drinking spree. Just one glass of Gallo wine for me. Eastland had all kinds of booze and all kinds of cigars that he got through a route from Cuba to Nicaragua. Really, I'm sitting there next to Gaylord Nelson on the liberal side. There must have been another conservative too. We'd argue. Eastland just watched. He liked that. This is sort of a digression. But Kennedy came once in ten times, and he liked these arguments. He'd just sit there and smile. I don't smoke a cigar. Mondale said, "Take one." So I'd take one. Then Eastland explained that it came from Cuba, and Mondale choked. He looked around, I think he finished it.

Young: It gives an idea, for the record, of the personalities and the relations between people who—

Eagleton: They started to change when I left and they're totally different now. There was another drinking room. I'm not a drinker, now I only drink wine, but the Secretary of the Senate, that's a plum. [Warren Grant] Magnuson was Chairman of the Board of this room. God, what a wonderful man he was. Magnuson was a great—he liked to discuss the good old days. Kennedy also was about a one in ten in there too.

It's my guess that Kennedy—it was pretty well known at that time, through people that I know, that Kennedy in his early days had a bit of a drinking problem. Since he remarried, his drinking problem went away. Now, sometimes he'd go over to, what was that restaurant?

Heininger: The Monocle?

Eagleton: No, it's one closer to the AFL-CIO building on the other side.

Heininger: La Colline?

Eagleton: Yes, La Colline. They knew when a vote was on and they would say, "Vote" and you have 15 minutes to get there. We'd eat dinner there often.

Young: Who were his closest friends in the Senate? Outside the Senate?

Eagleton: Dodd, Culver, [William] Hathaway,

Young: [Mark] Hatfield?

Eagleton: No. I was close to Hatfield, a took a trip a couple of times with Hatfield. His wife liked to buy hats, no, straw baskets. She just loved baskets, little baskets. Dodd and Culver were his very close friends. Some people think that helped defeat Culver, that he became known in Iowa as Kennedy's pawn or whatever. Kennedy in his early days had become kind of a rogue. When you're the best friend, they used that in Iowa. I don't know to what degree.

Young: Did you see much of Joan at this period, Joan Kennedy?

Eagleton: They were never at my house, they were separated later, but he came to my house. The only time I saw Joan, I saw her on a foreign trip we took. During the time they were married, quite obviously, we went to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and it was known she had a drinking problem. That was a given. If she did it on that trip, she did it out of my sight. I never saw her staggering around or making noises or anything that would appear to be a drunk. I sat with her for about an hour on the plane, I remember. It's the first time I really talked to her, it was the first time I'd spent any kind of time with her. She was a very lovely lady, I thought. I was very impressed with her. I don't know what happened in the marriage. But I looked very kindly on her, she was a very nice—that's about the longest we were together. I don't know what we discussed, her children, her life, I don't remember. It was not a substantive discussion.

Young: That was on a trip to NATO?

Eagleton: Yes.

Young: Was that in 1972, do you remember?

Eagleton: We went to NATO every year, almost every year. Sometimes there would be five Senators, a couple of House members sometimes. Most of the time the House had their own plane, but sometimes we'd go—sometimes the plane would have ten, rarely, but occasionally, you'd have six Senators and four House members, that's it. Typically, it would be three and two, something like that.

Heininger: You mentioned the respect that Goldwater had for Kennedy. Were there other Republicans who felt that way?

Eagleton: [Alan] Simpson very much admired Kennedy. Howard Baker. Baker admired Kennedy a lot for the work he did. Mathias, [John] Cooper, certainly these sort of Theodore Roosevelt, Bull Moose Republicans, or whatever they were called. That cluster of five or six, now gone, Hatfield, [Edward] Brooke, etc., really controlled the Senate because a lot of times they voted with the Democrats. They're all gone; it's a big loss for the country. But any of those progressive—Eisenhower, Dewey—Eisenhower Senators would admire Kennedy, again for this enormous hard work that he did. Ted Kennedy had the largest capacity to work of any Senator I observed.

I can compare Kennedy to me. Kennedy, when he was on the health bill, he was also interested in guns, he was also interested in civil rights and civil liberties. I was interested in most of those too, but I would pick one and say that's the one I want to spend my time on. He'd spend his time on several, simultaneously, with this hard-working staff. I don't know if he had to be shoved into some of these or not, but his agenda was very large, from foreign policy to the District of Columbia. I was Chairman of that committee. I won't tell you how I got there unless you want to know. But he can handle a bunch of bills at one time. I couldn't. that was part of Kennedy's greatness.

The only one better than him was Jake Javits of New York. He handled a whole bunch of bills. He was more articulate than Kennedy, and I think he was the greatest brain in the Senate. I don't think Kennedy would be rated as the biggest brain. I don't know how far down the list they'd put him; he certainly would be ranked as the hardest worker.

Heininger: How much of that do you think was his staff versus Kennedy himself?

Young: Did you know anything about Carey Parker on Kennedy's staff?

Eagleton: Yes. A great, solid guy. He was a pleasure to be around. I can give you a name, [Stephen] Breyer, now Justice. Breyer worked with Ted on airline deregulation. I certainly remember that. Once again Kennedy was involved with that and Goldwater was very involved with that. So Breyer. I'm forced to remember because that's the guy who went on the Supreme Court. Brilliant guy.

Heininger: Did you work with Kennedy on healthcare?

Eagleton: Yes, but I was a minor figure. Marcia worked with the staff, we might have had some little amendment. We knew Kennedy was in charge of that. Nobody ever really—no Democrat on that committee ever went one-on-one with Kennedy on any of that issue. I'm talking the Democratic side, Pete Williams, me, Mondale, Gaylord Nelson, several of them. The word "health" meant "Kennedy."

Heininger: What about aging issues?

Eagleton: Aging he left to me, I had the aging subcommittee. I created the National Institute on Aging at NIH [National Institutes of Health]. I don't think he ever said, "That's yours." But aging was me.

Young: I think what you said about, he had a large agenda and he wanted to be in charge, he wanted to be in control. Then you also said after 1980 he seemed to get more relaxed. Maybe, would it be fair to say that after that time he found it easier to see the initiative—

Eagleton: I think he cut down on his agenda. I think he said to himself, "Look, the Presidency is gone. I'll be judged in history, I hope, by my legacy in the Senate and I'll go forward with a few bills that I think will be landmark," or a few amendments or whatever it was. And his agenda narrowed.

Heininger: In narrowing his agenda, and choosing a few issues—

Eagleton: This is after 1980.

Heininger: After 1980. How did he accomplish whatever he did on that? Did he do it by working and getting a coalition of Democrats? Did he work across the aisle with Republicans?

Eagleton: We always work as best we can with those Dewey Republicans, Mathias, Clifford Case of New Jersey, Ed Brooke, Javits, Hatfield. There were—maybe he had six or seven of them. They were usually part of anything that Kennedy did.

Hatfield changed once his daughter got a job in the administration with [Ronald] Reagan. He wasn't as much a part of the liberal action after that. He became a more "establishment" Republican.

Heininger: What about working with Nancy Kassebaum?

Eagleton: Don't remember. She was not part of any group that I've just described. Refresh my memory.

Heininger: Portability, insurance portability.

Eagleton: Don't remember. That was an issue, but I wasn't involved.

Young: You said that Kennedy was a very hard working Senator.

Eagleton: That's got to be on his tombstone. Kennedy, if the historians are fair about it, will go down in history as one of the great Senators of all time.

Young: That was appreciated, his hard work at his job was appreciated by all the—it was known by all the other Senators—

Eagleton: Goldwater I mentioned.

Young: And Jake Javits was another hard-working—

Eagleton: There were a couple of hangers, but the numbers grew after I left, it was growing. Well, for instance, Kennedy and [Orrin] Hatch worked well together, I mentioned that, very close. There was Hatch—Mormon, doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, etc.—and Kennedy. They became very close. They must have worked out something to sort of like each other or get along with each other. That's a very good example. I think Hatch was on the more far right group. He was an intelligent person on the right. He and Kennedy worked together very well.

Young: This is very important to hear your observations on that because of course today Kennedy is reputed outside of Washington to be a person who just beats up on Republicans, a

liberal. But in the Senate, we need to get a picture of how he works. So he may not have been the biggest brain in the Senate but he was one of the hardest working.

Eagleton: He had the best political gut in the Senate, that's very important.

Young: What do you mean by that, political gut?

Eagleton: Instinct. What would be appropriate at what time. Timing is how I lucked out, if you want to call it luck, with the Vietnam amendment. It was something I sensed. Nobody came over to me and said this is the time, introduce—nobody knew about it. I wasn't trying to be secretive, it just clicked. Kennedy has a very good political gut in terms of public sentiment. He knew some of his health stuff, he knew it would fail. Gun control, he knew there weren't 51 votes. In several areas, you can probably name them, help refresh my mind, he didn't expect to win, but he thought the issue ought to be ventilated, ought to be debated. I'll give you an example.

John Glenn, when he first came to the Senate, he sat lower—we like to sit in the back row so we could go to the cloakroom or the bathroom and not disturb anybody, go to the cloakroom, watch baseball. What were we talking about? Kennedy's gut.

Young: His political gut. I was just thinking about the cloakroom and the Cardinals playing.

Eagleton: I'll tell you a cloakroom story, and Kennedy was there and it's relevant, I think very relevant. It was, again—the night session is where we sort of socialized. But night sessions occasionally went to one in the morning, but more often went to ten p.m., so the television, especially during baseball season—anyway, there were about six of us, Kennedy, me, I know there were more than Kennedy and me but there were three or four more others.

Someone, not me, said, "That son-of-a-bitch [Richard] Nixon got the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] to audit my tax returns." I said, "Oh me, they've done that to me too." Some other guy "confessed," I can't remember if Kennedy "confessed." You don't go running around and being audited by the IRS, but this was revenge. You were on the Nixon "Enemies List." That was discussed. Certainly, they had a full court press on Kennedy on everything. So if we were audited, he was audited. There's no way he would escape. They were after him, constantly. Dirty tricks and whatever kind of stuff. But back on my tax return, they wanted to find out if I'd contributed, written a check to something, they kept my records for about five years.

My secretary pulled all this together. My secretary didn't report a $500 honorarium for a speech, but something else I should have claimed, so it was a wash after all those years.

Heininger: Why has Kennedy not been in the leadership in the Senate? Why did he lose to [Robert] Byrd for the whip position?

Eagleton: Bear in mind, he got defeated by Byrd, that was interesting.

Young: Yes, he defeated [Russell] Long

Heininger: But then was defeated by Byrd.

Eagleton: Was he assistant leader or was he a caucus leader?

Heininger: He was whip.

Eagleton: Number two. This is interesting. I'd forgotten about that. We're in Europe on this NATO thing and we're in Holland and we're having a gourmet dinner in a great restaurant. Joan wasn't there, I don't know what the date was. Well you know, what year did all this happen with Kennedy?

Whatever that year was. Teddy got called to the phone. They traced him to this restaurant and it was his staff. I wasn't in on the conversation. He came back to the table and he said, "Huh, Byrd's going to run against me for deputy leader." He wasn't demeaning to Byrd, but he was very confident he'd win. I said, because of what I'd heard, "Teddy, you'd better get back there because Byrd will work morning, noon, and night and you're sitting over here, and you're going to be here two more days—" whatever was the schedule. I think he was too overconfident.

This may be one of the few times that Kennedy made a big political misjudgment, really big. He delayed getting back and once he got back, he didn't know Byrd was a 24-hour a day politician. Byrd just worked harder at it, Kennedy took it for granted. And Byrd beat him.

I remember Richard Russell was dying. The other Georgia Senator, Herman Talmadge, went to the phone when the vote was taken. He said, "Russell is still living and he's conscious, and he says he wants to vote for Bob Byrd." Somebody probably should have challenged it, but anyway, we took his word and he voted for Bob Byrd. Nobody else was close to death while we were meeting, it was a unique occurrence. We voted by secret ballot. I don't know if it was a landslide or what it was.

Young: Then you tear up the ballots after, nobody knows.

Eagleton: Oh yes.

Young: I think some people have a pretty good idea.

Eagleton: This was commonly done, to show that you're not a double crosser, if you want to play the game, you show your ballot to the guy on your right. If you had spoken for Kennedy, I voted for Kennedy. I don't know if everybody did it, but it was commonly done.

Young: Not everybody did that though. Did Kennedy hold a grudge against Bob Byrd? Did he hold a grudge against him because he got beat out of it?

Eagleton: No. Bobby Byrd, his whole life, political life, he always believed people were after him. He had this Ku Klux image and he wanted to be leader, and he knew he couldn't be leader just with a few segregationists in the South. So he tried to become more liberal. And part of that being more liberal, he became a friend of mine and Nelson and he called us in. I think this was

after he became leader, but he called the two of us in. He said, "What are they talking about me?" We said, "Bob, things are fine, they're not after you."

One time we said, "Bob there's a little uncertainty," etc. Kennedy was also ready to take him on, but not by himself, he wanted some of his group. He knew that having been defeated—he didn't regard this as revenge, he just wanted to get Byrd out of there. Byrd was terrible on television, Byrd was terrible. But Byrd kept the job for a good number of years, you can check the years.

We were his contact with the liberals. The liberals knew that we talked to Byrd and that Byrd trusted us, blah, blah. I didn't repeat to them everything that Byrd said. Byrd said, "Keep this in total confidence," Nelson and I respected that. In effect, I would say, or Nelson would say, "We're not going to talk about that." We simply stayed away from any personal Byrd matters.

Young: A little while ago you mentioned—well, one more thing about Ted Kennedy, his hard work. Was he also known for his persistence or drive?

Eagleton: Oh yes.

Young: Because often you'd—

Eagleton: You know, he's been pursuing national health coverage for 30-40 years, since the first day he got in the Senate almost. He'll never give up, and I hope he lives long enough because I think we'll have it. Someday, I think the Chamber of Commerce will say, "Let's get rid of this." You know how it affects, what it has done to the airlines, the car companies, General Motors. That's spreading. I used to own a company here in St. Louis, and that's going back some years, and it was 6 percent, 7 percent, now it's 10 percent or 11 percent. Sometime sooner or later the Chamber of Commerce will say, "Give it to them, we don't want it on our books." I hope Kennedy is there when that happens, because that's when we're getting this, and we won't get it until the Chamber says, "We give up." So that there's a joint bill between the AFL-CIO and the Chamber and all the other commercial groups.

Young: Nineteen sixty-eight, the first year you were in the Senate, was also the year that Bobby Kennedy was murdered.

Eagleton: Yes.

Young: Were you in a position to observe what effect that had on Teddy?

Eagleton: I had a wonderful father who had strong beliefs. He originally was a Republican; he was a Bull Moose Republican. This was my run for the Senate, mind you. The night, let's see, Robert Kennedy was killed about 10 PM, California. He was leaving the stage and that's when the guy got him.

Heininger: He was shot about midnight.

Eagleton: He was going out, off the stage, the thing was over, midnight California time. Anyway, I remember this, forget the time. I gave a speech the next day in Bonne Terre, Missouri, and gave an enormous tribute to Bobby Kennedy, and I talked about the Kennedy family and I said, "We need gun control. What happened to Bobby Kennedy shouldn't happen not only to a Kennedy again, but anybody." That gun control speech almost defeated me.

In Missouri then it was considered, [Stuart] Symington and I and [Thomas] Hennings and all those, we were more liberal than the state. The state was more interested in Governors. We had very conservative Governors including Warren Hearnes, a friend of mine. But he was much more conservative than me. Of course, now the politics are different. Our state, Missouri, is now solidly Republican. We used to be able to win—"Little Dixie" is in the middle near Jefferson City, and then the "Boot Heel" from Cape Girardeau south had cotton as the major crop until soy beans became—and we got those counties, the liberals. But those were Dixiecrats, now Republicans get them and that's the difference. Democrats have only St. Louis and Kansas City and it's not enough.

Young: We were talking about Bobby's assassination, and whether you noticed that Kennedy was absent from the Senate.

Eagleton: Teddy was unpopular in Missouri, is that what you're asking?

Young: I was asking about in the Senate, his work in the Senate after Bobby was assassinated. Did he become absentee, did he lose steam, did he not appear very much after his brother was assassinated?

Eagleton: Was there a gap where he just sort of disappeared?

Young: Yes, I was just asking, did you notice.

Eagleton: I don't remember that.

Young: I don't know that it's the case, we're just trying to find out.

Eagleton: It could have been, but I'm not aware of it.

Young: Then the following year there was Chappaquiddick in 1969.

Eagleton: Was that in '69?

Young: Chappaquiddick was '69, in fact he was going to a party—

Eagleton: He was absent from the Senate after that.

Young: He was? I just want you to talk about that.

Eagleton: You're refreshing my memory. He didn't appear so much for a while. I don't know what a while was, how much time it was, a couple of months, three months, I don't remember.

Heininger: What about his role in presidential politics, particularly, say, the '72 election?

Eagleton: Seventy-two? Is that when he—

Heininger: He didn't throw his hat into the ring.

Eagleton: When did he run for the Senate, he was too young—

Young: He ran for the Senate in '62.

Eagleton: Why are you asking about '72?

Heininger: Presidential politics.

Eagleton: Is that me?

Heininger: Yes, you and—

Eagleton: Was that [George] McGovern?

Heininger: Yes, it was McGovern, '72. Kennedy didn't throw his hat in the ring, although everybody expected him to at that point.

Eagleton: McGovern begged him to be number two on the ticket and Kennedy said of course not. He asked about people including Gaylord Nelson, and Nelson said Eagleton.

Heininger: So you were—

Eagleton: Nelson gave a hint to McGovern and then I said yes. Today, McGovern has said different things at different times. He said many times that that was his biggest mistake and he should have left me on as a martyr, or the young kid being picked on. Then he said other times, no, he did the right thing getting rid of me, and he faulted me for losing the election. But he has said these different things at different times. I used to have a file on them just to keep track of what he was currently saying. He came out here on a book tour and I went with him, introduced him. He was lavishly in love with me at that time, I was present. I might have done the same thing.

Heininger: There were many years when Kennedy was rumored as a presidential candidate. Did that affect his work in the Senate at all?

Eagleton: I don't think so. Kennedy did not tell me this, but I truly believe that Kennedy knew—in '80, is that right?

Heininger: Well, ’72, ’76, ’80.

Young: In ’80 he ran.

Heininger: He ran in ’80.

Eagleton: I think Kennedy knew that he was a very long shot, either to get the nomination or to be elected. He said, “Kennedys run for President. I’m getting older,” I don’t know what his age was then. “This is my last foreseeable shot.” But he knew it was a long shot, I’m positive of that. I have a friend named [Louis] Susman, he’s a money raiser, and amongst others he went to Kennedy, and said, “Don’t run, Ted, this isn’t your time.” Kennedy said, “Well, when is my time?” So I think Kennedy viewed this as his last shot at being President. Many of us thought that was a loser, to Carter, right?

Heininger: Everybody talked about Kennedy throughout the ’70s as a presidential candidate, ’72, ’76, then in ’80 and ’84. Did it affect his Senate work at all?

Eagleton: Not to my knowledge. Yes, when you’re campaigning, once you start campaigning for President, you’re absent from the Senate, you’re on the road, so that was down time, it had to be. You can’t run for President and vote in the Senate. Bob Dole resigned from the Senate, I think, to run.

Heininger: He did.

Eagleton: So yes, that was time when he wasn’t doing much Senate work.

Heininger: So he didn’t pick issues because they would enhance his potential as a presidential candidate?

Eagleton: I don’t remember. I keep saying health; I know he didn’t drop that. I don’t know to answer that specific—I don’t remember a major issue where he overtly dropped it because he was running. He simply disliked Carter and thought he was a second-rate President.

Young: In fact, some of his campaign themes were based on his commitments in the Senate, but I want to ask you, what happened between Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy, do you know?

Eagleton: Kennedy thought that Carter was a southern, hokey guy who never had enjoyed life, a typical Dixie southerner, and he’d run against him. Obviously Carter disagreed with that. Kennedy shouldn’t have run, there’s no question about that, but again, I described the circumstances. It developed into a serious digression. I don’t want to use the word “hatred,” but “lack of confidence” is too moderate. It was between hatred and lack of confidence. On the scale of zero to one hundred, it’s up in the 80s or 90s.

Young: I see. A lot of people have asked, historians have asked, when they look at Kennedy’s position on healthcare and Carter’s position on healthcare, they see substantive—

Eagleton: Are they very close? I don't remember—

Young: In terms of strategy, no, but in terms of goals, pretty close.

Eagleton: Reluctantly Kennedy came to the 1980 convention, at the end of the convention. There were rumors he wouldn't come at all. He went through a speech written by somebody, where he was to support the ticket, but it was a reluctant endorsement. You could tell his heart wasn't in it.

Heininger: Did you think that it was a long shot in 1980 because of Carter or because of Reagan?

Eagleton: Because of Reagan, and because Carter, because of Iran and inflation, had become unpopular. That speech about—where he wore a sweater—malaise and it's your fault, we're all in a malaise, it's not my fault totally, it's everybody's fault. That hurt him. It had been tough for Kennedy—no, he wouldn't have won, I don't think. If he had beaten Carter it would have been very difficult to beat Reagan.

Heininger: You talked about Kennedy's staff and how aggressive they were and arrogant and pushing—

Eagleton: Yes.

Heininger: What was Kennedy's relationship with Senators compared to how his staff operated?

Eagleton: Good. I mentioned those Republicans who respected him. The views I've expressed of Kennedy would be shared by many, many people. I don't know how many you've interviewed or how many you intend to interview, but my views are not unique in terms of Kennedy's skills and talents. There would be Republicans who—some of them would say pretty close to what I say, Republicans. Goldwater I mentioned, Laxalt probably. Yes, Laxalt would have been an admirer of Kennedy.

Heininger: Kennedy himself would be the good cop and his staff would be the bad cop? Is that a fair assessment?

Eagleton: We always got mad at the staff, we never got mad at Teddy.

Young: What that means is of course another question.

Eagleton: Are we getting near the end, I hope?

Heininger: Yes. Do you have any final assessment about Ted? What makes him distinctive as a Senator, what makes him stand out?

Eagleton: His persistence, longevity. How old is he now, in his 70s? He got there in his thirties.

Young: He's 73.

Eagleton: I'm 76. What's his total years in the Senate?

Young: Forty-three.

Heininger: Same as Dan Inouye.

Eagleton: More than Byrd?

Heininger: Byrd is the longest.

Eagleton: But Byrd is the House. In all these years in the Senate, there was a question, why don't I retire? I like Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and all that, why don't I just sit back and write my memoirs as many people do? And I could do some good work supporting pertinent issues. Kennedy would die a year after he left the Senate. It means so much to him. You've had situations where the wife dies and a year later the husband dies or vice versa. That's sort of instance is true of Kennedy and the Senate. He wanted to be President, of course, but his mark in history is the Senate, and he doesn't think he's done. He thinks there's more he can do and he's 73.

I left the Senate, what was I? Fifty-nine or something like that. I could have won again; my numbers were good. But that's when we started having these filibusters. Senator [James] Allen, Voting Rights, others. We voted a hundred times on abortion, Jesse Helms, and I just got fed up with it. Kennedy, he was probably fed up, but said, "There will be a better and a brighter day." I just said, "I don't like it anymore and I think I'll go home." Not Kennedy, he'll die as a Senator, I don't think there's any doubt about it.

Heininger: With his boots on.

Eagleton: Yes. And his legacy will exist and his biographers, once they get through Chappaquiddick and other things—I don't know what [Robert] Caro would do. Maybe it would take two books, a bad book and a good book. That's what he's done with Johnson; he can do that with Kennedy, and he might. Okay?

Heininger: Thank you.

Eagleton: My pleasure. Nice to be with you.