

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 23, 1969
INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH O'DONNELL
INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN
PLACE: Mr. O'Donnell's office, Park Square Building,
Boston, Massachusetts

Tape 1 of 2

M: Let's get your identification on the beginning of the tape here, sir. You're Kenneth O'Donnell, and your official position with the Johnson Administration was as special assistant to the president from the time he took office, a job you continued in from the Kennedy Administration, on until the early part of 1965. Is that correct?

O: In addition to that, Doctor, I was also executive director of the [Democratic] National Committee. I held two positions at the same time.

M: You had been in Washington beginning in the late 1950s with the Rackets Committee investigating staff, with, later, Senator Robert Kennedy. Did you get to know Mr. Johnson at all during that time?

O: No. I had seen him, but I'd never met [him]. The first time I saw Senator Johnson then was when the hearings were being conducted on the space program in 1957, where they used the same room we used. We were ejected from the room because of the hearings that the Majority Leader then wished to hold. But I never met him until the convention of 1960.

fear. I've got the door locked. Will you call them and tell them, because I won't schedule a stop in Brooklyn on the schedule--I cancelled it." And he had called the President, he got him in Denver, Colorado, or some place and told him to cancel it--that it was all for Bobby Kennedy--and the President said cancel it. "You call O'Donnell and tell him I don't want any more of that. Cancel it. I've got enough of New York."

So about ten minutes later the President called me and said, "I don't want to go to Brooklyn again." I said, "I don't think you ought to go to Brooklyn again. I've already cancelled it anyway." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because I think Bobby's much better off now alone. Did you see the latest Daily News poll? "No, what?" I said, "It shows Bobby winning 56-57 per cent, and I think he's better off alone without you because people think you're drawing the crowd when it's really him." Silence on the end of the phone. He said, "I think I'd better go to Brooklyn." You bet your life he showed up at Brooklyn.

M: Perfect psychology.

O: But anyway, that was a constant, constant contest.

Well, the election is over. He went down to the Ranch and I was at my desk in the White House and he called me on the phone, and this is another Lyndon. First he told me he and I were going to pick a whole new cabinet. This was when he'd had a few pokes. I laughed and he laughed. Now he called me up on the phone and said, "Kenny, we've got to pick an attorney general." Katzenbach was then

acting attorney general. I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, tell you what. I'm not going to pick that fellow Katzenbach. Before you get mad--I don't even care, Katzenbach doesn't interest me--I want to tell you why. You know the Senate is a very difficult place, a lot to learn up there, and Bobby has never been up there. There's no sense in him holding two jobs at the same time. So therefore I think I'd better put somebody else in the Attorney General's Office because Katzenbach would be reporting to Bobby every night. Therefore, you get me a list of five fellows and send them down to the Ranch, and you and I'll talk about it and we'll pick an attorney general." I said, "Yes, okay." That's the last I ever heard of it, because that would be the five fellows that wouldn't get the job.

M: He didn't know Katzenbach either, I think, to think that he would be reporting in every day.

O: Yes. But he figured if he worked for Bobby, he was going to be the Kennedy loyalist in some strange bond. He couldn't quite understand how the Kennedy people all stuck together, they all worked together and that none of them made any money. That just positively stunned him. Lyndon being Lyndon is, how much do you pay him, what it would be--that's all his judgment was. He said to me once on Dick Maguire--he called Dick in. Dick was then treasurer of the committee and really good money raiser and Lyndon had nobody who knew any of these New York people. So we were riding up to Bill Green's funeral when he said to me, "What about that Maguire? Is he a little crazy?" I said, "Why?" He said, "I had him in yesterday to ask him to stay