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AGENCIES AND FORMS OUTS

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NEW YORK AP — Former presidential aide Kenneth O'Donnell says John F. Kennedy picked Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate in 1960 to remove Johnson from his key post as Senate majority leader and keep the Texan "safely tucked away." "That thought never had occurred to me or, incredibly enough, to anyone else around John Kennedy," O'Donnell said in excerpts from a forthcoming book being published in the Aug. 7 Life magazine.

In a passage heavy with irony, O'Donnell relates Kennedy's assessment of his longevity in explaining at the 1960 Democratic convention his offer to Johnson of second spot on the ticket.

"I never forgot what he said next," O'Donnell writes. "I'm 43 years old, and I'm the healthiest candidate for president in the United States. You've traveled with me enough to know that. I'm not going to die in office. So the vice presidency doesn't mean anything."

"I'm thinking of something else, the leadership of the Senate. If we win, it will be by a small margin and I won't be able to live with Lyndon Johnson as the leader of a small Senate majority. Did it occur to you that if Lyndon becomes the vice president, I'll have Mike Mansfield as the Senate leader, somebody I can trust and depend on?"

O'Donnell said Kennedy warned that if there were a split with Johnson after the convention, "I'll be the laughingstock of the country. Nixon will say I haven't any power in my own party."

O'Donnell served as White House chief of staff under President Kennedy and after Kennedy's assassination Nov. 22, 1963, remained at that post under President Johnson until after the 1964 campaign.

In the Aug. 7 Life issue O'Donnell also disclosed:

—Johnson wanted Sen. Mike Mansfield of Montana as his vice president for the same reason Kennedy selected Johnson: to remove him from the Senate leadership position.

—As vice president, Johnson felt sidetracked and ignored and blamed his fallen prestige on the president's brother, Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy, a point that led to bitter feelings between the two.

—When Johnson became president, he needed Kennedy staffers as his link to Democratic leaders around the country because, according to O'Donnell, Johnson's contacts "were unbelievably slight."

O'Donnell said Johnson was "obsessed" for a time with the idea that Robert Kennedy would try to force himself into the vice presidency in 1964, although Kennedy privately rejected that possibility from the outset.

While Robert Kennedy laid plans to run for the Senate in New York, O'Donnell and others began to promote Hubert Humphrey as their choice for vice president, a choice opposed by Johnson, O'Donnell said.

"I urged Bobby not to reveal his plans in order to keep Johnson off balance and enable us to build up support for Humphrey," said. "He finally agreed. To me this was one of the finest moments of his controversial career. No one has ever fully appreciated how much personal political damage Bobby suffered because of this delay."

O'Donnell said Johnson was clearly opposed to Humphrey as a running mate and "frequently ridiculed the garrulous Minnesota senator in private."

He said Johnson made a last-minute effort to get the nomination for Mike Mansfield, rejecting O'Donnell's suggestion that Mansfield would refuse the post.

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"Let me tell you something—that's what they said about little old Lyndon in 1960," O'Donnell quoted Johnson as saying. "When they lead you up on that mountain and show you those green fields down below and that beautiful White House standing there—you know what you do? You take it. They all take it."

O'Donnell said that was the last he heard about Mansfield, and didn't learn until last year that the Montana Democrat had told Johnson personally that under no circumstances would he ever accept the nomination as vice president.

O'Donnell said that when he decided to resign after the 1964 election, he knew the move would "irritate" Johnson.

"I explained that I wanted to go back to Boston," he said, recounting his last conversation with Johnson. "He didn't ask me what I planned to do and he didn't say goodbye or wish me good luck."

"He said only, 'It's all right with me and when you leave, take Dave Powers with you. He never works for anybody except you and the Kennedys anyway.'"

"Those were the last words I ever heard from Lyndon Johnson," said O'Donnell. "He never spoke to me again."

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