

'60 Choice of Johnson: Another Version

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 2—A close associate of John F. Kennedy says that Mr. Kennedy chose Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate in 1960 principally because he wanted to be sure that if he won the election he would have a more cooperative and trusted man than Mr. Johnson as the Senate majority leader.

Kenneth P. O'Donnell, a key White House aide under both Presidents, also maintains that four years later Mr. Johnson first tried to use Sargent Shriver to block Robert F. Kennedy from the Vice-Presidency, then considered dumping Hubert H. Humphrey in favor of Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana,

Mr. Johnson's successor as the Senate majority leader.

Writing in the latest issue of Life magazine, Mr. O'Donnell provides these and other new insights into the political history of the nineteen-sixties, as well as fresh background on early Democratic decisions regarding the use of American military forces in Vietnam.

Mr. O'Donnell says that President Kennedy was determined to withdraw all troops from South Vietnam by the end of 1965, although he planned to hold up the announcement until after the 1964 election.

The article indicates that Senator Mansfield played a major role in persuading Presi-

dent Kennedy to reverse his position and withdraw troops. Another major influence was General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, according to Mr. O'Donnell. He writes that the general as early as 1961, warned the President against a military build-up on the Asian mainland.

Mr. O'Donnell was appointments secretary to Mr. Kennedy and stayed on as a special assistant to President Johnson until his resignation in January of 1965. He is now in a four-man race for the Democratic nomination for Governor of Massachusetts. He lost a similar primary contest in 1966.

In his article, based on ma-

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terial from a book he is writing, Mr. O'Donnell also makes these points:

¶ President Kennedy never considered substituting another Democrat for Mr. Johnson on the 1964 ticket, regarding such a move as an admission of earlier error and an invitation to a "mess" over the selection of a successor.

¶ A month after the assassination in November of 1963 of President Kennedy, President Johnson ruled out Robert F. Kennedy as a Vice-Presidential candidate for 1964, but he did not inform the then Attorney General of his decision for seven months.

¶ Robert Kennedy decided in May of 1964 to run for the Senate in New York State, but he delayed the announcement for two months at the request of Humphrey supporters, who wanted to keep President Johnson off balance.

In defending his selection of Mr. Johnson for the Vice-Presidential nomination, John Kennedy reportedly said to Mr. O'Donnell:

"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 in 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 ever 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?"

'Peace With Johnson'

Mr. O'Donnell writes that John Kennedy felt it was essential "to make peace now with Johnson and Rayburn" so that the two Texans would not "ruin me" when the Congressional session resumed after the convention.

Sam Rayburn was then the Speaker and very close to Mr. Johnson.

Without their support in the reconvened Congress, Mr. Kennedy said, according to Mr. O'Donnell, "I'll be the laughing stock of the country. Nixon will say I haven't any power in my own party, and I'll lose the election before Labor Day."

The article says that Mr. Kennedy regarded the maintenance of short-term friendly relations with Senator Johnson on the Congressional level as more significant than his vote-getting value on the ticket.

Mr. O'Donnell quoted Mr. Kennedy as saying that "keeping him friendly until Congress adjourns... is more important to me than Southern votes, which I won't get anyway with the Catholic thing working against me. I doubt if Lyndon will even be able to carry Texas."

The Kennedy-Johnson ticket carried Arkansas, Georgia, Lou-

isiana, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas, losing Florida, Tennessee and Virginia to the Republicans and Alabama and Mississippi to slates of unpledged electors.

Robert Kennedy's View

Mr. O'Donnell calls it "simply not accurate" that Robert Kennedy tried to block the nomination of Mr. Johnson as Vice President. He supported his brother's decision, the article says, exhibiting reservations only when the possibility arose of a floor fight, generated by liberals.

According to Mr. O'Donnell, President Kennedy referred privately to Mr. Johnson after the election as "safely tucked away" in the Vice-Presidency and teased Mr. Johnson by stressing the role of Robert Kennedy in the Administration.

"The President sometimes pointed out with great amusement to Johnson that many of Bobby's friends in the Administration, who were always trying to push him into running the State Department as well as the Justice Department, looked upon his younger brother as the real number one man in the government," Mr. O'Donnell writes.

The article states that President Kennedy was aware of Mr. Johnson's unhappiness as Vice President and "leaned over backwards to keep him involved in important government affairs," giving him the privilege, shared only by Robert Kennedy, of entering his White House office unannounced through the back door from the garden.

President Kennedy, Mr. O'Donnell recalled, "issued a firm order that everyone in the White House was to be courteous and considerate with Johnson and held me personally responsible that the order not be ignored."

Mr. O'Donnell writes that after the assassination, Mr. Johnson "was uncomfortably aware that most of the Kennedy people in official Washington were cool toward him, particularly the Eastern Ivy Leaguers in the Government."

"He was in a hard situation, striving courageously to do his best under unpleasant circumstances," Mr. O'Donnell writes.

When General MacArthur visited President Kennedy in July of 1961, Mr. O'Donnell says, he "implored the President to avoid a U.S. military build-up in Vietnam, or any other part of the Asian mainland, because he felt that the domino theory was ridiculous in a nuclear age."

The general is also reported to have said that there were "domestic problems—the urban crisis, the ghettos, the economy—that should have far more priority than Vietnam."

During the Kennedy Presidency, Senator Mansfield continued to argue for less, rather than more, Vietnam military involvement, first angering the President and then gradually converting him, Mr. O'Donnell says. The conversion was reportedly completed at a White House meeting in the spring of 1963.



Associated Press

Kenneth P. O'Donnell



Associated Press

John F. Kennedy with Lyndon B. Johnson before Mr. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961

Troop Withdrawal Planned

"After Mansfield left the office," Mr. O'Donnell says, "the President told me that he had made up his mind that after his re-election he would take the risk of unpopularity and make a complete withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. 'In 1965 I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser,' Mr. Kennedy reputedly said. 'But I don't care.'"

As President Johnson's election campaign approached in 1964, the article contends, "the simple fact was that Johnson didn't want anybody to be his Vice President. He felt threatened by anyone who had a constituency. That, in Johnson's eyes, would detract from his own victory."

Mr. O'Donnell writes that Bill D. Moyers, then the White House press secretary, reported

to Mr. Johnson that he had sounded out Mr. Shriver for the Vice-Presidential nomination and had found him "agreeable."

At a meeting in April of 1964, the article continues, President Johnson was urged to abandon his preference for a Roman Catholic running mate and settle on Mr. Humphrey. Mr. Johnson then reportedly concluded: "Well, if you guys want Humphrey, you've got him. You can leak it out now if you want to. I won't deny it."

By July, however, Mr. O'Donnell said he had detected an attempt by President Johnson to switch to Senator Mansfield, a Catholic, based on a newspaper column by William S. White, a Texan and a friend who regularly echoed the President's positions. Mr. O'Donnell called the column "a

clear signal to me that Johnson was still determined to ditch Humphrey as his running mate."

On the Friday before the convention, according to the article, the President told Mr. O'Donnell: "I've been looking at some new polls. I've decided on Mike Mansfield."

Visit to the White House

Sometime between then and the convention, Senator Mansfield went to the White House and told Mr. Johnson: "Mr. President, I saw Mr. White's article about me and I want you to know that under no circumstances will I ever accept the nomination as Vice President."

In confirming the account, Senator Mansfield recalled in an interview that the report of his selection by Mr. Johnson had also appeared in The Washington Daily News. He em-

phasized that the President had never offered him the nomination but that he had stepped in "in case he was thinking about it."

Generally, the men involved confirmed most of the incidents in the article over the weekend. Senator Mansfield supported President Kennedy's determination to withdraw the troops from Vietnam. Former Senator George Smathers of Florida, whom President Kennedy reportedly told that he would not replace Vice President Johnson, said this was "substantially correct."

Mr. Shriver, while denying he had ever had an official inquiry from Mr. Johnson, said he had told Mr. Moyers he would accept the Vice-Presidential nomination.

Efforts to reach Mr. Johnson for comment were unsuccessful.