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Byrne, John E. "Jeb" oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with John E. “Jeb” Byrne by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Byrne, John E. “Jeb”

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

December 5, 2000

Place

Alexandria, Virginia

ID Number

MOH 253

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Biographical Note

John E. “Jeb” Byrne was born January 15, 1925 in New York City. He went to public schools in Larchmont, New York, attended Iona Prep School, and then served in World War II for two years. Byrne graduated in 1949 from Marquette University College of Journalism on the GI Bill. Both of his parents were Democrats and politically active. Byrne became the Editor of *Iona News*, which he did for two years, then started a daily Catholic newspaper in Kansas City, Missouri in 1950 called the *Sun Herald*. He also worked for UPI. Byrne moved to Maine in 1951 to run a one-man UPI bureau. He was Governor Clint Clauson’s press secretary in 1958.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1955-1956 Muskie’s first term as governor; 1956 Maine gubernatorial campaign; 1957-1958 Muskie’s 2nd term as governor; 1960 John F. Kennedy-Lyndon B. Johnson presidential campaign; Republican Party in Maine; Democratic Party in Maine; Maine Legislature (early 1950s); media (UPI, AP, Portland Press Herald, Bangor Daily News); liquor scandal-Governor Payne; Westchester County politics in 1930s and 1940s; discussion of Muskie’s 1954 gubernatorial race and the use of television; and Governor Clauson’s endorsement of JFK in 1959.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is the 5th day of December, the year 2000. We are in Hollin Hills, Alexandria, Virginia, and we are interviewing Jeb Byrne for the Muskie Oral History Project. The interviewer is Don Nicoll. Would you give us your full name, Jeb, and spell it?

Jeb Byrne: My name is John E. Byrne, B-Y-R-N-E. I'm known as, always have been known as Jeb Byrne, J-E-B, a nickname. And I was born in New York City on January 15th, 1925.

DN: Where did you grow up, Jeb?

JB: I grew up in Larchmont, New York, a suburb in Westchester County. My father was a, managed part of a stock brokerage firm in New York City, and I went to public schools in Larchmont, and to Iona Prep in New Rochelle. And then I went away to the war for two years, mostly in training, or it was all in training I should say, and after the war I went to Marquette University College of Journalism on the G.I. Bill and graduated from there in 1949.

DN: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

JB: I had two brothers. My oldest brother Harry is a Roman Catholic priest who's just celebrated his fifty-fifth anniversary of his ordination, and my brother Bill, who's an engineer, who still lives in Larchmont, and a younger sister Mary, who lives in White Plains, New York. My parents, of course, are dead.

DN: Did your mother work outside the home, or did she spend her time taking care of the family?

JB: She took care of the family; it was a very traditional home. My father was the breadwinner, and she was the homemaker.

DN: Were your interests in journalism stimulated at home, or in school or elsewhere?

JB: I guess it really started out in school where I was editor of the Iona News for two years, and I was interested in journalism right from the beginning.

DN: And was your home a location where there was lots of political discussion and debate, or

did that not play a role?

JB: Yes, you got to think back to Westchester County in the 1930s and '40s, it was the hotbed of Republicanism and my father was still a Democrat. And I remember one time when he was campaign manager for one of the supervisors, and after the election he came back and the both of them were congratulating themselves, because they only lost seven to one. So there was a lot of talk about politics in our family.

DN: And your father and mother were both Democrats I take it.

JB: They were both Democrats, they both had been raised in New York City. My grandfather on my father's side was a captain of police in New York City, and had fought in the Civil War as a matter of fact. He was in the Navy, Union Navy, in the Civil War, Patrick Byrne, later became the captain of police in New York. And my father, as I say, went on to become a stock broker and then we moved out to Larchmont.

DN: What was your maternal grandfather's occupation?

JB: He was a manufacturer of, I think it was hairbrushes in Brooklyn. And I happen to know more about Patrick Byrne because there's more records of him in the National Archives which I've looked up, mainly through his Civil War service.

DN: And you went off to Marquette and got your degree in journalism, and then where?

JB: As I was in graduate school at Marquette, I stayed for, in the master's program, I got a job working for United Press at night in Milwaukee, in the Milwaukee *Journal* building, and I was a night man for the United Press while I was still going to graduate school. As a matter of fact, the pressures became too heavy. I was working for United Press, I was teaching as a teaching assistant in the College of Journalism, and I was supposedly also earning a master's degree, and so I just gave it all up for the United Press job finally.

DN: And did you stay in Milwaukee?

JB: Well, then I resigned from United Press, this is a part of the history that probably even a lot of my friends don't know about. A bunch of us, we decided to start a Catholic newspaper daily in Kansas City, Missouri called the *Sun Herald*, and we were very eager and somewhat zealots, but we were very strong that this would be a good influence upon the American press. So we started this newspaper in Kansas City in 1950, in October, 1950. I was a later starter; my wife was involved in it first, which had something to do with bringing me into it, too.

DN: Now, your wife's name is Bev, and where did you meet her?

JB: Beverly, Beverly Byrne. I met her at Marquette. She was a fellow student in the College of Journalism. And she left to go back to Kansas City and that's where the newspaper group got together.

DN: Was she a native of Kansas City?

JB: She was a native of Kansas City.

DN: What was her maiden name, by the way?

JB: Beverly Ann McKinley. And, as I say, that newspaper, I went down there as city editor. And we had no financing and we had no advertising, we just had a lot of energy and desires. We lasted for seven months before we went belly up. And that's only the second attempt as far as I know in the history of the United States where a Catholic newspaper was started, a daily.

DN: You indicated that you felt that the daily press needed this alternative. What was it that you thought particularly that a Catholic daily would bring to the public?

JB: We thought too much of the media was concerned with economic men and that some of the spiritual values were being ignored, and we tried to incorporate that into our report. The only trouble was, we didn't have a lot of (*unintelligible word*) on correspondents, and we depended upon the wire services. We had United Press, for a lot of the basic information. And as my wife Beverly so succinctly put it at one point, you can't publish a Catholic newspaper at the copy desk level.

DN: Now, I take it from your experience in trying to set up the Catholic paper that your family must have instilled in you pretty strong feelings about the Church and about the teachings of the Church and the meaning of society.

JB: Absolutely, both my mother and father were very strong religious people. And I think it's, my oldest brother, as I say, went into the priesthood and, well, not on the same level but my interest in going into starting a newspaper, a venture like that would be part of it, stemmed from the same sort of background. We were also living in voluntary poverty at this newspaper, you just drew money from what you needed to live and that was part of the mystique.

DN: So when the mystique didn't last and you had to throw in the towel as it were, where did you and Bev go?

JB: I went rushing back to the United Press. We got married about halfway through the newspaper's seven months existence, and I went back to United Press, and I went into the eastern division and went to Albany, New York, helping cover the capitol up there for United Press. But the fellow who was head of the whole division said there was an opening in Maine. They were transferring the present guy out, and so I decided to accept the offer that he put to go up there and run a one-man bureau for the state of Maine. That was October of 1951.

DN: And the bureau was located where?

JB: It was on Congress Street, Congress Square, right, the Congress Building I think it was.

DN: In Portland.

JB: In Portland, yeah. And I was covering this pl-, whole state with a lot of stringers located throughout the state. We were different from the Associated Press which could use the reports of all the newspapers which were members of it, but the United Press of course was a sole, it did not have that connection and so you had to scramble for the news. It was an interesting competitive situation since AP had seven staffers up there and I was alone, so I kept busy. Had the telephone into the house as well as the office, and Bev helped out now and again taking calls from some of our stringers.

DN: How many stringers did you have?

JB: I only had really, regular stringers, about a handful of regular stringers. And on special occasions I had, pick them up for special occasions and other things. I like to tell the story about before the telephone went to dial, I found great resources talking to telephone operators around Maine. Used to call up, I remember calling up Skowhegan, for instance, and asked to speak to Sheriff Gallant and the operator says, "Well wait a minute now, I'll see if I can locate him. I think he went to the barber shop. I'll try the barber shop. No, he's not there, well I'll try the drug store. No, he's not there. Well, what do you want to know?" And then I told her and she provided some information and eventually I got to talk to the sheriff. But it was wonderful to talk to these people. When it went to dials, everything went out the window on that.

DN: You wished sometimes you were back in the old days.

JB: Right.

DN: Now, were any of the stringers that you had later colleagues in your work?

JB: No, I don't, well let's see, Tom Nute, Floyd C. Nute who was a, he was a United Press stringer for Augusta covering the capitol when I first went up there. And of course we know that later he became press secretary of Governor Muskie. But he was a colleague and close friend. He and his wife Alice have remained, he's dead of course, but his wife Alice has remained a close friend to this day. But, of course I knew all the members of the press gang up there and associated with them, but no long-term. Well, I did have a long-term friendship for instance with Leonard Cohen who worked for the Gannett newspapers, who just died a year ago, and we remained close friends for many years.

DN: Now, as you look back on that period, you worked out of Portland. Did Floyd or Tom Nute cover all of the state house business for you, or did you go to Augusta as well?

JB: I only went to Augusta on special occasions; for instance, the liquor scandal with Herman Sahagian and Governor Payne. I went up there for a couple of things on that. But with a one man bureau you were, it was necessary that you stay there and send out newscasts every half hour, so there wasn't much time where you could go out and do leg work, I mean you had to depend upon other people to do that. And it was a bit of a mess when you had to leave the office because the radio stations, which were the principal users of the United Press, you know, had to have their newscasts. So they had, and you know, I didn't even have a puncher; I had to put all

the stuff on myself at sixty words a minute. As a matter of fact, I not only typed it at sixty words a minute with about three fingers, but I had to write it as I was going along. It was a hectic time, though, I'll tell you.

DN: Did you find the discipline for typewriting?

JB: Absolutely. Working for a press association is good background to learn how to type when you're writing.

DN: Now, when did you move the, you moved your bureau ultimately to Augusta, didn't you?

JB: Well we decided, there was pressure from, particularly from the radio stations, that we have more reports from Augusta that was possible for us through a stringer arrangement. So we opened a second bureau up in Augusta. I think that was about 1956. And they sent Bill Howard up from Boston to take care of that bureau, and so there was two of us there, he in Augusta and me in Portland, for about a year I'd say. And then he was moved out to another job in United Press and it became obvious that the focal point was becoming more Augusta than Portland. United Press liked to stay in the same town where the principal newspaper was, which was the *Portland Press Herald*, but in this case it was thought that it would be better to have the principal bureau in Augusta. So in 1956 I moved up to Augusta and I was Maine state editor which meant that I had actually one subordinate, the guy who was running the Portland bureau.

DN: And at that time you really got exposed to the politicians in Augusta.

JB: Well that's right and, actually I should step back a little bit to say about Portland, 1954. That's when I first became acquainted with Ed Muskie, and 1954 was his first election and I did some coverage, or did a lot of coverage of his campaign, which was a very interesting campaign, because in some ways it was really the first instance, at least that I know about, where television played a large part. He came across very articulate and with his progressive program as compared to his incumbent opponent, Burt Cross, who came across as sort of self-satisfied and arrogant. I think in one instance when it was obvious that the Washington county and far Down East Maine was in real economic trouble, he sort of kissed it off and I think that hurt him very much. But Muskie came across as a very attractive figure on television and I played a little role in interviewing him. WCSH was not the Gannett newspaper, it was the other major Portland news gathering organization, they used me several times as their interlocutor to, or interviewer, of Muskie.

DN: Oh, this was for on-air broadcasts?

JB: For their broadcasts, yeah. And that may be in, I don't know what kind of files WCSH has of 1954, if any, but that might be worth looking into.

DN: Now, I'd like to drop back to one other story that you mentioned. You referred to the Herman Sahagian - Governor Payne liquor scandals and the fact that you went to several of those events. Did you go to the hearings in Augusta on that scandal?

JB: I went to the hearings and had to telephone my reports into Boston so they had to cover me for putting out local news. But the reason they wanted me in Augusta at that particular time was this liquor scandal was of interest beyond Maine. There was really a lot of interest in Massachusetts and other New England states, and a lot of the Boston newspapers were really zeroing in on that scandal.

DN: Do you remember some of the participants in the proceedings in Augusta?

JB: I hadn't thought about it until just this moment, but I remember Freddy Papalos, and Fred Payne was dealing with some risky people up there at that particular time.

DN: Do you remember Governor Payne's lawyer who had the case?

JB: Yes, it was Frank Coffin. That was the first time I met Frank Coffin, and I remember seeing him and hearing him talk and seeing him make his presentations and being very much impressed by him. And I remember at that particular point he didn't care much about shining his shoes. For some reason or other that sticks in the mind. He was all intellect and legal knowledge and not worried about some of the niceties.

DN: Now, in 1954 you've talked about Ed Muskie, the candidate for governor, and the fact that you interviewed him for some of the television programs on WCSH. Did you have any other observations of him and his style of campaigning in that year?

JB: Well, I thought he came across with great warmth and enthusiasm, and in comparison with the incumbent governor, who was a nice enough man, was striking. I think the warmth of his approach really struck home and got a lot of people in a very strongly Republican state to think again.

DN: What about some of the other candidates in that campaign? Jim Oliver, who was running for congress, Tom Delahanty running in the second district, Paul Fullam running for U.S. Senate, and the candidate in the third district whose name is skipping me at the moment.

JB: Robert?

DN: No, that was the, Ken Colbath.

JB: Colbath, oh yes, yes. Yeah, I particularly remember Paul Fullam who was a professor from Colby. A very earnest and, obviously didn't have much of a chance against Margaret Chase Smith but worked very hard at trying to get across his message. It was, I thought he was sort of offering himself up as a sacrificial lamb at that particular point, but he did a good earnest job. Jim Oliver, of course, had been a former Republican and he was, for some reason or other he reminded me of Jim Farley, he just had that, he had that look about him, and Jim was a pragmatist I think. I remember him well. Colbath I don't remember very well, I just remember the name and think I, he did not make a big impression upon me. And who else was -?

DN: Tom Delahanty in the second district.

JB: Oh, Tom Delahanty, later judge, very impressive man. But he, let's see, he didn't make it that time. Was Nelson -?

DN: Charlie Nelson was the congressman at the time. And Charlie decided to retire in 1956, when Frank Coffin ran.

JB: When Frank Coffin ran.

DN: Frank was the state chairman in 1954. Did you get much exposure to him in the course of that campaign?

JB: Yes, he was always very helpful in putting the campaign message across, and he was always willing to talk. I was very much impressed with Frank Coffin. I, somewhere I have written that the people responsible as far as I could see for the tremendous Democratic resurgence in Maine were Ed Muskie, Frank Coffin, and if you'll excuse the reference, Don Nicoll. I thought that was a sort of triumvirate of people who were really pushing the new look to Maine politics.

DN: What, could you characterize the new look as you saw it as a reporter?

JB: Well, I think that it was a more, in some ways a populist look, it was talking about the problems of ordinary people that had been sort of swept under the rug. They had strong ideas about legislative service, about cleaning up the state and taking it away from the control of the railroads and the paper companies, which had such a strong influence upon the legislature.

DN: So you went to Augusta in '55 during the first year of Governor Muskie's first term. What was the, or was it '56?

JB: Fifty-six.

DN: Fifty-six, you were still in Portland in '55. During those years of his initial governorship, what were your observations, and do you recall any incidents around his relationship with both the governor's council, or executive council, and the legislature?

JB: Just to keep the chronology going, I'd like to just step back a minute. I was just thinking of election night. One thing that the United Press could do, and I used to organize the elections up there, was we could give sort of rapid fire returns because the AP was waiting for the newspapers to check in, the local newspapers around with their accounts, while we had individual people doing counties and regions. And I remember talking to Ed Muskie when it became clear from the United Press count that he was elected, and there was a delightful party going up in Waterville at that particular time and they finally got him to the telephone and I interviewed him. I can't remember many of the things that he said or that I asked him, but I do remember asking him if he was a Truman Democrat, which was one of the things being bandied about at the time, and he allowed that he was a Democrat, he didn't need any extra things on it. Not being that he was against Truman or anything else, but he was a Democrat and that was that.

But really, the conflict between the governor and the executive council, I thought, surfaced more in my mind when I got up to Augusta and began to attend the meetings at which the governor and the council met. And that's when I got a better feel for the deep seated animosity between the two. It was not, it was the system sort of, because the legislature appointed the executive council so that meant the executive council were all Republicans, and here you had a Democratic governor. And he was very persuasive, and that was appreciated by such Republican observers as Bob Haskell of Bangor. He always thought that Ed Muskie was very smart and persuasive. But there were a lot of party line things going on that the executive council blocked them.

One instance that comes to mind was the building of the executive office building there, and the governor and council sort of had to act as the manager of that building and there was a lot of squabbles going back and forth about this thing and about that thing. And one time after one squabble going on, I approached Arthur Ely who was a sort of a 'American Gothic' type from I forget where in Maine, but sort of stringent and dry-faced and predictable. And I asked him about the conflict between the governor and the council on the executive office building. I can't remember what the particular problem was, but Arthur was going down the elevator and just before it disappeared from sight, when I said, "What's the problem with the governor?" And Arthur said, "Lust for power," and then the elevator went down. I included that in about the eighth paragraph down, but I think Peter Damborg picked it up and made it a headline.

There was a lot of talk then about this vigorous opposition between the two parties, but there was an opposition just because of that system. The legislature hiring the executive council was a drag on the administration of the governor. He had a hard time pushing some things through that needed executive council approval, including appointments to office.

DN: In general, what was your sense about Governor Muskie's working style in dealing with the legislature and with the executive council?

JB: This is a long time ago, but I found that he tried to be, understand that he was operating in a certain situation where he had to be persuasive, and I think that he did that very well, that he managed to get things out of the political arena and into the reasonable arena. And I think he did very well at that.

DN: Let's talk about some of the characters that you met in Augusta, particularly members of the press. Give us a sense of what kind of journalists were covering the State House at the time.

JB: Okay, Bob Crocker was the long-time Associated Press correspondent, and although we were opponents, we turned out to be very close friends. I had a high respect for Bob. He tried to cover all the bases. He covered the bills and the hearings and he did a very, very good job. He was a tall, lanky sort of fellow, later became head of the Augusta Masonic Order, an appointment which I attended when he was installed incidentally. He was a good man. He died fairly young from cancer. He was a very strong American Newspaper Guild member, and later left Maine and became secretary or treasurer of the American Newspaper Guild here in Washington where he died. So he was the principal AP fellow up there. They brought extra people up during the legislative session.

Then there was Peter Damborg who was a political correspondent for the *Kennebec Journal* and the *Portland Press Herald* and the *Sunday Telegram, Portland Sunday Telegram*. Peter was a little more flamboyant and he knew a lot of people. He was a sort of a bon vivant, that type a little bit, and he did, he wrote sprightly prose. Not also always very deeply discerning, but very sprightly and readable.

His, they sent another fellow up from Portland, Leonard J. Cohen who was, he used to cover the city hall in Portland, a Bowdoin graduate. Leonard was very earnest and a very good reporter, and he wrote probably some of the best journalism that came out of the state as far I'm concerned. Leonard just died last year after being with the Providence newspapers for a long time. And he was a very excellent reporter, very slow spoken, but did such good work.

Doc Arnold was the Bangor, from *Bangor Daily News*. Bangor -

DN: *Daily News*, yeah.

JB: *Bangor Daily News* political correspondent, who did spend a heck of a lot of time in Augusta, but was very knowledgeable. And I think he had sort of a hard time with the people who were running the *Bangor Daily News* who were a little bit more political oriented or wanted to push things a little harder than he did. He was older than the rest of us and he had sort of a hard time with his own organization. And, let's see, who else was, and of course before he became governor's press secretary, Floyd T. Nute, known by some as Floyd, by others as Tom -

DN: And some as both.

JB: And some as both. He was a, he did a good solid job as a stringer for United Press up there, and he was a good friend.

DN: What sort of a person was Floyd?

JB: Floyd had a very good (*taping blip*) . . . Floyd, or Tom had a very acerbic way of looking at things sometimes and very colorful language about describing things that were going on, particularly to his friends and associates. Since he was working as a stringer a lot of his, that didn't come through to the general public except in some cases when he was quoted directly, because he was just furnishing information to news organizations. But he had a very keen sense of what was going on in Augusta and he knew shams and scams when he saw them, and was not afraid to talk about them.

DN: There were two reporters from Lewiston regularly in those days, Ed Penley and Lionel Lemieux.

JB: Penley of course was mostly, did mostly editorial for the editorial page as I recall. And he was a thoughtful and, a thoughtful and could be convinced by reason. I thought he was a fairly reasonable man is my recollection. Lemieux, I have so weak memory of Lal, he I really hadn't thought about him for many years. But he was a lively fellow, and I can't remember

enough about him to characterize him.

I do remember Ed Schlick, and Ed was a good reporter. He covered a lot of things there. He later became the executive secretary of the Democratic Party as I recall correctly, but he was a good, solid reporter working for the Lewiston newspapers. They were the major players in the press corps as far as I can recollect. Other people drifted in and out, and there was, some of the people from WCHS would come in from Portland and cover some stories. But it was very, really a tight knit press gang up there and who got along very well.

One of the things about journalism there was, when there was developments, you know, you had the AP there, you had the UP there, you had the Guy Gannett newspapers and the Lewiston papers, and maybe the *Bangor Daily News*, but you know that was it. It isn't like the mass scenes we see so much in journalism today where the amount of journalists outnumber the participants in a news event. And people waited for your, for the news from the established organizations like the wire services and the big newspapers. This had some advantage because it wasn't that the news media was dominating events. They were reporting events and they were there in that sense. Some of the things were fairly casual. I mean, there was a sort of a bonhomie, maybe that isn't the right word. There was sort of a good relationship between officials and the press. There wasn't much nastiness going on and it was informal. I remember when Bob Crocker and I used to cover the executive council meetings, sometimes people would ask us questions.

DN: What sorts of questions would they ask you?

JB: Well, mostly in a joking way. I remember when a fellow from Bath chamber of commerce was trying to get some money for the, some heritage day they were having down there, and they were talking about sending the shallop, which was the original, one of the pilgrims' boats, rebuilding it and sending it up to Augusta. And I think Bob Crocker and I offered that it would be a good idea if they filled it up with potatoes and called it shallop potatoes. I mean, it was joking things like that mainly on the thing. They weren't asking us for substantive deals. But there was this good feeling of friendliness that existed between the press and the officials we were covering.

Ed Muskie was always ready to answer questions. I remember particularly having a special interview with him on capital punishment in Maine. Unfortunately, I lost all my Maine stories when I moved to Washington. Somewhere along the line I lost all the things so I don't have a copy of it, but I remember the story. I was always interested in the fact that Maine had abandoned capital punishment back in the last century and trying to get his views on it. And it's my recollection that the governor said that he was very comfortable with the opposition to capital punishment, that in Maine it seemed to work. It's also my recollection that at some time in Maine history they had executed the wrong person, and so that was one of the reasons for their opposition to capital punishment.

But Ed was very good at press conferences. There was one case that raised some eyebrows. Shortly after he was, became governor I think, there was some hate mail from somebody signing, calling themselves "German Ike", threatening to kill him. I don't know whether it was religious

or what kind of reasons, and they had to put a state trooper outside the executive office building, outside of the executive suite, the governor's suite. And the governor wanted the press not to mention this at all. And to my recollection we went along with him. I don't think that would happen today.

DN: The, you've mentioned the relationships with people in the executive council, with the governor, did you have a similar informal relationship with legislators, and also what about department heads?

JB: I don't think it was quite as good. I think there was a little more wariness upon the part of department heads, not wanting to be caught in any crossfires. But that seems to be a bureaucratic mode everywhere you go in Washington as well as other places. Some legislators were very forthcoming, others No, I think we had a better relationship with the governors and his people than we did have with the legislature. I think they were a little suspicious of us. We were possibly a little bit more liberal than they would like to confide in.

DN: Was that true of Bob Haskell, the president of the Senate?

JB: Bob Haskell was a very interesting character, a big, burly fellow, very strong, very strong willed. He used to wield the mallet there and he would break them on a regular basis as he gaveled things through. And he had a, at least to me, and we discussed it back and forth, he had a very high respect for Ed Muskie. I remember he talked to me sometimes about how he thought some of the Republican reluctance to embrace a lot of his programs was very shortsighted and was unreasonable. But he was a very interesting character. He became governor of the state, you know, for one day. That was between Ed Muskie's resignation and Clinton Clauson's ascendancy. He had a party in the Blaine House.

DN: Were there any events between 1956 and 1958, the campaign of '58, that stand out for you as significant or revealing events of that period?

JB: Fifty-six to '58, seems to me that that was a period, and I'm not really clear, everything's in a bit of a haze back that far, but it seemed to me that that was the first anti-pollution legislation was passed. Some of us were a little leery about it, as, looking on it as putting Roman numerals on sewers. But it was a start, and that I do recall. I also recall, oh, the Department of Economic Development. I don't think that was the original name for it.

DN: It started out as the Maine Development Commission, and then the first name was the Department of Development of Industry and Commerce, if I remember correctly.

JB: Right, but it ended up as the Department of Economic Development I think. I think this was, Brogey, Carl Brogey, was the first, he was from Sanford I believe and had played a large role in the revitalization of Sanford after the big plant moved out. I think this was a big plus for Ed Muskie that somebody was really taking, making an effort to restore economic viability to a state in which there had been severe blows through the departure of industry. And it seems to me that that was a large focal point of his administration, his first and second administrations.

DN: Do you remember some of the details of that struggle to get the new department and the role that Bob Haskell played, and Jim Reid who was then majority leader in the senate?

JB: No, I must confess that it's, I'm a little slight on that. But Haskell and Reid both were helpful in getting it through, I do remember that. I don't remember any of the particulars of the thing. One thing I'd like to say on the side is, about Ed Muskie, there was always a problem about how to deal with the problem of the poverty of the Indians, the Penobscots and the Passamaquoddys, and I used to sort of confront Ed -

End of Side A
Side B

DN: This is the second side of the initial tape for the interview with Jeb Byrne on the 5th of December, the year 2000. Jeb, you were just starting to tell about Senator Muskie and the needs of the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians.

JB: Yes, everybody was sort of concerned about the dire straits of poverty and despair in the reservations, and I remember being particularly obnoxious about it at one Christmas party when I was talking to the governor. And it was a really difficult problem to change patterns of the generations. And he said, "Have you got a piece of paper?" And I said, "Yes," and I handed him a piece of paper. And he wrote on it, "I hereby authorize Jeb Byrne to solve the Maine Indian problem." I had that for many years and can't find it any more. But Ed could be a little sharp-tongued on occasion, justifiably so I might say.

DN: What, in 1958 Governor Muskie ran for the Senate, and after a primary battle, Clinton Clauson of Waterville was running for governor. That was quite a campaign.

JB: Well, that's right. And Clinton Clauson was not the favorite of the new Democrats of Maine.

DN: Why not?

JB: Well, he was sort of old school stuff and looked upon as sort of bumbling and, I don't know whether you'd call it reactionary or what. He'd been collector of Internal Revenue for Maine for about twenty years and he'd, when they reorganized the Internal Revenue Service he was not deemed qualified to be a candidate, which hurt him very much. He was a chiropractor, and he was in many ways a very nice man, but he was not looked upon as on the leading edge of the Democratic Party by any chance. And he was particularly angry at the, some people in the new Democratic party who talked about him being a monster for the party. I think he always thought Dick McMahon had said something along those lines, but he was elected and I think he tried to do what was right according to his knowledge, which wasn't tremendously deep, about Maine state problems. But he took on the responsibilities of the governorship.

And I believe that, I believe that I was present when a conversation between him and Governor Muskie in which the governor said, "Well, you know, we moved," Governor Muskie said, "We had moved so, pretty far fetched ahead in the last four years, maybe this was a time for sort of

retrenchment and consolidation rather than a lot of innovation,” at that particular time. And I think that was what Governor Clauson decided upon and was trying to do, was trying to solidify things that had been developed by Muskie.

DN: Now, you had a chance to observe that fairly closely, didn't you?

JB: Yes, as a matter of fact, I guess that's the only inaugural address I ever wrote. Clinton Clauson was not a very great speaker. He tended to meander and so forth, and I remember there was a lot of problems with getting him focused on getting his inaugural address together. And Maury Williams, who had served in a similar capacity as assistant to the governor under Muskie, was now with Clinton Clauson and he was responsible for a lot of the financial arrangements made in the inaugural address about how money should be spent and so forth, and I put the words on it. I remember I got sort of lost in the metaphor of the maritime references and some of the guys in the press corps chided me for being a little overboard on that.

DN: Now, had you left the press corps at this point and gone to work for the governor?

JB: Oh, yeah, I guess I skipped that part in '58. Actually you probably recall that in '54 when Governor Muskie had become the governor-elect, I was under consideration to be press secretary at that time and was willing to go and I, as a matter of fact I think you and Frank Coffin had expressed some interest in that approach. But I think that Ed Muskie decided he'd better pick a Maine man and somebody who was not an outlander like I was. And he decided upon Floyd T. Nute, who was my stringer, to be press secretary.

But by this time I was getting a little tired, I think, of wire service work, and doing this sort of round-the-clock business and using the same things over and over again. And I was interested in the Democratic Party's initiatives in Maine and the whole flavor of their administration, so I had offered myself for Muskie as press secretary and that didn't work out. So when Clinton Clauson came along I was asked if I was interested and I said, "Yes," and I therefore signed on with him in '58 and became his press secretary.

DN: Now, you mentioned earlier that some of the new Democrats didn't think much of Clinton Clauson, and you've also indicated some enthusiasm for what the new Democrats had been doing. I take it that the fact that he didn't fit the mold didn't bother you.

JB: Well, no, because I thought that the Democrats were in charge. They still held on to the governor's mansion and, you know, they were going to have to, you know, work with their newly elected leader and that he probably needed some help. And I suppose like everybody else I had some ambitions for myself, but I think I was also interested in helping the Democratic Party through this period.

DN: What was it like going to work for Governor Clauson?

JB: Very easy, we had a real 'old shoe' arrangement. He was very, I think he recognized his own limitations, and he was very strongly dependent upon Maury Williams for dealing with the machinery of government and, or proposing a lot of things. And he was very thankful for what I

could contribute, words and helping him get his message across to the public. So he was a very easy fellow to work with.

DN: How did policy develop under Governor Clauson?

JB: Well, that's a good question. He probably was deeper than a lot of people realized, and he took a lot of advice from a lot of old friends. I remember being in the governor's office when the two guys who ran the labor unions came in. Denis Blais, the AF of L, no, CIO, and Ben -

DN: Dorsky.

JB: Ben Dorsky the AF of L guy. I guess that was before they had come together, or was it?

DN: I think they did not merge until the next decade, in the sixties.

JB: Well, the conversation in the governor's office about whether there should be a state income tax or a sales tax, and as I recall Ben Dorsky and Denis Blais said, "You know, we don't care what you have as long as you let us write their exemptions," but I guess it was sort of a joking matter that way. But Clinton Clauson talked to a lot of people to help him make up his mind, and he had a lot of conservative friends who he had met through the Internal Revenue Service. Somebody said in the Internal Revenue Service, when he was collector, that when somebody came in with a problem he, Clinton Clauson, would be on that guy's side and they would argue with the professional staff. He was, if I think back on it, a fairly conservative man, probably more conservative than the rest of the Democratic Party that was emerging.

DN: What was his appeal to the Democrats and then to the public in large?

JB: Well, let's see. At that time the Republican candidate for governor was Horace Hildredth who had a very distinguished career in many ways as an ambassador, a college president, a governor, former governor. And he was sort of the old school thing coming back to Maine. And I think, a lot of people who had been entranced by the advances made under the Muskie administration were very reluctant to go back to what seemed a return to the old school Maine Republican dominance. And I think that had a lot to do with the election of Clinton Clauson, that there was this idea, 'let's not go back, let's not turn the clock back, let's keep moving ahead'. Maybe that had more to do than the personal attraction of Clinton Clauson himself. He was looked at as sort of a populace thing, who was kind of an old shoe common place people rather than the aristocratic level of Horace Hildredth.

DN: And through that year, how did the relationship between the governor, the executive council and the legislature progress? It was still Republican.

JB: Well, since there were not a lot of great innovations going on, we were only in there for a year. He was elected to the first four-year term as the constitution had been changed. The Democrats, I think there'd been something like eighteen bills passed to change the election date and to change the term of governor, with the Democrats favoring, pushing most of those bills, and all of a sudden they were sort of hoisted on their own petard, for reasons I'll get into later,

but he was elected to the first four-year term so we really only had a year in office.

And since there were not a lot of innovations going on, the camaraderie of the council and the governor was a little bit better. Except when it came to things like appointments. I mean, the Republicans were determined to hold on to their appointments, what they looked upon as their, not advise and consent, but their appointment power, and that was a matter of discord between the governor and the council. I have in my notes here that I had sent out telegrams to the executive council, to be present in Augusta on November 30th, for a meeting at which there would be various people, appointments put up for confirmation. And of course the governor died early in the morning of November 30th so the meeting was cancelled.

Among the appointments we made was Adam Walsh, the famous football player on Notre Dame, and later coach of Bowdoin College football team, to be commissioner of fish and game. And there were others, that just don't come to mind right at hand. But of course with the death of the governor all those appointments just went out the window because the appointments were to be made by Governor Reed who was a Republican and the former, who was then the president of the senate, and through Maine constitution was sent into the governorship. But they were, there was a friendliness between the council and the governor, but on the matter of appointments, that may have been a day when warfare would have broken out over those appointments. And it didn't happen because of the governor's death.

DN: And, so were there any major political developments during that year of '59, during Governor Clauson's term? Not just at the state level, but looking toward 1960?

JB: Yeah, 1959 political developments, the big thing was looking forward to the 1960 election. We didn't have to worry about the governorship then at that time, but we had to worry about the presidency and the Senate seat held by Margaret Chase Smith which was coming due. And John F. Kennedy came to the issues, the Democratic issues conference in Augusta on November 15th, 1959. And he also was, well he was there really to seek support for his bid for the presidency. And I remember he flew into the Augusta airport with his hair blowing in the wind, coming off there, it was cold as could be, and the welcoming party, including the governor, had taken shelter from the thing. So I went out and greeted JFK and some of the news guys were there and I said, "Why don't we all go back to the mansion, the Blaine Mansion?" And JFK said, "Fine." And he said to me, "Why don't you get together with Pierre Salinger on the ride back and exchange notes."

And so JFK got in the limousine with the governor and they went back to the Blaine House, and Pierre and I rode down to the Blaine House in my car, and Pierre was asking me all sorts of questions about the situation in Maine, how it looked for support for JFK. And then he showed me the address that JFK was about to deliver at the Calumet Club at the issues conference, and it was strong on Passamaquoddy and he said, you know, "What do you think of that?" I was kind of blasé about that, I said, "Well, you know, that's an old political thing here, it gets banged around all the time and it's never getting built but, you know, it's all right," on the thing.

So when we got to the Blaine House we went to, Governor Muskie was there, too, and there was in that party from, the JFK party, there was Abe Ribicoff, the governor of Connecticut and

Bernie Boutin who was running for governor in New Hampshire, and I think it was Fred Fayette who was running in Vermont, I believe he was probably running for governor. And who else was involved in it? John Bailey, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee. And first thing was a press conference, Ed Penley and I believe Damborg, all the regulars were there in the sun room at the Blaine House. And I remember it was very striking that day with the sun streaming into this room, sort of highlighting JFK as he sat there wearing a vest. And somebody said, one of the newsmen said it looked like he was trying to appear a little maturer than he is, he's only forty-two.

But he spoke, he answered questions very knowledgeably and they all began to look at each other and they thought he was doing a great job. And later on I talked to the press, who of course I knew intimately, and they were all impressed by Kennedy. They thought he was doing a, that he was an excellent candidate. And I talked to the governor, or rather I talked to Kennedy and I talked to Pierre Salinger and both of them were particularly pleased because the Maine press had gone into many of the issues facing the new president, and as Pierre said to me, "They finally got off their religious kick." He said, "Some places in the country we go and they talk nothing but, the press talks nothing other than the religious issue and we never get in to say anything else."

But after the issues conference, we had a reception at the Blaine House and the hard politicking went on in the back room where people in the JFK group were trying very hard to get an endorsement from the Maine delegation, congressional delegation and from the governor. And frankly, I think Governor Clauson was more inclined to give that endorsement pretty fast. I think he was slowed down a little bit by the feeling from the more seasoned politicians from Washington, you know, let's not be precipitous here, we have to move a little more carefully than that. And Kennedy, who was a little angered I would say, by what they saw as foot dragging, but I think that

Well one thing, it was my impression that Governor Muskie, he had what, he had other members of the Senate who were running for presidency. Stuart Symington who came to Maine, Hubert Humphrey who had come to Maine, and Lyndon Johnson who didn't come to Maine. I think he wanted to, you know, he had certain respect to show to these candidacies of the other senators who were friends of his, too. I think right from the beginning they were all pretty sure that they were going to endorse JFK, but they didn't want to be rushed to judgment and seem precipitous on it.

And so later on the Washington group, I don't know exactly who did it, but somebody put together a statement of endorsement of JFK pointing out that this was an endorsement of the signers which was the members of the Maine congressional delegation and the governor, but said that they were not trying to speak for the Democratic party as a whole. It was their endorsement and they thought that this candidate they had was much more than a regional candidate, he was very important for the country. And of course that was to be released as Kennedy formally announced his candidacy.

Well, just before it was to be released the governor died, and so I was contacted from the Washington office of either Senator Muskie or Congressman Frank Coffin to issue it. I think the

reason they wanted me to issue it was precisely because it was well known among the Democratic Party and others that there had been some animosity between Clauson and the new Democrats signified by Muskie and Coffin and others. And they didn't want it to look like somebody was using the, voting a dead governor for endorsement. And they knew that I was a loyal employee of Clauson and that I wouldn't do such a thing, so I was able to put that thing out and explain to the press that this had been agreed to by the governor before he died, and his name was on it because he wanted it to be on it. And so we made the announcement.

I get a little confused about when exactly JFK made his announcement in Washington. It was in January, it was January 5th I think it was, but I think it coincided with the same time as the governor's funeral up in Augusta. The governor's funeral up in Augusta, Bobby Kennedy came up and he was in the Blaine House talking to all these weeping women, I remember, and he was so happy to see me walk in, who wasn't a weeping woman, at the time. And I could work out some things about his appearance there.

He came with us, Maury Williams and his wife, and Bev and I, and Bobby Kennedy drove together to the funeral. And then Bobby Kennedy had come up in a light plane that had landed in Waterville. I guess it landed in Augusta and then they took it to Waterville so he could take it back home, but it didn't have any navigational aids so he wanted us to, he wanted to ride with the family to the funeral and peel off and take him to the air ship before it got dark, because he didn't have the night navigational aids. And I said, "No, that wouldn't be possible." That's one of the few times I guess I faced Bobby Kennedy down and told him that I'd have to put him in a separate car and he could peel off the cavalcade and get his plane and return. But that was about the size of the endorsement of Kennedy by the Maine congressional delegation and the governor. I can speak for the governor in that I know he told me privately that of course we're going to endorse JFK, "He's a New England man and we want him, but we'll just, I guess, have to be careful about how we do it."

DN: Thank you, Jeb. We're going to continue this interview at another time. We've run out of time this morning, and look forward to some further observations on '59 and then of course starting with the election of 1960.

End of Interview