

2-24-2001

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

February 24, 2001

Place

Alexandria, Virginia

ID Number

MOH 258

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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: John F. Kennedy visit to Augusta; working at the General Services Administration (GSA); 1964 presidential campaign; advance work; Muskie’s relationship with Maine; impressions of Edmund Muskie; Clinton Clauson; Maine politics; and Maury Williams.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Saturday, the 24th of February, the year is 2001. We are in Hollin Hills, Alexandria, Virginia, at the home of John and Beverly Byrne and Don Nicoll is interviewing Jeb Byrne. This is the second in a series of interviews with Mr. Byrne. Jeb, when we ended the first interview back in December, you were talking about the end of the Governor Clauson administration and the endorsement of Senator Jack Kennedy in his campaign for president. And the big item in that effort was a meeting at the Blaine House in November of 1959. Would you take us back to that time and the background on the meeting, and the meeting itself?

JB: I was remembering that, that took place on November 15th, 1959, and Jack Kennedy was going to speak to the Maine Issues conference at the Franco American Club in Augusta. And I remember him landing in the Augusta airport on a windy, cold day and all the prudent politicians had taken cover from the cold and sent me out to meet the plane and I told the senator that the press was all around and wanted to talk to him but we'd do it back at the Blaine House because of the weather conditions.

And so we went back to the Blaine House and Kennedy spoke to the press, the political writers and the rest who were very much impressed with him. And his speech at the Franco American Club was very well received. And later the hard politicking took place in the back room of the Blaine House, the governor's mansion in Augusta, and the subject of the discussion was whether the Maine Democratic politicians would endorse Jack Kennedy for office and when. And accompanying Senator Kennedy was John Bailey, the head of the Democratic National Committee, Abe Ribicoff the governor of Connecticut, and Bernie Boutin who was a candidate for senator from New Hampshire. The Maine people were Senator Muskie, Congressman Jim Oliver, and Frank Coffin. And the discussion waxed for quite some time in this back room. I was in and out of the room because I was sort of acting as host to the people of the party, the visiting party, but I caught the tenor of it very much. And there was some irritation on the part of Kennedy and his stalwarts that the Maine delegation seemed to be reluctant to immediately endorse him. And actually, I had asked the governor what he thought about that, Governor Clauson, and he said, "Of course we'll endorse him. It's a matter of timing," and the timing apparently included the fact that Senator Muskie had colleagues in the Senate who were running for the presidency, though I can't remember whether they were announced or not, but Senator Symington, Johnson and Humphrey; and he had to be a little careful about his position in this.

So the conversation went on and on, and as I say, it was not fully to the satisfaction of the, Kennedy and his cohorts, and he declined to stay overnight in the Blaine House and flew back to Massachusetts. So what happened from then on was that the Maine delegation in Washington prepared a statement of endorsement, and I have a copy of it which I believe was written by Congressman Coffin and that really became the basis nearly verbatim of the eventual endorsement which was released on January 5th, 1960 in the State House. In the meantime, early in the morning of December 30th, Governor Clauson had died and I had word from Washington from the Maine congressional delegation that it would be better for me to issue it in the name of the governor because he had instructed me to prepare a release, and that I should just carry out his wishes rather than make it seem like the Maine congressional delegation was putting words in his mouth. And so we released this document which I will provide a copy of, and the covering release. And it got front page play in all the Maine newspapers, and I sent a copy to Pierre Salinger, press secretary to Senator Kennedy. And the statement, incidentally, said that the Maine Democratic politicians were not telling their party how to vote, they were just saying that in their judgment this was a man to back.

DN: As I recall, Jeb, in the papers you were showing me earlier, Governor Clauson on the day before he died wrote a letter to the members of the delegation on the endorsement transmitting I believe the agreed upon statement.

JB: That is correct. He sent it out to all of them. And he also sent a copy to the, to Jack Kennedy and to Abe Ribicoff. It was not really changed from the original draft, the original draft that Frank Coffin had provided.

DN: You went through a traumatic period then. First Governor Clauson died, and then you were faced with initially the endorsement of Senator Kennedy, and then where did you go from there?

JB: Well, it was agreed, Maine had no lieutenant governor so the governorship devolved upon the president of the senate, John Reed, who was a Republican. As a matter of fact I called him up at three o'clock in the morning to tell him he was governor. And he came to Augusta, and since it was widely known that I was a Democrat and there was no sense in me thinking that I could stay around as press secretary to the Republican governor, so a deal was worked out where I transferred to the Department of Economic Development and worked there for the following year. But they let me, I told Governor Reed that I would be presenting this statement from Governor Clauson and the Maine congressional delegation as my last act in the office of the press secretary, and he was quite agreeable to that. So I worked with the Department of Economic Development and I did a little work on the side for Lucia Cormier who was running in 1960 for senator. My wife and I both sort of (*unintelligible word*) her campaign during this time. This was not unusual. Phil Macy who worked for the Dept. of Economic Development was doing the same thing for Governor Reed.

DN: There was plenty of double engagement by civil servants.

JB: I guess.

DN: Were you a civil servant or a political appointee technically?

JB: I was a civil servant. But it was an interesting period.

DN: And after the national election, did you have an interest in perhaps going to work for the federal government?

JB: Right, I had become friendly with Pierre Salinger for instance when he was up with Senator Kennedy on the November 15th meeting, and I wrote him and said, told him of my situation and was anxious to go down. But really the impetus for me getting a position in Washington was to go into Senator Muskie's office. I might say Don Nicoll had something to do with it. Bernie Boutin, who had been the senator, the candidate for senator in New Hampshire, had become deputy head of the General Services Administration and when he came to Maine on another problem I met with him and I was taken on as press secretary, actually I guess director of information and deputy assistant administrator of GSA, and I went to Washington in April or 1961 and later on became a career civil servant and stayed until 1988.

DN: Now, in the early days you were a political appointee in GSA.

JB: I was a political appointee and, in that position, and of course when Nixon came in, well

before Nixon came in my position was converted to a career. But since it was a sensitive political position too, when Nixon came in and a new Republican head of GSA took over, it was agreed that I would move over to the National Archives and Records Service which was then part of GSA where I served as director of information over there. And I stayed with the government back and forth a couple of times between the National Archives and General Services Administration until 1980 where I took over as director of the Federal Register which is part of the National Archives and Records Administration, which is now separate from GSA, and I stayed there until retirement in 1988.

DN: And during this time we might note you were going back to school.

JB: Yeah, I went back to school, when Nixon came in I had a little free time, I didn't have so many late nights, so I went back to school and got an M.A. at George Washington University in American literature, and then much later on in 1987 I got a doctorate in American studies, American civilization. It was, I was doing, I was one of those six o'clock scholars at the Library of Congress. People who worked all day and then went to school at night.

DN: And I wanted to note that you have had a long standing history of interest in American history, and I was struck for example reading some of the materials to find a newspaper article from 1958 with the most detailed account I've seen of the old Maine September election day.

JB: Well, yeah, I mean the old business about how Maine goes, so goes the nation, which after FDR sank Alf Landon, I guess it was Jim Farley who said as Maine goes, so goes Vermont. Well I wanted to explore the history of the early Maine elections to find out why it was early in the first place, and it seemed to be tied to the agricultural situation in the, between the early and late harvest as some of the early commentators said, that they had an early election in September. So '58 was the last time they had that election. Now, the Republicans, or rather I should say the Democrats, quite difference, had pushed for combining the elections in November, the September and November elections in Maine to hold them in November with the rest of the country. And the Republicans had been reluctant to do that to take whatever political or whatever public success might be had from having an early Maine election for the rest of the country. But it ended up that the Democrats were hoisted on their own petard, because when the 1960 election came along the overwhelming Republican support for president overshadowed the congressional and governor's races and the Republicans took everything in 1960 in Maine.

DN: Now, while you were at GSA in the Kennedy and Johnson years, you picked up some assignments that were outside the normal duties of a deputy assistant administrator.

JB: Well yeah, in those days the old advance man business, now in the White House, ever since the Nixon administration there has been an officer of advance, advance office, and it's fully staffed with experts in all sorts of fields. In the Kennedy years and Johnson years, things tended to be a little more ad hoc, people would be borrowed from the agencies, from the Schedule C or political appointees, to go out and make arrangements for presidential trips. And I was seized upon from GSA to do such things, and of course the first one I did happened to be a rather cataclysmic one, I was sent to Fort Worth, Texas on Governor Kennedy's 1963 fatal trip and I set up the engagement in Fort Worth which occurred the night before and the morning of,

actually November 21st, the night of November 21st, 1963, and the morning of the 22nd when we had a big speech for Kennedy in Fort Worth. And then everybody knows what happened a few hours later in Dallas. Apparently I became (*unintelligible word*) by Bill Moyers for the conduct of the Fort Worth advance, so when Lyndon Johnson ran for president in 1964 he asked me to serve as deputy to Wilson McCarthy who was head of the advance operation in the '64 campaign. Another fellow and I served as co-deputy directors of the campaign, of the Johnson campaign for president. And we resigned from the government at that time because that was clearly political, and after the election I went back to the government, went back to my position in GSA.

DN: Tell us about the experience in Fort Worth. You've written an article for the National Archives publication, *Prologue* and you've also written a piece about the New England trip in 1964 and were telling me earlier about the Campobello visit after the '64 election.

JB: That was in '66.

DN: Sixty-six. What were the differences in style between the Kennedy and the Johnson advances?

JB: Well both of them were kind of chaotic, to be honest with you. Everybody talks about the machine like precision of the Kennedy operation, but, you know, it was more of haphazard things going on. For instance, here I was in charge of Fort Worth, Texas, and I had never done a presidential advance before and nobody to give advice to me, I was out there with a shine on my shoes and a smile on my face. And I think by the time the '64 campaign had been a little more thought given to advance operations, and it was a little more structured than the, that first Kennedy advance.

DN: Now, in the 1964 campaign the New England swing included a trip to Portland, Maine. Were you directly involved in the Portland visit?

JB: I was overall directly involved in the whole New England trip, which visited six states in twenty-four hours, and I put together the schedule as I received word from the, my superiors in the White House, and from the advance men who I had sent to the various places. I was sort of the you might call it the technician along on that thing. I wrote the schedule, assigned the advance men, and went along on the trip to see if I could deal with any problems that occurred on it. This was a fantastic trip, we saw many, many people in that swing. And anybody who came out of that trip realizing that Lyndon Johnson was going to be overwhelmingly elected would be right. I mean, it was an overwhelming experience. Johnson of course was absolutely delighted.

In Maine We went first to Providence, then to Hartford, Connecticut, then to Burlington, Vermont, into Portland, and then to Manchester. And then LBJ stopped in Boston to see Teddy Kennedy who was recovering from a plane crash at that time. He did not have a big event in Boston, but in all the other cities there were huge crowds, tremendous crowds. Portland, for instance, I remember Col. Robert Marks, the head of the Maine State Police, estimated that perhaps as many as a hundred thousand people crowded into Portland to hear the party going on

in the city hall at which Johnson and the others spoke. I had talked briefly with Ed Muskie about the thing and, well one thing we discussed was that Johnson always liked to get the senators or the congressmen for a stop to ride along in the plane with him, which struck me as being kind of ridiculous because what happened was when they arrived in a place, it would be the person on the ground greeting the president who would get all the publicity. And in Maine, for instance, Governor John Reed, the Republican, was on the ground and Muskie and the others were in the background when they landed at the airport. But that was the way Johnson operated.

Of course when Johnson got out there he was very high on supporting all the Democratic candidates in his Portland speech. It was a tremendous crowd. And actually one of the funny things, John Reed, who was a nice man, sort of got dragooned into taking part in this campaign swing. I remember when the motorcade was forming to leave from the airport, Johnson said to his short shadow, Jack Valenti, go find the governor and bring him up here, and he got the governor to ride with him and handed him a bullhorn, and so we had this sort of a spectacle of a Republican governor participating in the Democratic campaign there.

DN: Was this intentional do you think on the part of the president?

JB: The president loved to do, Johnson loved to do things like that. I'm sure it was intentional. And of course I think Governor Reed later on became head of the Governors' Conference and he became supportive of Johnson on many of his things, including the Vietnam operations.

DN: Speaking of the Governors' Conference, when you were working for Governor Clauson were there any Governors' Conferences in which you participated?

JB: Yes, we went down to San Juan, Puerto Rico and, in 1959, the one year in which the governor served, and Senator Muskie came down to push for his intergovernmental affairs assignment in the Senate. He wanted to mingle with the governors and so forth, and he made quite a lot of contacts with governors at that point to discuss intergovernmental problems. Actually, he apparently started kind of late and did not have a reservation in that, the hotel, the El San Juan Intercontinental where the conference was being held, he had a distant hotel. So I offered him the use of my room so he could work out of, and he did that. I was thinking of an amusing thing which occurred. We, everybody had been swimming in the afternoon while the meetings were not going on, and we came back, he was using my room at that time, we came back to the room after swimming and were having a drink before a meal, and we were sitting in our shorts and getting dressed when the phone rang and the statehood committee of Puerto Rico representative was on the phone and said they wanted to come up and make a presentation to Senator Muskie of keys to a courtesy car. So I conveyed that to the senator and he said, send them up. So they came up and the door opened and in walked about three women dressed in all sorts of finery, and they saw us in our shorts and turned around and ran out again. And we dressed up quickly and then received the keys.

DN: Being caught in a relaxed setting.

JB: In a relaxed setting. We had no idea who was heading the statehood committee or who their representatives were.

DN: Did, were you part of any of the discussions that Senator Muskie carried on at that session?

JB: No, it seemed to me that most of the stuff was informal. One thing I guess I, Governor Pat Brown of California sitting on the beach with a bunch of us out there, I heard Muskie talking to him about the intergovernmental things, but I didn't hear any presentation, formal presentation by the senator. And I'm not so sure whether he made one or not. Everything that I saw was informal. I think he was trying to get his feet on the ground on this committee assignment and, you know, get to know all the players well, introducing himself around to all the governors.

DN: Your, going back to your advance work days, in 1966 President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson went to Campobello for a big event.

JB: Yes, that was a very, very interesting period. That was for the designation of the International Park up at Campobello and I was determined that the president would, President Johnson would go to Maine first. And there was all sorts of problems with this operation. It was supposed to be completely nonpolitical, but actually Democrats were being short circuited on the thing because we were approaching an election time and the incumbents, some of them were Republican like Senator Smith and congressman Tupper, and I can't remember who else at the time, but because it was supposed to be nonpartisan, if you weren't an incumbent you weren't supposed to be included in the ceremonies. And Senator Muskie got, on that day when they were, the president was about to set out from Washington, had just finished giving a spirited defense, which he was manager of, the model cities or however you called it before?

DN: It was originally called demonstration cities.

JB: Demonstration Cities legislation, and he really handled himself tremendously on this thing and is credited with a lot of political savvy people with having changed votes in the Senate to approve the program. There had been a strong challenge from Senator John Tower of Texas as I recall, and Muskie received all sorts of plaudits for his presentation showing the value of this new program. But then when he arrived in Portland, Maine by airport, Portland, Maine airport to participate in the things that would occur before the Campobello visit, he was handed a newspaper which said that the Republicans were the people in Maine who were going to profit from the trip rather than the Democrats. And he was quite furious about this. I mean, here you would have Democratic challengers not included in the program, while we had Republican incumbents included in the program. So he was quite concerned about this.

And I happened to be the advance man for the Maine part of this event and the plan had been to have speak-, to have the president speak in Portland, then at one time it was Bar Harbor, and then to go to Campobello, but things got all changed around and it ended up where he would speak in Portland, he would land in Brunswick, he would then land in Brunswick, Maine at the Brunswick Naval Air Station, and then speak in Lewiston and then Portland. And I had to organize that part of the itinerary, which I did. But Muskie, when he arrived, as I said, got this bad news about what this so-called nonpartisanship was doing to the Democratic Party in Maine, and he said, "Well you know, I don't think I'll participate. I think I'll go right to Campobello."

And I said to him, I had met him and we were having dinner in the steak house in Lewiston with George Mitchell as aide and with Dick McMahon, another Maine associate, and I said, "Why don't you come over to the motel where we are, where we have set up headquarters for the advance, the Flamingo Hotel, and I'll get somebody in Washington on the line and see if we can turn this around." And so he said, "All right."

So when he finished his dinner he came over to the hotel and I had the White House communications guys seek Marvin Watson, who was then principal assistant to Johnson, and to get him on the phone. The trouble was, the Air Force One was enroute to the Catskills where Johnson was going to be first, and Marvin Watson was in that plane and they couldn't locate him, they couldn't get him on the phone for a long time. First he was in the plane and then he was in the cavalcade, and finally he got to the hotel. In the meantime Senator Muskie, growing increasingly irritated and saying, "Well I'm just going to go home." And just as I think that was about to happen, for him to leave, Marvin Watson came on the line and Muskie laid out the problem before him and Watson said, "What can I do?" And so the senator laid out what he wanted done, including the candidates, the Democratic candidates who were not incumbents to take part in the ceremony, and that was all agreed. But then there was to be the trip from Portland to Campobello by Navy ship, and he agreed that the incumbents should be the only ones on that, which left Peter Kyros of the first district, the Democratic candidate, quite angry or quite disturbed, but it didn't seem to matter because he later got elected in the thing. But everything worked out all right, thank goodness, but it was awful nip and tuck there for a while [because] I was, on the one hand, the chief advance man up there, and the possibility that Senator Muskie would not appear at the Maine appearance of President Johnson. But everything worked out, thank goodness.

DN: You recall the picture of candidate Kyros standing on the pier in Portland?

JB: I not only recall it, I walked up to him and said, "Peter, why don't you get off the pier. It just adds fuel to the fire." And it turned out that they ran that picture, and as I say he got elected so maybe it helped him, you know. I've been wrong before.

DN: The worst publicity can sometimes be an advantage. Did you do any other advance work during the Johnson years?

JB: I had, as I say, in the '64 campaign I was right there from the beginning. I set up the first, I resigned from the government for three months, and I set up the kick off of the campaign in Detroit, Michigan, in Cadillac Square, the big labor center, and then I was, I think I figured one time I traveled fifty thousand miles in front of Johnson during that campaign, as well as acting as deputy advance chief, assigning advance men around. This was quite an experience, it left me limp at the end. And then a couple of times after the election I was called upon on presidential trips to go out and advance the president. And I was quite, I was delighted to participate in it, delighted to leave the field and go about my regular job later on.

DN: Now, in your regular work, did you have contacts with Senator Muskie and his office relating to General Services Administration projects or programs?

JB: Not too often. Ed Muskie would, or his staff, would talk directly with Bernie Boutin who was administrator because they were friendly, and so I didn't have a lot of contact with them. I had a lot of contact at that time with people in the White House press office, but most of the conversation about Maine and GSA was between Muskie and Bernie Boutin I would believe.

DN: Did, now during this period you were in a sense moving farther from the Maine scene as you got more involved in General Services Administration and the archives and the Federal Register. Did you retain ties with the state though?

JB: With the state of Maine? Really, ever since the early 1950s, we'd gone to Maine in 1951, and ever since then we always went in the summer to Popham Beach off the peninsula where the Kennebec River debauches into the Gulf of Maine, and we have always loved that place. As a matter of fact, when I was summoned to, during the 1964 campaign for Johnson, I was called from the beach at Popham Beach by an associate of Bill Moyers to come back home to Washington and take part in that campaign. So really, it's been summer visits, vacation time in Maine that I have continued to do. We had a great love for Maine. Our four sons were all born there, and I probably would have stayed there if my governor hadn't died on me.

DN: As you look back on the, your Maine experience and the political leaders that you got to know, Senator Muskie, Governor Clauson, Congressman Coffin, Congressman Oliver, Congressman Kyros, what strikes you about the people and the nature of the political environment in Maine during that era?

JB: Well, as United Press correspondent in Maine, and who had, a person who had chosen journalism as his career, I got completely enamored of politics by the regime of Edmund S. Muskie as governor of the state of Maine. I saw him as being a man of great intelligence and who really presented the Democratic ideals, knew how to translate them into working models. And really the thing that pushed me to turn from journalism to politics and government was the example of Senator Muskie, and I might add his associates, to witness what they were doing, as Congressman Coffin, and my good friend Don Nicoll, and others. I was, I thought that they, by presenting a fine vision for Maine, that they were doing a tremendous service. I thought that their, for instance their establishment of issues conferences which got away from the razzle dazzle of campaign things was a very great innovation, and something that made sense in politics. So I think, I went to Maine as a Democrat but I came out of Maine a stronger Democrat.

DN: What were the qualities that you felt distinguished Ed Muskie as a person and as a public figure?

JB: Well, one thing, he had a very clear mind, a very quick mind, and he also knew something about the art of compromise. And here he is working with a Republican legislature and a Republican executive council which had to approve all his appointments, and he just couldn't come slam bang into things, he had to realize that there had to be some accommodation and he had to move very carefully and persuade people rather than to do things by fiat, or attempt to do things by fiat because you couldn't do it if you didn't have control of the other branches. And his vision to get things done and his method of going about it by persuasion I think were the

things that impressed me the most. And I might say the same thing for Frank Coffin, that intelligence there was very, very, a very high order. And also the vision of public service as a service rather than a self aggrandizement.

DN: Governor Clauson was not close to Ed Muskie and Frank Coffin, and his nomination represented something of a split in the party. Were there significant differences in fact between Governor Clauson and Ed Muskie and Frank?

JB: Yes, I think, Clinton Clauson I was very fond of, he was a, he was, in many ways he was a very nice man and he wanted to be a good governor. He had been the collector or Internal Revenue for Maine and when they reorganized the place, although he'd been in for about twenty years, the qualifications were such that he was not even chosen to lead the thing on and it was quite a blow to his self esteem. And when he became governor he was just delighted that this honor had come to him. But he wanted to do his best. I don't think he had the clear political savvy or knowledge of policy that was characteristic of Muskie and Coffin, but he wanted to do a good job and he worked hard at it I think. But he was not a, he was sort of an interim figure, he was not an innovator, he was, he was just trying to do a good within his own limitations.

DN: What explains then his election in '58 when he was up against a very distinguished former governor and former ambassador and college president, and a man with significant roots in Maine?

JB: I always thought that one of the things that led the resurgence of the Democratic Party in Maine was the feeling that the arrogance on the other side, that they took everything for granted, that things belonged to them, and I think that came across to people. It came across to people with Governor Cross who was the predecessor to Ed Muskie, and also the candidate for governor against Clint Clauson evinced the same sort of arrogance, that this belongs to me really, and I think that was one of the things that turned people off, that they -

End of Side A
Side B

DN: This is the second side of the tape of the interview with Jeb Byrne on the 24th of February, 2001. Jeb, you were talking about Governor Clauson and his place in Maine political history, particularly you said that he was part of the ongoing party revolution.

JB: Yes, and I was mentioning the fact that the candidate, the Republican candidate who he was opposing as governor, was Horace Hildreth who had a very distinguished career. He was a former Maine governor, he'd been an ambassador to Pakistan, he was a president of a college, but again he was sort of standoffish and I think that the Maine people had been conditioned by this time to like people a little more, who were closer to the desires of the people than this elite class. And I think that's what sank Horace Hildreth. He'd also been very scornful sometimes of the press. It just occurred, I was just remembering that he delivered a talk at Portland at the Portland Club, which was rather an exclusive club, and he didn't know that one of the *Press Herald* reporters was a member of the club and he spoke disparagingly of fifty dollar a week headline writers and things, and that was the kind of arrogance that turned a lot of people against

the Republican establishment in Maine.

DN: I'll interject a personal recollection here that bears a bit on Governor Clauson and the issue of arrogance and personal reactions. It involved Maury Williams, his administrative assistant who told me once about his somewhat embarrassed feelings on occasion about the governor and the fact that he wasn't as articulate as Ed Muskie. And Maury was going to Newport, his home town, with the governor one day when the governor was speaking to the Rotary Club. And Maury wasn't very anxious to be there with his home town folks when he thought the governor would not show up very well, but he went. And he said that the governor made sure that they got there early, stationed himself at the door where people would come into the meeting room, shook hands with everyone as they came in, then went in for the luncheon, gave his speech, and as soon as the question and answer period was over and the meeting was breaking up, made a beeline for the door and stood there and shook hands with everyone going out. Now, Maury said that the speech was not very well delivered and he was really embarrassed about it, and he stayed away from Newport for a while, and then he had to go there on family business and was downtown and bumped into several of his friends, and every one of them said without exception, Maury, you must be very lucky, you're working for a wonderful man, Governor Clauson, wonderful man.

JB: I think that's very discerning. As, I guess as press secretary I was also, you know, we only had two male assistants in the governor's office, Maury Williams and myself, and I was his speech writer, and I took my, took it rather seriously at first and I'd write a speech for him, and then I'd go and listen to it, he didn't use any of it. So later on I got a little wiser and would just give him talking points sometimes, because he liked the old shoe approach and he liked to convey his warmth, and content was sometimes secondary. So being a, later on I came to the conclusion that being a speech writer for the governor of Maine at that time was not a full time job. He did deliver several full blown speeches, his inaugural address for instance. We did something we innovated there at the time, it was usual for the governor of Maine to, up to that time, to deliver an inaugural address and then a budget address, but we combined the two of them, we put them together, and of course Maury Williams and I worked pretty hard on that, give him a good leg up.

DN: Tell us a bit about Maury, because he worked not only for Governor Clauson but for Governor Muskie before. What was Maury like?

JB: I think Maury had a very, very deep knowledge of state government. He really knew the budget end of it, which is a lot of state government as we know, a big piece of it. I don't think he had a lot of strong partisan positions. He was a very, very shrewd technician in state government, and he, I think he was very helpful to both Senator Muskie when he was governor and to Clint Clauson because of his deep knowledge of the machinery of government, just how things work and, he was very good on that. On the other hand I do recall that sometimes when he got involved in something, it immediately got a high priority. Sometimes I think he, I think he, I'm sort of contradicting myself here to say he didn't have strong positions, but they weren't partisan, but they were in methods of operation that he would push very strongly if they appealed to him.

DN: His interest was in the mechanics of government?

JB: I think that's the way I recall it.

DN: Do you know whether he was central to the part A, part B budget development under Governor Muskie?

JB: I really don't recall exactly what his role was with Governor Muskie. Of course I was much more familiar with his role with Clint Clauson.

DN: That's an interesting thing to pursue in terms of his role in some of the changes in the way government functioned under both governors.

JB: Well, he was a very shrewd tactician, or technician about the workings of state government and that was his principal value to these governors.

DN: Now you were telling me earlier before we started the formal interview today, or the taped interview, about an incident where Senator Muskie's enthusiasm for his subject and his photography overcame both Governor Clauson and Maury Williams.

JB: Right, well that was a funny incident. It took place in 1959 when the senator, one of his first big trips as senator was to Russia where he surveyed the hydro electric situation in Russia, and he traveled extensively and he had a lot of enthusiasm for his subject. And he also took numerous slides of hydro electric sites and powers and things in Russia. So when he came back to Maine on a visit, he said he'd like to show it to the governor, so we all went to Maury William's house, Maury and his wife Louisa, and I believe the senator, I don't know whether Jane was there or not, I can't, I think she probably was but I'm not sure, and my wife Bev and myself. And we sat in Maury's living room and pulled down a screen and began to look at slides, and there were many, many, many slides. Somehow or other the figure seven hundred remains in my mind, but it doesn't seem possible that all of those could have been shown. But they went on and the senator had a running commentary on the hydro electric situation in Maine. At some point, somebody unfortunately turned on the light and everybody was sort of asleep, and I don't think the senator appreciated that particularly. I'm sure that Governor Clauson was snoring slightly because he fell asleep very easily. But it was an amazing evening, we learned a lot about hydro electric systems in Russia.

DN: More than you probably ever wanted to know.

JB: Right.

DN: Are there any other comments you'd like to add at this time, Jeb, on Senator Muskie or the political climate of those 1950s through 1970 years?

JB: Well, just that I think Maine had a wonderful transition from its former authoritarian gang on the Kennebec government to a more open government with less quid pro quo arrangements. I think it helped break the holds of the big companies and the railroads and the

utility companies and the paper companies on, it helped at least mitigate their strong role in the government of Maine. So I think it was a, that period of the fifties was very important for Maine's future, and it really changed the way people thought about government and politics in Maine, and I think it helped push Maine forward. And I was proud to play a little tiny part, or mostly an observer, but a little bit with Clauson as an actor.

DN: Well, I would say you played more than a little tiny part. You were an educator as a reporter, and you obviously contributed substantially in both Governor Clauson's time and in the work you did for both presidents, Kennedy and Johnson.

JB: Well, it's easy to love Maine, it's a great state and I completely enjoy going back there every year. Sometimes I wonder why I came to Washington but I guess I know why, that was a road that opened at the present time.

DN: Thank you very much.

JB: Thank you.

End of Interview