

Victor J. Gabriel Oral History Interview, 7/30/1964
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Biographical Note

Gabriel, chairman of Citizens for Kennedy in Harrison County, West Virginia (1960), discusses the 1960 Democratic primary campaign in Harrison County and Clarksburg, West Virginia, the impact that JFK had on the people of West Virginia, and how West Virginians responded to JFK's domestic programs as president, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

Victor J. Gabriel

July 30, 1964
Clarksburg, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, before we begin our discussions of the late President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], would you review just briefly some of the political offices which you have held in Harrison County and in Clarksburg, West Virginia?

GABRIEL: I first ventured into politics about twenty some odd years ago, and ran for committeeman of the magisterial district. I was elected and served a four year term, and immediately after that I was elected President of the Harrison County Young Democrats Club. To me this was a great honor—being from the foreign element and being the first man to ever be elected to this office, and I might also add that the first Catholic to ever serve on the Executive Committee, as well as the first Catholic to ever serve as President of the Harrison County Young Democrats Club.

YOUNG: When you say foreign element, do you mean national background?

GABRIEL: My parents were born in Rome, Italy, and that has always been a factor here in this county, and of course it had no bearing on my political status. Apparently it didn't have because I was very successful in what I achieved. Then later on I was the first man of Italian descent and of the

Catholic faith to become vice chairman of the Harrison County Executive Committee, and I served that post for eight years, and then served as a member of the Executive Committee for sixteen years. I enjoyed all my political background, and I still enjoy it. Of course I am what they call a Jeffersonian Democrat—not a middle of the roader and not a so-called renegade who sees the grass is a little greener on the other side of the fence. I've always followed the policy of the Democratic Party and its platforms.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, when did you first become interested in the political career of Senator Kennedy?

GABRIEL: I distinctly remember the national convention, at which time he was trying to seek the vice presidency of the United States. To me he was very impressive. I considered him a very high caliber man and a very well educated man, and I became very interested in him from seeing that convention on TV. After his defeat as a candidate for vice president, a short time after that, he appeared in Morgantown, West Virginia, for a Jefferson Day Banquet, and he was a very humorous man that particular night. He thanked the state of West Virginia delegation for having not voted for him at that convention, because had they gone for him instead of Estes Kefauver, he remarked that his political career would have come to an end at an early age. He laughed about it and of course the overflow crowd was very humorous

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and cut up over it and we more or less became acquainted that particular night. Then in March, 1960, I had the opportunity to go to Washington and went to his office and it was a known fact then from the great activity going on in his office and out in the waiting room, and the long distance telephone calls, this man was definitely a candidate not for the vice presidency this time, but for the presidency of the United States.

YOUNG: Had he announced yet that he would enter the West Virginia primary at that time?

GABRIEL: Let me say, publicly no, but to me he had intimated that he was thinking about it very strongly, and was collecting support from various states. That particular day, during my stay in his office, he had a long distance telephone call from Governor Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] of California, and I took from their conversation that this man was going to definitely be a candidate and how he was going to enter this particular election was beyond me and beyond a lot of other people in America. Then he told me that the State Democrat Chairman of the state of Alabama was outside waiting to come in and discuss a political matter with him, and I saw then that he was not only getting the forces of the West Coast by talking to Governor Pat Brown, but also gathering the forces of the political party, Democrat Party in the South. Then after that it was a known fact that he was

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definitely going to be a candidate when he began entering the particular primaries in various states, and the first gentleman to come in this county, whom I had met with, was a brother, the Honorable Senator Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy]. We had a luncheon here in this particular hotel for about fifty or sixty of us, and I was chosen that night to head his Citizens for Kennedy Committee here in Harrison County, and I thought that I knew politics from the ground root up until I had ventured into this Kennedy staff. They certainly knew their political standards and they gathered it from years gone by, I presume from relatives. It was a different kind of campaign altogether. They were not interested in people who were flushed with money. Now these are the kind of people we have to have like a lot of politicians do, but they went to the bottom to the ordinary common labor man. We found out later he had a reason for doing this, because he was interested in the American people as a whole, and he probably figured he had to have these people to make him successful. Then he in turn would repay their contributions to him by taking care of the poorer class of people of America. Then they began coming in one at a time, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., who to my estimation in the state of West Virginia was certainly an asset to the late President of the United States. In our travels throughout the county and our surrounding counties, numerous people

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have made the remark to Franklin D. Jr., that they wished he was a resident of the state of West Virginia, and that he could win the governorship of this state hands down through the political background and the great history his father [Franklin D. Roosevelt] has written on this land of ours. He was a very popular boy and I would say, particularly the coal miners and the ditch diggers, and the common labor men, the factory men, who goes to the polls and votes, and executes their American rights, I would say that Franklin D. Roosevelt had gotten sixty percent of the votes for the late President because of his father's outstanding work as president, and the people still love the name of Roosevelt. I know that every place he appeared the crowds were a little larger than they were for some of these other fellows that were sent in here. Then Ted came in and was received very highly in the town. Nice looking boy, very soft spoken boy, and a very sincere boy. He came in behalf of his brother, the late President, and did a tremendous job for the late President. Then there was Fred Forbes [Fred A. Forbes], who was handling a lot of the late President's publicity, who was received very graciously here in this county, and well liked. Bob [Robert F. Kennedy] had made numerous appearances here and was very effective particularly with the CIO, the labor here, the United Mine workers. They felt that Bob was a man who knew labor problems and they enjoyed talking to him. They

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enjoyed talking to all the Kennedys. I know the late President's first trip into our county. The family was having their regular Easter in Miami Beach which they always spent together, and I had received a call from the late President that morning telling me he would be in our

city sometime that night, and the phone calls kept coming in all day saying they were going to be delayed, but the schedule was already set up for him to be here on Monday morning, the Monday after Easter Sunday. That plane didn't get in here until 2:30 that morning. I remember his wife, Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], being on the plane along with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. They flew on to Washington, Mrs. Kennedy and Franklin D., because she was not dressed for the climate—having come dressed from Florida—so I picked up the late President at the airport and we came on here to the hotel and I said to him on our way in, I said, “Senator, there's about twenty-five fellows who are affiliated with various organizations of labor who would like to sit down and talk to you and ask you some questions.” He looked at me very tired, and knowing he was going into this West Virginia thing and had an uphill fight he said, “All I want to do is put on a clean shirt and refresh my face a little bit, and I would be glad to meet with them.” We went down, I had them all in one room, he went down and met them and asked each one of them what their problem was, and the

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reciprocal trade act which in the glass industry which is very heavy in this county one of the main subjects that night—what would he do for the glass industry in regards to the reciprocal trade act in the event he became president? He was trying to refresh his mind about the reciprocal trade act and the particular bill that had been presented to the House as well as the Senate, and assured them by 8:30 the next morning he would have the contents of this bill. We left the conference and went up to the room which incidentally, after he became President the room was redone, and now is named the Presidential Suite, because he always occupied it and all the Kennedy forces that came into the hotel occupied that particular room. He had the data on the reciprocal trade the next morning. He made a long distance telephone call to his secretary and had all the information for these men, and they met again the next morning, and he answered their questions.

YOUNG: Do you remember any of the other questions, Mr. Gabriel, any subject, dealt with other than the glass industry?

GABRIEL: Yes. Of course being a labor organization they were very concerned about the labor problems. They asked him about the Taft-Hartley Law, and the late Senator was never a man who had to hesitate to give you an answer. He had a concrete answer for him, and the times when he felt the questions was a little too hard, let us say, he would give you a humorous

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answer with it, which was always very effective with the public. They asked him about the reciprocal trade act, they asked him about the voting problems of this country, they asked him about social security, they asked him about education, and all these things he had answers for, and of course, long before he came into the primary in West Virginia he was

advocating Medicare for the aged, and they were very much concerned about that, and he painted a very nice picture on that in his answers.

We left that next morning, had a press conference downstairs, we went to the radio station, we appeared on the 9:00 o'clock news of the TV station, and the Continental Glass Company which received him very well at the gate, and he toured the plant, and from there we went to Fairmont, and we were traveling from an hour and a half to about an hour and forty-five minutes on our schedule, but everybody wanted to see this outstanding man. They had heard him on radio, they had seen him on TV, and when he came into these various communities where it was two hours or three hours delay in his trip, they would wait. A tremendous crowd met us in Fairmont, and received him very well. We motored from there on to Moundsville and from there on into Wheeling, and then I left the party that night and went on into Ohio Valley, into Weirton and down through there. But the campaign was well on its way and rolling in high gear.

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I would say that within thirty days after the late President entered the primary in the state of West Virginia that the campaign, as far as he was concerned, was pretty well in his corner, because he was very effective with the people. The religious thing, in the county here, was not a factor, not an issue. The only religious thing we heard was national on TV or on radio, but as far as the person on the street is concerned or the individual it was never a question with them. I would say that the religious issue was something that was brought out and kept before the public and they kept hammering at it, and I don't mind saying this. I blame the religious issue on press, nationally, in this country, because I think I heard him use the phrase one time—"if it's where I go to church that's going to keep you from voting for me for president of the United States, then I advise you not to vote for me," which was very clear in the people's mind. He was a devoted man to his church regardless of what church he went to, and he wasn't a man who criticized anybody for going to any other church. He believed in his religion, that he upheld, and as far as I'm concerned many, many other people could not condemn him for that. They were looking at the late President as an intelligent man. What could he do for this country, and his words at the inauguration will always remain in the people's mind—"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

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As the campaign went on Pat Fitzgerald, who I understand and learned later was one of his pride and joys as far as relatives are concerned, Pat came in here and worked with me for about ten days. She handled the women's end of it for the social activities, and Eunice Ford [Eunice Ford Williams] who is in the art department at Harvard University, the two girls did a tremendous job in this county. It was very effective as far as the women were concerned. They came in here and I remember the Sunday before the election, which was Mother's Day, those girls had gathered up a group of high school girls from the various high schools in this county, and at one time we had fifty-two young girls in our headquarters one night, addressing personal invitations to people of this county to come and meet the late

President here at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel on Mother's Day, which would have been his last appearance before the primary election. Well, naturally it rained tremendously the day before, which was Saturday, and it rained all day that Sunday. Now on Saturday night there was a mass of confusion here in our county, because we had a ten dollar a plate dinner and we had at that dinner the now President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, Symington [Stuart Symington II], Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], and of course the late President was not here because he had to go into Indiana and had to fly back, and Franklin D., Jr., represented him that night, and we went to the dinner and there was an

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overflow crowd. Well, I stayed here with Franklin D. all night in the hotel, and the next morning we got a phone call, and the minute the phone rang, we knew what it was—pretty well had an idea of what was going on. It was very foggy and the late President's flight here had to be cancelled. So, he told us on the phone that Bob was leaving Charleston by car and would be here to replace him, the now Attorney General of the United States, because he could not drive here and be back in Charleston for his last TV appearance on Sunday night with his wife to close out his campaign, and this large crowd was here that day to receive Bob Kennedy. They were standing outside, the lobby of the hotel was filled, and the ballroom was filled. So later on in the morning about 11:00 o'clock we thought up an idea. We called the Senator at the hotel in Charleston, and worked out a deal with the Bell Telephone Company, whereupon he could speak to them through a microphone over the telephone, and he thought it was a wonderful idea, and agreed to do so. After we did this and had it all set up with the telephone company, well, we thought it's Mother's Day—we'll just make arrangements and plan to contact his mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] in Boston and have her to talk to the people. That worked out very well. The people received her nicely on Mother's Day she talked to them and explained to them about her family and about how proud a mother should feel about her

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sons or daughters, and all these little things were very striking to the people, not only to this county but to this state. Everybody felt that we had a man here that was determined to change the economic situation in America, and take care of the old as well as the young, and to make preparations to handle the young as our population grew in this country. As I said before, the individual person on the street I don't think was concerned where the late President went to church. It was a national thing and they kept hammering it and tried to bring it forth as a big issue politically, and I think it eventually died down and he proved not only to the people of West Virginia, but he proved to the fifty states of this country of ours that it doesn't make any difference where you go to church, because when he ran in the state of West Virginia he was certainly fighting an uphill battle. The ratio of Catholics in the state of West Virginia was a very low percentage and the man won a great victory when he won in the state of West Virginia. They said to me, asked me, and I don't want to elaborate on finance, how much it would cost to carry this county. Well, anyone with common sense knows that it takes money to win elections regardless of what party it is, and I gave them a figure and told them I was

only concerned about two particular districts in this county, and that, was Ten Mile District which is composed of Seventh Day

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Baptists, and Simpson District where the Catholic ratio in this county was very, very low, and that is where we spent a little bit of money. No large amount to amount to anything, and I remember the night of the election when the returns were first coming in, first return we got was Salem College. The late President carried that precinct three to one. As a matter of fact he beat United States Senator Jennings Randolph by fifty-seven votes in that particular precinct and that is the Senator's home precinct, and he graduated from Salem College. I looked at Mr. Chuck Spalding [Charles F. Spalding], who was with me that night, and had worked with me for about two months, and I looked at him and I said, "Chuck, let's go to Charleston. This thing is all over with." And he said, "What do you mean?" "Well, if we can carry precincts like Salem College with that total of vote out in front, we've got this county whipped." And we did. We ended up with a forty-five hundred vote majority in this county for the late President. Of course after the primary, and its always that way with either party, you join forces and work through your national headquarters as well as your state and your county headquarters, and we all formed ranks and gave him a wonderful vote here in the general election.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, I don't believe you described exactly your position in the Kennedy campaign. What was your official title?

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GABRIEL: Well, as I say, when we first met with Ted Kennedy at this luncheon here in the hotel, they appointed me as his campaign manager in this county, which was known as the Citizen's for Kennedy for President. As the campaign began to roll, of course I was working at that time and couldn't devote the full time that I wanted to devote to it, and a gentleman here in this town, who was the former city manager, Frank Wiseman, who came in with me and so we were both operating as co-chairman of the thing, and Frank Wiseman did a terrific job in the Kennedy campaign. Between the two of us and all the volunteer workers we had we gave the late President our best effort.

YOUNG: Well, did you find, were you associated at all with the volunteers for Kennedy? Did you work with any of the volunteer labor?

GABRIEL: Yes, the CIO here, and many of the other labor organizations would come in every two or three days and want more literature on the President, and I might add, speaking of literature, this tabloid they had made up of him as a child, he grew up and finally ventured into politics and his service in the Navy, was a very, very outstanding tabloid. People would receive this and they would call up and want to know if there were any more available and the way we distributed those things, we have here what we call the schoolboy patrol, and I met with the head of the schoolboy patrol, and told

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him how we would work it and what we would do for the kids. Then we designated sections of towns for them, and had them to come to headquarters, and if they had to go over into Additson, which is about three miles from where we are sitting today, we would get a taxicab and pay their cab fare for the boys, and they would go out there and distribute those tabloids, and have one of the men picked as a captain, and he would call in to have a cab pick up these youngsters and bring them into headquarters, and we would feed them there, and then when the day was over with we tried to pay them. We knew then that the reaction of their parents because their parents had given them strict orders: “Now if they want to pay for your food, all right, but don’t you take any money from them. You do this work for Kennedy for nothing.” All these kids volunteered and after that particular Saturday when we covered this whole town—municipality end of it—they would come in every evening and want to know if there was anything we had for them to do. They were very enthused about it. If we had something for them to do we would suggest they call their parents and let their parents know where they were, and of course the parents were tickled to death they were involved in this thing.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, do you think any of this rubbed off? Have any of these youngsters remained active in politics?

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GAHRIM: Yes, let me say not because I was involved into it, but I have seen in the last two or three years that we are getting an awful lot of younger people in politics, and they are becoming interested in politics. It’s always been said that the late President was admired very, very much by the younger elements. I have a daughter that is twelve years old, that I don’t think will ever forget the late President, as well as my son who is sixteen years old. Anytime anything is mentioned about the late President on TV or radio, they want silence in the house immediately because they want to hear what it’s all about. They were, I am only using them as an example, but the kids of today in schools, you can talk to them, they want every piece of literature they can possible get hold of on the late President. I think the kids of today are in a much better position than we were—those who were living when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. We just went on the assumption on what we read because there was no TV back in those days, and very little radio, but the American people today were fortunate enough to have TV and they saw the late President’s rites on TV and it’s in their minds to stay.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, how well organized were the forces of Senator Hubert Humphrey in this county? In other words, how much opposition did you have?

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GABRIEL: Let me say that to this date she is a very close friend of mine—she serves

with me as the vice president of the Young Democrats Club in this county, Mrs. Lynda Bowers, who no longer lives here—lives in Gilmer County, she worked in Humphrey’s headquarters, and of course she and I were always close in politics and we were still very close friends. The fact that she was for Humphrey and I was for the late President Kennedy, we never crossed our paths as far as fighting politics is concerned, but I don’t think they had the force that we had. They didn’t have the volunteers that would step forward for the late President. They would step forward and volunteer themselves, where they didn’t do it for Humphrey. In fact I was honest enough to tell her one day she was letting these school kids come into their headquarters, and they would pick up bumper stickers, and they would just destroy them. They were wasting money. You would come through town here at seven or eight o’clock at night, and you would see these Humphrey stickers plastered on these department stores, and the kids weren’t using them to good avail at all. On the other hand, we were trying to hold our bumper stickers for the voting people, and the night of the election I met with the Humphrey forces and they were very nice about it and Lynda Bowers is the type of Democrat who admitted to me that night in the courthouse before midnight, “Well, it

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looks like you all have done an outstanding job. Now, the thing to do is for all of us to get together, and go forward with John F. Kennedy for the presidency of the United States.” I’ve always admired the girl for her remarks that night.

YOUNG: Did there seem to be any real issues between the two senatorial candidates running for the presidential nomination, or do you think it was a matter of organization and personalities—that sort of thing?

GABRIEL: I think as far as organization is concerned, the late President, without a doubt, had one of the finest organizations, and I’m not referring to those in this county alone. He had teams, and when I refer to teams I say that two or three people would come in here and say, we’re from Massachusetts, or from New York, we’re in here on behalf of Senator Kennedy, and those type of people made it awful hard for you to beat. Now you just couldn’t beat a team like the man had. Where, on the other hand, Humphrey I don’t think had the top echelon that Senator Kennedy had. Let’s say for instance, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., as I elaborated a little bit ago, was a very outstanding man in this Kennedy campaign. He was a tremendous asset to the President. Bob Kennedy, who people have heard a lot about, and respected him an awful lot. Humphrey didn’t have these type of people that would come in here for him. I think that his biggest problem was that he didn’t have outstanding people like that—that came into this state and campaigned

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for him. I might add that Bailey, who is now the National Democratic Chairman, did a tremendous job for the late President in this county. I know one night about 5:00 o’clock I got a phone call saying that Bob Kennedy was not able to be here due to other commitments,

and that they were sending Judge Bailey [John Moran Bailey] (known as Judge Bailey at that time). He was the state chairman of the Democratic party of the state of Connecticut. So I went out to the airport and picked him up. We had a tremendous crowd over here at the courthouse, and he made a wonderful talk, and I know that when we got upstairs in the room that this man was a great politician because we sat there and the phones rang constantly, long distance. I'd heard so much about Carmine DiSappio of New York, and we were sitting there and I answered the phone, and it was DiSappio of New York calling Judge Bailey on political matters. I remember very well the governor of Michigan, who was Mennen [G. Mennen Williams], then I believe, Mennen Williams, he called and he apparently asked Judge Bailey where he was at, and he replied, "I'm in the hills of West Virginia. Where in the hell do you think I am?" Then they talked for about twenty minutes. Then the Governor of New Jersey called later that night, and I knew that this gentleman had been around politically, and was pretty well known throughout the United States. Those were the types of people that were an asset to the late

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President. Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], I met him. He was a very smooth politician I would say and a very intelligent boy. There was Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] and Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. I met all these fellows. They were young, vigor, where they had learned their politics, whether they had learned them from the Kennedys or where I don't know. But they knew the fundamentals of politics. They knew how to face the people. They knew what to do with them after they were before the public. Now, as far as the state of West Virginia is concerned with regards to the late President, they felt that here was a man that was going to do something for this state. They were taking on the assumption the things he had told them and had promised them, that this man would go through with it.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, before we go into the presidential years I'd like to interrupt, if I may, and ask you to say a few words on this subject. West Virginia, as we know, is divided as every state is—each section with its own economic and political interest. Was the campaign of Senator Kennedy pitched in this county toward any particular interest in this county? Do you remember any special appeal that was made to this section of the state?

GABRIEL: No, because economically this county was in pretty fair shape, and let me say that about the only hard hit thing in this county, and it isn't only to this county as a year

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gone—it apparently has happened throughout the state—at one time coal mining was the big industry in the state of West Virginia, and of course during his campaign it had dropped off and employment had dropped off as far as the coal mines are concerned, but the output of coal itself was greater than it ever was. That was due to automation. The glass industry was very much concerned about the President and he in turn was very much concerned about

them because here in this county we have one, two, three, about five glass plants in this county, and of course those fellows were very much concerned about what was he going to do in their behalf, and he in turn was very much concerned about what he could do for these particular fellows in the glass industry. The big businessman, the lawyer, the doctor, the dentist, managers of department stores, what can this man do for us? He has promised this and that. Now what can he do to make the situation much better for us here in this county?

YOUNG: Do you know if Senator Kennedy made any suggestions to the people in the glass industry—either labor or management—made any promises with respect to that particular industry?

GABRIEL: Well, let me say that he did make this statement, and I was there in his presence when he made it. The glass industry, for instance, they were concerned about foreign glass being shipped into our country and hurting the glass

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industry in America. He was a man who believed in his theory. Now, he didn't believe in stopping the entire shipment of foreign glass into this country, because he felt that we had to trade with other countries to keep the economy of America rolling. However, he did believe that perhaps a greater percentage of it was coming in than the American people knew and he intended to do something about that. In other words, if we were only shipping twenty percent abroad and they were shipping thirty percent into this country something should be done about it, and he intended to do something about it. And likewise the coal industry. His theory on the coal industry was that coal could be used for other purposes besides heating and he felt that something should be done about it. He felt that we could sell a lot of coal to the foreign countries, which are supposed to be rolling in high gear today, and said that he would see and make it his business to have the type of men that would go into this field and see that this county and the state of West Virginia would come out of it economically in better shape than what they are in today.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, you indicated earlier that you didn't think religion was much of an issue in the primary in this particular county. Did the lingering ghosts of religion linger on through the general election, however? Did you find in the campaign with President Kennedy running against

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Vice President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] that religion was raised in the fall election—in the general election?

GABRIEL: Well, to a certain extent. Let us put it this way: General Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] had served two terms as president of the United States, and

Nixon had served with him as the vice president, and in turn ran against the late President for the presidency of America. We know that Eisenhower was put in office by a big majority of women. I think I have to say this for Richard Nixon, I think that he tried to keep religion out of it, and as I said before, the press, the radio, these ABC and NBC studios tried to keep this thing—religion thing—rolling even in the general election. But I believe myself, my own convictions, you heard less of the religion in the general election than you did in the primary election.

YOUNG: The primary in West Virginia then seemed to end it or almost end it?

GABRIEL: That is right. You didn't hear as much about religion in the general election as you did in the primary because in the primary this was a factor. Here is a man trying to become president of the United States, and we've never had a Catholic president before, and the people, some of them, were a little leery after they'd heard all these reports on TV and radio. But as an individual in my contact with the many, many people in this county, and incidentally, we handled all the literature for surrounding counties

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here at our headquarters, and not one time was that ever an issue. As a matter of fact, in some of the counties they don't even have a Catholic church, and I spent a little time there and I never heard the thing mentioned.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, let us move on then to the presidential years. What do you think was the reaction of the people that you knew in Harrison County and Clarksburg to President Kennedy's domestic program or to many, of course, of his domestic programs? Which ones were well received and which ones perhaps was there some criticism of?

GABRIEL: Let me say that the things he had done and the things he tried to accomplish in the few years he was President of the United States was outstanding. The people knew that we had a man in the nation's capital who was determined to do his utmost for the American people. The things he accomplished were well received, and a lot of the reaction was this: Now, here was a man who was trying to propose something, and whether he wins this battle or not, I think the American people have come to the conclusion that a man can't do a job in four years. He must have ample time to do so. You ought to have heard the remark made well, they may have defeated him on this bill at this particular time, but his next four years—they were looking forward that he was going to serve another four years, and he would accomplish the things he was out to achieve in his next four years as

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president of the United States. I remember very well with the steel industry. He stopped a raise or something wasn't it? Price increase in steel? This was a tremendous thing for the late

President. You'd be surprised the number of people that accepted that as an outstanding man. There was talk for months after he did this, and right away the people's reaction was this: Well, here's a man that big industry is not going to roll over and steamroller as they want Here's a man who is going to hold his guns and stand by them. This was a great asset to him. If the election had been held forty-eight hours after he stopped that price increase I would have hated to be the man that ran against him. The public sentiment because they thought he had done a tremendous thing, and another thing his bill for the aged, Medicare for the aged. This thing is not a dead issue with the public. In this particular county, or this state, and I hate to refer to the Senator from our state who voted against the bill. A lot of them resent the fact that he voted against the President on that bill.

YOUNG: That was Jennings Randolph.

GABRIEL: That's right. After all, Senator Randolph is a personal friend of mine, and if the election was tomorrow. I would go out and work hard for Senator Randolph, but immediately after the bill was defeated the people began to say, "Well, they may have defeated him this time, but I'll lay you ten

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to one by the time that man serves eight years as the President of the United States that Medicare bill will be a national thing in this country. It will pass both the House and the Senate. He has a way—he may have to revise it in a few places, but he'll eventually win out on it."

YOUNG: Well, among the nominal Democratic supporters of President Kennedy did you hear any criticism of him?

GABRIEL: In regard to that particular bill or anything?

YOUNG: Any kind.

GABRIEL: Well, naturally I have some doctors in this town who are personal friends of mine who naturally were against the Medicare bill. Outside of that, I don't think there was any criticism to amount to anything against him. They felt here was a man that was young, who would eventually accomplish the things he planned to accomplish even though he may go into defeat. In this particular bill he was a man who would not let it be pigeonholed and forgotten. It would come back out again, and the American people knew this man was going to do what he could for this country, and as his years rolled on as the President you'd be surprised by the amount of people who are of the other party affiliation who would even come out and say, "I voted against him four years ago, but I guarantee you I'm not going to vote against him this time."

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YOUNG: You mean had he had the opportunity to run for a second term the vote would have been even greater?

GABRIEL: That's right. I sincerely believe he would have carried this state with a tremendous amount of vote, and in my travels throughout other states, it's amazing how many people would admit that they didn't vote for him, but they weren't about to vote against him this next time if he ran again for his next term.

YOUNG: Mr. Gabriel, I think at the beginning of this interview you said that you had been in politics about twenty-four years, but that you had learned more in the Kennedy campaign than you'd learned in all these other years. Then you did go on to mention some of the campaign techniques. What new techniques could you use that you haven't mentioned or what do you think was your most successful campaign technique in the primary?

GABRIEL: In years gone by in politics you always have what you call the old line politician, and when a person is running for office the first thing you do, well, now here's Mr. Jones, he served as sheriff, he served as county clerk. He's been in politics thirty or forty years. Let's go contact him first. I found with the Kennedys it wasn't that way, but they didn't want to leave anybody out of the picture. They were interested in young people of America. They felt that these young people would be an asset to them, and it

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proved that they were. I would say nation-wide that sixty percent of the younger elements voted for the President, and I would say those who weren't old enough to vote were getting into the swing of things. They wanted you to keep in contact with these young people. By the same token they didn't want you to lose sight of the old politician either. I know that when one of them was in town if I had the opportunity and the time, so many times you didn't have time to even release a story because they were coming in on you and you didn't know anything about it. We would get radio flashes out that so-and-so was going to be in town to speak at the courthouse, to speak at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel, or wherever the case may be, and always be a gathering there. Here is a thing that always impressed me about the Kennedys. So many politicians will make a speech and they'll shake hands with maybe fifty or one hundred and then move on. This man or his staff insisted, regardless of how late we were going to be at the next stop, that, "I intend to shake hands with everybody here before I leave." Now, the morning he was here it was a jam-packed hotel at 9:00 o'clock in the morning. Republicans and Democrats alike. Protestants, Methodist, Jews, Catholics, and what have you—they were all here. That man looked at me and I said to him, "Senator, we're running about an hour late right now. He said, we're not leaving this

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ballroom, we are going to form a line over here, we'll close that door, and they'll all have to come out this door, and we intend to meet everyone of them before we leave here." And that's exactly what the man did. And to the public that is something.

YOUNG: Do you think this has raised a new standard with all future politicians?

GABRIEL: I definitely do, and I think that he has done a tremendous job politically in this country. He has changed the theory of politics. Of course we all realize to play an important part in politics today, and the American people, as long as we live, those who saw it and those who will read about it, those who will keep hearing other people talk about it, will never forget the TV debates. This is going to live in the American people's mind forever, politically. I think from now on all politicians are going to cash in on debates. But their theory of politics is so much different from the ordinary county politics, or state politics. State politics, there may be a big rally in the southern part of the state today and people in the northern part of the state read about it. Well, in his campaign Franklin D. Roosevelt could be in Wheeling, West Virginia, the late President would be in Logan, West Virginia, Bob Kennedy could be in the panhandle up in Martinsburg, and Ted Kennedy could have been over in Webster Springs. You pick up the paper

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the next morning and the late President spoke in Logan, Franklin D. Roosevelt gives them hell in Wheeling, and this one here speaks somewhere else. And that's all you had in the paper. It was a team effort all the way through.

YOUNG: Did you have an opportunity to visit or meet with the President after the nomination?

GABRIEL: I met with him once after the nomination here in this state, and I talked with him twice on the telephone. A man that made you feel like you won the election yourself for him. He was that type of man, who was very grateful for everything you did for him, and gave you the impression that he shall never forget it.

YOUNG: Well, did you have an opportunity then to meet him as President?

GABRIEL: No, I had never.

YOUNG: Well, looking back over all your experiences with the late President can you think of anything you haven't mentioned so far that would provide some interesting insight into his relationship with the public, and politicians, in general?

GABRIEL: Well, the thing that always impressed me about the late President, and I, myself, and I've been doing this myself right here this afternoon, whether it's

a form of habit or what and regardless of where I was if I knew that the late President was going to have a press conference at 3:00

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o'clock in the afternoon I tried my darndest to make it my business to be near TV someplace to see this press conference and hear him, and not because of what he was going to say, but he always impressed me. I've always had the impression that the man had a photostatic mind. I used to get amazed at the press conference when these members of the press would ask him a question. I don't think I ever heard him use the phrase "uh." He immediately had an answer. And if he didn't have an answer he'd say, "I have no knowledge of that; however, I will look into it immediately." Very, very impressive to me and to the American public. I think this man by holding these press conferences made himself before the American public. The American public loved him. Not because he was president of the United States, but because of his ability—caliber of man that he was. He was a very sincere man. I don't think he was trying to cram—as a matter of fact I know he wasn't trying to cram anything down anybody's throat. The American people or the legislative for that matter. Everything that he did was very sincere. He took—as the old saying is in the political line—he took the bull by the horns and tried his best in everything.

YOUNG: Well, if we were to go back and summarize the Kennedy years in West Virginia, what do you think was the outstanding result of the President's primary campaign in West Virginia? Any long-range residue, any lasting contribution?

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GABRIEL: Well, I think when the President traveled this state and saw the economic situation the state of West Virginia was in, he emphasized the fact that instead of going forward this state was going backward, and this is true. Long before the late President came into the campaign in this state, there was nothing ever forceful about our highways, about our economic situation in the state of West Virginia. Number one he insisted we should have better highways, and I very well remember and I don't think it's a good issue to this day, the amount of money they appropriated for the state of West Virginia for federal highways, because the Republicans from other states, particularly the Senator from Ohio, who just raved about the President using the biggest part of the appropriation for the highways in the state of West Virginia. This was a promise that he made to the state of West Virginia. This was a promise that he withheld and kept. Another one of his great and outstanding promises was coal in West Virginia. He was going to try to see if coal could be used for something else besides heat. And since he became President of the United States, the coal industry in the state of West Virginia has increased tremendously. He would go before these, not at rallies at the courthouse or at city hall, he'd visit the coal miners right at the mine, in the mine, and showed these coal miners that he was absolutely sincere and was

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interested in their welfare. I think this was very impressive to them.

YOUNG: Do you remember which Ohio Senator it was that objected to the highway?

GABRIEL: No, I don't offhand. I know he's a Republican, and he made an issue of it, and he was going to have an investigation about the matter he said, because the President had released this tremendous amount of money for highways in the state of West Virginia. As I said earlier in this interview he was a man who wanted to meet with the common ordinary man, the laboring class of people. He wanted to do something for them, as well as the youth of America, as well as the youth of West Virginia, those who were going to grow up in years and become the part of the government of this state of ours. He was interested in them and he was interested in the old people. He would visit the abandoned coal camps where these old people were living and had very little coming in. The greatest thing that he did for the state of West Virginia was the Food Stamp Plan. That was something that the people in the stricken area of West Virginia will never forget, because it's—the stamp plan they can't go out here and trade it off for something else—they've got to go to that particular store and use that stamp, and it's for nourishment for their children and for their family. This he had promised the people and this promise he kept.

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YOUNG: Well, Mr. Gabriel, as we bring this interview to a close do you have any concluding summaries that represent your impression of President Kennedy and his political activity other than those you've already given?

GABRIEL: Well, let me say that I think what happened to our late President was a terrible thing to this country, it was a blow to the world as a whole because we felt that politics was laid aside regardless of party affiliation and regardless of what church you went to. We felt that we lost something, as well as the world, and I might add that I don't think in my entire career politically or otherwise I ever met a more outstanding family than the Kennedy family. A family to have so much wealth and yet come down to the lower level of the common people. Everyone to them was a friend as far as they were concerned, and I don't say only the late President. Ted is involved in politics and Bob is United States Attorney General, but the entire family was well liked, not only by West Virginians or the American people, but well liked by the world. I think had our late president still been living many problems that are confronting us today throughout the world would have been solved in the near future. Maybe not had he finished his four-year term, but certainly after he had been reelected. There's no doubt in my mind and no doubt in many, many minds of the American people that he would have been

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reelected he would have certainly gone down in history books as one of the greatest Presidents of all times, and I'm sure that he will always be missed, and I'm certain that he will never be forgotten as far as the American people are concerned who are old or young.

YOUNG: This has been an interview with Mr. Victor J. Gabriel of Clarksburg, West Virginia, held in the Stonewall Jackson Hotel, July 30, 1964. Mr. Gabriel served as chairman and then as co-chairman with Mr. Frank Wiseman of the Kennedy Primary forces in Harrison County and Clarksburg in 1960. The interviewer was William L. Young.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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