Young: Let me say a few words about what we’re up to, what this project is about. Senator Kennedy may have said a few words to you about it, but the idea of this project started a couple of years ago when he was, with some of his friends and advisors, thinking about what he should do about passing something on to the next generation. I’m sure he and Vicki [Reggie Kennedy] considered doing a memoir, doing an autobiography or an authorized biography or something, and they hit upon the idea of doing a spoken history instead, which is what we call an oral history.

He had two purposes in mind. It wasn’t to be just about him and his career. It was also to be about the Senate and the great legislative battles of his time. One of the main purposes that he saw in this was to make this spoken history available to the next generations so that they could look back and, as he put it, “Learn how our laws are really made, and learn about the least studied institution of government in the United States, which is the Senate.” Speaking as an academician, I can say that there are very few courses on the Senate. There’s very little taught about the Senate and there’s comparatively little written about it by historians or political scientists, compared with what’s written about the Court or about the Presidency or about the House of Representatives. Because we were doing oral histories of the various Presidencies and he liked the way we did it, he chose us to do this oral history.

He was the first person to be interviewed for it, and I’ve been interviewing him now for about a year. I think I’ve had my twelfth interview and there are many more to come. This is a six-year project. Very early on, I think the first visit I had with him in the Senate when he was still looking me over, he said, “There are certain people you have to talk with, and you have to talk with them soon because they’re very important.” You were one of those people, and he said, “You also need to talk to my allies, to my alliances. I’ve worked a lot with my alliances.” So I’ll start from there.

Byrd: Very well. All right.

Young: So would you like to start with the early days, yours and his, in the Senate?

Byrd: I’d be glad to. I do have these notes. Well, let me start at the beginning. We’re talking about Senator Kennedy. Let me tell you, I suppose that I’m the only Senator who can speak in this fashion about Senator Kennedy. He and I have had a very special relationship. There have been none other like it. I’ll try to start at the beginning of that relationship. My first day in the Senate was January 3, 1959. I came into the Senate when it had Senators like Sam Ervin, a great
constitutional lawyer, and William Fulbright, bright and I mean a professorial mind. Lester Hill might have been there. Wayne Morse, irascible, smart, independent to the core.

Other Senators I remember very well are [Joseph] O’Mahoney, Everett Dirksen—what a man, what a speaker he was—and Mike Mansfield. Also Jacob Javits and Norris Cotton.

The greatest of them all, Richard B. Russell, the Southern Chieftain, a man who was never married except to the Senate. The Senate was his love. He was the man I most admired of all Senators. I have visited his grave in Winder, Georgia, I believe it is, and I can see the tall pines as I saw them then, in the bright sun, that bright southern sun coming down between those tall pines and shining upon the grave of Richard Brevard Russell, the man who taught me to love the Senate and to love its history, and to learn its rules. Not only its rules but as he said one day, “Robert, the rules are important, but also read the precedents and learn to know how to use the rules and the precedents.” He was my mentor. He once told me he wished I were his son. He didn’t have any sons. He had never married. Brilliant. His vocabulary was profound. He spoke with cool judgment. He loved the Senate. I prided myself on learning the rules and the precedents, the whole book of precedents, I read it from cover to cover, I guess about a half dozen times.

We’re here today to talk about Ted Kennedy and that’s what I’m going to do. Ted Kennedy and I have a relationship like no other relationship I’ve ever known or witnessed in my time here.

Ted came a little later, he came with a scion of wealth reputation. The great—and I mean it in every sense of the word—the great Senator Kennedy and the great Kennedy family. I have so much respect for that family.

Ted Kennedy has seen tragedy after tragedy after tragedy. He was sitting in the chair of the Senate presiding over it when the news came that his great brother, President John F. Kennedy, had been shot, and that has been the way with Ted Kennedy. He has lived through tragedy after tragedy after tragedy. I don’t know of any other family—no other family comes immediately to mind that is like this family, the Kennedy family. They had a wonderful mother and great father. He had a brother who did not live long and so we don’t know what he might have been or what this country might have become, because it was not God’s will that he live long.

I did not like Ted Kennedy.
Young: This is when he first came.

Byrd: When he first came. I’m giving it to you just as raw as it can be. He did not like me. We knew it. We didn’t like one another and we didn’t care who knew it—I didn’t, he didn’t. I don’t know how he viewed me, but I can tell you how I viewed him. I didn’t like him from the start. He was sworn in, I believe, as one of the youngest Senators ever. In any event, as I recall, he was catapulted into the office of Whip. I believe Senator Long was the Whip at that time. I liked Russell Long. He was a wheeler and dealer, but a great mixer. He came from a very prestigious family, and I believe his father was known as the Kingfish. He was one of the Senators who had been mentioned for President. I voted for Russell Long for Whip. He had been a Senator before I became a Senator. Ted Kennedy came into the Senate and defeated Russell Long for Whip. I didn’t care for Ted Kennedy.

Young: What was it about him? Was it because he was not acting as a Senator then? He was coming on too strong? He hadn’t learned how to be a Senator, or his brother was President?

Byrd: To tell you the truth, I can’t remember exactly why I didn’t like him. Now I was a friend of Russell Long and I told Russell I did the work. I did just exactly what Senator Russell told me to do, learn the rules and the precedents and know how to use them. On January 21, 1971, I defeated Ted Kennedy. I decided that if I was going to do the work there, I might as well have the title. Ted Kennedy was the Whip. Mr. Mansfield was our leader. I was true to him, loyal to him, told him I would never run against him, and so I was his Whip. I think I was doing the work beginning about 1967. I was, in a way, virtually the leader of the Senate. Mr. Mansfield didn’t care for the floor work and he was happy that I did it. I was in that job for a long time.

There were a couple of Senators who wanted that job. Ed [Edmund] Muskie, he was a big man. Not only was he a big man in many ways, he was a big man physically and a tall man, sun-crowned, who lived above the fog in public duty and in private thinking. God give us men. There were men in those days. I don’t think they liked me very much.

Young: Why not?

Byrd: Well, because they saw me as a formidable somebody who was ambitious.

Riley: And studied the rules.

Byrd: No doubt about it. I mastered them. I couldn’t tell you much about them today, I’ve forgotten most of them, but that’s not important. We’re talking about Ted Kennedy.

Riley: And you and the Senate.

Byrd: I did not like him. He didn’t come up the ladder like I did. I was a poor boy to start with and I started life behind scratch. Nobody can tell me much about poverty. I came up the hard way and am proud of it. I had to scratch my way up. I was made fun of, called a hillbilly. I married a coal miner’s daughter and I grew up in a coal miner’s home. I came up the hard way,
as they say. I didn’t come from scratch, I came from behind scratch. I can remember when I didn’t get anything for Christmas. I can remember wearing tennis shoes in the snow. I came from a background of penury and want and privation, but two people raised me who loved me, and the man who loved me wanted me to be somebody. He raised me as the greatest man I ever met. I’ve met Kings, Shahs, Princes, Presidents, Governors, the great men of the world, but he was the greatest I ever knew.

Riley: So you came from behind scratch, as you say. You made your own way and here was this man coming in at 30, born with a silver spoon in his mouth needless to say.

Byrd: He came right into the top. I had been doing the work on the floor for I don’t know how many years, since 1967, and he just leapfrogged over me. So here all of a sudden came this scion of wealth, Ted Kennedy. So I disliked him from the start. I had been doing the work of Whip all along for Mike Mansfield, and I told Russell Long I would never run against him because I liked him. I didn’t intend ever to run for Whip against Russell Long. I liked him and that was good enough for me. But here came Ted Kennedy and defeated Russell Long, so he was the Whip. I’m sure he saw me as formidable. No man ever owned me, no man ever put his collar around me, and I’ve had some pretty big ones who have tried.

Ted Kennedy was the Whip and I despised him because he leapfrogged over me and I thought he looked down on me. We came from different beginnings, as far apart as one can get. I respected his brother, they were very different. He had another brother whom I didn’t like at all and he didn’t like me, which is understandable. I was a roughneck and I came up the hard way. I mean, I didn’t back off from anybody. The bigger they are, the harder they fall was my motto. Since I had been doing the work, I figured I might as well have the title, and so I began to plan. I worked the plan. I took my time, followed the plan to the limit, and nobody knew it but me. I decided, well boy, you’re the Whip and I’m coming after you. You may think I’m nothing but a piece of dirt but you’re going to find out.

Young: So you followed the plan and now he’s no longer Whip.

Byrd: Yes, I became the Whip.

Young: How did he take that, when you won the Whip away from him?

Byrd: Well, nobody knew I was going to fight him. It was a master plan, and so I defeated him. Somewhere along the line after that, I watched him back there in that back row. I watched him as he worked in the committees. He did a splendid job. Somewhere along the line we became friends.

Young: Let me ask you a little bit more about after you became the Whip. This didn’t make relations between you even worse, did it? Because somebody has written that later he told you that was the best thing that ever happened to him. He went to work on legislation.

Byrd: He did a great job on the committees. I was the leader, and when I wanted to ask questions about this legislation or that or how do we stand on this or which direction should we go, I’d talk to my Democratic leaders, the chairman and so on. I had tremendous respect for Kennedy. I always called on him and Wendell Ford and some others. I came to admire him very
much. He became a loyal supporter and was very loyal to me when I was leader. It took a while but he became a loyal supporter and friend.

His brother, John F. Kennedy, was a Senator when I came to the Senate. I didn’t have any close relations with John F. Kennedy. I felt that he should have paid a little more attention to me. I was a new Senator. I had had six years in the House and I wasn’t exactly a neophyte. I thought he was a great Senator but he asked me one day, he told me that he would like me to support him. I said, “Senator—” and I believe we were both sitting in the back row that day— “I’ve been here quite a while and this is the first time you’ve ever taken the pains to know me, to say hello to me, and now you’re asking me to support you. Until now you hadn’t noticed me. I can’t be for you. I’m going to be for Lyndon Johnson. He’s my leader, he put me on the Appropriations Committee, and I’d be a poor wretch to not remember that.”

I was on the Appropriations Committee and could go anywhere in the world that I wanted to. Lyndon B. Johnson saw to that. Lyndon came to me one time and I said, “Listen, you can send me anywhere. You put me on the Appropriations Committee, I can go anywhere I want to at any time.” He was trying to get me to vote a certain way. I’ve never folded, ever, even to the man that I owe this great debt, and I told him I owed him a great debt. I didn’t fail to show it either, when the time came in San Francisco (or maybe it was Los Angeles), when I stood up for Lyndon Johnson.

Young: You were talking about after you became the Whip officially. You had been doing the work before. Kennedy is now no longer the Whip and he’s turning his attention to committee work. You’re watching him in the committees and you’re seeing things that are causing you to maybe change your mind about him, or what?

Byrd: I thought he was one of the best committee chairmen that I had.

Young: What was it about him?

Byrd: Ted Kennedy was one of the best. He loved his committee work. He went about his work with great zeal. He knew the subject matter on any bill that came out of his committee, and he was loyal to me after a while, loyal to the core. He was very concentrated on his work. He was a leader. He was one who was able and capable of being the leader of the Senate. I gave him his due and he was due a lot. He was a Senator in every sense of the word. I admired him because he proved himself to be a man when he was defeated. He was the first to shake my hand when I defeated him. I can remember standing behind the back row of the Senate after the caucus that day and he came to me and shook my hand. I’ve never forgotten that. I fully trusted him and I came to like him more than any other Senator I’ve ever known other than Richard B. Russell.

Ted Kennedy and I became friends. I suppose I’m too close to the forest to see the trees in my own time, but I think that Ted Kennedy is one of the outstanding Senators of this age, of the 20th century. We both came into the 20th century in the latter half of it politically and I think of him as a Senator in every sense of the word. It’s hard for me to forget that I’m talking about Ted Kennedy because he’s so near to me and I love the Senate.

Young: I try to come at this from the viewpoint of what people, after we’re all gone, should learn about the Senate, about you and about Ted Kennedy, which is one of the things I think that
will be very interesting to people who listen to or read these transcripts, if it goes the way we like it to go. So let me give you the viewpoint from an outsider looking at this. One of the things that really is interesting to me and is very important historically, as you’ve said, you’re two very different people, you and Ted Kennedy.

**Byrd:** Worlds apart.

**Young:** It’s hard for people to understand how two people come together in a deliberated body like the Senate where people have different views and so forth. How does it happen that you two became friends and became such admirers of each other and had such respect for each other? I’m asking myself, could that happen anywhere in this world except in the United States Senate?

**Byrd:** I don’t know that it has ever happened before or since in the Senate, and probably this kind of relationship has never been equaled. I admire him. Now why do I like him? He was a man. He didn’t go about his work as a defeated man, he went about it as a giant, as a man who was a man. Why do I admire him so much? It’s the kind of relationship that only I and Ted Kennedy could have; two worlds apart, men who did not like one another. He probably didn’t think I even belonged in the Senate and I didn’t think he belonged in there as Whip.

He has never been a defeated man. He has been my equal and I accept that and love him. He’s the man I admire most in the Senate, except Dick Russell, as I say. All along, Ted has done his job. He put his shoulder to the wheel and never seemed to hold it against me. He recognized that he had been defeated, but that was just one chapter, the book was not written. So he came on as one who was deeply loyal to the Senate and he knew how to handle himself as a man, as a Senator and we had great respect for each other. I think of him as a man who is entitled to the title of Senator. When I think of Senator, I think of Ted Kennedy.

**Young:** That’s what I was wondering when I asked if it was the respect for the Senate, among other things, that you have in common. How can these two people who started out very different—? And you’ve been on the opposite sides of plenty of legislation, but you’ve been together with him too. What is the bond between these two men? I think one of those things is that you both respect the Senate. Is that a rare commodity these days in the Senate?

**Byrd:** It is, in my judgment. In my judgment it is a rare commodity. Ted Kennedy and I are Senators and we both love the Senate. We like the same people. We both like and believe in the common man. He’s always taken the part of the common man. He’s made that his life’s work. Education, that has been a prime interest in his legislative life and there’s plenty of legislation to show for his belief in education. It’s easier for me to see the common man and to believe in him. I don’t know how it is for Ted Kennedy, but he certainly has taken the lot of the common man and put it into legislation. It has been his life’s work.

Education, health, Iraq—his vote against Iraq, which I think is the greatest vote I ever cast out of my 17,000-plus votes in 48 years in the Senate. He voted against that war and he is against it, as I am against it. We’re for our men over there, our soldiers, our sailors. The United States, the American uniform, we are for them, to the last dollar and the last bottle. This man is my blood brother, that’s the way I feel about him. It was hate at first, it was rivalry, it was no holds barred,
and I could be mean. But that’s all gone. There’s something about religion that’s real. I’m a changed man from what I was and I think Ted is too.

Young: That was going to be my next question, is he too?

Byrd: Yes.

Young: How has he changed? You know, you said he had a lot of tragedy. He had some misfortunes too and his private life was not—

Byrd: Yes, yes. I never thought about that. I never spent my time thinking about such. I had my own private fight that wasn’t so good. I joined the Ku Klux Klan when I was young and didn’t have the right attitude. I came from a background that was part of that, so that is that and I regret it. So I have something in my background that I’ve talked a lot about. I don’t hide from it, but I don’t think about the backgrounds. We came from opposite poles but we’re together.

Young: Let me ask you a question about him. Some people have said about Kennedy that he didn’t really decide to become a Senator, as you put it, in the best sense of the term, until his Presidential ambitions crashed. Some people say that that’s when he became a real Senator and I’ve wondered myself whether that’s true or not. Or was the Senate becoming his life, his place in the world of public service, before that? My question is did this happen after his Presidential ambitions were gone, or did you see it happening after that handshake?

Byrd: I don’t see it through a glass darkly. I saw it up front. He was a Senator before that time. He worked in his committee, and just as I told Mrs. [Hilary Rodham] Clinton once before she became Senator, work your committee. Get to know the jurisdictions, get to know the work. Get to know what’s in that committee, what’s in the work. He did do just that. He has been a study of mine for a long time. I’m looking from the outside and I’m looking from the inside, and I’ve known him as no other person has known him in a way, and my admiration for his work in committee happened earlier than that. He has mastered the work of his committees and he has mastered the work as a Senator.

I don’t have to be here today to earn a living. I’ve paid into this retirement system longer than any other person on earth; 48 years I’ve paid into it, and before then when I was in the House. So I don’t have to work here to earn a living. I work here because I love this Senate and that’s what I live for, the people of West Virginia. They’ve had faith in me all along. They never lost their faith in me and they’ve never let me down. I say that for a purpose. I am a unique Senator. I suppose every Senator can say that and that’s probably true, but I’m not here to get my paycheck. I’m a Senator.

He’s a unique Senator. You have to be pretty unique to get here. Any Senator must have read a lot and talked to a lot of people to get here, but in my judgment, there’s some more unique than others. Ted Kennedy is a unique Senator. Here’s a man who has come from tragedy after tragedy after tragedy. He’s been down but he’s always come back. What a man, to survive all these tragedies, terrible tragedies. One of his brothers was President of the United States, shot dead, and another brother who was going to be President, shot dead. What a history, what a life. Here he is the only brother, the only one left. He has cared for the family name in a great way. It takes
something and there has to be something in a man to have that kind of iron will and purpose and dedication, and it’s there in Ted Kennedy.

Young: I think it’s there in you too and we’re also talking about this unique relationship. Two unique people, one of the unique relationships, unique in history.

Byrd: Absolutely.

Young: Russell has been studying this, and what was it, you and Senator Kennedy?

Riley: This would have to be the longest serving pair of Senators ever in the history of the Senate. There isn’t another pair this long.

Young: That’s never happened before. So you had a very long journey together. The term he used to me, what he said when we started this project, was, “Jim, we’re going on a long journey through time.”

Byrd: Yes, and he’s not finished yet either. If we think about human beings and the tables of length of life and longevity and so on, I feel he’ll be here a long time. He’s a bit younger than I am and he’s great in his own way. His story is unequal.

Riley: Senator, is that unusual now? Do you get the sense that there are people serving in the Senate now who don’t really love the Senate in the way that you’re talking about?

Byrd: Oh, of course there are, yes. I think there are some good Senators who are doing a good job. A lot of them are young and they just know how to make a headline, but true greatness does not come about easily. Some are born great, some have greatness thrust upon them. Some are never great, some would be great, but I’m glad that I’ve lived long enough to see some Senators who were great in their time, and Ted is one of them. I have a sense that Ted Kennedy will go down as one of the notable, remarkable Senators of all time. I think he is a Senator who would have spoken out, who would have been active, who would have been listened to, who would have been a leader at any time. I think he very well could have been among those men at any time in this nation’s history. He could have fitted in.

Young: This is also about the Senate. It’s not just about Ted Kennedy but Ted Kennedy and you, and also the Senate in your time. That was a very different world, was it, in the Senate when you came here in the late ’50s and he came here in the early ’60s, from what it is today?

Byrd: It was and is. When I came here, Senators came to be Senators. That is a world that is different.

Young: Looking at the situation now, not just at the other Senators, but has the Senate gone downhill in terms of its importance, its constitutional importance? What about the relations with the Executive Branch? Of course, I’m thinking about you and Ted Kennedy on Iraq and the war powers and all that we’re in the middle of right now.

Byrd: You’re opening up a vast new plateau. I don’t know how deeply we ought to go into that. Would you ask that question again?
Young: I started out by asking is the Senate going downhill in terms of the arc of history, and I’m thinking now of its battles with the Executive Branch or its deference to the President.

Byrd: I could answer that part quickly, not at great length, but I can answer it. In my judgment, as a viewer from the outside and as a participant and viewer from the inside, the membership of the Senate, the men and women of the Senate are what make the Senate at a given time in history. The Senate will always be a forum in which men and women can stand on their feet if they know what they’re doing and speak freely and without fear. Ted Kennedy I think is like that.

The Senate, has it gone downhill? I think so. I don’t think that the Senate is fulfilling its purpose in some ways as the framers intended. The framers intended for this Senate to be independent, have a mind of its own, a voice of its own, a wheel of its own, and intended for Senators not to defer. Well, you speak respectfully, of course, of the Executive Branch. Remember there are three branches. The President is the top person in the Executive Branch, but we Senators need to remember, Presidents don’t make us. No President makes me. No President elects me. No President can send me home. I can help to send a President home if the House impeaches a President. I wouldn’t mind doing that on some occasions but that has not fallen to my luck yet at least.

I’m a Senator, I love being a Senator, and a man gets just as much respect as he deserves, and if he doesn’t want to be respected he won’t be. I’m a Senator for the people of West Virginia and the good Lord will it, until I die.

I think Ted Kennedy is every inch a Senator. In his conduct in the Senate, he has known how to be a Senator, be a committee chairman, be a committee member, and be one of the leaders of our time. I don’t know how I could speak more highly of Ted Kennedy.

Young: He’s also learned to be a loser and hold up his head.

Byrd: Look, he has been a great loser and that is the test of a man. It’s easy to win and I’ve always been a winner, thank God. The Lord has been on my side and the people of West Virginia have been on my side and the members of the Senate have been on my side. I’ve never lost a battle so I can talk about it, but one has to lose a battle to really know what it’s like. Ted Kennedy has been a loser but in losing, he has been greater. I wish I could live to see his full service but that is in God’s hands, in the people’s hands, in the Senate’s hands and in his hands. As one who is the winner in a duel, I’m not going to be like the winner in another duel that took place in New Jersey, I respect this man and love him.

Young: Thank you.

Byrd: Barbara, did you have something you want to add, to remind me of?

Videnieks: Yes.

Byrd: She is my alma mater. She knows me, my mind and she knows my thinking, and she is absolutely true in every sense of the word. She has been the only one in my staff who has known me for so long.
Videnieks: I think you wanted to bring this out and you just didn’t. What’s interesting about the two men, it’s their small interests that bind them. It’s unusual because coming from the kind of background that Senator Byrd hails from, you wouldn’t expect this. You’d expect it of Ted Kennedy. They both love poetry. They exchange, they goad each other on to recite poetry. They love it, they share that. They both love history. They’re history buffs, they can talk on and on about history, and then of course there’s the Senate. These are things I think they discovered later, that there were these other kinds of ties too. I don’t know if you want to tell them about the almost Kennedy/Byrd ticket.

Byrd: He came to me when I was leader. It was a personal, private conversation that took place in my office when I was leader. He said,”Bob—” he always calls me Bob. And this was when he was about to get the nomination, wasn’t he?

Videnieks: He was thinking of challenging [Jimmy] Carter.

Byrd: He came to me and he said—I believe he said he knew what the answer was going to be or something like that, but he said, “I’ve thought of you as being on the ticket with me, and I would like to ask you.” I believe he said, “If I’m nominated for President, I have to think of someone on the ticket with whom I can serve and will serve,” and I believe he said, “I thought of you.” I believe he deferred to me then to respond and I believe I responded in the negative. To say he offered it to me, I’m not sure I can say that, but he spoke with me as someone whom he had given a lot of consideration. Here he was, a man who was almost assured of the nomination, at least we thought, coming to me and probing me as a possible Vice President on his ticket with him. I was greatly honored, but I said—I think I reacted in the negative, in a nice way.

Videnieks: You either reacted in the negative then or did a day or so later. I can’t quite remember.

Byrd: I don’t remember either frankly, exactly.

Riley: Senator, your thinking on that? You declined for what reason? I think I know the answer but I’d like to hear it from you.

Byrd: Well, may I just have a moment for recess?

[BREAK]

Riley: You had declined a potential Vice Presidential nomination, and I just wondered if you could tell us why you felt like that wasn’t something that you wanted to consent to.

Byrd: May I speak of one other declaration that I made along those lines. This will be a brief, off the cuff reflection. President [Richard] Nixon once spoke to me. I won’t say he offered, but he asked me or he rather said, “Senator Byrd—” I forget how this came about. I went with him on a flight over to Elkins, West Virginia. He said there was a Supreme Court vacancy. He didn’t say
he would give it to me or offer it to me, but he said, “I don’t believe you’ve practiced law.” I said, “No, I haven’t practiced law. I’ve studied law and I graduated, and never intended to be a lawyer. I wanted to be a better man, a better servant of the people. I’m in the Senate and that has been my goal, to make myself better. I started out as nothing and I think I’ve advanced some.”

So he said, “Well, there is a vacancy on the Supreme Court. There have been people who have mentioned you. Strom Thurmond has mentioned you, and the Senator from Wyoming mentioned you. The Secretary of the Treasury, John Connally, he’s very much in your corner, and others. Russell Long is very much pushing you, people in the Senate. There have been a couple that I’ve turned down, but the Senate, they wouldn’t turn you down. We know about your background but the Senate has accepted you.” I believe he said there were two that he had considered and turned down. [G. Harold] Carswell was one and [Clement] Haynsworth, a very highly respectable jurist.

Then he opened the way for a response and I said, “Well, let me think about it. I’m greatly honored and I’ll get back to you quickly.” That night I went home and talked to Erma [Byrd] about it. We went out to dinner together. While we were out to dinner I said, “Erma, what do you think of this?” She said, “Well, I think you like being what you are. What do you think?” I said, “There’s some good sides about it. I wouldn’t have to run for election. I wouldn’t have to have those problems, but I don’t think that I would be happy. I don’t think I’d be happy as a judge and have to study briefs and put myself in a closet just to be by myself and read all that. I don’t think I would like that.” And she said, “Well, you had better let the President know that. You ought to tell him, tell him that you don’t want to be that even if he’s thinking about it.”

That was the first evening and I believe it was the very next day, I went to John Pastore, a very liberal Senator and one of the best orators that I’ve ever heard in the Senate and who was a supporter of mine. He was of Italian heritage, very frank, outspoken, and brilliant. A flaming liberal from Rhode Island and here I was, Nixon was about to select me or maybe thought of me as he said he did, as a strict constructionist. He was looking for a strict constructionist to go on that Court, and I was one. I said to Pastore, “I don’t think I’d like to be—if he’s going to name me, I don’t want him to name me.” He said, “Well, you had better tell someone who will let him know that quickly or else he might do it, and it would be embarrassing if you turn it down.”

Of course we both knew I was no sure shot as far as the President was concerned. He just talked with me about it. One of us jumped to the conclusion that I was going to be it, but it was a clear possibility. I knew if the President were to nominate me, the Senate, which had turned down Carswell and Haynsworth, would accept me. I was one of the club. In the Washington Times—it was called the Evening Star at that time, it said that I was his first pick. I remember the headline somewhere. Anyhow, that’s besides the point. We’re talking about Ted Kennedy, aren’t we?

Riley: You were using this as a second instance where somebody tried to lure you away from the institution that you ultimately devoted your entire career to.

Byrd: So I said to Pastore, “I don’t want to be that. I want to stay as a Senator.” He said, “You’d better tell the President, and you had better not go down to that White House yourself. They—” meaning the press—“will be all over you if you go down. Tell someone you know who knows the President well, and you tell him and he can tell the President.” I said, “I know the Secretary of the Treasury, who has been pushing me, like you.” I got John Connally on the phone and he was
a booster of mine. “Mr. Secretary,” I said, “I don’t want the President to nominate me. If he is about to, I don’t want him to do it and I wish you would let him know. If it were to happen it would be too late so I wish you would tell him.” He said, “I don’t agree with you—” Connally said that to me very clearly—“I don’t agree with you, but if that’s your wish I’ll let him know.” That was the end of it.

Riley: And your response to Senator Kennedy when he approached you was also because your career was in the Senate and you felt that you preferred to continue there?

Byrd: I thanked him. I thought it was an honor that he would think of me. I’m not sure that I didn’t say let me talk with my wife first. I probably did, but I’m not sure about that. Anyhow, I let Senator Kennedy know after three or four days, I believe it was, that I didn’t think I would like being in that position. Well, I guess I was the first one he mentioned it to, and he also mentioned to Scoop [Henry] Jackson, who was a very fine Senator, who I thought was one of the great Senators of our era. I don’t know if he talked with any other Senator about it. I don’t recall. So that was the way, as Walter Cronkite said, “That’s the way it was.”

Gavin: Senator, one thing that we talked about before these gentlemen came in the room was the human side of your relationship with Senator Kennedy. On your birthday he sent you those roses that one year, and then, just most recently for instance, during the [John F.] Kerry Presidential campaign, Senator Kennedy came to West Virginia and you and he and Senator [Jay] Rockefeller rode around on that bus, including the day it caught fire and broke down. There was a lot of humor mixed into your relationship too.

Byrd: There was a big bus carrying us all and I got up out of my seat, “Where’s Teddy?” He’d be in the back seat and he’d say, “He’s getting ready.” We had a flat or something on that bus and we both were out there on the highway. We didn’t work to fix the flat, but we stood there and looked for a ride back to the city, and we got one. But Teddy, as I say here, I tell you there’s just nobody like Ted Kennedy. I really came to be a real friend of Ted Kennedy and to cherish his friendship. I don’t say this boastfully but I think Ted Kennedy feels about the same way toward me that I do him. He is the Senator whom I admire most and I think we have come to be a little bit alike in our viewpoints. We differ sometimes on some things but he pays no attention to that. There’s one example, I can’t remember what it is right at the moment, that I’m very different from him on it, but he pays no attention to that. He respects that as I respect him when he differs from me.

Young: When you get a chance to talk with him, where is it? Is it on the floor or in the hall or in your office when you encounter each other?

Byrd: It’s been a little of all that, but what is the usual thing? I would say it’s on the floor, the usual thing. I usually talk with other Senators on the floor and that’s the way things are with me. I don’t go very far when we’re not in session. I’m someone who generally stays near my family and that’s about it.

Young: You’ll get a transcript of this in due course. You should look at it and, Barbara, you’ll look at it too I’m sure. If there are things you’d like to edit, you’re free to do that. If there are
things that you remember that you think ought to be in there that didn’t occur to you, you can extend your remarks as they say.

**Byrd:** As [Daniel] Webster did in his day. He took whatever was taken down to his boarding house and edited.

**Young:** So you knew about the boarding house. You probably knew about it before I discovered it is my guess. By the way, there was a list of—you know they used to list everybody by the boarding house group in the early days. There were several issues of the boarding house list that were missing for certain years and I had to give up. I had to get my dissertation done and my book done, but one of my friends decided he was going to find those books, and he finally found them in the old Senate Library. He wanted to look in there. They were all dusty on a shelf in there and I remember he couldn’t get access to it because only Senators could clear access. So he asked me to write to my Senator and ask if he could get in there.

I was at Columbia University at the time and my Senator was Robert Kennedy. I wrote to him and he gave us permission, and lo and behold, he discovered three of the missing volumes. All these years they had been sitting in there and they had recipes written on them and everything. Anyway, I’ll send you the transcript. You can edit it and extend your remarks. We want to thank you personally.

**Byrd:** I thank you. I think you’re doing a great service to the country and I thank you for that.

**Young:** You were at the caucus lunch and I noticed you were sitting right up there in the front row with Vicki when he announced this project. It was in the Russell Building of the Senate Caucus and Senator [William] Frist was there also, and I remember you had a few nice things to say afterwards.

**Byrd:** Oh, thank you.