Knott: Thank you very much, Senator Tunney, for being with us today. We’re very grateful.

Tunney: It’s a pleasure to be with you. How do you want us to start?

Knott: Jim and I were talking about this the other day. Perhaps if you could take us back a bit and discuss your family’s background with the Kennedys. Perhaps your father had a relationship with Ambassador [Joseph] Kennedy. I think that would be a terrific place to start.

Tunney: I met Ted Kennedy for the first time on the first day of law school. I came into the classroom, which was in Clark Hall, and there were a bunch of students milling outside. Somebody pointed him out to me. This was in 1956, and it was shortly after his brother had tried to win the nomination for the Vice Presidency. So John Kennedy was a big name in the country, in the law school, and I was introduced to Ted. The first thing he said to me was, “Your father arranged to have a sauna built up at our place at the Cape.” And I said, “Really? We have one of those saunas in our home.” And he said yes. So we had a short conversation about that.

The thing that happened to me during that conversation was that I felt that this was a person that I was really going to like, just the way he carried himself when he talked, a smile. I thought, This is a person that I’m really going to enjoy knowing. So that night, I came back to my room and I called my father and said, “There’s a classmate down here called Ted Kennedy, and he says his father knows you.” Dad said, “Well, I know a lot of Kennedys. Who?” And I said that apparently his father was Ambassador to England. Frankly, I didn’t really know that at the time. I said, “But his brother is a Senator.” And Dad said, “Oh, Joe Kennedy. Oh, yes, he’s a wonderful man, a great man. Yes, I did arrange to have the person who put our sauna in put it in for them up there.” So the next day I told Teddy that I’d spoken to Dad and he was extolling his father. Teddy said, “Well, that’s great.”

During the next week or two, all of us were working extremely hard. The subject matter was new to us, we had tons of homework. We didn’t have much time to do anything. We were spending a lot of time in the library. Gradually we would ask one another to go out to lunch, or we’d go out and have dinner together. It became clear very quickly that we were going to be really good friends. I started a friendship that has lasted until today. Ted became an intimate friend, I mean a really, really close friend, to the point that I think it’s fair to say that I treated him more like my brother than I did as my friend. I would share everything with him: thoughts about my life and my family, my girlfriends, things of that kind. And I think it’s fair to say that he did very much the same thing with me. I have maintained a veil of privacy around all of those conversations and
thoughts because I felt that the friendship was much more important than any temporary type of satisfaction I’d get by talking about him or members of the family and having it be reported. Whatever little celebrity I might have gained, I would have lost tremendously by the lack of the guarantee of intimacy.

So we became really close pals. We began spending all of our vacations with each other. We would travel together. That was back in the days of Virginia too. Not that we shut other people out, because we didn’t; we had many friends in the law school, but we did have that bond that we were living together. Not the first year. It was the second year and the third years that we did. But the fact was that we were always together and doing things together and talking together made that relationship a very rewarding one for me and it helped me, I think, in my feelings about law school.

I must say that at times I was very unhappy with the amount of energy that I was putting into my studies, when I didn’t really believe I was ever going to be a lawyer. It wasn’t that I disliked the law, but it was just such an incredible and rigorous regimen that we were under. I have to tell you, those early days in law school the first year, say, up to Thanksgiving, I think that I was studying 15 hours a day. I think that probably Teddy was too. You’d go out for lunch, have a quick lunch, and have a quick supper. The rest of the time you’re studying. Then you go back and go to bed for maybe seven hours or something. There was no real fun, as I recall. Then, maybe gradually, as we got further along towards the fall, we would take Saturday afternoons off and play touch football. That was the big reward for the work that we’d been doing during the course of the week, a couple of hours of touch football.

But there was such anxiety. You knew that everybody in the school was pretty smart. They wouldn’t be there if they weren’t. And you also knew that not everybody was going to make it, and you didn’t want to be one of the ones who failed. Teddy felt the same way that I did about it, and so we worked our heads off. I think that during that period, as our friendship ripened, we had camaraderie, having been tested by fire, and we got through. I mean, it’s that first year, that first semester, when maybe both of us thought that we might be left behind, but we made it. After that, law school was much better. We didn’t have to work quite as hard because we were old hands, so to speak. That time, I think because our fathers knew each other well and because we had a similar family culture, was very important in bringing us together.

My father was an Irish immigrant’s son and they were very poor when they came over. My grandfather was a stevedore on the docks of New York, very poor. My dad had achieved tremendous notoriety and fame as a brainy boxer, and he retired undefeated and he made money. Then he married my mother, who had come from a different type of family. Her ancestors had come over from Scotland and had made a substantial amount of money. So when Dad met my mother, she came from a family that had roots and position in society, whereas Dad came from a family that had no roots in America and no position in society. But they married and they ended up being married very happily for 50 years. But it was this Irish background that we shared, and the fact that we had gone to similar schools and had similar interests, that enabled us to get together.

I had been interested in politics from a very different viewpoint probably than Teddy in that I had a father who was very conservative and a mother who was very conservative. I had been at
Yale, a member of the political union, but in the conservative party, the Bill Buckley party, but I had had my views moderated by being a student of anthropology. If you have interests in social conditions, which you would have as a student of anthropology, you begin to think of a more progressive type of political structure than what I saw us having under [Dwight] Eisenhower, who was a hero and who was a decent human being, but I thought that we ought to have something happen in this country.

I got to meet John Kennedy through Teddy very quickly in late 1956. In ’57 and ’58 we saw much more of him and much more of Bobby [Kennedy] too. As a young guy who had progressive instincts, I couldn’t help but be dazzled by John Kennedy. He was so articulate. He had such a great sense of humor. He was witty in the way he approached issues, and his skepticism about people and places and times was always, I found, charming and instructive and enlightening. So I became a real fan of his brother, and of course Jackie [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis] was so beautiful, you couldn’t help but be a fan of her.

I was around the Kennedy family a great deal then because Teddy and I did everything together at that point in our lives, so I was always there. We’d go up to see Bobby and we’d stay at Bobby’s house in McLean. We’d go over to John Kennedy’s house for dinner, and I was always accepted as a friend and as a person who they perhaps had heard of. Lem [LeMoyne] Billings was a great friend of John Kennedy’s, and his mother had been a travel companion with my mother when she was a young girl in Europe. It’s unbelievable. I knew his mother very well, and of course Lem knew of our family. So you had all these interconnections between people who were around the Kennedys and my family, even though Teddy and I had never known each other until we got to law school. But we became fast friends.

You asked me to give you some impressions of what I thought of Jack Kennedy and what I thought of Bobby Kennedy when I first met them. I was awed by Jack Kennedy. I mean, I just was awed by him. You couldn’t help but be. At least I couldn’t help but be. I thought he was so smart and so quick and clever, and he just seemed to have everything going for him.

When I first met Bobby, I didn’t have an opinion much one way or the other, except that he had a great sense of humor. The first weekend we spent with Bobby—I think it might have been during the fall of ’56—we went up and spent the night and the day and then came back down. We played touch football. Teddy threw me a pass and I went up to catch the pass, and it was touch, and Bobby nailed me from behind and I went head over heels. I was infuriated. I got up and said, “What the hell are you doing?” He gave me this smile and said, “What’s wrong, can’t you take it?” I remember thinking that this guy is just a punk. I couldn’t abide him, if you want to know the truth. [laughter] I was so angry. I was his guest, so I had to be polite, but I was just infuriated by him.

The interesting thing is that over the years, my impressions of Bobby not only changed, but towards the end of his life, I looked upon him as one of the most extraordinary men that this country has ever produced. I thought he was just a brilliant, marvelous man of tremendous passion and feeling, and I think he would have been a great, great President. I think that part of it was that Bobby softened too. I think Bobby’s compassion for people, which was always there in his heart, but because he was so competitive with other members of his family, he never really had a chance to express it the way he did towards the end of his life, particularly after his
brother’s assassination. He was always a great family man, right in the very beginning. But he was also a person who, I think, didn’t suffer fools kindly, nor did he suffer whiners or complainers kindly, especially on the athletic field. So I had a real metamorphosis with Bobby. With Jack, I always had a feeling of extraordinary appreciation for his skills, his character, and things of that nature. With Bobby it came slower, but it became very intense at the end. He was truly a giant among men.

So there it was. Teddy and I used to suffer, probably, from similar feelings of, Are we going to be up to the mark? Are we going to be adequate? In my case I had my father, who was sort of an icon. There had never been a professional fighter like him, actually, if you want to know the truth. I mean, here was a guy who had been heavyweight champion. He lost one fight, retired undefeated. He was great friends with George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Hemingway. We used to have musical directors, like Eugene Ormandy, at our house. His associations were with people in politics, people in music, people in the arts, and they all admired him, liked him. Dad was very smart, even though he had a very limited education. He had lectured at Yale, in [William] Shakespeare, back in the time he was heavyweight champion, and not only didn’t make a fool of himself but had done extremely well, and people really appreciated his personality. And so I was fighting that image, and I think Teddy was fighting the image of his father and his brothers. But we shared some of those same feelings. Are we going to be adequate to live up to our family’s names?

Knott: You both talked about this openly?

Tunney: Oh, yes, we sure did. Not as though we were sitting on a psychiatrist’s couch, but just two buddies talking about things. You got the impression that he had a big burden. His father was a major figure in his life in those days. I mean a major figure. You could just tell when he was talking to his father on the phone, that his father played a huge role in his life, in his thinking. The thing that impressed me getting to know Teddy at that time was what an extraordinary family man he was. His family was critically important. Of course, every book that’s ever been written about the Kennedys keeps proving that point over and over again. I can tell you from the inside, it was that way. They were just bound to each other.

Young: You were both in the same situation in many ways, measuring up, establishing your mark, and so is that one of the reasons you were working so bloody hard, both of you?

Tunney: I think that’s right. No, I don’t think there’s any question.

Young: Preparation.

Tunney: Oh, I think that’s right. Also, I think that both of us realized that we had others looking over our shoulders. The others in my case were my father and my mother. I didn’t care so much about my brothers’ opinions. I’m very fond of my brothers, but I didn’t really care so much about their opinions. I cared much more about my father and mother’s opinions, and I guess Teddy probably cared equally about his father—no. His father’s opinion was most important, and then his brothers after that. He carried perhaps a larger weight family-wise than I did. Numbers are not really what count, it’s the intensity of the feeling that counts. I felt very intense feelings about whether or not I was going to measure up, and he did too.
An interesting thing happened in our second year of law school. Teddy said to me, “How would you like to be partners in the moot court competition?” I had never really thought about the moot court. He said, “Really, I think it’s something that we should do.” I said, “Do you really think so?” And he said yes. I said, “OK, let’s do it then, I’ll be happy to do it.” As you recall, or maybe you don’t know, at Virginia in those days, practically the entire class did end up in the moot court. It was something that was expected that you would do, even though it was an extracurricular activity. You had to do moot court in your class activities, and I think you had to have two arguments, but the extra was joining the competition, which was a two-year competition, in your second and your third years.

We had our first argument and we won by a split decision. Afterwards, one of the judges—I guess there were third-year students that were our judges in that first competition, and one of the judges came to me and said, “You won 2 to 1. But the only reason that you won was because of Kennedy’s argument. Your presentation fell short.” I said, “Really, why?” And he said, “You didn’t have a positive way of speaking, you didn’t exert yourself.” I said, “Wow. Thank you very much for that.”

So the next time, I had done some training on my own, and it was much better. At that point I think we became really good partners with each other. But Teddy always did have, right from the very beginning, that very forceful presentation, whereas in my case, I had to learn it. And I think I learned it from him, to be really honest about it. I saw the way that he was presenting himself and so I became more that way, but I kept my own style. As you can see, I have a different way of talking than he does. But allowing the energy within to flow out through the mouth, the vocal cords, through the eyes, through the presentation, that came from him. I’m learning from him.

Then we went on, and as you know, we won the moot court competition, and it was really a terrific thing for both of us because it was an intellectual pursuit. It was something that—neither one of us was going to be in the top ten of the class, so we were very pleased to have been able to achieve something intellectual, that was understood to be intellectual in that group of people, many of whom were quite brilliant. The other thing was, it was a distinguishing mark because we had the final argument on law day. There were probably three or four hundred people in the audience. We had a Supreme Court Justice there. The Chancellor of England was on the Court. [Clement Furman] Haynsworth, who was on the Court of Appeals, was there. I got two job offers from Wall Street firms after that argument, from people who were in the audience; they asked me if I would consider coming up to their firm. So all told, it was plus, plus, plus. It couldn’t have been a better thing for us, and I think, to a very considerable extent, it helped bring us even closer together. On a friendship basis we were always very close, but this was something that we were able to do together in a way that gave us confidence about the future and what our future potential was, whatever it might be.

Now by this time, this was 1959, John Kennedy was campaigning. I should go back. In 1958, John Kennedy was running for reelection to the Senate, and Teddy was going to spend the summer doing his campaign work. I guess he was chairman of his campaign. I had a girlfriend who ended up being my first wife. I went to spend a month and a half with her in Holland; she was Dutch. And then I came back and spent the last month of our vacation with Ted up in Massachusetts, on the campaign trail. So I had that experience of being with him and being with
Larry O’Brien and the other people involved in the campaign. I said to myself, Wow, I really like this. This is what I want to do with my life. This is great.

I don’t think that there’s any question that at that point Ted was seriously thinking about a political career for himself. I’m not so sure about when we first got to law school, but certainly by ’58 he had thought about a political career, not necessarily in Massachusetts. I think he was thinking of going west, going out to maybe California and putting his roots down. He even talked about having part ownership of a football team, an NFL [National Football League] team or something of that kind, anything to get his roots down, but his idea was politics. Of course, I had not a thought of being a Californian at that time. I was from the Nutmeg state, Connecticut. I was a Connecticut Yankee and I was going to go back there. I really thought about going into politics at that time. I mean, ’58 was a high watermark for me in my decisions because it went into my brain as a seed and it found all the fertilizer and soil that it needed to grow and develop and consume me.

Young: Can I go back a little bit and ask about the moot court competition, and the satisfaction and the importance that this had in its meaning for you and for Ted? Was that the kind of practice and the kind of experience that would be very important to somebody going into legislative life?

Tunney: Particularly the ability to articulate an argument and be able, if challenged, to think quickly. To be able to address the question in a succinct and hopefully creative way that would allow you to move on to the next point in your argument, because you hate to get trapped by a questioner, in back-and-forth type colloquies, where you lose track of what it is that you’re trying to accomplish with your overall argument. So it’s very important to be very quick on your feet when you’re in a moot court competition and the judges begin throwing questions at you. You’ve always got to remember where you’re trying to get to as the final goal in your argument, and not be waylaid by what you consider to be peripheral issues. That was unbelievably valuable to me, and Teddy can speak to it for himself, but I think that it was very helpful to him too. He was a very good moot court talker, counsel, and in the last argument that we had before these distinguished judges, I think that we really reached our peak of understanding what was needed and how to address the court.

Young: There was also the preparation, intense preparation.


Young: Intense, and factual grounding. So you know the precedents, you knew—

Tunney: That’s right. And we always did something that many people, I guess, didn’t do, but we would always choose two people as opponents who were not going to be arguing against on that particular case, and we would practice with them and argue against them. We would hone our skills and of course we would hone their skills, but we knew that, at least for that particular case, we were not going to be in direct competition, so that you could let it all hang out, so to speak. We were able to do that. We always were able to find opponents, right up until the last argument. Because there were only two teams, we didn’t have anybody to practice against. But we did have—I know we got somebody. I can’t remember exactly who now, some smart guys in our
class, to be the devil’s disciples and throw questions at us so that we could sharpen or hone our skills.

And another thing, we’d go out—I know that Teddy did the same. I felt that I had to go out into the forest sometimes, the woods around our house, and just speak to the trees, like Demosthenes. Just get it out there in an open, articulated way, which is practice. It’s interesting that you can think things but it doesn’t necessarily come out the way that you intend it to unless you rehearse it in an open way. We did that. We worked so hard at that. We were so well prepared, really well prepared. We might have lost, but it wasn’t for lack of preparation. We really put our hearts and souls into it, and it paid off.

Young: So it was the preparation and the practice, and the ability to articulate and to keep your eye on the ball.

Tunney: Eye on the ball, that’s right.

Young: You said earlier that you really didn’t want to be a lawyer. That was not your motivation.

Tunney: No, it was not.

Knott: I wonder whether Ted, in your estimation, really was there because he wanted to be a lawyer.

Tunney: No. No way. It was mental preparation, mental training. I looked at it that way.

Young: I see.

Tunney: When I was in college, I majored in anthropology. I majored in anthropology when my mother and father gave me an opportunity to take a trip to Latin America in my sophomore year. I had a chance to be with two anthropologists from the Smithsonian Institute, and we went up to Cuzco and to Machu Picchu with them. They were brilliant people; a man and a woman, husband and wife. Both of them worked for the Smithsonian. I became totally fascinated by their line of inquiry. It just was so amazing to have them talk about the culture of these tribes, the Quechian Indians, and much broader, of course, about the Inca Empire. I was majoring in English; when I came back, I changed it to anthropology. There were only seven members of my class who were majors in anthropology. We had to take an oral exam at the end, in order to get your degree, and I was told by the panel that I was the only one who was not going on to get his PhD after graduation.

I had come from a discipline at Yale where there was intense scrutiny, obviously, of what you were doing in your classroom preparation, and most of it was seminars towards the end. And so you’re constantly having to make a presentation. I had to teach, in one course, two classes at the end of my last year. So I had developed some skills of communication, but I realized early on that my ability to communicate, unlike Winston Churchill or Bill Clinton, was restricted by preparation. I had to be well prepared in order to be able to say what I wanted to say, and I think that Teddy also found that. He’s a naturally—he’s a gifted speaker, but when he is prepared, he’s vastly better than when he’s unprepared. I must say that there are people who don’t seem to have
to prepare, and those people I really admire and respect, not that they always have the most interesting things to say, but they seem to get it out pretty effectively.

**Young:** So you got the political bug during that summer of ’58.

**Tunney:** Yes, to be a candidate. I had the political bug years before, because Dad was very interested in politics. He had known Franklin Roosevelt and campaigned for Roosevelt in ’32, but he had become a Republican and he had been a great supporter or friend of Wendell Wilkie, and Wilkie was in our home. We had a home in Florida, so we would see a good deal of Wilkie and other prominent Republican politicians. I went to the Republican Convention in ’48. I was a page in the Republican Convention in ’52. I sat next to Clare Boothe Luce and John Lodge. I was at the Republican Convention in 1956. So I was solid Republican, and very interested in politics.

As I look back on it, neither of my brothers went to those conventions. It was always me, because I was the one who always told my mother and father how much I was interested. But I never thought of myself being a candidate. I never thought of that until ’58, until joining Teddy in that campaign for his brother’s reelection. I really got the fire—the fever got into my bloodstream, and it was clear that it was in his bloodstream too because he was having to give speeches all the time for his brother, and he was helping organize the campaign. Obviously, Larry O’Brien was a very important figure in that campaign. We all know that Larry O’Brien was a brilliant political strategist. At that point, Teddy was still very young, and he was learning. He learned very well, but he was learning at that point. He hadn’t reached the maturity that he achieved later on.

**Young:** Was Kenny O’Donnell around?

**Tunney:** Yes, he was involved. Kenny was there too, sure.

**Young:** And Larry. Did they really think Ted was up to the job of managing that campaign?

**Tunney:** No.

**Young:** He was there because—

**Tunney:** He was the show horse.

**Young:** But they knew the ropes and he was learning the ropes.

**Tunney:** He was learning the ropes. They were the ones who were close to the Senator. Teddy was in a family way, but they were the ones in a political and strategic way. It’s not that he was pushed aside or walked over. He played a very active role, and they would consult with Teddy on things. I don’t mean to suggest that he was just pushed off.

**Young:** But he was a novice.

**Tunney:** But he was a novice obviously, and they were the pros and they were there close to the candidate. But Teddy learned fast and everybody adored him. It was clear that he had a magic with crowds; the way he spoke, the way he looked, he was very handsome. It’s hard to know
what it is in the brain and the heart of a candidate that enables him to catch whatever fire there is as background music in the community, that allows that candidate to synthesize hopes and aspirations and needs, and get it out there in a way that that person then becomes an image of what people want in the way of leadership. You can’t describe that very easily, but there is a connection between the brain and the heart. There’s a fire that develops in a really successful candidate, and I’m not saying that all of them have it. Some don’t have it but they still get elected. But every now and then you do see that combination of fire in the heart and the articulation of the need through the brain that allows people to be willing to follow. One of the little stanzas of poetry that I used to love to quote—I memorize a lot of poetry—but one that I love is, One man with a dream and pleasure shall go forth and conquer a crown, and three with the new song’s measure can trample an empire down.

And that is what John Kennedy had. Bobby, later on, got it. He didn’t have it at first, but he got it. Ted had it very naturally. He was a great politician. He just had it, and his family used to say that he was the most natural politician in the family. I mean, he just had it. He had a great sense of humor, great buoyancy, and was very positive about things. It was not a question of why can’t you do it, it’s always how are we going to do it, how are we going to get it done? Now let’s go, let’s do it. And he had that on the athletic field. He was the president of the Student Legal Council down there and he was able to get some of the better speakers from the Senate and other places to come and be with us. He had that thing, that magic. It’s ineffable. You can’t describe it really, but it is something between the brain and the heart. And he’s always had that.

[pause] Where are we?

**Knott:** I think you were about to start talking about how you yourself got into politics.

**Tunney:** Well, that was 1958 and I became inspired by that. After we graduated from law school, Ted went on up to Massachusetts. He took the bar up here and he got a job in the district attorney’s office. I knew I was going to have to go in the service, because of the draft. I was 25 years old and I was married. Both of us were married at that time. We got married in our senior year. Teddy got married in the late fall and I got married in February. I knew I was going to have to go into the service, so I thought I’d take a job at one of the law firms that had offered me a job, the Cahill Gordon firm, and I would just await going into the service.

I applied to the Judge Advocate Department. I didn’t want to be a grunt and be an infantryman, so I applied for Judge Advocate Department in the Air Force. I got in, and then it was just a question of when they were going to call me. I guess they called me in late spring of 1960. I went out to California, to March Air Force Base; it was strategic air command. While I was there, I mean when I landed, I decided that I would like to hone my legal skills. I went to the university in Riverside, which was University of California Riverside, and asked if I could teach business law, and they looked at my background and such, and said yes. So I taught a class in business law at night.

In 1961 Teddy called and said that he was going to go down—let’s go back a little bit earlier than ’61. In 1960 his brother is running for the Presidency. I’m in the Air Force. Ted comes to California, and he is working the western states. Of course I was not able to participate in the campaign because I was an officer in the Air Force, and in those days they weren’t allowed to
participate in politics. But the month before the election, I took a leave of absence for a month and I traveled with Teddy in California. I couldn’t be speaking; I could be in the background. We traveled together and it was, of course, unbelievably exciting. My instincts, wanting to be a politician myself someday, were fed the food that was necessary to eventually just commit myself 100% to that pursuit. It was like throwing raw meat to a young lion, and I became tremendously interested in it. Teddy was very good by this time. He’d become a really polished speaker, but I would say campaign speaker. He really knew how to get the crowd going, he knew the right phraseology, and he was able to attract crowds.

Young: Even in this alien territory.

Tunney: Even in this alien territory.

Young: He’s the guy from Massachusetts.

Tunney: He was the guy from Massachusetts, but he did well. He was really good. I’d seen a new manifestation of skill. I had known Teddy of course at law school, where we had been speaking in the moot court together, and I think at that time we were roughly comparable. But he had developed a new style, the campaign style, which was beyond me. I had not been involved in that before and I was once again impressed, even though, as I pointed out, he was my intimate friend and buddy and competitor in many ways. I always thought of him as being a kind of competitor, even though he was a dear, dear friend and I would have done anything for him, but it was just we were competitors a little bit. But I was very appreciative of his skills.

And John Kennedy won, that was in 1960. Then in ’61 Teddy called me one day, I think in the spring, and said, “I’m going to go down to Latin America. I’ve got a young professor from Harvard, John Plank, who is going to go with me. He’s a specialist in Latin America. We have another person called Bela Kornitzer, who is a biographer who has written a number of biographies, and he’s thinking of doing a biography of the Kennedy family, and he would like to come along. Would you be interested in coming?” I said, “Oh, my God, yes. I think that would be fabulous.”

So I got a leave of absence again. It appears I didn’t take any vacations when I was in the service, as I look back on it, except to be involved in politics. But I did take—I had a month a year, 30 days a year, so I took 30 days and went with Teddy down through Latin America. I couldn’t go the whole trip because it lasted a little longer than 30 days, but I went through Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, and Brazil. And it was unbelievable because he was the brother of the President, so we were able to see the heads of state, the top religious leaders, the top labor leaders, academics everywhere we went, students. It was just like a campaign trip. I was fascinated by it and loved it, and thought that I had really gone to heaven.

When I came back, I wrote a series of articles for the newspaper in my district, the Riverside Press-Enterprise, which was a terrific paper. I think it still is. It won the Pulitzer Prize. I helped them win the Pulitzer Prize, actually, when I was a young Congressman, which is another story. They had an editor called Norman Cherniss, who had been chosen as a fellow at Harvard Journalism School.

Young: Nieman.
Tunney: Nieman fellow, that’s right. He’s just a brilliant guy and a marvelous editorial writer. He and I became friends. This is long before I had started to run for politics, but I wrote four articles about my experiences in Latin America. Norman thought that they were just terrific. I’m not being duly modest here, I should be, but that’s what he said. He said, “These are really terrific articles. We’re going to publish these thing but we’re not going to publish them all at once. We’ve going to publish them every Sunday, four weeks in a row. I think this is really important stuff that you’re talking about.” Look, the trip made the stories. I mean, we were seeing all these people, having all these experiences. I took excellent notes. Being a law school student, I knew how to take notes, and I was just really feeding back what I had absorbed while I was down there.

Then I began getting requests to speak, and I began speaking at service clubs. I’d speak at one and I’d get invited to one or two more. I was an adequate speaker. I could really dramatize what it was that I was talking about. So this thing built up. I spoke to 75 service clubs. I was still in the service, and I spoke to 75 service clubs throughout my district. Then the buzz began, you ought to be running for Congress, you’re a natural.

Teddy called me as I was getting out of the Air Force. I was leaving as a captain. He called and said, “You just come on back to Washington. Bobby has a place for you in the Justice Department. It will be terrific. We’ll have so much fun if you were back here.” I said, “Well, Teddy, no. I’m going to run for Congress.” He said, “What?” I said, “I’m going to run for Congress out here.” He said, “Oh, my God.” I said, “Yes, really. I think I have a chance.” This was 1963. And he said, “Well, when you get out of the service, come back here and let’s talk about it.” So I came back to Washington and I got together with him. Then I got together with two or three people who he suggested that I talk to, real political pros, and they were so unbelievably helpful. They really gave me the nuts and the bolts about how to run a campaign. To this day, if I had to sit down and write a memorandum to a prospective candidate, which, by the way, I’ve done for two or three prospective candidates over the years, I am sure that 90% of the best stuff I had came from those conversations I had with Teddy’s guys back in the days that I was getting ready to run for the Congress.

I mean, here I was. I had been in the district for three years. I spoke with an eastern accent. This was a very conservative district. Only one Democratic Presidential candidate had ever carried the district. No Democratic gubernatorial candidate had ever carried the district in the history of California. So it was a conservative farming district, but it was changing. Riverside was getting bigger and we had a university town; things were changing. At any rate, I learned the nuts and bolts from these guys, and then I came back and began to organize, as best I could, my campaign, with Teddy, of course, giving tremendous encouragement.

About the fall before I actually announced my candidacy he said, “John, I think I ought to have these two guys come out and speak to the people that you’re organizing your campaign with. They’ll give them really what they need in order to get this thing off the ground.” So they came out and my brother was going to be my campaign manager, he was my campaign manager, and I had two or three other people who were sort of in our organization. These guys sat down with us for two days and we just went through everything about how to run the campaign in that district.

Knott: Who were these guys?
Tunney: One of them was called Eddie King and the other was called Eddie Martin.

Knott: We’ve interviewed Eddie Martin.

Tunney: And they were so, so good. Eddie, now, of course, he’s had a stroke. Is he alive?

Knott: He passed away a couple of months ago.

Tunney: I didn’t know that. But he was—oh, he was so sharp, Eddie King was too. Eddie King was just as good, as far as the nuts and bolts of politics. I won’t go into—unless you’re interested—I won’t go into more detail, but I mean really laying out how you get the precinct maps and how you attack the different precincts, and the things that you do with regard to coffee klatches and how you get your workers. They just laid it out in a way that—there were two days of intensity. I will tell you this. There were about three things that made the difference in my campaign, my own presence excluded, and if I hadn’t had two or three things, I couldn’t have gotten elected. I just couldn’t. One of them was this. Eddie King and Eddie Martin were giving me and the people that were working for me everything that we needed to do to lay a blueprint for how to go about winning an election. The second thing, I guess I would say, was my father and Jack Dempsey coming in to campaign for me in the last summer, just before the election, which elevated my stature a lot.

I would say a third thing was when—it probably had a big impact on the fundraisers or the fund givers more than it did in the actual politics of the election, but fundraising is an important element, obviously, of any political campaign, so you would have to say that this was a third major reason. Ted came out and kicked off the campaign. We went around and had about three or four stops in which he spoke for me, in January. That made the Democrats used to giving to the Presidential candidates or gubernatorial candidates, Senatorial candidates, that gave them a sense that I was really credible, even though I was nowhere. I mean, if you took a poll of me against the incumbent Republican, I would have been beaten by 50 points. But it gave me credibility with the financial people, and we began to get some campaign contributions that were very important to us. So those were really the—but the Eddie Martin and Eddie King thing was, I’d say, number one; Dad and Dempsey, number two; and number three was Teddy coming out to kick off the campaign for me.

Young: Now this was 1963.

Tunney: Nineteen sixty-four.

Young: Sixty-four, OK, so Jack had been assassinated.

Tunney: He’d just been assassinated. I can talk to that also, which is very interesting. I took a poll in the district in the last two weeks of September, the first week of October of ’63. It was taken by a pollster out of the East. I guess he’d worked sometimes for John Kennedy, but he worked for a lot of people, a lot of political figures back here. His name was John Kraft and the poll was to see if there was a chance of my winning, because I didn’t want to spend a year doing this if I didn’t have any chance of winning. I got the results on November 19. It had all been prearranged. I was going to get them on November 19, and I was going to fly back to New York and have a visit with my mother and father. Then I was going to fly down to Washington and
stay with Teddy and Joan [Kennedy], and then I was going to go and speak to some of the guys at the White House, the Larry O’Brien types, Kenny O’Donnell types, to get their impressions of where we were and where we ought to go.

So I flew back to New York. Teddy had arranged to send up the family plane to New York to pick me up, on November 22, and take me down in the early afternoon. I was with my mother and father at a restaurant, and the owner of the restaurant came up to my father and said, “Mr. [James] Tunney, the President has been killed.” I said, “What?” And we all just were dumbfounded. We finished the meal and then we walked out into the street and all the flags on Park Avenue were going down to half mast. I called and I found that the—I think they called it the Caroline. The Caroline had been brought back to Washington. It was waiting for me at LaGuardia, but they brought it back to Washington. So then I flew down there on a commercial flight and spent the weekend with Teddy at his house. Oh, what a weekend that was. Whew. And then after the funeral, Teddy and I went to see Jackie at the White House. We spent an hour and a half or two hours with her, and went back to his house. It was a very—it was a tough time. That was a very tough time, oh yes. [chokes up] Excuse me.

Knott: No, no problem.

Young: Would you like a little break at this point?

Tunney: Yes, please.

[BREAK]

Tunney: OK, let’s keep going. I just had a momentary flashback. I’m fine now.

So I had this poll, which showed that I could win, but it was going to be very hard. I then went back to California, and at that point I was just totally determined that I was going to win that race. A lot of it was the emotion that was tied into John Kennedy. As I look back on it, probably I lost my marriage then. I didn’t know it at the time but I probably did, because in the next year, it was a year, I took two days off, and the rest of the time I was working probably 14, 15 hours a day. I took two days off after I won the primary, in June of 1964, but the rest of the time I was working, out in the field. I shook 75,000 hands. I know that because we used to give a brochure to everybody that I spoke to and shook hands with, and we got rid of 75,000 brochures. I did door-to-door walk, where I’d walk up main streets, down side streets. It was just incredible. Coffee klatch after coffee klatch.

You have to have some good humor because in the early days of the coffee klatches, we may have had three or four women there. Who’s John Tunney? They wouldn’t pay a bit of attention to me, but it kept building and building and building. Finally, we began to have a really powerful organization. I was young, very young. I was 29. But I could feel the thing building. I was speaking at the high schools and I could tell that I could communicate with these kids, giving them the same kind of idealistic thoughts that I held in my own brain. It was not phony. I really
believed this stuff, and to some extent I still do. I’m a little bit more suspicious of people these days, and suspicious of politicians particularly.

We really started building. Then we had my father and Dempsey come in, which was very important because it was a very conservative district. The Okies and Arkies, who had settled in that Coachella Valley and Imperial Valley, they didn’t like guys from Yale or Harvard, but they did like prizefighters. They loved Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney. They thought those guys were terrific. And so I had a little bit of the sprinkling of that holy water on me as a result of it. Then we won. It was unbelievable.

Young: You said that your district was in change, so there were newer people and younger people.

Tunney: Yes, it was changing.

Young: It was changing. And your brain and your heart were especially effective with the newer and the younger people.

Tunney: Absolutely.

Young: Because you yourself were very young.

Tunney: Yes, and I taught at the university. So I had the professors there all on my side, and I had some of the professors helping write position papers for me. I was studying all the time. I had the Democratic study group back in Washington, in the Capitol, giving me position papers of the Democrats, which I would study faithfully. So I was able to articulate a program of change that met the test of fire with the reporters, and most particularly with Norman Cherniss, who were the ones who were going to help me get my message across. I met with the editor of every newspaper in the district, and also went to all the radio stations and met with the political reporter there. By the time I was really in full throaat, if you will, on my speeches, talking about the issues, I had a very comprehensive and I think tight series of recommendations for change as it related to health, as it related to education, all the basic issues that you would be talking about. Inflation, things of that nature.

I also had a very good farm position too, and I made the farmers believe that I was not a person who was going to come in and take away their Mexican workers and force them to try to find blacks or Hispanics that were in Los Angeles and bring them down to the fields. They knew they wouldn’t come. The Mexicans that came to the United States and were here for one generation did not want to go back to the farm, I can tell you, not work in the incredible heat of the Coachella Valley or the Imperial Valley, which gets up to 120°F in the summertime. It had to be people who were really hungry. That was what the farmers used to harvest their crops.

So I had positions, I felt, that were well thought-out by others. I was able to take information and synthesize it and apply it to my own campaign, but I certainly can’t say that all these ideas were generated in my mind, they were not. I just was able to utilize what was being prepared by others. And we won, as I say. That night before the election, Teddy and I worked out a system where we would be able to communicate with each other during the course of the evening. I was
on the phone with him ten times, I think, during the course of the evening, telling him how things were going. It was just fantastic, as I remember, when we knew that we won.

I think what I’m probably showing in these recollections is how important Ted was, both as a friend and as a slightly more experienced political figure, and of course after he got elected to the Senate, much more experienced. But taking the gradations of our knowledge from the time we were in school. He was a little ahead because his brother was Senator, and he had been slightly involved in those campaigns. Then he goes to work up in Massachusetts and gets prepared to run for the Senate, takes these trips to Latin America, and is meeting with people in the administration and getting to know much more. He got way ahead of me, and I was not able to be nearly as effective as he would have been if he’d been in my position. But with his help, his incredible help, I was able to improve my situation to the point where I was able to get elected on my own.

After that, then you are on your own. I was running for reelection and I was running for the Senate by myself. But in those early days, I couldn’t have done it without the help that Teddy gave me. Always, he’s been this extraordinary friend. We’re going to get to other parts of our relationship later on, but as we’re talking about those early days, it was really an incredibly intense friendship, relationship. He was very kind and so supportive. I mean, just going way out of his way to do things for a pal and much more than you would ever expect anybody to do, but he did. And he always has been that way. Even in the Senate, he always, if he can help a constituent or can help someone who has a problem, he’s willing to do it. He does it over and over again. He has this huge reservoir of energy, not only the willingness but the energy to do it. It’s amazing.

Young: Did you ever have any conversations with him about his decision to run for the Senate?

Tunney: Oh, I did, of course, because we were—

Young: When was he thinking of running?

Tunney: I don’t think there’s any question that the day that John Kennedy was elected, Teddy made a decision he was going to run for the Senate. He probably had made the decision that he was going to run for the Senate in some other state. If Kennedy had lost that election, he would have still been in the Senate, so he couldn’t have run there. So the question is, where were you going? I think he was definitely on a career path to be a politician. He might have had to go for the House of Representatives first, probably would have had to if he’d gone to another state. But he certainly, in my mind, had made up his mind to be a political candidate and/or political figure. I think the day that John Kennedy won, it’s clear that Kennedy gave Ben Smith that job, made sure the Governor appointed Ben Smith, which was obviously a two-year holdover to keep the seat warm for Teddy. Then Teddy coming down to Latin America in 1961, for Ted to learn more about Latin America. That was all done with the idea that he was going to be a candidate for the Senate in Massachusetts.

Young: How did that trip, by the way, come about? What was the stated purpose of the trip?

Tunney: It was a fact-finding trip down to Latin America. It was educational.
Young: Was it from Jack? Did Jack set it up or arrange it?

Tunney: No, no. It wasn’t official, it was behind the scenes. The brother of the President gave Kennedy a chance to have communications to these Presidents, which was helpful. I think it was very helpful to the President to have an attractive, intelligent brother who was willing to go down there and meet with these people and talk, and make personal comments to them that came directly from the President of the United States. I think it was helpful to Jack to have that, and I think that it was obviously very helpful to Teddy, because he was developing a reservoir of international experience.

He came back and he wrote articles too for his newspaper, and he was able to speak about Latin America around his state, just the way I was speaking around my Congressional district. So it was clearly foundational for him to do it, in order to have foreign policy experience. Everybody expects a Senatorial candidate, these days, to have some foreign policy experience. So he had gotten that by doing that trip. He may have made some other trips, which I was not a part of, during that same time. I don’t know about them, but our trip for sure was an important one for him. I wasn’t a part, at all, of his campaign against Eddie McCormack because I was in the Air Force at the time. I couldn’t get away, but we kept in very close touch about how things were going and his experiences when he first got into the Senate. The first statement that he made on the Senate floor, he called me and told me he had given this speech.

Young: I’m sure Steve is going to want to follow up on that in a second, but give me one more chance. We’ve heard that President Kennedy’s staff was not at all happy to see Ted going into the Senate, running for the Senate.

Tunney: I’ve heard that too.

Young: Suppose he didn’t win. Suppose, you know, then the three Kennedys in here.

Tunney: That’s right.

Young: We’ve also heard that his father was insistent.

Tunney: Yes, that’s my impression. I think that’s absolutely true. I didn’t hear his father say it, but there’s no question that his father was insistent upon it. Bobby may have been more negative about it than Jack. In those days, Bobby was sort of his brother’s protector, and he thought differently about things than he would have later on. John Kennedy, I think that he really liked Teddy a lot, he really did, because he loved his sense of humor and he loved his esprit, the fact that he had such a good sense of humor about things and could laugh and joke. There’s no question that John Kennedy thought Teddy was just great. So I don’t think that the President himself would have been strongly opposed to it. Maybe he wouldn’t have been thrilled, but he was not strongly opposed. I think he took much more of a neutral stand on it. I can see where Bobby would have been a bit negative about it.

Young: I think some people on Jack’s staff were the protectors.
**Tunney:** But once Joe Kennedy laid down the law that he was going to run, that was the way it was. And I didn’t participate in any of those conversations, but I have second-hand information that leads me to believe that was the case.

**Knott:** So you get a phone call from Senator Kennedy after he makes his first speech on the Senate floor.

**Tunney:** Yes. I said, “What did you say?” And he said, “Well, not very much.” [laughs] But he said, “I said something. I did say something. I’ll send you a copy of the Congressional Record.”

And it was true, he didn’t say too much, but at least he’d broken the ice and had gotten out there and said something. He did it with such good humor. He has this wonderful way of being humorous and skeptical about himself and about things that he does. It’s a little bit more difficult now that he’s achieved almost an iconic status, because you don’t have those first impressions any more. There are not many first impressions that occur in the Senate these days. I mean, you’re locked into positions that have been there for many, many years. In his case, was it 46 years? But this was at the very beginning, of course, before he had those positions well established, well known. And God knows how many thousands, millions, of words have been spoken by him on the Senate floor. He really had a very good view, I think, of himself and never gave me the impression, ever, that he took himself that seriously as a human being. He took his issues very seriously, always took his issues very seriously, but himself and his importance and his status, I don’t think he took himself that seriously, even to this day.

I don’t get much of a chance to be with him just alone, the two of us chatting about things. Occasionally, we do up on the Cape. We’ll get out on the veranda for a few minutes and talk, but we don’t get much of a chance to do that any more because first of all, he’s married to Vicki [Victoria Reggie Kennedy], a person that he adores and who is his closest companion, whereas back in those days I was his closest companion. The circumstances have changed. Vicki is his closest companion and I’m one of many friends that he has. I think that we’re still obviously very close, but he has many, many people that he has to pay attention to these days. So I don’t get those raw emotions as much today as I used to. Occasionally, in times of crisis, yes. In times of crisis, yes, but not just every day, for sure.

**Knott:** Did you see him during the period after he had the plane crash in 1964?

**Tunney:** Oh, I did, yes. I went up and visited quite a few times at the hospital. It was interesting because he made it an educational experience for himself. He used to get people to come out from Harvard to give him lectures and talk to him about economics and things like that.

**Young:** Economics 101.

**Tunney:** Yes. It was unbelievable. You know he had that bed. They would turn him upside down and turn him around, and he would—really, he was educating himself as he was lying there. He couldn’t move, hardly at all, but he could get this input, and that’s a typical Kennedy way of handling a problem. The idea that you immediately take advantage of the resources that you have available to you as a Senator and brother of the President. You get top people to come out and pay a lot of attention to you when you’re in a position where you can’t do much in the way of movement or even perhaps communication. But they would talk to him. I was very amused
and impressed by the way that he did that. He kept his spirits up. In the early days, of course, it was very tough because he was in a lot of pain. But later on—he was there how many months, six months?

Knott: I think so.

Young: He had the crash in June, was it? And I believe he did not return to the Senate until the swearing in of Bobby and him as Senators. That would have been in January of ’65. I think he was pretty much out of commission. Then, though, there was campaigning going on. Joan was out on the campaign trail, and he was trying to keep abreast.

Tunney: What year was that?

Young: The plane crash was ’64, and it was in June. Of course, in August there was the Tonkin incident, and a lot was popping then on Vietnam.

Tunney: I was heavily involved in my campaign, but I came back to see him. Then after I got elected, our families went—well, Joan and Teddy and my first wife and I went down to Florida to spend about a week or ten days down there before the swearing in. I think that was in late November, something like that. But he made use of his time very effectively. It was very interesting how he was able to do that, but that’s his typical style. Nothing much has changed there.

You asked me to describe Kennedy as a law student. I’ve already pointed out that he was a very serious student. He was very interested in politics. We used to argue like crazy at night after dinner. We’d always have dinner together, and the arguments would start at dinner, and we would argue for about a half hour after dinner. Carmen would serve us dinner and we’d have coffee after dinner, and so we would spend about an hour and a half arguing about—well, just arguing. [laughs]

Young: For the hell of it, or did you have real differences?

Tunney: Well, it was all in good spirits, but I obviously he was in very good spirits. They were never angry arguments but differences of opinion, expressing differences of opinion. Both of us had strong ideas of what we thought was right or wrong, and so we would—and a lot of it was politics. I was much more conservative at that point than he was, and so we would have very sharp discussions.

Young: Well, of course, his father was very conservative.

Tunney: Yes. So is my father. That’s right. So politics was a very great interest. He had a great interest in dogs, great interest in dogs. We had two dogs, and I took the puppy of those two dogs and it became my dog. They were German shepherds. He loved those dogs. That was another important thing. He did a lot of discussion of family. I would discuss my family, he’d discuss his family, all that stuff. Obviously, the great influence of his father, which was a tremendously powerful influence on him in law school, even though it was all through the phones. But it was great and they had very important conversations. I tried never to listen in to those conversations,
so I can’t tell you what they were about, but I knew that they were things about his life, what he hoped to do and things that he was planning to do that summer or whatever.

He was very interested in public speaking, and he did compete in a couple of public speaking contests down there. Not big, big deals, but there was an organization on the campus, I think the undergraduate campus, that put on public speaking contests, and he would be involved in that. Those were the things that we fought a lot about. As you know, we used to be together all the time, on vacation all the time, Christmas, and spring and summer. We’d always be traveling. We went to The Hague. Hardy Dillard was giving a series of lectures over there, and so we got Hardy to give us one unit of credit at the law school.

**Knott:** That’s pretty good.

**Tunney:** We traveled around Europe. I have to say, everything that has been written about his interest in his family and the importance of his family, and the tremendous pressure that he felt relating to family, was there. It was quite an extraordinary thing. I’ve never known anybody quite like it. Well, I’ve never known anybody as well as Teddy who was not a member of my family. But I’ve never seen it before, never heard of it before, frankly, to the same degree. He was a big, big family man.

You asked about RFK [Robert F. Kennedy], to discuss my impression of the brothers. Teddy and Bobby were unbelievably close. I think that Bobby was Teddy’s best friend. I really think so. They were just incredibly close. As I mentioned, Bobby, in the early days, was unbelievably intense on the athletic field, and a lot of other things too. In every way, I suppose. But he did have a huge sense of humor. All of the brothers did. Every one of them had a terrific sense of humor. And Bobby was very gifted intellectually. I don’t know what kind of a student he was, I never really found out, but I just know he was a very smart guy. He read a great deal and had a great ability to quote different passages from historians and poets and such. Bobby did not have the star quality that Jack did in the early days, but boy, did he get it after the President was killed. A metamorphosis took place in him. There are probably others who are much better able to speak to it than I can because I did not ever do a study of Bobby Kennedy. I’ve never interviewed any of Bobby’s other friends, but I saw it.

I used to be at his house a lot. I used to play tennis over there a great deal. Almost every weekend, Teddy and I would be over at Bobby’s house playing tennis with the family. I was looked upon as sort of family, kind of a fixture, in a way, in those days because I was always with Ted, and he was very frequently over there with Bobby. Bobby just changed so dramatically. His ability to express compassion and to reach out to people and make you feel as though he was a man of destiny. And that’s what he was.

When Bobby was killed, I just couldn’t believe it. I was with my father. We were speaking at the Police Athletic League up in Boston. We both had been invited as kind of a tandem team, and Dad was going to be speaking a little bit about athletics and sports and things, leadership, and I was going to be speaking about politics. I was getting ready to run for the Senate; it was 1968. I was already on the move. But I was with my father and we were watching television. And I see the thing take place, and I jump on a plane and come out to California and went up to the hospital. I was with Teddy during that time, for several days. That was another one of those
things, because I was with Teddy when he died, and I was with him when we went down to the morgue. I wouldn’t let Teddy see him as I saw him. I just grabbed him and I said, “You can’t look. You’ve got to get out of here. Just remember him the way he was. Don’t look at him.”

Those were very trying times. All of which, of course, eventually come to the questions that you have of how Teddy reacted to all of these tragedies and how he is able to sustain himself. I can’t give you the answer because I don’t know what inner resource of toughness and resilience that he has that enables him to do it. It is something that is really beyond what is normal. It really is almost hypertrophy, if I can use that word. It’s way beyond the normal strength, resilience, and toughness that human beings have. He is an incredibly powerful source of energy, of constancy. The reason that he’s been able to take care of all these kids in the families and all these tragedies is because he’s able to reach down into the depths somewhere, and he has that inner core of strength. It’s supernatural. I’ve never seen anything quite like it, and I’ve been with him in tragedy after tragedy. He has that core that enables him to just keep moving forward.

Some of it is not just the tragedy of his brothers being killed and such, but the sadness of his marriage breaking up, which was more like a Chinese torture than it was a dramatic event. And the loss of the election for the Presidency, which I think hurt a lot. Not so much perhaps that he lost but that he never really, in the early days of the campaign, was taken seriously. Something happened on the way to the forum. I don’t know quite what it was because I’ve mentioned to you how well prepared Teddy was for everything. I mean, starting from law school, always getting himself prepared, prepared, prepared, prepared, and then he starts off on the biggest campaign of his life and he doesn’t prepare himself. Like for the Roger Mudd show. It’s absolutely unbelievable. I can’t believe it to this day, why he didn’t. You’ll have to get it from him. I don’t know why that is the case. I just don’t know, because it was atypical of the way he handled himself. It’s almost as though he felt that he had to run but really didn’t want to.

In the early days, after Jack was killed and after Bobby was assassinated, I think he was getting all kinds of death threats all the time. I think that he thought that his days were numbered too, that he was probably going to be assassinated, that somebody was going to go for the third one and knock them all off. I know that he felt that way. But we get to 1980 and I think he had banked a number of those fires of fear about his own personal safety. I don’t think it was that he was afraid of getting killed that put him into a frame of mind that he didn’t want to get himself prepared for the Presidential race the way he should have, could have. I don’t know what it was. He would be the best spokesman to that point. I can tell you, it was atypical, and that Roger Mudd show was a disaster for him, a disaster. He asked him, “Why do you want to be President?” And he can’t answer the question, why I want to be President. I mean, that’s kind of fundamental, isn’t it? Normally, like when he was running for the Senate, he could just bang, I’m running for the Senate for this, da da da da. This is what I want to do, da da da. It was almost as though he was completely unwilling to be communicative. I don’t know. I don’t know why, but it happened.

Young: There was also that he stuck with—in the campaign after, there was just almost zero prospect that he could win the nomination.

Tunney: That’s right. He got better and better. His speeches got better and better. His ability to communicate to the public got better and better, and he began winning. He was going around the
country, he began winning. He became the alternative to Jimmy Carter, who was very unpopular with the Democrats at that point. Maybe it was just his desire not to quit. He did not want to be a quitter. I think that’s probably what it was. I will tell you very frankly that I suggested that he get out.

**Knott:** At what point did you do that?

**Tunney:** After he took his third or fourth clobbering, when it was obvious that he was really just sinking like a stone. I can’t recall. I guess the first really important contest was up there in New Hampshire. He got beaten there and then he just began getting beaten everywhere. It was just bang, bang, bang, bang. I said to him, “Why do you do this to yourself? You don’t need to expose yourself to this punishment, it’s humiliating.” He kept his counsel and he just said, “Well, thank you for your opinion.” And I said, “Whatever you decide to do, it’s fine with me. I hope you understand, but I’m just giving you my impressions.” And so he stayed in.

I’m glad he stayed in, after the fact. I think that it was very good for him that he did. And he began winning these primaries, had a big victory in California. So he came to the convention in a much stronger position than he was after the first month of defeats. Some could ask, well, do you think that he contributed to the defeat of Carter by splitting the party? I don’t think so. I think Carter would have lost anyway. I think people really disliked Carter. He showed such weakness with the Iran hostage situation. He seemed befuddled. It seemed as though he was micromanaging and he didn’t really seem to know what he was doing.

I will tell you that I think that Jimmy Carter is probably the best ex-President there ever was. He deserves a Nobel Prize. He’s a fantastic ex-President. He’s one of the worst Presidents that we’ve had, in my opinion. I don’t hold him responsible for everything that went wrong, but he had no real leadership capabilities with the Congress. It was so important to be able to lead the Congress, and he just didn’t have a clue as to what to do there. He was a terrible President, and we’ve had some terrible Presidents recently, sadly.

Jimmy Carter was, in my opinion, a terrible President, and I think that worse, much worse is George W. [Bush], for different reasons. But I thought that Ronald Reagan was a good President, despite the fact that I disagreed with Ronald Reagan on many things. But he was a good President because he was a good leader, and he was able to communicate effectively with the American people and he was able to get some things done in the Congress, which I thought, in retrospect, probably had to be done. The New Deal was becoming very much an institutional apparatus that was attempting to give taxpayers’ money away, but was not doing it effectively. It needed to be shaken up. There needed to be changes.

I think that Reagan addressed that issue pretty effectively and we did see some changes later on, changes in welfare, changes in individual responsibility for trying to find employment and not live just off the government. Reagan was right, in my opinion. I didn’t like it at the time, but I thought he was right in the way he stood up to the Soviets with a military spending program that forced the Soviets to spend as much as they did. And it probably hastened the collapse of the Soviet regime by a decade or two. I think that Reagan was a pretty effective President. Not my cup of tea, totally, but when it comes to the political issues.
Knott: Could you talk a little bit, Senator, about the time when Robert Kennedy’s in the Senate, Edward Kennedy’s in the Senate, and you’re in the House of Representatives? Do you have any favorite recollections from that period? That’s a four-year span of time, more or less.

Tunney: I saw a good deal of Bobby. As I mentioned, Teddy and I used to go out there almost every weekend to play tennis. Frequently, in the morning we’d play tennis out there. Most weekends we’d go out there. And Bobby was developing, of course, as a Presidential campaigner. It was clear that he was going to run for the Presidency at some point. He didn’t know quite when, but I watched the evolution of his thinking about Vietnam. I watched Teddy’s evolution, my evolution, all of us were evolving, I guess. Maybe Bobby was a little ahead of us, but not much. We all were moving in that direction, and the relationship between the two of them was absolutely intimate. Clearly, Bobby was the lead dog. He was the alpha dog in the relationship.

Knott: I was going to ask about that.

Tunney: He was the older brother, but that was a family thing. Teddy would do his stuff in the Senate, on health issues and labor issues. Teddy was a much more effective Senator than Bobby was, but Bobby was a much more effective spokesman to the world than Teddy was. Teddy was not trying to speak to the world, really, at that time. He was leaving it up to Bobby, and Bobby was going to South Africa, he was traveling all around. He was a big, big, big star. But in the family, he was warm, charming, funny, intimate. Bobby had extraordinary charisma. Different from Jack’s, but in his own right, he had unbelievable charisma. Of course, Teddy does too, but in a different way. He has his own kind of charisma, his own ability to reach out and touch people.

What do I say? I saw Bobby go from the position of saying that he was not going to run for the Presidency to a position where, after New Hampshire, he changed his mind and decided to run. He caught many of us by complete surprise. I made a commitment to Lyndon Johnson, as a member of the Democratic delegation in California. I made a commitment to Lyndon Johnson when Bobby said he wasn’t going to run. Then Bobby changed his mind after New Hampshire and I was caught in a terrible position. I just didn’t say anything. I just kept my head down. [laughs] I did not want to get involved at all because I was obviously emotionally totally for Bobby, but I had made a public commitment for Johnson.

One of the things that I learned early on in politics, your word is your bond and you can’t be flip-flopping around. And by the way, that’s Kennedy too. His word is his bond, and when he gives his commitment, he gives a commitment. I did it on two or three occasions, to a great detriment to myself. I made a commitment early on that I was never going to vote in favor of having handguns in the hands of ordinary citizens. Phil Hart offered an amendment in the Senate to ban handguns, except for police officials and military personnel, and there are seven of us that voted for that, in favor of that, and it came to haunt me in my next election because the gun lobby really just had me right in their crosshairs.

Getting back to Bobby, I couldn’t come out for him after I’d made a commitment that I was going to be with Johnson, I didn’t think. I still look back on it, and I probably would have done
the same thing all over again because there are too many people in politics that jump ship, move back and forth, are wishy-washy, and don’t give you a sense of strength.

Knott: Did they understand your position? Did they try to pressure you?

Tunney: No, no, Bobby never tried to pressure me. Teddy never tried to pressure me. No, we were too close. I just wouldn’t say anything in favor of Johnson. I really went down into a hole. I mean, I just wouldn’t talk about it. I never talked about the Presidential election from—there was about a two-month period, wasn’t it, a two- or three-month period before Johnson withdrew. I forget how long it was, but it was a short period.

Knott: Very short.

Tunney: And then of course I was able to come out for Kennedy and was very active for him in the election down in California, after he lost up in Oregon, and then he came down to California. By that time he’d built up a tremendous head of steam and he was looked upon as the alternative to the continuation of the war. That is one of the things, when you get to the current times, as I mentioned in the first part of our interview, that the thing that I respected about Teddy so much was that he learned the lessons of Vietnam and applied them to Iraq.

That’s one of the reasons that I have such distaste, to be honest, with many of our candidates for the Presidency—to be wrong on that issue as a person who had been in public office for a protracted period of time prior to the issue coming up, is just, to me, dead wrong. It’s so wrong, and the judgment so flawed, that I find it very difficult to support such a person for the Presidency. I just think it was cowardly, it was wrong. It was almost, for me, a decisive point in history, where we have a Muslim population of a billion, 200 million people in the world. Let’s face it: historically, Muslims do not like Christians and Jews. They don’t dislike them but they want them to be Muslims, and the Muslim religion suggests that everybody eventually should be Muslim, because it’s the last revelation. And the last revelation is the best revelation, and therefore everybody should be a Muslim.

Jihad, back in the early days, was a way of establishing that, and they did a pretty good job in a very few years, moving out of North Africa, moving out through the Middle East and up into Spain. And they haven’t forgotten any of that. They haven’t forgotten history the way we have, and for them, history is just—1,400 years ago is as fresh as yesterday for us. And anybody that had known and knew anything or pretended to know anything about the Middle East or about the Muslim religion would know that there was this sharp difference between the Sunnis and the Shiites that goes back within 30 years of the time that Muhammad died. It probably started at the time he died because Ali [ibn Abi Talib] wanted to be the caliph at the time, and he didn’t get it, for the first three caliphs were someone else. And then he got it and they assassinated him. They assassinated his son Husayn shortly after that, and from that point on the two sides were split.

I only mention it in such detail because of what it shows me about a guy like Kennedy, who made the same mistake that I made about Vietnam, not understanding the history of Vietnam, not understanding the culture of Vietnam, not understanding what was going on for centuries before the French got involved, not understanding the colonial period. But he learned from that and applied those lessons to Iraq by learning something about the Muslim religion, learning
something about the history of the Middle East, the pre-Ottoman Empire, going right back to the early stages. Teddy understood that and he did the right thing, and boy, do I give him credit for that. I think that it was a defining point for our country, a defining point for him.

Believe me, in my opinion, and I could be dead wrong; you’re historians who probably know better than I. I pretend to be a historical student. I think that we’re going to be reaping some very bitter harvests for many decades as a result of what we’ve done in Iraq. We have inflamed a very radical segment of the Muslim population, not just in the Middle East but all throughout the world. Now it has become fashionable to become a human bomb. I mean, how do we stop these people? It’s a horrible thing. And Teddy was so strong on that. I think that his strength and his position define him in relationship to a lot of other people who are in the Senate today who want to be President.

Knott: You mentioned Vietnam. We noted that you took a trip to Vietnam in October of 1965, with Senator Kennedy.

Tunney: Yes, that’s right.

Knott: He was chairing a judiciary subcommittee on refugees. Could you tell us a little bit about that trip and the impressions that you both may have had?

Tunney: Yes. We went with then-Congressman [John] Culver, later Senator Culver, and Senator [Joseph] Tydings. Teddy, John, and I were very friendly, obviously. To put it mildly, we were very friendly. We were talking about Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson was building up the troops in the summer of ’65. We thought that it would be a very important thing to go over there and see what was going on, because it looked as though we were going to really be involved in a big fight over there.

I can’t speak for Kennedy, but without much preparation on my part, I went over. And when I say preparation, I did not study the history of Vietnam. I did not speak to Bernard Fall. I just decided that I wanted to be there. I went to the State Department and I got fully briefed from them. They gave me the message that went to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], they gave me the holy water, and I had my briefing papers. I got on the plane with John Culver, and we go out over there, and we all met there. Teddy and Tydings came later. Culver and I stopped off in the Philippines first, and then we met in Vietnam. We were taken immediately into the headquarters and we were outfitted with military uniforms, which we wore, hats the whole thing, full gear, and given the briefing by Westy [William Westmoreland] and others in the high command. Then they put a moveable cocoon around us, and we moved with helicopters and military transports.

Young: The press was with you all the time, weren’t they?

Tunney: Yes. There was quite a bit of press with us. Not in the briefings, but there was press as we had our various meetings, yes.

Young: You were in the House of Representatives.

Tunney: I was in the House of Representatives.
Young: Were you concerned, in your committee work, with refugees at that time?

Tunney: No.

Young: Ted was head of the—

Tunney: Oh, he was the head of the refugee... It’s interesting. Culver and I, at least, were not traveling under the auspices of Kennedy’s refugee committee. We were traveling as concerned members of the Congress. John, at that point, was on the Foreign Affairs Committee. I was not on the Foreign Affairs Committee that year, but I was the next year. Vietnam was very important in California. On the East Coast we don’t think much about Japan and Vietnam and the Philippines. On the West Coast we think about it all the time. That’s our pond, if you will, the Pacific, so I was very concerned about it. And there was developing concern in my district, substantially developing concern because a lot of resources were going to that effort. We were beginning to see inflation starting up after many years of quietude, maybe 1.2% inflation a year. It had edged up to over 2%, 2.5%. Our farmers were beginning to get very concerned, as were our businessmen. So I wanted to be able to go over and see it.

Originally, I think I talked to Culver, that the two of us ought to go over together. Then Kennedy came into it too, because he said let’s all go together, we can all go together. I traveled with my own funds. Teddy might have been traveling on his committee, I don’t know, but I paid for it myself, and I felt that it was an important thing to do. But we were always together there. We spent, I don’t know how long, a week, seven days maybe, eight days, nine days.

I sometimes confuse that trip with the second trip I took, in 1968, in which I spent two to three weeks there. I went by myself. I was on the Foreign Affairs Committee at that time, and I wrote a report to the Foreign Affairs Committee on the Hamlet Evaluation System, in which I tore apart the Hamlet Evaluation System and pointed out how ridiculous it was as a guide or a mechanism to judge how successful we were in pacifying the Vietnamese people, which got me seven minutes on the Walter Cronkite show because nobody had ever said it quite the way I had said it in that report. I was helped a great deal by reporters who led me on to the story. One of them was my cousin, David Greenway, who was, I guess, the editor of the Globe. At that point, he was the head of the Time magazine news bureau over there, so I had a lot of very good information that was fed to me as I was planning that trip. So that trip came out very differently than the trip in ’65.

The trip in ’65, we were in a cocoon. In ’68 I refused to allow them to put me in the cocoon. Although I did play badminton with General [Creighton] Abrams a couple of times, I basically hung out with the reporters and traveled where I wanted to go, by myself, with a Sony tape recorder. I interviewed captains and lieutenants who were assistants to the provincial chiefs, and asked them about how they figured out how well things were going. That’s another story and I won’t get into it, but it was a very different trip from the first trip.

The first trip was when we were surrounded by officialdom. We were constantly being fed information by these officials, and they gave us input that we took back home, which was just dead wrong. Dead wrong. I mean, it was what I guess they hoped that they would accomplish. But it didn’t take us all that long, after we had gotten back home, before some fissures began to
show up in the edifice of propaganda that they had surrounded us with. So we began, tentatively at first, but gradually over a period of time, a period of months, we began to move away from that position.

It was a very interesting trip in one respect because we were given an opportunity to see all the top people in the Vietnamese Government. General [Nguyen Cao Ky, General [Nguyen Van] Thieu, all those people. We were able to meet with the monks, they had us go up into Cambodia. We went up into Laos, the capital of Laos, Vientiane, and traveled around. So we had what you would call on the outside a very informative trip, but from the inside it was a colossal failure because we never really saw what was really going on. And we never heard from the people who knew what was really going on. We just heard from the people who had an axe to grind, and that was, they had been—the officers of our military had been told that they had a war to win, and they were following orders, and they were going to do everything they could to convince the Congress that what they were doing was the right thing. Naturally, that was their job, to do it. But we weren’t smart enough at the time to realize that we were being buffalowed.

**Young:** When did your conversation with Bernard Fall take place?

**Tunney:** Almost immediately after I got back.

**Young:** You mentioned the journalists earlier….

**Tunney:** Bernard Fall was—his name was communicated to me about two weeks after I got back from Vietnam. It was more than Vietnam. After Vietnam, Culver and I went to India and to Pakistan and to Lebanon, and then came home. We probably were on the road for another two weeks after that, so it would be probably a month later. After I had gotten back to California, I had been giving speeches in my district, so it’s probably now in November some time. Tydings called and said, “Have you ever heard of Bernard Fall?” I said no. And he said, “He’s a very important French/Indochina historian. He’s a Frenchman and has written a number of books that are very well regarded. He has a very different take on this war than what we heard. It would be really worthwhile for you to listen to it.” And I said, “Well, God, yes.”

So he gave me the name and when I got back to Washington, I called Fall and said, “I heard about you from Senator Tydings. I’d really like to meet with you.” And I did spend two or three sessions with him, and I read his books. I said to myself, *Oh, brother.* I mean, this is really wrong, what we’re hearing is wrong. Not that the war is wrong necessarily, but what we’re hearing is wrong, and the chances of success are tremendously less obvious than what we had originally been told. And it got down to understanding that it was a revolutionary war against French colonialism, against Western colonialism, and that they looked upon us as being colonialists. We were just there after the French. And we’d helped the French to some extent, when they were trying to hang on there, so they looked upon us as being a part of that whole colonial regime.

That was what the difference was. Kennedy, I think, also met with Bernard Fall, although I don’t know for sure, you’ll have to ask him. But I think he did. We were all talking about it, and I went to see him individually. I didn’t want to be part of a team in that. I wanted to meet him
personally and talk to him individually about it. I did, and it made a big difference in my thinking.

**Young:** Ted was writing an article for *Look* magazine after he came back. Before he drafted it, I understand, before he got clued in about what was really going on and began to have second thoughts, he may have talked to Bernard Fall also. But there are some articles that said that you saw a draft of this article, or he talked to you about this article, and you advised him not to go gung ho.

**Tunney:** Yes.

**Young:** Because—

**Tunney:** That is true. It’s a hazy memory but yes, that is true. We were all evolving our thinking, as you can imagine. I mean, I had just given maybe seven or eight speeches to high schools, in which I had just been real gung ho. And then I came back and I met with Bernard Fall and I said, “Why did I ever give those speeches?” It was a terrible—it was an epiphany, if you will, for me. One of the things that it *really* taught me is do not jump into positions on issues before you’ve had a chance to study them and understand, from the best information that you can get, what really is happening.

History is critical here. It’s absolutely critical. If you don’t understand the history of a region or a country, how the hell could you send an army in to try and change things around? It’s like Franz Josef after [Franz] Ferdinand was killed. I mean, the stupidity of what they did, trying to knock out Serbia. I mean, just the stupidity of it ended up killing 50 million people. Fifty million people died through the stupidity of about three or four men, and the Kaiser wasn’t one of them. He signed on, but the gang around him, the warlords, were the ones that were really anxious for that war to happen.

History keeps repeating itself because human beings are so God damn stupid. They really are. We’re brilliant, obviously. You’ve got the [Albert] Einsteins and we can understand everything; we go into quantum mechanics. I mean, we’re geniuses, but at the same time, when it comes to human relations and when it comes to territorial aggrandizement and feeding your population or having enough breathing room for your population, we are just as primitive as the monkeys that came out of the trees. I know that’s a harsh statement, but I happen to believe it. We are what we were. We can change and modify some of our habits, but essentially our temperaments are what we have been for hundreds of thousands of years, and maybe millions of years, if you want to go back to *Homo habilis* or *Homo erectus*. We descend with a certain genome that is—

**Young:** But there’s also the development of reasoning function in the brain.

**Tunney:** Yes, but these decisions are not made by reasoning. These decisions are made by emotion. We’re using an antidiluvian brain when we decide that we’re going to smash ’em. You know, we’re just going to kill ’em, we’re going to go in there and destroy ’em. [*Makes an arrgh sound*] That is not the reasoning brain, that’s what’s going on back there in the archaic brain.

**Young:** No, but they don’t always go in and kill ’em all. [*laughter*] I’m an optimist.
**Tunney:** Well, I’ll tell you why I’m sometimes an optimist and sometimes a pessimist. In Vietnam, we ended up killing about two million Vietnamese. The Cambodians, unfortunately, got the tail of the tiger and our bombing in Cambodia allowed the Khmer Rouge to come in, and they killed about a million or two million. So there were about four million, a job well done. And now we are in Iraq. We have a savage guy in the form of Saddam Hussein, a bad, bad warlord, a bad man. On the other hand, how many would he have killed in the last two or three years if he’d stayed in as warlord? Maybe he would have killed 10,000. I don’t know how many he would have killed. I won’t put a number on it exactly. We have ended up killing 60,000 to 100,000 people directly and indirectly, and we have about two million refugees. A million of them are in Syria, several hundred thousand are in Jordan, and others are wandering around as nomads in their own country, no security. Job well done.

Now, that is not the rational part of the brain. [Paul] Bremer’s actions were not rational. None of these people that were in charge of this war were thinking rationally. They were thinking with this reptilian brain. And frankly, that is one of the problems with people who don’t pay attention to history, because history tells you that your reasoning, what worked and what didn’t work, and what you should be looking for in the way of effectiveness.

I’m not saying that all war is bad; obviously, self-defensive war is very important. But I am saying that when you have a person in public office, the highest level of public office, who says that the United States has a perfect right to attack any country that some day—some day—may represent a national security threat, you’re talking about a very different country than I’m aware of historically, constitutionally, we have come to expect our country to be. And yet everybody sits on the side, Oh yes, this is great, salaam, salaam, salaam. We’ll go along with it because he’s the President. That is not the rational brain that’s working, that is the reptilian brain, the follower brain. I just have to tell you—as you can see, there’s a little bit of passion still left in me.

**Young:** Well, believe me, I’m not defending the current administration. That was not the intent of my remark.

Getting back to Vietnam, of course there were—as you point out, what was not seen was the history and where we fit it in when we come in essentially as successors to the French.

**Tunney:** That’s right.

**Young:** But our reason is the domino theory, that was the proffered reason, and somewhere in there we are bringing democracy to South Vietnam.

**Tunney:** That was what was used.

**Young:** Yes, that was the—

**Tunney:** No, that was used. Those, I will grant you, are rational thoughts. But the problem, unfortunately, is that the means used were not democratic means. Our support tacitly, of the assassination of Ngo Diem was not democratic. Our support of the generals was not an act of democracy. The domino theory, I grant you, is a theory that was based on fear, which is an emotion. It was based on fear, and the idea is that you’ve got this amorphous philosophy, communism, that is much stronger and more powerful than Christianity or Buddhism or the other...
religions of the region, and therefore they are inevitably, like a fog coming in from the sea, going to swamp us and take over, and we’re going to be destroyed, and we’ve got to stand up to it. It’s a theory. I would not say it’s a rational theory, but it’s a theory.

**Young:** That was John Foster Dulles’ contribution actually, and it was Eisenhower who articulated that theory after he decided he was not going to rescue the French.

**Tunney:** That’s right. But Eisenhower was a pretty smart guy. He knew the limits of an army and warfare, and what it is that you can accomplish through warfare. Foster Dulles didn’t have a clue about that, really, except maybe as an intellectual exercise. The trouble is that so many of the people who are in positions of power have not really read history, at least have not read history the right way. And by the right way, I’m thinking in these terms. I do not look upon Napoleon Bonaparte as a great man. I’ll put it this way. I don’t think of him as a great statesman. I think Napoleon Bonaparte was a brilliant general, obviously an incredibly egocentric person who was determined to dominate Europe and to put it under his dictatorial control. Interesting man, but certainly not the kind of person that I would want to have our country follow. And I don’t think there’s anybody in the high public office who wants to be a Napoleon. But there’s a bit of a napoleonic complex that exists in certain of our leaders.

I mean, this idea that we could go into Iraq and in two weeks finish ’em off and that was going to be the end of it, is to me just mind-boggling. I can forgive the leader, perhaps, if he’s getting that kind of information fed to him all the time, but I cannot forgive the people around him, who supposedly were experts, military experts, experts about the region, who would go along with it. To me, the idea that—it’s almost as though because everybody was saying the same thing to each other, there was no independent thinking at all. And that’s why, again, you get back to somebody like Bobby Byrd and Ted Kennedy, who were willing to say something that was out of sync with the general conclusion of what had been agreed to at the highest levels of government, that that was so important.

In a democracy you need real debate, and particularly when it comes time to go to war. I don’t think Ted is a pacifist at all. I think he’s just the exact opposite of what I would call being a pacifist. He really feels that you have got to take responsibility for trying to bring a better way of life to people around the world who are incapable of providing the resources themselves, and his interest in refugees, his interest in foreign aid, and all the things that I think you would expect somebody of his background to be in favor of. It’s amazing that we have now, in our Capital, people who feel—or at least they have felt up until very recently—they have a perfect right to use a philosophy that we would have condemned [Vladimir] Lenin for, to go out and strike any country, attack any country that some day, some day, may be an actual threat to the United States. Give me a break. That means any country in the world. I mean, it’s all a question of timing then, isn’t it? Is it a century from now, 50 years from now, ten years from now, or is it next week? Those are issues that I do not think have been effectively debated in the Congress.

I really believe that it is much better to articulate what the issue is, and then attempt to come to some kind of a rational understanding of what the best policy would be, given different sets of circumstances. But we don’t do it. We’re all wrapped up in issues of whether or not there’s been corruption in the delivery of the services. We’re wrapped up in whether the new surge of troops is going to have a little bit more effect than the past surge. We are also involved, and
appropriately so, in wondering about deadlines, dates, and things. But what is not effectively looked at is, what are our national policy interests in the area, in the region?

Clearly, we have a very important reason to be in Afghanistan. They attacked us. They used that as a staging area to attack us. In self-defense we have a right to do something about that. I think that everybody in the world would say that’s true, or at least they used to say it. They’re so mad at us now about Iraq that they might not give us leeway to go in and finish that job and be supportive of us. But the Iraq thing is something that is part of a much larger mosaic, and the longer—you don’t need to hear my thoughts on that. Sorry. I didn’t mean to get started on that.

**Knott:** That’s OK. It’s all right. You mentioned Senator Byrd a few minutes ago. Were there older Senators when Senator Kennedy first came into the United States Senate that he sort of looked up to as mentors? Did he ever talk to you about the kinds of folks that he viewed as role models perhaps?

**Tunney:** When he first came into the Senate, he told me that he went to the prayer breakfast, and he did that because he wanted to develop a relationship with the southern Senators, who were always at those prayer breakfasts. He thought that that would be a very good thing, to establish a bridgehead to people who ordinarily would not think that a young Senator from Massachusetts, a Catholic liberal, would be prepared to do. And so he did have a real feeling that that was something that was important. He had great, great respect for Phil Hart, I know; tremendous respect for Phil Hart. He thought that he was really the Senator’s Senator. And he was smart, he had integrity, he was modest but very effective. So there’s no question that he was a big person in Teddy’s life in the Senate, a very important person.

I think he liked a number of the southern Senators. You’d have to speak to him more about that, but I think that he had respect for John Sparkman, with whom he had a relationship, a good relationship. On the Judiciary Committee, both Teddy and I were always on the wrong side of Jim Eastland, but at the same time, Teddy had a very warm working relationship with Jim Eastland. I learned from Teddy, how to handle Jim Eastland. It was thanks to Teddy that I—

**Young:** How was that?

**Tunney:** What?

**Young:** How do you handle a Jim Eastland? [*laughter*]

**Tunney:** You mean how? I’m giving away all my secrets here. No. Teddy said, “You know, you’re never going to get along with...” I had been on the Senate Judiciary Committee for two years and I hadn’t gotten a subcommittee, and I was very eager to get a subcommittee. I knew that Eastland kind of liked me, but I also knew that the day that I came into my first caucus, a resolution had been offered by Fred Harris to strip Eastland of his seniority because he refused to support Hubert Humphrey in the preceding campaign.

**Knott:** Sixty-eight?

**Tunney:** The ’68 campaign. Yes, that’s right. It was the ’68 campaign, because I got elected in 1970. So he wanted to strip him of seniority in the Democratic caucus. I knew that this was a
terrible vote for me because I had just been put on the Judiciary Committee, and if I voted against Eastland, it would hurt me with him and I’d probably not get a subcommittee. On the other hand, if I went along and supported Eastland maintaining his position as the chairman, in California it would leak out and obviously I’d be asked about it. I’d have to say what I did, and that would hurt me terribly with my Democratic constituency. It would just be the kiss of death. So I voted against him. I knew nothing about him. I’d hardly ever met him before, but I voted against him. So during the first two years I was on the committee, he was OK with me but didn’t show a particular friendship, but he didn’t point me out as a person that he wanted to punish. I tried to be friendly with him.

Two years went by, a new Congress came in, and I said to Ted, “How in the devil am I going to get a committee?” He said, “There’s one way to get Eastland. You’ve got to go down to his office. Ask to see him, go down his office, and have a drink with him after hours.” I said OK. So I called Eastland and I said, “Mr. Chairman, can I see you after hours?” He said sure. So I went down there and we went in his private room, and his Administrative Assistant brought out a bottle of scotch, glasses, ice. He said, “How do you want your scotch?” I said, “I'll have it with soda, please.” He said fine. We poured it; we had a drink.

He said, “Why did you vote against me?” I said, “Jim, it was political. I didn’t know you, that’s number one. I didn’t know you. Number two, if I had voted with you, it would have killed me in my constituency, and you have to understand that. In California, the center of gravity in the Democratic Party in California is very liberal.” He said, “Well, that was very unkind of you and I don’t think that was justified by anything I had done to you.” I said, “Mr. Chairman, I can’t say anything more and I’m sorry it happened, but it did happen. It occurred to me that I had to do it to stay alive politically, and there’s a lot of other things that are going on in this committee, a lot of things going on in the Congress and the Senate that I really would like to talk to you about. And maybe if you said enough about that, we could move on to these other subjects, because I can’t say anything other than I’ve said.” And he said, “Well, what do you want to talk to me about?”

So now we have been drinking. That bottle was full and now it’s down to about the last two inches. I am getting completely crocked and who, at 7:30 PM, should come bouncing into the office, just all chipper and cheery, with his dancing shoes on, but Senator Kennedy. And he says, “Hey, Jim, is Senator Tunney trying to get a subcommittee from you?” [laughter] And then he sits down and we all sit around there and we laugh and we talk and we tell war stories about what’s going on in the Congress and Senate. Jim Eastland’s very interested about my father and boxing. We spent about—I spent probably a total of three or four hours with him. Kennedy was with us for the last hour and a half. We’re getting ready to leave and Eastland said, “John, you come to see me tomorrow and we’ll talk about that chairmanship.” [laughter]

Now that is the way it worked. I wish I could say that it was something else, something more rational, something more intellectual, but from a human point of view, the meeting over drinks was what did it. I think that what Eastland really wanted more than anything else was to see me eat some humble pie. I liked Eastland. I didn’t like his positions on the issues, but I understood where he was coming from. I really did. I understood what his courthouse was like, what they were saying in his courthouse, around his cracker barrel. We all have different cracker barrels, and the great genius of the founders of our Republic was that they could get people from
different constituencies coming in and working together and not trying to kill each other, but trying to accommodate each other and each other’s political views, to the point that you can get something done and keep the Republic together.

Teddy Kennedy is brilliant that way. He is brilliant. He’s able to get you to cross over and bridge these kinds of ideological barriers, because he believes in the essential goodness of humankind. That’s the best way to put it. He does. He couldn’t do what he does effectively unless he did. He understands the southern mentality, or the—now it’s the Republican mentality. He gave a speech last weekend in California. He was invited out by the Reagan Foundation. Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan extended the invitation, and he gave a brilliant speech. I wasn’t there. He asked me to come but I couldn’t join him because I was back here. But he gave a brilliant speech out there that was hands across the water, talking about Reagan and his contributions, and how they had differences but how he was a fine President, a fine presenter of what it was that he believed to be right. Apparently he said that Reagan and he shared many common views about the country, and he complimented Reagan on the Cold War positions and helping bring about the demise of the Soviet Union. That’s a good example of his continuing ability to do that, and I saw that on the Judiciary Committee.

Both of us were there during the ITT [International Telephone and Telegraph] hearings, which were probably six months—yes, maybe six months before the Watergate problem. We were the ones that brought out things that [John] Mitchell was doing and [Richard] Kleindienst was doing, and [Richard] McLaren and ITT and the Republican Convention in San Diego. That was a prelude to Watergate, but many of the issues that we exposed at the ITT hearings ended up being a part of the file in the Watergate, and it was sort of an extension and continuation. In committee, you can imagine the ferocious arguments that we would sometimes have with the chairman, who was taking one position. He was taking a strong position in favor of what [Richard] Nixon wanted to have happen, pro administration, and we—Hart, Kennedy, myself—were taking a very strong position the other way.

But we had to get along, and we were very effective in getting along together in a very difficult time. Kennedy showed considerable courage in those meetings, speaking his mind, but not doing it in a way that was bound to bring about a negative personal reaction from Eastland. He never let it get personal. He kept it intellectual; you know, we disagree but this is our position and we have to do it this way, and we have the votes. And we did have the votes, so we were able to get things accomplished that we might not otherwise have been able to.

**Knott:** I think we need to take a break.

**[BREAK]**

**Tunney:** We were focused on the ITT issues, and those, if you remember, were very important issues, or at least they were conceived to be at the time because it looked as though the Justice Department had been corrupted. It looked as though McLaren, who was a very smart guy, a very intelligent person, head of the Antitrust Division, it looked as though he’d been compromised.
He had not wanted to allow those mergers to take place. He thought they were violations of the Antitrust Act. Then he’d been told by Mitchell and Kleindienst that he had to allow those mergers to go through, so he did it. Shortly after he did it, you recall, he was rewarded with a federal court judgeship, became a federal district judge, and it looked like a real payoff to him for having done what he was ordered to do. So it looked as though there was a subversion of the Justice Department’s responsibilities in that area. That’s the way we looked at it. It’s the way Teddy looked at it and the way I looked at it and Hart looked at it. Teddy, of course, was a very important person in all of that discussion and investigation, very important. I mean, he was a very strong voice with excellent staff work. So I would say that he showed his colors there very strongly.

**Knott:** Let me take you back a bit, if I could. I’m just curious whether you have any recollections of—there was a period in 1972 when Senator [George] McGovern considered putting Senator Kennedy on the ticket.

**Tunney:** Yes, yes.

**Knott:** I’m wondering if you have any recollections of that, or were you involved in that at all? Did he consult with you?

**Tunney:** I do have recollections of it. My impression is that he very much wanted Senator Kennedy. He was very eager to have Teddy Kennedy be the Vice Presidential running mate. Teddy turned him down for his own reasons, but he did turn him down. I remember that very well. Teddy talked to me about that at the time. I don’t know what they were, you have to get it from him, but I think that part of it was that he really did not feel that being Vice President was the answer to his situation. He was having some family problems at the time, as you recall, and those were tough issues for him, very tough problems. I know, I was very much involved with it. I can’t talk to those issues other than just to say he was having serious family problems, and I think that he felt that he just couldn’t handle it.

**Knott:** Were the same factors at play as 1976 approached and there was pressure building on him again to decide whether or not to run for the Presidency?

**Tunney:** Yes, there was pressure that was building on him at that time. Again, I think that he thought it just wasn’t an appropriate time for him to do it. I will tell you my impression is this, that Ted was deeply hurt by Jack’s death, deeply hurt. I mean it was really very psychologically damaging to him. But Bobby’s death was much worse. Bobby’s death really—that was a haymaker that really put him down almost for the count. He was really hurt by that internally. He adored his brother, he admired his brother, talked to him all the time. And then suddenly to have Bobby removed from the scene, I think that Ted went through a period that would have destroyed a lesser man.

I had told you earlier that he had this extraordinary resilience. I don’t know how he did it, frankly. It’s one thing if you don’t care for your brother, and it’s another thing if you’re competitive with your brother, but where you have so much of your soul and spirit embedded in your brother’s existence and friendship and companionship, and then to have that taken away in the way that it was was awful. Teddy was excited about Bobby’s campaign, because I think he
thought that he really had a shot at being President. And then to have that removed—Look, we all know the factual story of Teddy and what happened after that, I’m not going to get into it, but I think Bobby’s death was a key factor for all of that. It was just amazing that he was able to get through it.

Young: He told Bobby that he didn’t think he ought to run.

Tunney: Oh, he did. That’s right, he did say that at the very beginning. I was there with him when he told Bobby that.

Young: Yes. But once—was that the occasion when you saw Bobby on the television?

Tunney: No, I saw Bobby when he got killed, on television. But I was at the house when—

Young: No, no. About running for President and Bobby’s campaign.

Tunney: Well, I was with Teddy and Bobby out in the house at McLean, Bobby’s house in McLean, and we talked about it. Bobby was saying he thought he could do it and Teddy was suggesting that he shouldn’t do it. They probably had several conversations. I’m only talking about the one that I happened to be at, and I heard him say that. I said it too, frankly, and my judgment was independent of Teddy’s. This was before Lyndon Johnson had pulled out. I thought that it would be very damaging to Bobby to do it. Little did I obviously know what was going to happen, but I just felt that it would arouse passions that would be very damaging to him, for a number of reasons.

One is that Lyndon Johnson did have strong support with a certain segment, a certain wing of our party, particularly the more conservative southern-type Democrats. And secondly, I thought that the liberals, the Gene McCarthy liberals, would be just enraged by having Kennedy come in at the last moment and pluck the cherry out of the pie just after McCarthy had put all the contents in it and put it in the oven. I was worried about that. But little did we know that Bobby would make such an extraordinary contribution to the dialogue on political issues at that moment. I think that towards the end of the campaign, as we moved towards California, both Teddy and I, and others who were more skeptical, had come around to be believers in his future. I was devoted to Bobby at the end, I mean just devoted to him and what he was trying to accomplish. I think that Teddy, by that point, well, he had the family thing going, which was all-powerful, but I think that intellectually he thought that Bobby was in a position to win because of the way he was articulating these issues. But Teddy did not want him to run at the beginning. He did not think it was wise for him to run.

Young: So after he ran and entered it and got assassinated, that was in June of ’68.

Tunney: It was horrible. It was horrible. I will just tell you, I know how horrible it was. I was there almost every step of the way and thereafter. Not in everything, but many of the things thereafter. Teddy, you know, he was not able to function effectively for a while. Part of his brain was not working, and it was because of this extraordinary grief that he felt, and almost to the degree that was fatalistic, that he was going to be gone, he was dead, he was going to kill himself, he wouldn’t be around much longer and what the hell, what’s going on? This world is crazy, it’s chaotic. What am I doing here? All this stuff. But he pulled—
Young: Then he begins to come out of it and he makes a talk, I think in August, that he’s going to stay in public life, or something like that.

Tunney: And then what happened?

Young: Well, he comes back to the Senate and it looks to me—I’d just like to ask you about this—that he starts throwing himself into a lot of Bobby’s issues: Indian education, Alaska, he takes over that subcommittee, Biafra, you name it. It’s taking up Bobby’s cause. Is that impression correct?

Tunney: Yes, I think that’s right.

Young: And he just—I’ve looked at his schedule from the time he—he started out with the Biafra thing. That was his first nonpublic business coming back. From that until the time of the Edgartown Regatta, I don’t see how anybody could do what he was doing. He was driving himself, it seems to me.

Knott: Well, he ran for whip too during that period.

Young: He ran for whip. He told Tip [Thomas] O’Neill on the plane going up to Boston that he was going to the regatta at Edgartown. He said, “I’ve never been so tired in my life.” So I don’t know, is this a correct impression? That’s one of the ways he comes back?

Tunney: Yes, I think so, partially. Yes, I do. I think that’s right.

Young: But there were other things.

Tunney: [Hesitates] I really feel reluctant to speak to the issue.

Young: Yes, I understand.

Tunney: I don’t feel comfortable about speaking to the issue. I can only tell you that he was not himself. He was throwing himself into these issues with abandon, but almost with reckless abandon. He had almost superhuman energy to be able to do what he was doing, but he hadn’t healed. He hadn’t healed at all. The healing hadn’t even really begun, if you want to know the truth. And he was carrying all these unbelievable schedules and at the same time having this fatalism about assassination. That was a very tough time, to be honest. But the amazing thing is that he was able to have happen what happened shortly thereafter at Chappaquiddick, and then come back from that.

I was in California campaigning for the Senate when the thing happened there, and I got a call from Pat Lawford. She said, “Your best friend is in real trouble, he needs you.” So I again caught a plane and went back, and I was with him for a couple days. I spent three or four days up there. I don’t have any memory about it. So I’ll just tell you I have no memory of that period.

Young: I’m not pressing you.
Tunney: No, no, I have no memory, I just don’t. It’s all been conveniently canceled out of my brain. But I can tell you that he, first just having had the death of Bobby and then having this thing happen, I mean it was unbelievable. I happen to be one of those who absolutely believe that it was an accident, I mean a complete, total accident. It was a tragic accident, but it was an accident. I just know that in my heart because of my relationship with him, and I am convinced that when we’d talk about it that he was telling me the truth. So it was another profound shock to his psyche and his system, to suddenly be elevated right up to the stars, assuming the mantle of his brother in a way, by many people thinking he was for sure going to be the next Presidential candidate, and then having that accident.

Young: And having become head of the family, which wasn’t something he would have been anticipating in his early life. And then all the children that were left.

Tunney: No, that’s right. And having—and taking it seriously. Taking it very seriously. Head of the family, taking it very seriously. He has that indescribable quality to always be thinking about other people. He does. He’s amazing. I’ve been a beneficiary of it. All of his friends have been beneficiaries of it. Every member of his family has been a beneficiary of it. He’s always thinking of other people and trying to help other people and do things for them. That’s one of his most charming, from a friendship point of view, one of his very best qualities, because you always feel, with Kennedy, that he’s thinking of other people before he thinks of himself.

Now in politics it’s a little bit different. I’m not talking about getting bills passed. I’m not talking about getting elected to the Senate or whatever. I’m talking just in human relations, he’s always thinking about other people. That is quite an admirable quality. That’s why he has such intimate friends, so many friends who are willing to do almost anything for him, and I happen to be one of them. I’d do almost anything I could for the guy because he has been always thinking of me. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to always be thinking of him in the ways that I can be. There’s very little that I can do for him, but I would do whatever I can do. And I have, as I demonstrated by my willingness to give up for a while, my Senatorial campaign to come back. My campaign meant an awful lot to me but I went back to be with him, and I’d do the same thing again if the occasion called for it. That’s because he is that way. He’s the magnet that allows that to happen.

Young: Sorry for dialing back somewhat. Steve was asking you about, was it the ’76?

Knott: Just every time there was a Presidential election, the speculation would build as to whether Senator Kennedy would jump in.

Tunney: Well, it was true, I mean even in ’68.

Knott: Yes, you were in Chicago?

Tunney: I was in Chicago.

Knott: How was that?

Tunney: I was at the Cape with Teddy and then I flew to Chicago.
Young: On a mission?

Tunney: Well, I was keeping my eyes and my ears open to see if anything could happen and if it was possible, we would put something together. He never pulled the trigger, so we never did anything.

Knott: Did you pick up a lot of sentiment in Chicago?

Tunney: Oh, very pro-Kennedy sentiment. It would have been a terrible fight. I’m not sure we could have won, but there was a lot of pro-Kennedy sentiment out there. It’s a little bit like what you see with [Barack] Obama now. He was a face that represented the Kennedy family and you have these two stricken heroes, and he’d be able to pick up the country and go on from there. So there was a lot of that operating in the system, but he decided that he didn’t want to pursue it. I was there, and I didn’t go there for my health. There were places I’d rather be. But it was interesting. Then, of course, in ’72 we had the same kind of thing, although by that time he was recovering from all the awful things that had happened up there in Edgartown. So I think what was happening there was that he just wasn’t ready for it psychologically. He just couldn’t do it, plus the fact I think that there was a huge amount of—there would have been a huge negative reaction in ’72, if he had decided to go. Then in ’76, I’m trying to remember now how that worked. Carter was, for a while, absolutely unknown. I think Kennedy was up for election that year too.

Knott: He was.

Tunney: Yes, so he couldn’t really do that and keep his position in the Senate. I think that he felt that his Senate career was more important to him than taking a flyer on the Presidency. So he decided to stay in the Senate. Then Carter came from nowhere and was preaching the gospel that the American people were good. He gave that speech, “American people are good, they’re good.” And he spoke like an evangelical. Because Nixon was so terrible, the aftermath of Nixon was so awful, it gave him such a strong connection with the electorate. He came in like an angel, the angel Gabriel, who was going to make things right again.

Young: There were a number of aspirants, Democratic aspirants, in Washington: [Walter] Mondale.


Young: Udall, Scoop [Henry] Jackson, and Carter was running against Washington.

Tunney: That’s right.

Knott: Fred Harris ran that year too.

Tunney: Yes, Fred Harris was too. But it was very interesting to watch Carter, and that tells you a little bit about the American people and the way they can be communicated to. Carter, at first, appeared to have very little going for him, but he did have people like David Rockefeller, who were very sympathetic to him. Maybe some of them were Republican, but they were very sympathetic to Carter because he was a southerner who had a progressive view of society and
was obviously a man of intelligence. So he had built, within the foreign policy establishment, a pretty strong base of support.

And when he began to articulate his view of how the American people were really a lot better than they were being given credit for, he touched on something that resonated. As I quoted earlier, “One man with a dream and pleasure shall go forth and conquer a crown.” The theme “Americans are good” was the background music, just waiting for the hero to show up on the stage, and Carter was the hero and the outsider, the hero who had the sword, who was going to give American the leaders it deserved. At the end, it was almost impossible for anybody to stop him because he really caught on. His name began to catch on. The scribes began to say wonderful things about him, and for that very short period of time, he had a wonderful honeymoon.

Young: Well, the Democratic Party had just revised its rules for the primaries. That was the first election where the primaries really were going to determine the outcome, and Carter, Ham Jordan, and those people really studied those rules and mastered them, so he had really a very effective primary strategy, which none of the other guys had. They hadn’t understood the change in the rules and how it was going to effect things.

Tunney: Yes. But he had the message too.

Young: Oh, yes.

Tunney: He had the message. He combined the strategy with the message, and the message was powerful.

Young: You’re right about that.

Tunney: He came to California and I was, of course, a Senator. He came to California and I listened to him talk. I had signed on with [Edmund] Muskie, and I really respected Muskie. Muskie crashed in New Hampshire when he started crying. I saw Carter in the early days and then I saw him at the end. In the end he was a hell of a lot better than he was in the early stages. And he was very effective at the end of that campaign. He was speaking what people wanted to hear, and people really identified with him. Plus the fact that I think they thought that he could win. It was likely if he was nominated, he was going to win.

I don’t think Kennedy ever was a factor in ’76 at all. I think that in ’80—I’m not quite as familiar with that campaign because I was not living on the East Coast at that time, but I used to see him quite a bit. I think that in ’80 it was almost as though Kennedy was thinking, If I’m going to do it I’ve got to do it now. This is my last hurrah. And Jimmy Carter was unpopular in a number of segments in the Democratic Party, particularly the labor unions and liberal factions of the party. There was almost incompetence in the way Carter was handling the Iran hostage crisis. Everything seemed to be going wrong for him. Although [Paul] Volcker was the one who was responsible, of course, for the extraordinary draconian measures to bring inflation down, raising interest rates and such, Carter was the hapless beneficiary of that and he didn’t seem to be able to communicate effectively how we were going to get out of this horrible bind of inflation and economic stagnation.
I remember I was getting, with federal treasuries at that point, 14% interest, and the prime rate was up to somewhere around 20%. I mean the economy was bad. And Carter didn’t seem to know how to talk to that issue. It was almost as though he wasn’t interested in it. I’m sure he was very interested. He’s an intelligent man and he wanted to win reelection, but it was almost as though he had taken that part of the agenda off the table and the economy was going to just handle itself. He couldn’t do much about it and he wasn’t going to try to do much. I think if he had been more vociferous about what he wanted the Federal Reserve Board to do or how we were going to get out of this bind of inflation/stagnation, he could have won reelection. I think he would have given people some direction and hope that things would get better. I was running for reelection at that time and I know that I was desperately anxious for Carter to show some gumption. I’m talking now back in 1979 before Kennedy decided he was going to run. I’m talking in the early stages of Carter’s reelection campaign. I was so eager to see some life in the guy so that it would bring the entire party forward.

It was a tough time. We were in the aftermath of Vietnam and there was a lot of weird thinking that was going on at that time. I related it to a Kurt Vonnegut novel. I mean it was hard to see where you could connect the dots. Emotions were so splattered all over the political canvas. There was a lot of unhappiness and anger about Vietnam as well as the economy.

Young: And the Watergate scandals and the pardon.

Tunney: The Watergate scandals. Yes. I mean the whole thing, everything was in sort of a state of political chaos. Jimmy Carter was, unfortunately, the recipient of a lot of stuff that he had no responsibility for, but he didn’t offer a clarion call regarding how to get us out of it, to lead us out of it. And that’s why Kennedy was, in a sense, sucked into it, because the labor unions wanted Kennedy. They wanted to have somebody who had some strength and a strong voice and articulated labor’s views. The foreign policy community was looking for somebody besides Carter as well because he had done very well with the Palestinian peace process, his attempts to bring about a resolution of that dispute, and the debacle in Iran in the attempt to free U.S. diplomats. Also, with regard to the Soviet Union, it looked as though the U.S. was being pushed around by the Soviets, with their invasion of Afghanistan and our seeming haplessness in being able to counteract that military adventure.

As we talk about it, I begin to think of more and more of those issues that were affecting the psyche of the American people. And so Kennedy was sucked in as much as trying to pounce on an opportunity. A lot of people said, “Teddy, you’ve got to run, you’ve got to run, you’ve got to run. We’ve got to get this party back to where it should be and you’ve got to offer the leadership.” So that’s why I think he got into it at that point. I don’t think it was as much a personal opportunism as it was answering a call of certain segments of the party.

Young: I think another issue here was that Kennedy was kind of a scion of the party, especially the liberal wing of the party, the labor element of the party, and Carter wasn’t, and made a virtue of that, of not being your standard liberal Democrat. He came out very strongly for fiscal conservatism and so forth. So he really was out of the mainstream at that time of the Democratic Party, and didn’t know how to—you couldn’t call on being a party leader if you’re really basically putting the party aside. As he once said, you know, “The Democratic Party is an albatross around my neck.”
Tunney: I don’t remember him saying that, but I thought that he was an albatross around our neck. [laughter]

Young: Of course, of course. The feeling is mutual. [laughter]

Tunney: I thought Carter was very arrogant, that was the other thing. He really didn’t have much respect for the Congress and individual Congressmen and Senators. Perhaps he was right, but he didn’t have respect for them and yet he needed them. You can’t govern effectively if you don’t have the Congress behind you. George Bush is going to find that out big time over the next year or two, because you have to have that. The average person in the Congress wants first and foremost to get reelected. I mean that’s 95% of their thought process, to get reelected. It’s very Darwinian in a political evolutionary sense. They want to reproduce victories in their reelections. That’s the only thing they’re concerned about, reproduction of their reelections.

Young: Of course, that brings up something really that pertains to Kennedy, because he doesn’t really have to worry.

Tunney: That’s right. That’s true.

Young: And that, the longevity, is what allows him to have that institutional memory.

Tunney: That’s right.

Young: Few other people do. Sometimes that’s an advantage.

Tunney: Yes, it is, and probably a burden too.

Young: He knows the Senate backwards and forwards, even though it has changed, and you might want to talk a little bit about that. But it gives him also an unusual opportunity.

Tunney: Huge.

Young: That sets him aside from the modern Senate that you described, that they’re playing the next reelection battle already. He doesn’t have to do that.

Tunney: And also the money game. The money game has really changed things. Now maybe in the old days, when the Senate was elected by the state legislatures, there was the money game too. I don’t know. My study of history does not really incorporate knowledge about the way people got elected to the Senate from the state legislatures, but certainly in the early days of the elected Senate, money did not play nearly as great a role as it is playing now. It’s a terrible thing.

Kennedy, fortunately, because he is now iconic, is able to raise a lot of money, much more money than he really needs to get reelected, and he doesn’t have to commit his soul to whatever special interests give him money. They know what he stands for and they give to him because they like him and they like what he stands for, or they give to him because he’s just been there and they want to have access to him. So he doesn’t have to worry much about that. But the average Senator has to get the money from wherever he can get it, and usually it’s the special interests. You’ve got a budget now of somewhat over $10 trillion. Much of it is inaccessible to
the Congress to do things with, but still, trillions of dollars are directable. So you have the special interests that want a piece of that action putting up the money in campaigns to get a return on their investment when the Congressmen and Senators go to bat for them with their special projects.

It’s a loathsome system and people say, well, it’s better than any other system. I don’t know if it’s better than the British system, to be honest with you. I happen to be prejudiced towards the American Congressional, Presidential, Judicial system, but I think that with the kind of money that’s going into these campaigns, it’s very dangerous. You go back to the Roman republic, and not that Rome ever had a real democracy, but the oligarchs in ancient Rome during the Roman republic were concerned about money. Roman Senators needed money to advance in political life. They were corrupt. You see this situation developing today in Washington. I won’t go into a long harangue on it because I know it doesn’t deal directly with Kennedy, although he is a perfect example of the opposite of what it is that we’re talking about.

You take a look at [Richard] Cheney and Halliburton. It almost makes me want to swear off politics for life. It is disgusting when you see a company like Halliburton get $15 billion plus of contracts, both down in the Gulf and over in Iraq, and never have to bid for them. All just sweetheart deals. Now that is really horrendous. It’s the sort of thing—it’s a corruption at the top that is feeding down through the entrails of the body politic. It’s rotten. Congress is going to have to try and reform itself.

I think it’s very hard to do, by the way. Institutions that have become corrupted find it very difficult to change direction if it requires a self-abnegation of the pleasures of the corruption. And there’s a lot of pleasure in being able to go to your favorite lobbyist and just take as much money out of the drawer as you need to run your campaign and not have to worry about it. There’s a certain sweetness to the corruption of being invited on the golfing tours and being put up and having jets fly you all around the place. It’s very hard to change that institutionally from within, but maybe we can restore democracy, and we still have a free press, and maybe we will be able to see some significant changes take place. Certainly a person like Kennedy is very helpful in that regard. That’s not his issue, as such, but he certainly is on the side of seeing reform. We’ve talked enough about it. I know that he feels very strongly about it the same way I do.

But we have what we have, and we’re not helped by the Supreme Court, which constantly is knocking down these campaign spending bills. [laughs] It’s time to put some kind of limitation on spending. We had a bill in ’75 that was very good, that put a limitation both on the collection of campaign money and a limitation on the spending of the money, but the Supreme Court knocked out the spending side of it, which allowed millionaires to put up as much money as they wanted for their own campaigns. And now it looks as though they’re going to knock down the collection side of it too. So it’s going to be a free-for-all for raising money. Is that the free enterprise system? I guess it is; you sell to the highest bidder. That’s however not good democracy.

Young: No, that’s the free enterprise system—

Tunney: It may be but I don’t like it.
Knott: Point taken. I had a question actually about your own race in ’76. Did Senator Kennedy help you at all? Was he able to come out?

Tunney: No.

Knott: I know he was involved in his own—

Tunney: No, I never asked him to campaign for me. My race in ’70 was—I had some problems, several problems there. You don’t know much, I’m sure, about my career and you don’t have to be concerned about it. I was very heavily involved in legislation when I was in the Senate. The Congressional Library did research for me just before I was getting ready to run. One of my aides came up with the bright idea, let’s see how many bills or amendments Tunney has had passed and compare it with other Senators who were freshmen. It turned out that I had approximately 65 pieces of legislation passed and become law, which was higher than any freshman Senator in history.

I was involved in a tremendous number of very controversial issues. I was involved in the ITT hearings. I was the first Senator to call on Richard Nixon to resign. I had the amendment to the defense bill that stopped the funding of the war in Angola, which in certain quarters of California was looked upon as being pro-commie, letting the Communists take over Africa. The domino theory. I was the author of the generic legislation to restrict or to regulate toxic substances going into the environment, which infuriated industry. I can tell you, it took me five years to get the bill passed, but I was the chairman of the subcommittee and we were finally able to get it passed. I was also the author of the generic noise pollution control bill. I was the author of an antitrust bill that came out of the ITT hearings, which required a federal judge to approve the Justice Department’s decision to allow a merger to take place. It had to be reviewed by a federal judge to make sure that the merger passed the sniff test as not being anti-competitive, and on and on.

There were many other things that I was involved in, all of them very controversial, and at the time I really didn’t care. I talked to Phil Hart and I’ve also talked to Teddy about this. There are two kinds of Senators: ones that try and get elected and reelected all the time, worrying and looking over their shoulders all the time, and those who go out and try to be good Senators. I had decided long before that I was going to try and be a good Senator. I was going to take on any issue that I wanted. I think I mentioned to you earlier that I was one of seven Senators who voted for Phil Hart’s ban of handguns. When I did that I knew it was politically unpopular but I didn’t care. I said to myself, I’m never going to vote for a bill that I think would allow again a guy like Bobby Kennedy to be assassinated. That was the way I put it, in those terms, in my mind.

Then I came out and said that I didn’t think we could afford Teddy Kennedy’s health bill. I was actually answering a question in 1975 in a public forum that stated, “What do you think about Kennedy’s health bill?” At that time, it was about a $60 billion bill and we were in tough shape economically with the inflation and recession. I said, “I don’t think at this time we can afford that bill. We have to move towards national health care, but I don’t think we can do it now.” It immediately got national play, big, big play all over the press. My position hurt me with my Democratic constituency.
And then I was the key vote to eliminate Federal Power Commission regulation of new natural gas prices. I wrote a book at the time on natural resources and the environment, and I became convinced that we had to deregulate new natural gas prices because we couldn’t keep subsidizing low-cost gas and have overutilization of that resource. So I was the key vote in the Commerce Committee. It was a tie in our committee, 9 to 9, and I voted to disallow the FPC [Federal Power Commission] to continue to regulate new natural gas. The result was the price of new natural gas could rise to the BTU market price. Oh, God, the consumer groups went crazy in California. Of course I believed I was right. I knew I was right. I had written my book, *The Changing Dream*, and spent a lot of time researching the book and writing it, so I was sure I was right, and I wasn’t going to change my opinion even if it cost me reelection. I had a greater vision. And so I held my greater vision right to the point where I had antagonized enough special constituencies, including the Catholic constituency, to lose.

I was Catholic at the time. I’m no longer Catholic because I remarried, married a Protestant. A priest, a monsignor, said I couldn’t continue to take the sacraments unless I got an annulment to my earlier marriage. I refused to get an annulment because I had three children. I said, “How am I going to get an annulment when I have three children?” I was fully intending to get married to my first wife. I got married in the faith. I said to the priest, “I think you’re wrong.” He said, “Well, then, you lose the right to have the sacraments.” So I said, “Look, I don’t need to go to your church either.” I became an Episcopalian. But the political fact is that I voted in favor of free choice, a woman’s choice, on abortion, and that got the Catholics wild at me. Down in San Diego County the archbishop sent around a letter to the parishioners to vote for my opponent.

So each controversial issue cost me votes. I lost a little bit of the consumer group, lost a little bit of the anti-Communist group, a little bit of the pro-handgun group. It was a little bit here, a little bit there. And so it ended up, when I ran for reelection, that I had a problem. Tom Hayden ran against me in my primary, which hurt me a lot in the general election. Hayden articulated the position that I was against health care, which was obviously not true, and that I was in favor of increasing gas prices that the voters assumed was automobile gas prices. So I lost a little bit of my pro-consumer vote and I lost the general election by 1%. Actually, the polls showed that last week that I was going to beat [Samuel] Hayakawa by 10%. So there was clearly a hidden vote that came out at the last moment. Voters were going to teach Tunney a lesson. I think many people who voted against me might have voted for me if they thought I was going to lose. I’m talking about the liberals, some of whom continued to stay with me, but I think many wanted to have it be a close election. I don’t know. It could be that it might have been the other way around too. I don’t know all the issues that worked against me.

One issue that also hurt me a lot in my election was that I was the chairman of the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, and I was the sponsor of legislation to allow a bilingual ballot. You would be surprised how that hurt. That probably cost me a solid 1% of the vote in California because people were enraged when they saw this bilingual ballot. We’ve got a lot of Okies, Arkies, Central Valley types that did not want any part of the bilingual ballot for immigrants. Their feeling was, if immigrants are here, they can speak English, God damn it. We don’t want them to vote if they don’t speak English. The registrars of voters in the counties got together and put out documents saying that I was responsible for the bilingual ballot, and that went statewide. As I
was campaigning up in the boonies, I would have people hold up signs, *Tunney bans guns, ban Tunney*. That cost maybe 1% of my traditional vote.

You can’t tell where the percentages come from but I lost, which is what counts. It’s the only thing that counts in politics. But I didn’t ask for Teddy’s help. Nobody could have helped me. It was really—I had to do it myself. I was very well known in California at the time. I had probably 95% name recognition and I doubt if anyone could have helped me. I was either going to stand or fall, based upon my own record. The only thing that the record did stand for was a substantial level of accomplishment in getting legislation through the Congress, much of which today is looked upon with favor by people who thought it was awful at the time. But that’s life. You roll with the punches.

In many ways, as I look at the totality of my life and my career, I’m very lucky that I was able to get out when I did, because I married a lovely girl, who is still my wife and with whom I’m unbelievably happy. And I don’t think she would have been happy—I wanted to marry her anyway, but I don’t think she would have been happy if I had been a political figure. I think that it really worked out for me on a personal level a lot better. After all, I am a student cosmologist, and I try to think in very long terms. We’ve been around—life on this earth has been around for about 3.9 billion years, and we are all just a part of a process. I’m only a few atoms of significance in the totality of the process, but I have a responsibility to myself and my family and my friends, and therefore we do the best we can in the context in which we find ourselves.

**Young:** How do you think Kennedy manages to take the bag home and do work on it, and keep up this very—he’s a very hardworking Senator.

**Tunney:** Unbelievably hardworking.

**Young:** How does he manage to do that and do all these other things? His family obligations, his—I’m trying to put this into some sort of context. In a number of our interviews with people on the executive side, we hear about burnout, about working so long and so hard, X days a week, X hours a day, not having time to be with the family, their marriages either breaking up or something going wrong. And this is after three years in the White House. Some of them just burn out. If I had to do it, I would have gotten out then. How does a person in the Senate, who seems to keep much the same kind of schedule, do it?

**Tunney:** Well, first of all, that’s a wonderful question and I’ll do my best to answer it in a context that makes sense for me. I think that Ted has an incredible amount of energy, just internal vitality and energy. He used to be a good athlete and loved to do almost everything in the way of sports. He hurt his back, so many of those athletic activities have been curtailed or ended, and now that energy has to be focused somewhere and I think it’s focused obviously on his job.

The second part of it is that I think he loves being in the Senate. I think he loves the issues that he’s dealing with. I think he loves getting out and meeting the people. He’s superb at it. I think he meets people and he gets energy, and it’s a reciprocal situation with him. I don’t think he likes fundraising any better than the rest of us do, but I think he enjoys being with people and having
them respect what it is that he’s doing. He likes the exchange. He enjoys the give-and-take of political discourse and debate. That’s the second thing.

I think that a third thing is that he’s like a seeker of the Holy Grail. He’ll never find it, but he is constantly seeking in his legislative efforts the Holy Grail. He’s constantly seeking good legislation that will have his name on it that achieves something important for the people of this country. Every time he gets a bill passed, he wants more. I think that’s a third reason for his colossal energy.

I think a fourth reason is that his wife Vicki is a great complement to him, a great contributor to him, in helping him do what he has to do without being resentful but being supportive of it all the time. I don’t want to move that to the end and say that’s the fourth in the order of importance, because I might move that up first in order of things as far as giving him the psychological support to keep going and doing what he’s doing. He did it without her for many years, but I think that in these later years of his life, I think he really needs her support and I think that she gives it to him. So I’m very respectful of her contribution there.

I think Ted wants to be looked upon as one of the great Senators. I think that that is a motivating factor in his career now. He wants to be considered a great Senator, one of the greatest. And if the truth were known, I think he’d like to see a little statue somewhere, [laughs] on one of the corners of the Senate, you know, in the lobby area, where he has—

Young: At least the equal of Dick Russell’s statue. [laughter]

Tunney: I really do believe that, and if you stop to think about it, he’s been there 46 years now, I guess. And my word, it’s incredible, the span of history, modern history, that his career has been responsible for, and the contributions that he’s made, both positive as well as what I would say negative, to the extent that he has demanded accountability of the institutions in ways that many Senators wouldn’t. So he’s been positive in getting legislation passed, but very good in investigating where there has been a failure to comply with the import of existing law. So I think that he’s well on his way to getting that statue. I’m using the statue as a metaphor, you understand. I don’t really mean that—

Young: Oh yes, I—

Tunney: —in the most serious way. I think he wants to be a great Senator and I think people would recognize him as being a great Senator now, even if they’re more conservative in their views. They look upon him as a person that they can work with in the Senate, conservatives, that is.

Young: It’s sort of hard for me to imagine him in any other pond except the Senate.

Tunney: Yes, I agree.

Young: My impression is this is a person who is so at home in the Senate. It’s such a match between some of the best qualities of the Senate; the deliberation, the give and take, the working things out and taking as much of the loaf as you can get to get something done, and his own
personal character and characteristics, his own strengths. It’s a form of elegant street politics in the Senate, in a certain way.

**Tunney:** Yes, it is.

**Young:** But he likes the street politics too. It’s also the intellectual challenge, and there’s the preparation. You talked about that in law school. Those things are pertinent to the career in the Senate too, which also brings me back to the question that if you run for President, that’s the end of your—once you’ve been in the Presidency, there’s no other place to go politically. John Quincy Adams did it, but he’s the only one.

**Tunney:** Right, a long time ago. Also we have now surrounded the office of the Presidency with so much pomp and circumstance that it’s almost impossible for a person to go from the Presidency into the Senate or into the Congress. It would be almost impossible. What are you going to have, his security guard around him as he’s sitting in the Senate, and nobody else has a security guard? Then we have the vote in the Senate to allow other people to have their private security guards. It’s just impossible.

**Young:** But in a sense that’s the end of your career.

**Tunney:** That’s right.

**Young:** If you’re interested in public service or politics, you have to find some other way to do it outside of elective office.

**Tunney:** The Senate is—the House too. The House gives that same opportunity. The House and the Senate do, in a very major way. That might very well have been one of those reasons earlier on in Teddy’s career that he didn’t feel that he wanted to go for it, all out. I don’t think he could have done it in ’72, for obvious reasons. I think in ’76 it would have been very difficult as well. It turned out that even in ’80 it was extremely difficult. The campaign just kind of collapsed in the beginning because of all the things that were being said about him.

But as I say, after the period that he was no longer going to get it, then the people began listening to his message, and his message carried the day on all the western states. If you remember, he won in Arizona, he won in California, he won in the Northwest. He was knocking them off one after another, which is a very interesting factor. I was very interested by that. I was very much hoping that he was going to be President, but it was very interesting to watch the dynamic that took place after Carter had really locked it up. Then the voters began telling Carter what they thought of him and it wasn’t a very pretty picture. I think Carter, probably to this day, thinks that Kennedy was responsible for his losing. Does he or doesn’t he?

**Young:** I have not talked with him about it, but Ham Jordan’s story is that we had double-digit inflation, we had the Iran hostage crisis, where we couldn’t bring them home, and we had Ted Kennedy running against us. He said we might have won with two of those against us, but we couldn’t win with all three. So that’s the politician’s take.

**Tunney:** Well, Carter may believe that; I happen to believe it’s untrue. I think that Carter could have won that election if he’d been able to do something about the leadership issue on many
fronts. I think that Kennedy was really a reflection of Democrats and Independents telling him, change your policies; do something differently.

**Young:** No, this was the political operative speaking. I don’t know what—

**Tunney:** Right. But there’s one other thing that I wanted to mention, that you raised, what were the factors of Teddy’s hard work and why he keeps going. There’s another thing too. He has an absolutely wonderful staff who prepare memorandums for him that he’s able to digest at home and get himself prepared for the next day’s work. Plus he calls upon experts, all of whom are dying to advise him, and he brings them into his home, and they also talk to him and prepare him. But he loves it. I mean, he just loves it. He loves being a part of that process. For him, I think, it’s a little bit like the 85-year-old president of a major corporation about whom people say how can they keep going? Well, they just love it. They just love being a part of it and love running things.

Look at Sidney Harman, 88 years old, Harman Industries. Well, he’s the head of Harman Industries. He was a former Undersecretary of Commerce. He’s married to Jane Harman, who’s the Congresswoman. Sidney just recently sold his company, Harman Industries. His deal calls for him to remain on the board. He’s 88 years of age. To remain on the board, to remain chairman of the board, to remain chief executive officer, and they give him $400 million. Not bad. But he’s 88 years old. Why does he do it? He loves it, he just loves it. And that’s the same thing with Ted Kennedy. He loves it. He loves what he’s doing. And I have to believe that Billy Graham loves what he’s doing too. He loves getting up in front of the crowd and giving them what he thinks is the word of God.

So everybody has his own abilities, and Teddy has extraordinary capacities in that regard. He’s also a great educator. What he’s been able to accomplish in preparing the groundwork for national health insurance. I mean, if he hadn’t been out there in the hustings talking, talking, talking about it, keeping the issue alive with the labor unions and other places, we may not be as close to getting health insurance as I think we are. I think at last, at long last, the issue is maturing to the point that we’re going to be able to get something done that will be beneficial not just to—

**Young:** But he’s had a lot of discouragements. He first tried NHI [National Health Insurance] you know, back with Nixon. It was possible they could have gotten a Kennedy-[Wilbur] Mills bill. Watergate comes, Nixon is out of it. He tries again with Jimmy Carter. Jimmy Carter’s coming from a different place on health care. This is a Democratic President now, who has campaign promises on health care. And then, by God, in comes Bill Clinton and here’s another chance. Here’s a President who is fully committed in his campaign on health care.

**Tunney:** Gave it to his wife.

**Young:** And I’m thinking, what is Ted Kennedy thinking about all this? Why didn’t he just give it up? [laughs]

**Tunney:** It interesting. He’s dogged. He never will give up. He’ll just keep going. He never will give up. People ask me sometimes if I think he’s going to retire from the Senate after the next term. He won’t retire if he still is mentally active. He will stay on as long as he is mentally active.
and is able to make a contribution. I think he will. I think if he were to leave the Senate, he would feel as though he’d lost the rudder on his ship of life.

**Young:** Well, who knows? He might have another big project in mind.

**Tunney:** You never know. Look, the oral history is something that’s very important to him. He’s spending a lot of time on that. I think he got something going up at the University of Massachusetts that is very important to him, and it’s tremendous, but it’s not like being in the Senate and dealing with all the great issues, national and international issues, that he’s involved with. He loves to talk about what he’s doing. I’ll talk to him and ask how are things going? “Well, I got this done and I got this done,” and he loves talking about this stuff. It’s exciting for him to talk about what he’s accomplishing on a day-to-day basis. For a friend who is supportive of what he’s trying to do, it warms the cockles of my heart that he’s still right there fighting for every inch.

I know we are getting close to the end here, but I didn’t know if there is anything else that you wanted to discuss. You had an interesting question here. [reads] “You have known EMK for many years. Has he changed as a person? What are the major turning points in his life and what are his proudest moments?” I think his character is the same. I think he’s always had a very strong belief and love of family, and a commitment to a social political agenda that, for him, is the correct way of running a society. I think he’s much more mature today, much more mature than he was, and that has moderated the beta in his political career. There were ups and downs that were somewhat eliminated, and I think that the band of approval or disapproval has solidified, and he’s right there. Right now in his home state, a great majority of people think he’s doing a great job. He’ll still always have the haters but he has a base, he supports a base, and I think that he has developed great maturity; emotional maturity as well as political maturity. Again, I would put Vicki as a very important factor in all of that. I give her great, great credit for it. She’s a solid trunk supporting his tree.

**Young:** He probably never had anybody that close who was also a partner to him to turn to.

**Tunney:** Yes.

**Young:** That is, outside of his friends. Somebody in his family.

**Tunney:** Somebody who is family. Yes, that’s right. That makes such a big difference. I know. I’ve been married now for 30 years, and very happily, although my wife and I frequently have disagreements about things. We essentially agree on one thing, and that is that we’re together for life and that we’re partners for life, and whatever the disagreements, we’ve got to work them out. It makes a big difference to have a partner that’s a lifetime partner. Friends are very important in one’s life, very important, but your mate is really the most important, and is the person that you most rely on, particularly when emotionally, you’re going through some downturns. You need to have somebody supporting you.

I pointed out that I think that he’s been remarkably consistent in his views, dogged in his pursuit of what he considers to be the right things to get done in the Senate. I don’t think he’s afraid of taking tough stands on principle on just about anything. Some people can say, well, his constituency allows him to do that. Yes, but if you had a referendum on many of the things that
he has been in favor of, the referendum would go against him. But the voters support him because they say overall, he’s our guy. We like what he stands for basically and we’re willing to give him a pass on an issue here, an issue there, that we don’t agree with.

I think that Ted does have a very strong feeling about his destiny, and I’ve already mentioned that in a different context, but I think he does think historically. He thinks about where he is in the context not only of his family career, but in the context of the Senate and future generations. He loves history. He reads a lot of books on history. You’ve been in his home and you see that there are all kinds of photographs and images of things that people have read and said. I think he’s very interested in thinking of himself in the context of the total historical record of his family, but more than the family, of the Senate as well.

[reads] “Has your own relationship with EMK changed over time?” To some degree it has. Back in the days that we were in school, in the early days that we were in the Congress together, I was an intimate friend and saw him all the time. I was with him doing different things. In recent years, we don’t see each other that much, maybe seven or eight times a year. He has found a mate, Vicki, who is his partner in life. We still are intimate friends. I’m not trying to suggest that we don't have that same level of friendship, but it’s different, it’s just different. He has a wife that he adores. I have a wife that I adore. Things change. So we probably have a different relationship, but just as solid as it ever has been. I mean at least on my side it is, and it appears to be on his side too.

[reads] “How did it change after each of you entered the Senate?” No Senator can be an intimate friend of another Senator if they hadn’t known each other before they got into the Senate. Impossible. Too much competition. There’s too much staff competition and too much personal competition. Teddy and I were intimate friends before we got into the Senate, and our relationship remained intimate. Our staffs were very competitive with each other. I think there’s only two or three times that Ted and I had a situation where we strongly opposed each other on an issue.

One of them was, I was in California. I was campaigning for reelection in 1976, the early part of ’76. I get a call from Lew Wasserman and he said, “You’ve got to get back to Washington. I’m told by Russell Long that Kennedy has an amendment to eliminate the investment tax credit for motion pictures.” I said, “What?” He said yes. Then he said, “You know what the motion picture industry has done for you. You’ve got to get back.” I said, “Lou, I’ve got a fundraiser up in San Francisco tomorrow night and I’ve got to be there. I’m going to raise $50,000—” “God damn it, we’ve done this for you, you’ve got to go back there. Jack Valenti says that you’re the one that can stop it from happening, from taking it away from us.” I said, “What? What about [Alan] Cranston?” He said, “Cranston can’t do it. He doesn’t have the contacts with freshmen Senators to do it in the Senate.” I said, “Well, OK, I’ll go back.”

So I took a night flight back and I arrived on the floor of the Senate groggy, and of course Kennedy’s amendment came up at about 9:00. I had just gotten off the plane at 6:30 or something, and I got into my office and splashed some water on my face, staggered down to the Senate floor and there Kennedy was offering his amendment. I never said anything to him personally about it, but I got up and I argued. I had prepared my remarks and I knew what I was going to say. I was able to speak extemporaneously against the amendment and I said how
completely unfair it was, particularly when other credits were being offered to other people in other industries, including industries in Massachusetts, blah blah blah.

So we got to a vote. It was a very short debate, I think an hour. Russell Long wouldn’t say anything. He turned the whole thing over to me. We had a vote and we had lost by I think 46 to 44. Some Senators hadn’t voted and they were coming in, and I got into the well and I said—I remember Lawton Chiles came in and I said, “Lawton, you can’t vote for this thing. You’ll kill me in California. I can’t possibly lose to Kennedy.” So I was able to get four of the freshmen Senators to change their votes and stay with me. We won by two votes or something like that. I never talked to Teddy about it. He never said anything to me. I just accepted that was something that he felt that he had to do. I felt that I had to do what I had to do, and that was it.

When I came out against his health bill—well, I didn’t come out against it, I said we couldn’t afford it, in ’75. Teddy called me up and he said, “Did I read that right?” I said, “Yes, you did. It was an answer to a question, it was remarks that I gave in answer to a question, and Teddy, I don’t believe that we can afford it.” And he never tried to argue with me, he never said anything more about it. He said, “OK, if that’s the way you feel, it’s all right.” We had a wonderful relationship in the Senate. Actually, our friendship probably became richer and more abiding as a result of that mutual respect that we had for our positions.

**Young:** But you weren’t voting cronies.

**Tunney:** No.

**Young:** You made your own—

**Tunney:** Always made our own decisions.

**Young:** But you were colleagues then.

**Tunney:** We were colleagues.

**Young:** Friends on the side but colleagues on the floor.

**Tunney:** I never knew how he was going to vote. But probably, if you looked at our record, you’ll find that we voted most often together. I probably was a little bit more conservative than Ted on economic issues. I think I was. I know I am now, for sure. But mostly—on civil liberties, civil rights, we were identical probably. On foreign affairs I think we were probably identical. Most of our disagreements would have probably been in the area of what I would call domestic policy, economic policy. Ted probably would not have voted to end the Federal Power Commission control over the new natural gas. He probably would have stayed with the people who were eager for that control to remain, but there were very few issues that we really disagreed on. And we didn’t try to influence each other.

I say with amusement now, it’s been so long, but when he offered that amendment to eliminate the investment tax credit, I was out in California campaigning for reelection. I just couldn’t believe it. And as I say, I never talked to him about it. I just went back and we argued on the floor about it, and then we had the vote. [laughs] Oh, God, those were the days.
“Do I think that EMK’s approach to politics and philosophy has changed over the years?” To some extent, yes. I think that he’s more prepared to make accommodations these days with the Republican view, particularly on economic issues. I think he’s shown—I mean he was for NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], which is more of an anti-labor position, which I don’t think he probably would have been as eager to do in the early days, but he did do it. But it’s on the edges, not core stuff.

He has a more open approach, I think, to governance and how you get things done. You don’t always have to be arguing on the left side of the issue just to be faithful to your constituency. I think he considers himself now above that, and he can take positions where his natural constituency would disagree. So I think he’s broadened his approach. I’m not nearly as knowledgeable about his recent career as you are because I don’t follow the Congressional Quarterly any more. I don’t read it; I just read the newspapers, but I sort of pick up what I think—

Young: Well, he is still held up as the poster boy of left wing, liberal, fiscal irresponsibility. That’s the picture on the outside, you know, he’s the red meat for the—

Tunney: That’s right.

Young: But this is not his reputation within the Senate.

Tunney: No.

Young: His reputation is as you’ve described it. He’s a reasonable man who will find votes on both sides of the aisle in the interest of getting something done. He can’t get everything done.

Tunney: Absolutely.

Young: And he’s very well respected on the Republican side of the aisle, and liked, whereas outside, it was a very different picture of the man.

Tunney: Well, that’s politics.

Young: Yes, but unfortunately, those things sort of get frozen into the public perception.

Tunney: Oh, I know that’s true.

Young: So that’s another reason why this project—

Tunney: Yes. Well it’s very interesting. Let’s see [reads], “Do you think that EMK’s approach to his work in the Senate has changed since he decided not to run for President again?” Not tremendously. I think that now, people don’t look at what he is saying in the Senate or look at the legislation that he introduces as a platform for a Presidential candidacy. That, I think, is very true, and that probably helps a lot because it doesn’t become a magnet for lightning. Like with Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama today, anything they introduce, immediately it’s, “How does it affect their Presidential candidacy?” With Kennedy, he can introduce legislation and nobody would think of him as being a Presidential candidate. So he’s able to get the legislation viewed

J. Tunney, May 3, 2007

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the way a normal Senator would have his legislation viewed. And that’s an important difference because he went for many years with everybody thinking that he might someday be a Presidential candidate. You know, as he’s been there longer and longer, he has more and more opportunity to get legislation passed.

It’s interesting that when you control the Congress and control the Presidency, you get a lot more legislation passed. One of the reasons I got so much legislation passed is that although we had a Republican President, we had a Democratic Congress, and practically every bill that I got through, or every amendment I got through, I’d always get a Republican to go on it with me. I’d look around and see who I thought was the likely Republican to sign on with me as a co-sponsor. I’d much prefer to have a Republican co-sponsor than a Democratic co-sponsor, so you have some protection. All these bills that we got through, we got through with Republican Presidents, but we always had Republican co-sponsors. And Teddy does that too, by the way, very effectively. He’s excellent at that.

[reads] “What are the greatest triumphs and biggest disappointments in his political career?”
[pauses] Wow. I don’t know how to answer that.

Knott: You don’t have to answer every question if you don’t—

Young: You don’t have to answer them all. This is a shopping list.

Tunney: [reads] “What do you see as EMK’s political legacy?” I think he will be looked upon as the most important, progressive voice in the Senate in the twentieth century, and depending on how long his career lasts in the twenty-first century, maybe into the twenty-first century too. I think he is an extraordinary, important progressive voice.

Phil Hart was a fabulous Senator, but if you take a look at Phil Hart’s career, as wonderful a man as he was, and you compare it with Kennedy’s career, it doesn’t compare. I mean Phil was wonderful, he was great. He has a building named after him in the Senate that shows how highly regarded he was, but Kennedy’s career is simply astounding. Who would you compare him with? People like Muskie, who was a fine Senator, but people don’t think of Muskie’s career as being comparable to Kennedy’s, in the Senate. When he was Secretary of State he did this, that, and the other thing, but as far as the Senate goes, it was Kennedy. McGovern never got much done in the Senate. He was liked and I think he was respected, but he never had the same juice that Kennedy did. I can’t think of one Senator.

Now, you take some of the modern Senators, and when I say the modern Senators, I mean in the last 20 years, I don’t know who they are. I think Chris Dodd is a terrific Senator, a very progressive voice, but I don’t think that he has the same respect that Kennedy does in the Senate for his legislation. I think he’s very well liked. I like him tremendously personally, but….

Young: Some people say that you have to go back to the nineteenth century, when the Senate, before it had been eclipsed by the Presidency, throughout the modern Presidency, defined long-serving leadership, national leadership in the Senate. There was [Daniel] Webster, there’s [John] Calhoun, people of that—you know, some historians have said this is the kind of figure that Kennedy will probably be in the eyes of future historians, in his century.
Tunney: I think that’s true. I really believe so. It’s hard when you’re talking about your great friend. It’s hard to compare him with these people of the past who are such icons. I think he’ll go down as the most important progressive voice in the Senate in the last 100 years.

[reads] “What mark has he left in the Senate, the Democratic Party, liberalism?” I think we’ve talked to that point.

[reads] “What features of EMK and the Kennedy family have been overlooked?” Well, I notice that we only very lightly touched on Kennedy as a father. I would address that just a little bit more completely by saying, I know Teddy’s children really well, really well. I am the godfather of Teddy [Kennedy] Jr. I know Patrick [Kennedy], I know Kara [Kennedy]. I don’t see as much of them any more, obviously, as I used to, but Teddy was, I thought a very good father, considering the fact that he was a Senator. Considering the fact that he had a difficult marriage. I think that his children had to respect the fact that he tried to always be there for them when they really needed it, and it continues to this day. I think his love of his family is quite noteworthy. Of all the political families that I’ve known, I don’t know any that have the same regard for family that Teddy does.

Now that may be that I don’t know them that well any more. I don’t spend a lot of time in the Senate any more. But I can tell you from the time when I was in the Senate, I thought that Teddy’s love of family stood out as a very important element of his character and the kind of person he was. Always trying to get home, if he could, for dinner. He always had the kids come up. We used to play on the lawn outside the Senate when he was in session on Saturdays and such. We would throw the ball around. My sons were his sons’ age and so we could do that. He was always taking his kids on vacations. He was, I thought, a very good father.

And I think that he thought that his father was a good father to him, and he wanted to be as good a father to his children as his father was to him. I think that was very important to him. He has a great sense of continuity of family and talks that way all the time, and he expresses it. I see it when I’m with him and his family. He does it with his stepchildren too. He’s very loyal to them, and they came very late in his life. He shows respect for Vicki by being respectful to them, but it’s not just Vicki; he likes them. He’s gotten to really love them and does things with them and wants to have them included. So that again shows an element of his character and personality which I personally find very attractive. Well, those are my impressions.

I could give you one last little thing there. If you see the way that he was with his sister Pat, you know, coming out regularly to New York when she was sick, really sick, with great difficulty communicating because of cancer in her jaw and her mouth and such. The way he treated her, always coming to see her and always making her feel good about herself and important about herself. That was an extraordinary act of charity, some might say, but in his case I don’t think he thought it was charity. I think he thought it was the way you handle a sister that you love. He didn’t think of it as charity. I think he thought of it as perhaps benefiting both of them, benefiting himself while benefiting her.

And his sister Jean [Kennedy Smith], who is a very dear friend of mine, she just adores her brother. I mean, just adores him. And he obviously adores her. The relationship that they have is so exceptional. It’s an amazing thing. He has so many characteristics that are what I call of great
importance for a human being to have who is brought up the right way with the right values, with the right Christian values. Let’s say that the basis of those Christian values is empathy, doing unto others as you’d have them do unto you, and that’s something that he has a very solid foundation in. That’s about all I can say on that issue, unless you have specific questions.

Young: Jean was nearest to him in age.

Tunney: Yes.

Young: Is it your impression he was closest to her because of that?

Tunney: Well, I think that he was very close to her obviously, but Bobby—

Young: I mean of the girls, of the sisters.

Tunney: Oh, I think yes, Jean. I think that the others were older. Of course, he had great respect for Pat and great respect for Eunice [Kennedy Shriver], and Eunice is quite a force of nature herself. She is something else again. He didn’t have the easy kind of relationship with Eunice, who is much older. He has huge respect for her. I mean, how could you not? Looking at what she’s accomplished in her life.

But all the Kennedys have that same sense of humor, that same kidding sense of humor. They’re always kidding each other. You would find me, if I were with them, lapsing into that same kind of dialogue with them. That was perhaps one of the reasons that I was accepted as a member of the family. I had that same kind of personality that would allow me to be kidding back and forth. They all have it in spades, probably to a more refined, elegant degree than I do. I loved being around them because they were always having so much fun kidding each other. Whether it was in speeches, in toasts. Mostly it was toasts; you’d get up and the family would start a toast and you would be harassed. You then have to try and figure your way out of it, lash back. They love to laugh at you.

No, it’s very funny, all fun. I mean, all good fun, with lots and lots of humorous asides. I don’t know whether Teddy gets to do that as much any more. I just don’t know. I’m not around more. I see Tedy up in Hyannis Port usually a couple of weekends a year. I go for maybe a couple of weekends down there, and then he comes up to New York and we will have dinner, lunch, or something up here. We don’t get together quite the way we used to, as often as we used to. But, as we’ve said, times change and your circumstances change, your responsibilities change. You have more people that you’re responsible for the older you get, until you get senile. [laughs]

Young: And none of us is there now. Did he ever talk very much about Rosemary [Kennedy]?

Tunney: A little bit, yes. Way back when we were first together, living in Virginia, he used to talk to me a little bit about Rosemary and about how unbelievably sad it was for the family. He would see Rosemary from time to time but it was always—there was no clarity, is probably the best way of putting it. No clarity of description of her condition. I never asked, nor did he tell me, exactly how much he could say or not say after her operation. I never knew whether she, to this day, although she’s dead now, but I never know whether she had the ability to talk even. He
never referred to that. He would talk about going to see her, and he did certainly have a great deal of sympathy for her, but he didn’t specify.

**Young:** When they were growing up, she was always included. In fact, wasn’t she his godmother?

**Tunney:** I’m not sure.

**Young:** She was.

**Tunney:** Well, that was before her lobotomy.

**Young:** Oh, yes, but I’m talking about before that, when they were young kids together.

**Tunney:** He never talked very much about her. I think it hurt too much. I think it must have hurt too much so he just didn’t talk about it. I didn’t probe. I didn’t think it was any of my business so I never asked. It wasn’t a factor in our— He talked about his older sister Kick [Kathleen Kennedy] and about her relationship with, what was it, the Duke of Devonshire?

**Knott:** That’s right, yes.

**Tunney:** I’m one of these people who has never read a biography of the Kennedy family, and that may sound very strange to you. But I do not like reading negative things about people that I really like and I’m very close to, including my father, including Teddy. I just don’t like doing it. I know that most of these books are what I would call revisionist histories. They are filled with very negative stuff about Joe Kennedy sometimes, as it relates to his business ethics and career, and sometimes relates to his daughter who had the lobotomy. And then with Jack. We all know what they said about Jack and Bobby. I just don’t read it. I don’t want to read it, so I probably don’t have nearly as good a foundation in the traditional family history that you do, if you’ve read those books, because I only know—my impressions come from what I observed with my own eyes and what I heard.

I was very privileged to be with the family the night that Jack got reelected to the Senate in 1958. Teddy and I went up there, and Joe was there and his mother was there, and it was Jack and Bobby and the sisters. The other outside person was—the Ambassador had invited Lord [William Maxwell] Beaverbrook to be there. It was just so interesting to listen to the banter going back and forth within the family about Jack, what he’d done and how he’d done it. But the interesting thing, as much as the banter was, although every member of the family showed such huge respect for John Kennedy, this is in ’58, he was really looked upon already as sort of a demigod, demiurge. I mean he was right there, and even by his father, who was clearly in control of the purse strings, but he looked upon John Kennedy with a huge amount of respect. I had the great privilege, as I look back on it, of being there.

I also had the great opportunity, if you call it that, to be with Teddy when we went to see Jackie after the burial of John Kennedy at Arlington, and spent an hour and a half with her up in the room, her suite, talking about the President and other things. Those were really important memories for me. I’ve never done anything with it and I never will do anything with it. I’ve had
many people say I ought to write some of this stuff out. I don’t want to write it out. It happened and so it goes into a black hole, frankly. I don’t want to trade on friendships.

Young: Yes, of course.

Tunney: You’re nice to say of course, but there are a lot of people that it’s not of course. There are a lot of people that don’t do that. It’s terrible.

Young: I don’t think we have talked to any of them, have we, Steve, in this project?

Knott: No, we haven’t.

Tunney: That’s great.

Young: People take this project pretty seriously. Kennedy shares with us for the project, some of his personal notes about meetings and people, and his own diaries. I’ve seen some of his own diaries, and going back to his schoolbooks.


Young: So I mean we’re not doing a—

Tunney: Kiss and tell.

Young: No. We’re not writing books, we’re doing this for the sake of providing materials to those who will do that later. I think there have been some—I think Doris Kearns’ [Goodwin] book, it’s not just about Teddy or about Joe or anybody. It’s about the Fitzgerald and the Kennedy families. I think it’s very solid. It’s a huge book.

Tunney: Yes, I know that. I actually have it.

Young: It started out with Rose Kennedy reminiscing about some of the papers in her attic that were going to the Kennedy Library. She started talking with Rose about it and said, you ought to write this up.

Tunney: Isn’t that interesting.

Young: Yes. So it was not one of those, let me tell you about what really happened, you know, that kind of stuff.

Tunney: I have respect for Doris Kearns. I know her. I haven’t seen her for a while, but for a while, I really knew her well. And I knew [Ian] McEwan very well. They lived in California, and even after I left the Senate, I used to see quite a bit of them. I saw them before I left the Senate as well, but I saw them in California a lot. I haven’t seen her recently. She’s a fabulous writer and I was very sad to see, for a while, she was held in some disregard by the community, the historical community. But she’s back again and her book on [Abraham] Lincoln is wonderful. She’s just a great, great writer. She writes so well.
It’s interesting about the Kennedy side. I’m not proud of the way I expressed myself. I told you the truth, but I’m not proud of the position I have about not wanting to read books about the Kennedy family. It’s just that everybody—you cannot believe the number of people that have asked me about the Kennedy family over the years. You see practically nothing in print that I’ve ever said about the Kennedy family because I don’t talk about the Kennedy family. It’s my private diary, which is written in my brain, not written out on paper. Particularly after Chappaquiddick, I really, really defended Teddy against some of these attacks that were being made about him, which I thought were totally untrue. I never have talked much about it since then, and I don’t feel comfortable talking about it because it’s not relevant to his political career and what he did.

Some people say it’s relevant in the sense he didn’t get to be President. If he hadn’t had that he could have been President. Perhaps true, but it is a fact that it was part of a tragic history in which he was, in my opinion, not nearly as culpable as others wanted to make him. It was an accident, an accident, and it’s something that I feel very strongly about. I just don’t like to really get into it. His career speaks for itself and the facts have fallen out the way they have fallen out and people can think what they think.

As you can tell, I have an ability to have a judgment about people. I like them. I sometimes like them and don’t like their politics. I told you what I think about Ted’s character and the way he’s handled himself with his family and the way he’s handled himself politically, the way he’s handled himself as a leader of our country. I think he’s been just an extraordinary leader, and that’s not said in hero worship. I mean, you’re talking about a guy who was a competitor for years with him and was his roommate competitor. We courted girls together when we were both in law school, and were competitive in that way. But we always had respect for each other. We never went after the same girl when one of us had established a relationship. [laughs]

**Young:** Well, on that note.

**Knott:** That’s a good note. Thank you, Senator.

**Young:** Thank you.