Young: This is September 22, 2009, and this is another interview with John Culver, in his office in Washington. We were talking a little bit before the interview about a couple of things among the several that we haven’t covered in the earlier interviews, and that we haven’t talked about really very much at all. One of them was the Kennedy Institute of Politics (IOP) at the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard, and the other was the work he [Edward Kennedy] asked you to undertake as head of the Culver Commission, for the Kennedy Library Foundation, to develop a program.

Culver: Right. It was shortly after I left the Senate. The spring semester of 1981, I went up to Harvard as an Institute of Politics fellow. I had to resign temporarily from the Institute of Politics Senior Advisory Committee, upon which I had served since 1975. Under the university’s rules, I could no longer serve in that capacity if I came there as an institute fellow. I also taught a course on Congress that spring semester at UMass Boston. After I completed the fellowship, I went back on the Institute of Politics board, where I’ve served until the present time.

Ted asked me, in 1981 or 1982 or therabouts, if I would head a committee that he wanted to set up with regard to the Kennedy Library. The library had not developed the programmatic side at that time. We set up a committee and met a number of times.

The work product was referred to as the Culver Commission Report. In it we identified a number of suggested initiatives that they should undertake. It’s my understanding, from recently talking to one of the new directors, that they’ve referred to the report as somewhat of a guidepost, and he was pleased to tell me that a large number of our recommendations had been adopted and implemented. It’s my best recollection that one of them was the Profile in Courage Award, which of course had been a centerpiece of the library every year.

Young: Do you want to go back to the institute first? That came first. Ted asked you to serve on the advisory board?

Culver: Yes, I believe in 1975. I was elected to the Senate in ’74. The library, of course, wasn’t even built yet, and the Kennedy School hadn’t been built yet, either.
Young: And the Kennedy Institute was in the little house on Mount Auburn Street.

Culver: That’s exactly right. My father was a club member in that same building, as a Harvard undergraduate in 1926.

Ted asked me to go on the Institute of Politics board, I believe in 1975, where I’ve served to the present time, with the exception of that spring semester that I served as an institute fellow. I don’t know exactly the time when Ted asked me to go with him up to Boston to look at suggested locations for the Kennedy Library. For a long time, as you are aware, there were efforts to have the Kennedy Library built at Harvard, as part of Harvard.

Young: Yes.

Culver: For ten years or so, there were efforts to overcome community opposition, but finally the decision was made to look for another location. Ted called me one day and asked if I would go with him to Boston and look at a couple of suggested alternatives for sites for the Kennedy Library. The Naval Yard was one proposed site.

Then we came over to Columbia Point. There was snow on the ground, I remember. We walked out on this rather barren area and looked across and saw the Boston skyline. It was a cloudy, wintry day in late fall. It might have been early winter. Clearly, the association with Boston and President [John F.] Kennedy, the water, and his love of the sea—Ted turned to me and said, “I think Jack would like it here. Don’t you?” And I said, “I certainly do.” Then the decision was made. Now we have that magnificent structure. After it was opened, Ted asked me to head the commission, to try to give thought to the development of a program that the library foundation could pursue.

Young: Sure.

Culver: We had an outstanding group of people. Doris Kearns Goodwin was very active, as were Professor Sam Beer of Harvard and Kathleen Kennedy, the one Kennedy family member who was involved in that committee.

I was a member of the Kennedy Library board, but because I was so intensely involved with the Institute of Politics as well, I resigned from the Kennedy Library board.

Young: What did Ted—I’m not clear on my dates here. The idea of the institute started in ’75? Or it was earlier, and then Ted asked you?

Culver: The Institute of Politics was the first initiative to honor President Kennedy’s memory.

Young: Yes.

Culver: Jackie Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Ted were the principals involved in making a decision as to what form of honor they thought was most fitting and appropriate for Jack Kennedy. After they decided that something should be done at Harvard, they invited the recommendations and thoughts of [Arthur] Schlesinger [Jr.], Sam Beer, and others, about what
would be most appropriate. This was done in 1966 or 1967, when it opened, and it was the Institute of Politics.

The idea behind it was that there was a general acceptance of the notion that at some period in Jack Kennedy’s undergraduate years at Harvard, he was exposed to some political or governmental activities that stimulated his interest in public service. The idea was that this institute would be noncredit, and it would be primarily for undergraduates. The hope was that, by exposing the undergraduates to a variety of public service–related activities, and providing a forum for speakers, these and similar activities would help stimulate an interest in undergraduates in public service or political careers.

Over the years the IOP has evolved and changed. It has the Senior Advisory Committee that meets twice a year with the director. Senator Kennedy has been extraordinarily faithful. I think it’s the most remarkable thing that, starting back then in 1967—It could have been as early as ’66—when this was set up, Ted never missed a meeting in the fall or the spring, until this last spring. When he came on the telephone, he said he wanted to be sure that people recorded him as being “present.” Of all the memorials to President Kennedy, all of which Ted threw himself into with enormous energy, effort, and interest, I believe this was the most important to him.

Young: This was the beginning.

Culver: It was kind of the gemstone, I think, in the eyes of the family, and I’m certain it was to Ted. It was the first and most personal.

Young: I think the negotiations or discussions with Harvard about the Kennedy School were going on at that time, but it wasn’t in being yet.

Culver: No. Littauer, remember, was the public service school.

Young: It was the Littauer School.

Culver: The Institute of Politics initially met in the house on Mount Auburn Street. It was felt to be an ideal location because it was physically accessible from the Harvard Yard and undergraduate houses. Then when the Harvard Kennedy School, the JFK School of Government, was built, the invitation was extended to the Institute of Politics to have some space at the Kennedy School. They offered attractive space on the first floor, and we had outgrown what we initially started with, although it was very intimate and nice, and had a wonderful informal feel for the students.

Young: The idea of having people who had been in public service come and spend a year—Was that part of the original plan, or did Ted start that?

Culver: That evolved. They weren’t all political. Some were academics. Today six fellows stay for one semester.

Young: Some would like to go into politics.

Culver: That’s right.
Young: I think that was the case with Vernon Jordan. He had wanted to get elected, as I understood it.

Culver: I don’t know. Was he ever a fellow?

Young: He was a fellow.

Culver: He was on the Senior Advisory Committee later. Another one of the fellows was a junior academic, very gifted, on the rise. So it was a mix of people, whereas later the fellows were people with some prior political experience, either in public office, journalism, or a public interest group.

We picked six each semester, for one semester. Earlier ones, it may have been for a year. They’ve added foreign fellows to the mix.

Young: So it was a public, an educational, and a sort of politics and history?

Culver: The fellows were required to teach a couple of times a week a seminar of their choosing. Again, the characteristic of the IOP is that it is an undergraduate organization not for credit. Secondly, although it’s housed in the Kennedy School of Government, it’s really independent because it was established by the president of Harvard. There’s always been an interesting tension historically.

Young: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

Culver: It was very important to Ted Kennedy that there be autonomy, as much as possible. We rented space and we wanted to cooperate in every appropriate way with the JFK School. The Institute of Politics manages the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum, which is the heart of the Kennedy School, in terms of its public lectures.

The thought is that the IOP be preserved largely as an undergraduate experience, and as a volunteer, extracurricular activity. It has worked out very well. Undergraduates elect their own leadership, like the Harvard Crimson and other student programs. It was always important to Ted that the integrity of the undergraduate experience as envisioned by his brother and Jackie Kennedy be sustained and maintained.

Young: And it didn’t present the problems that establishing a new school at Harvard would have presented, I mean, where you had departments who either wanted to have it, or—

Culver: Exactly.

Young: It’s the usual tensions that appear. And that took a long, rather painful—

Culver: Adjustment.

Young: —adjustment on both parts.
Culver: Yes. Again, I give Senator Kennedy great credit because, in a very civilized way, he was conscientious about sustaining the integrity of the IOP as he envisioned it, and as it was originally meant to be, even though we now are housed at the JFK School. It’s worked out to be a satisfactory arrangement, because of the forum and the attractive facilities and space.

Young: Did he sort of run the meetings?

Culver: No, he didn’t. He would often—I succeeded Ron Brown as chairman after he was tragically killed in a plane crash.

Young: Oh, yes.

Culver: He had been a fellow, also, and he was chair of the Institute of Politics Senior Advisory Committee. When he was lost, Ted asked me to succeed him as chair. I’d been on the committee there for a number of years. It was very interesting. We met twice a year, spring and fall. Every committee member was sent a large packet of materials covering the semester, the main projects and activities that had been undertaken, and a recommended agenda for the meeting. Ted participated and was asked about approving the agenda too, and I was also, as chair, in conversation before the materials were sent out.

On a number of occasions, Ted would call me the weekend before the committee would meet. He faithfully went through all the materials every time. It was remarkable, because they were rather routine reports, frankly, from each of these kids, on each of the different things they were involved in.

Young: Yes.

Culver: The thing that Ted was most interested in and best informed about was the finances, how the money was being spent. He familiarized himself with the budget before every meeting, and his questions were largely related to the budget. The IOP paid rent to the Kennedy School, and he kept an eagle eye on how that Institute of Politics endowment money was being spent, and of course it grew enormously over the years. I think it started with $10 million, and now it provides an annual budget of about $2 million. I was struck by how conscientious he was about the financial situation. He kept right on it all the time.

Young: You might want to talk a little bit more about the Culver Commission. But I’d like to ask you some questions about other things too.

Culver: It was so long ago, probably 1983. We had a wonderful group of people who were very committed to give serious thought about how to develop the JFK Library.

Young: What I’m really hearing here, and that I’d like to hear a little bit more about, is that in these situations in which he turned to you to get something done or to manage something or to set something in motion for him, like the Culver Commission, to get a program concept going, to help get the institute—

Culver: Or if we had problems with the management in some way.
Young: So you could also troubleshoot.

Culver: I think he felt comfortable confiding in me.

Young: Sure.

Culver: And felt that I could perhaps help facilitate some change that might be an improvement. He felt we had shared values about its mission, and he could talk to me candidly.

Young: I have to reveal to you that he told me personally that you were in charge of his blind trust. You know, I’m just putting these things together to try to get at the nature of that trust, and how the relationship with you grew over the years. You started out at Harvard together. He asked you to do things earlier. He asked you to come and help him in his Massachusetts campaign. You did the issue group. He then asked you to come and help him set up his office.

Culver: Right.

Young: And there are these other things. So it’s a pretty close personal relationship you’ve had with him over the years. This is what I’m interested in getting at with you. You were with him through fair weather and foul, good times, bad times, difficult times.

Culver: I think in every situation, I was called upon to be—

Young: And now in his book, he has talked about those times.

Culver: He has?

Young: Yes.

Culver: I haven’t. I’m waiting for the book to come out.

Young: Well, I got a copy of it yesterday from Vicki [Reggie Kennedy].

Culver: I have a copy. We had dinner with Vicki actually last night at her house, and she gave me and my wife a copy of the book. I am hopeful that there is going to be an audio book.

Young: I hope so, and you will find it, I’m sure, intensely interesting.

Culver: Yes.

Young: It’s a very straight book and as I read it through, there was very little that surprised me. I don’t know whether Ted or Vicki ever talked to you about his interviews on the oral history. I didn’t talk about them with anybody. He talked about his personal life and he talked about it in ways that he’s now talked about it publicly in his book. I did 30 interviews with him over the years, two-and-a-half to three hours each, mostly at home on the Cape, or here in Washington. He told me at one point, “I think I can now do a book.” He got used to talking about himself, you know, because Kennedys don’t talk about themselves.

Culver: Much less something that private.
Young: Much less something that private. So it’s just him and me in the room, and Vicki, I invited.

Culver: That’s wonderful.

Young: It’s now written in the book. It’s not defensive. It is extremely honest. The pain shows through. I’m kind of sorry you haven’t had a chance to listen to it yet, because my questions might seem sort of intrusive, but I’m just talking about what he’s said in the book. For example, there was a time in his life when he’s said words to the effect that—The person who was helping him with the book was saying, “What amazes me is how you kept going, why you kept going.” And he said, “I guess I was maybe always running to keep ahead of the darkness.” That was a very somber thought, but this was after he had been diagnosed, so he was looking back on it then.

Culver: But also, of course, the tragedies.

Young: The tragedies.

Culver: Bobby and Jack. He had to move on.

Young: Other people would have just quit or done something else.

Culver: Oh, absolutely. When I look back on our almost lifelong friendship, since we were 18 years old—We had that undergraduate year, really his freshman year, and then he left for two years and then he came back. When he came back it was my senior year. Even during that two-year period when he was in Europe, I traveled to Europe one summer, went to the Olympic Games as a visitor, in Helsinki, and met with him in Paris while he was on military duty there. I saw him when he came back, when we attended summer school in ’53. And then during my senior year, we both in the Winthrop House.

Then I went to England, to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, on the Lionel de Jersey Harvard Scholarship, where you live in John Harvard’s rooms. Ted came to visit me there in the winter of 1954 or ’55, following a ski trip he took to Switzerland. He came and stayed in my rooms at Cambridge. Then I went into the Marine Corps, and I was asked to be a member of his wedding. I was in California and couldn’t make the wedding.

When I went back to Harvard Law School after the Marine Corps, he looked me up, after the ’60 election. It would have been in the winter of ’61. He knew that I always had an interest, as an undergraduate, in Iowa politics. We talked about whether I would be interested in helping him, because he, at that point, did not know for sure whether he would run for the Senate or Secretary of State. He was going around the state and testing the waters. He wanted to know if I’d like to be involved. I thought so much of him, and was so interested myself in politics, I said of course I would.

So roughly my last two years, maybe a year and a half or so, of law school, I really worked a great deal of the time as a volunteer with him and traveled with him extensively around the state. He had an office on Bowdoin Street, across from the Capitol, which was Jack Kennedy’s old bachelor pad and voting residence.
Young: Yes, all the voting residences.

Culver: I’d take the subway down there and I would meet with people that Ted had scheduled. I remember one time Rocky Marciano came in. I was a big fight fan and I was so excited. Ted’s secretary asked if I could see Rocky Marciano, because Ted was on the road that afternoon. I had this simple little office with a desk and a visitor’s chair, one chair. Rocky Marciano came in and sat down in the chair opposite me at the desk. He had his manager with him, right out of Damon Runyon. He had white hair and a pink shirt and a diamond tie clasp and plaid sport coat. He looked like he was going to the races. He stood behind Rocky and there was silence.

Finally, I said, “Well, Champ, it’s really an honor to meet you. I’m a great admirer.” He said, “Uh-huh.” Nobody said anything. Finally the manager said, “Rocky would like to help Senator Kennedy in the campaign.” I said, “Oh gosh, that’s wonderful, Champ. That’s great.” I looked at the calendar and I said, “I see we’ve got a parade in Brockton on such-and-such a date, in July, and maybe you’d ride in a convertible with Ted Kennedy.” He didn’t say anything. He reached in his pocket and he brought out a wad of bills about six inches in diameter, of hundreds and fifties, and he proceeded to lick his thumb and peel off the hundred-dollar bills. “How much? Tell me when to stop.” And of course, here I am, this naïve kid from Iowa that thought everything was on the level. Finally, even I got the point after a while and I said, “Well, Champ, thank you very much. I’ll just make note of your interest in Ted and we’ll get back to you if we’ve got something going on here.” That was it. The Champ got up and walked out. [laughs] That was one of my duties in that campaign.

Young: Yes.

Culver: I also remember—I may have mentioned it in an earlier interview—we used to go down to the Cape on Fridays frequently. That was issue day, working with Ted and Milt Gwirtzman. Who was the other?

Young: Sam Beer?

Culver: Well, he didn’t ever go down the Cape, that I remember.

Young: Bob Wood?

Culver: No, it really was mostly Milton and I who met with Ted at Squaw Island, at his house.

Young: Oh, you met. I see.

Culver: On Friday, and we’d go over different issues, like social security. We would try to get briefed on it and then talk to him about it. Late Friday afternoon, of course, the President would come in, and Bobby would come in, in helicopters, and the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy] would be standing by the flagpole in the front to greet them. And the kids—You’ve seen that scene, of course.

Young: Yes, many times.
Culver: On several occasions, Ted asked me to join the Ambassador and the President and Bobby on the *Marlin*, his boat, and we’d go out for a sail. I would try to get as far into the woodwork as I could. We would talk about the campaign and I was afraid they would ask me a question. Of course, the official version out of the White House initially was, as you are well aware, that Kenny O’Donnell and a number of them didn’t want Teddy to run.

Young: Yes, I know.

Culver: The Ambassador made it clear that Jack had his turn, now it’s Teddy’s, and that was the end of discussion. But the official word out of the White House was that they were totally separate from this campaign. The people of Massachusetts must decide. So here we are, out on the *Marlin*, with the Ambassador, Bobby, Jack, Ted, and me. And I offered nothing, I can assure you, on these occasions. There weren’t that many. I went two or three times.

Ted also would ask me to come and have dinner after two or three times. It was quite a remarkable evening with the Ambassador and Mrs. [Rose] Kennedy, the President and Jackie, Ted and me. One time, I got caught after dinner, finding myself alone in the study with Ambassador Kennedy, who was wearing a smoking jacket. He was an incredibly imposing figure. Ted had walked Jack back to his house after dinner. Jackie had gone earlier and Mrs. Kennedy had gone to bed. Suddenly I was alone with this impressive figure.

I recall what he said. He was happy that I was working with Ted. He felt Ted found it helpful to have someone he respected helping him. And he said, “But now, you should realize, it’s a great opportunity for you too.” [laughter] He wanted to make sure I appreciated what a great opportunity it was to volunteer for his son, and take my chances on graduating from Harvard Law School, all in the service of Kennedy. It was very funny because, you know, he made the sale. He was telling me how glad he was that Ted found it helpful having me around, but I should not be unaware of what a great opportunity for me, too.

Young: You’ll get something out of it too.

Culver: Yes.

Young: What do you think was the hardest thing—Looking over your years with Ted, what was the hardest thing for him?

Culver: I had just gone back to Iowa in September of ’63, and I had no more gotten back and started to prepare to run for Congress—I had been away from the state 12 years, so it was going to be a challenge—I had only been back two months, and Jack Kennedy was killed. I flew out to be with Ted in Georgetown and went up to the house afterward, on the Cape.

I had just finished my primary in June of ’64, when there was the tragedy of the airplane crash. I came out during my campaign briefly, to see him in the hospital in Massachusetts.

When Bobby was killed, I rode with Ted around New York City, alone, with a driver, virtually all night, before he made that remarkable eulogy. I don’t think he slept at all. He changed his shirt or something. I rode around New York with him that night, and then came down on the train with Bobby for the burial, late at night in the fog at Arlington.
Then the next crisis was Chappaquiddick, and I heard that on the car radio and called. Ted, and he asked me to come to Hyannis. I was there for a number of days during that terrible period. Then he lost the Senate Whip position in ’70.

**Young:** His father died in ’70, months after—not too long after Chappaquiddick.

**Culver:** Yes.

**Young:** That was right after Chappaquiddick. Some time about then, his father died, I think in a matter of months. You know, most of the stories—and his marriage was falling apart during that period and they eventually divorced in the 1980s.

**Culver:** I do remember we went on a trip together in ’83, and at that time it was pretty clear that he definitely was going to run in ’84. He had decided.

**Young:** And this was after he ran against [Jimmy] Carter for the nomination in ’80.

**Culver:** Right, this is ’83. He had decided he was going to run. He then had a meeting where his children forcefully urged him not to run. The stories came out that he had decided to respect their views and not run. I remember at the time, most people thought that was just an excuse, politically. But it was definitely the case that he decided not to run because of their anxiety and concern about his safety.

**Young:** The other tragedy that happened, of course, was that Teddy Junior had the cancer.

**Culver:** With the leg.

**Young:** Yes.

**Culver:** He was only 13, I think, when that happened. Then there was Palm Beach later. I was asked to—He called me.

**Young:** You helped Patrick?

**Culver:** Yes. Initially, I helped by working with both of them, at Ted’s request, and then I felt that it was best that I worked with Patrick and he had other counsel for himself, because I just felt that it would work out best for Patrick. That’s when he had Greg Craig come in as his counsel in Palm Beach. During all this period, almost every year we’d go sailing, a group of friends, that particular close group of guys.

**Young:** Yes.

**Culver:** Tim Hanan, John Tunney and their wives, and myself and my wife.

**Young:** Wasn’t he kind of lonely during that period? He had his friends, but when you—

**Culver:** I think he was terribly lonely. He’d go back to that big house alone.

**Young:** I know. Nobody at home to really talk to.
**Culver:** I think you’re right. And at the same time, he’d have these other problems present themselves, family issues, as you have mentioned, Teddy Junior with the leg, and Patrick had an asthmatic condition. Ted would sleep in the room with Patrick. When Teddy Jr. had the chemo, Ted would go to the hospital room and sleep there with him. It was just amazing how, time after time, he was called upon to deal with family tragedies. And, as you say, meanwhile his own marriage was failing, and she had difficulties, too.

**Young:** Yes.

**Culver:** It took enormous strength.

**Young:** And the political weather wasn’t very encouraging, either, during the [Ronald] Reagan years.

**Culver:** No. I do remember one interesting thing, though. When Ronald Reagan was elected, I lost, in 1980. We had a lame duck session in the Senate in the fall of 1980. The Senate was in session after the election, so even though I was defeated, I was still there until January.

One night, when Ted and I were to have dinner together, Ted told me earlier that he had made arrangements through Paul Laxalt, the Senator from Nevada who was close to Reagan, to set up a meeting with Reagan. Ted said that he told Laxalt that, while he had met Reagan casually a couple of times, he had never had a serious discussion with him. “Hopefully we can realize some areas we could constructively, productively work together on.” He said, “I wanted to have that opportunity to meet him and talk about that.” So Laxalt arranged for Reagan to meet Ted where they had offices set aside for the President-elect to occupy before the inauguration.

When Ted and I got together for dinner, I said, “How did it go?” And he said, “You can’t believe it.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, if I ever had any reservations about my ability to be President of the United States, they have now been removed. They’ve all been removed.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, you know, I prepared with my staff about four or five issues that I was particularly concerned about: healthcare, arms control, and a couple of others.” He mentioned four subjects, as I recall, substantive areas that he was particularly involved with at the time and that he wanted to explore with Reagan as to where they might have some meeting of the minds.

He said, “I’d start a subject, and Reagan would tell a joke. I’d start another topic when he didn’t seem to bite on the first one, he’d tell another joke. He was perfectly charming. He couldn’t have been warmer or more delightful, but I could not get him to engage substantively on any one of those subjects where we might work together.”

**Young:** That’s right.

**Culver:** Of course that confirmed what I had heard during that same period. Tom Korologos was the Republican lobbyist prominent in those days, and he had been asked by [Edwin] Ed Meese—

**Young:** Yes. Well, Meese was Attorney General second.
Culver: Meese was his key guy on the legislative program. Tom, in this lame duck session, told me that his job was to call Meese every day and tell him what the calendar was for the day, the legislative activities in the House and the Senate, and what, if any, marching orders there were for the Republican troops to follow, as far as the President-elect was concerned.

Tom told me Meese would go boom, boom, boom, just right off the top of his head, and tell him what the marching orders were on every vote. Finally, Tom said, “This one day, there was a particularly awkward parliamentary situation that I really felt wasn’t so clear on its face, and I said to Meese, ‘What does the boss want here?’ And he said, ‘Bing’—the same way, very perfunctory. And I said, ‘Well, Ed, I don’t know if you understand this.’ He said, ‘I told you what the vote is. Go vote it.’”

The point is that Meese really was—Which I gather was true when Reagan was the California Governor—he really was the man. It was so clear, that Tom just shook his head, because Reagan’s involvement was nonexistent in terms of all these decisions. In the ordinary course, Tom was accustomed to [Richard M.] Nixon substantively participating.

Anyway, we’re getting off the subject here. But Ted said, “If I ever had any doubts as to my capacity to be President, they’ve been removed.”

Young: Do you have any insights on Carter and Kennedy? In his book, he talks about that, and he expresses his frustration on healthcare, with Carter, but he also said that he felt that Carter had a special animus toward him. That kind of surprised me, because—

Culver: Do you think it was resentment toward his family advantages?

Young: I don’t know.

Culver: Compared to his own humble upbringing?

Young: I can’t figure it out. I don’t know.

Culver: Would that be a possibility?

Young: He voted with Carter on a large majority of things.

Culver: When I was in the Senate during the Carter administration, Dick Clark and I, of Iowa, had the highest percentage of support for Carter. We were way up there. I went to Dick Clark in 1978, when he was running, and I said, “If it will help you, I’ll say I’m not going to run again,” because I was tired of it. I’d been ten years in the House, and it was admittedly only my first term in the Senate, but after 14 years at that point, I felt it was time to think about doing something else. I don’t know exactly my total feelings, but I went to Dick and he said, “Don’t say anything now, because you might change your mind.”

Well, much to my surprise, Dick Clark was defeated, upset, in 1978. He was way ahead in the polls. He was defeated by Roger Jepsen. Ted had known of my tendency to think about getting out, and I remember quite vividly, in August of ’79, we took a walk around the Capitol. I don’t know if I mentioned this earlier.
Young: I don’t think so.

Culver: We took a walk around the Capitol. We walked east several blocks and he said, “I know that you’re thinking about not running again.” This was after Dick Clark lost. “If you’re not going to, if that’s what you decide to do, I hope you will think about joining me in my campaign.”

I was the only statewide Democrat standing and I did feel an obligation to run. Then we had another conversation after I decided I had to run. When I announced I was running, Ted was still way ahead in the polls.

We talked, later that ’79, or early ’80, at his home. We talked and mutually decided that I would remain neutral in the Carter-Kennedy race in 1980. At the same time, Governor Bob Ray, a Republican, took the same position. He was running, and took a neutral role on the Republican combatants. It was agreed that I could best be helpful after the election.

We agreed on that and that was my public position. Later on Friday night, just days before the caucuses in Iowa, Ted came by to see me in my office and asked, “Would you consider endorsing me now?” It was a very difficult time. It hadn’t been going well, and rather than being way ahead, he was in real trouble. I said I thought it would not be helpful at that point, and that it could be counterproductive, because I had been out there month after month, neutral, and so had Bob Ray. I said, “I’ll think it over.”

I discussed it with a couple of people. I made some calls to Iowa. They said it would be a disaster. It wouldn’t help him, and it would ruin my campaign out here. It was a tough decision for me. The next morning I told him that I could not endorse him at that point. He left and went on to Iowa. There was some sensitivity there, at the time. In the ’80 campaign, I was way behind in June, and I got ahead in October. It was a very tough campaign. I ran as a liberal, but that year was just so bad.

Of course, I followed his fortunes along the way. But it wasn’t until after the general election that we got together. I think later Ted did understand the difficult circumstances for both of us.

Young: Well, I think maybe we’ve had enough for today.

Culver: All right. I hope we covered your areas you were interested in.

[BREAK]
**Young:** We’re resuming after a pause.

**Culver:** I was asked to attend a number of sessions out at the McLean home in the run-up to 1980, against Carter. I took the position from the beginning that this decision was his alone to make. I felt so strongly that way because I had great concerns about his security and safety. Privately, I had those concerns. Although I was in meetings with people who were pushing him to run, I’m sure in good faith, I was not one of those who urged him to run.

Subsequent to his defeat in the Carter race, there were stories about how certain major Democratic Party politicians and Senators had reportedly been those who urged him to run and then had moved away or changed their position. There were one or two stories at that time, where I was thrown into that category, and that was false. It was wrong, and it troubled me. I had taken the position I took out of real love and genuine concern for him. Certainly, as close as we were, I was not going to urge him to do something where I had apprehensions about his safety. So, I was never one of that chorus, even though I sat in on some of those meetings that he called.

**Young:** I’m glad to have the record straight on that.

**Culver:** Yes. But that was always my private position. I never was one who felt it was appropriate to subject him to all those dangers and risks, unless he himself decided that was the course he wanted to take.