

**Michael V. DiSalle Oral History Interview – 11/24/1964**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

DiSalle, Governor of Ohio (1959-1963), discusses his first impressions of John F. Kennedy (JFK), campaigning for JFK in the Midwest, and JFK's personality, among other issues.

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MICHAEL V. DISALLE

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Oral History Interview

With

MICHAEL V. DISALLE

November 24, 1964  
Columbus, Ohio

By Ken Mack

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MACK: Governor, you had known President Kennedy for several years. When did you first meet him and what were the exact circumstances?

DISALLE: I think our first contact was in 1946 when he was a candidate for Congress, as was I in the Ohio Ninth Congressional District. He was elected that year, and I was defeated by three hundred votes. But he was one of the few newly elected Congressman of the Democratic Party. That was the year that the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress was elected, and of course he attracted a great deal of attention in being elected in what was a bad year.

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MACK: Did you have any other particular close contact with Mr. Kennedy before the 1956 political conventions?

DISALLE: During the period that I served as price stabilizer in the years 1950-1951 he was a member of Congress, and we met a number of times, in 1952, if I recall—actually it was 1953—I went back to Washington to be toastmaster at the dinner for a close mutual friend of ours, James McInerney [James M. McInerney], who since has passed away. Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] then was just a youngster, and he was treasurer of the committee for the dinner, and Jack was a member of the Senate and

was seated at the dais. But in 1952 at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, Mr. Kennedy called me and asked that I join with him, as well as Archie Alexander [Archibald S. Alexander] of New Jersey Walter Granger of Utah in a round robin letter asking Adlai Stevenson to accept the Democratic nomination for the Presidency that year. We all agreed and issued that open letter several

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days before Stevenson consented to become the nominee.

MACK: Do you think that letter played an important part in his decision?

DISALLE: I don't know how important it was, but I know that Senator Kennedy was always a great admirer of Governor Stevenson. In 1956 he made the nominating speech for Governor Stevenson as the candidate for the nomination again at the Democratic Convention, again in Chicago.

MACK: Now, speaking of the 1956 Convention, Governor DiSalle, President Kennedy, as I recall, was considered a strong possibility for the vice presidential nomination. Yet you, who were considered a friend of his, placed in nomination the name of Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee for the vice presidency. I wonder if you could give the background on how this happened?

DISALLE: Well, in politics there are always different decisions to make. It happened that Senator

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Kefauver in 1951 had asked me to be campaign manager in his candidacy for the nomination for president. I, at that time, was price stabilizer. President Truman had not as yet announced whether or not he was going to be a candidate for re-election, and I had to tell Senator Kefauver that although I admired him greatly, and I did admire his courage and the work he was doing at that time as Chairman of the Senate Rackets Investigating Committee, that I felt my first loyalty was to President Truman, and I could not take on another assignment until I knew what President Truman was going to do. I think Senator Kefauver accepted that with graciousness and understanding. But he announced his candidacy, and of course I declared in 1952 for Governor Stevenson. In 1955, Senator Kefauver again had asked me to manage his campaign, and I asked for time to review the situation. I made a number of calls across the country and I reported back to Senator Kefauver

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advising that he not become a candidate for the nomination, that I felt that Governor Stevenson would be the nominee and that he could be the number two man without leaving Washington. He had enough residual support among party leaders who were appreciative of

the fact that he had made numerous appearances throughout the country, and that they felt strongly that Governor Stevenson should be given another opportunity to lead the party, but that they would in turn support Senator Kefauver for the number two spot, or for the number one spot if something should happen that would block Governor Stevenson or if he should decide not to become a candidate. Senator Kefauver declared his candidacy in spite of this report, but I still felt very strongly about him. I thought he was a good public official and should not be discouraged. When Governor Stevenson declared that he was going to let the Convention nominate a candidate for the

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vice presidency, I then felt that I owed my allegiance to Senator Kefauver. In making this distinction between Senator Kefauver and Senator Kennedy, I felt that Senator Kennedy was young enough that he had great prospects in the future. Senator Kefauver asked me to place his name in nomination, which I did after consulting with the Ohio delegation. The Ohio delegation, with the exception of five or six, stayed with Senator Kefauver. I think this was a deciding factor in giving him the nomination. On that evening as we were leaving the Convention Hall, I stood with Senator Kennedy on the platform – we were about the last ones to leave the Convention hall – and he was disappointed, there is no question about it, but I said to him that if he had received that nomination that day and the ticket had been unsuccessful, he might have really received a great deal of the blame for the defeat. As it was he was young and he was fresh and he had

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possibilities of becoming the candidate for vice president or president four years or eight years hence and certainly this should not be regarded as any hazard as far as his political career was concerned.

MACK: How did he accept that defeat at the 1956 Convention?

DISALLE: I think it hit him hard, but I think he realized that his future was bright and he had made great impact at the Convention. He couldn't help but feel the warmth of the delegates towards him. I knew that many of the delegates who were supporting others felt that Senator Kennedy had a great future, and it was his youth at that particular time and older ties that kept him from becoming the nominee in 1956. Yet this was possibly the best thing that ever happened to him.

MACK: As I recall from that length of time ago, Governor, Senator Kennedy made a very, very big impression on both the delegates and all of the millions of people across the country

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who watched the convention on television.



DISALLE: Yes, there isn't any question about that. In 1957 I spoke at a testimonial dinner for Senator Kennedy in Boston just three days before Caroline [Caroline Kennedy] was born. I recall that it was three days before because I asked him where Mrs. Kennedy was, and he said, "Well, she is going to have a baby Wednesday." I thought he was kidding, and I said, "What time on Wednesday?" He said ten o'clock, and then I realized it was a caesarian; it was planned. In my remarks at that testimonial dinner I said that there were two fine nominating speeches made at the Convention, the one by Senator Kennedy nominating Governor Stevenson and the one made by me nominating Senator Kefauver, as a result of which, Senator Kennedy was still alive politically. Well, he got quite a chuckle out of it, and when he came into Ohio in 1959 he reminded the people of this incident and said, "But I just don't want

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Mike to make a career out of saving mine."

MACK: How do you feel that Mr. Kennedy took your position, as you nominated Senator Kefauver in 1956? Do you think that this alienated your relationship any?

DISALLE: I don't think so. In 1956 I was a candidate for governor in Ohio and he came into the state and made several appearances on my behalf. In 1958 when I was again a candidate for governor he made several appearances. I have great admiration for him. He had a great ability to forgive and forget and to go on to the next step.

MACK: Well, the next step in this case was in 1960 running for the candidacy for the Presidency. When and where did you and Senator Kennedy first discuss this possibility.

DISALLE: I think over the telephone several times, but then he came to Columbus in June of 1959. We discussed this at the Governor's Mansion that evening without coming to any real formal conclusions. The next morning

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he had a press conference at the press club, and he handled himself with real maturity. He fielded every question that came his way. He came back and sat down next to me, and I whispered to him, "There certainly should be no concern on your part about what Ohio will do." I affirmed this to them at that time; that I was for him and we would do everything possible to see that he was nominated.

MACK: Did you hold any more meetings after this between then and the 1960 Convention?

DISALLE: Yes, he came back to Columbus again and we discussed the matter by telephone several times. Then we met in Pittsburgh in December of 1959. at that time he told me of the day that he would make his announcement, and we agreed on a date that I was going to announce my support for him. He was going to announce January 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of that year, and I would announce my support on January 6<sup>th</sup>. As it really turned out,

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there was a leak someplace and people began to get wind of it and I called him. Instead of announcing on January 6<sup>th</sup>, I announced a day earlier, on the morning of January 5<sup>th</sup>, that I would become a "Favorite Son" candidate in Ohio but it was to be understood that any delegates pledged to me would be, in effect, supporting Senator Kennedy, that he would be my choice at the Convention.

MACK: Governor, there were several published reports and stories about that meeting that you and Senator Kennedy held in the Pittsburgh airport in the latter part of 1959. Did you make any other decisions, other than what you just told me?

DISALLE: No, this was it. It was a decision as to timing. One magazine reported that we were meeting in secrecy and that one of us registered at the hotel as Smith and the other as O'Donnell. The truth of the matter was that there was a Smith— Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith], the President's brother-in-law – and Ken

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O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] of his staff. We walked together through the Pittsburgh airport and several people recognizes either one or the other of us, and we said hello to them. There was no real purpose in keeping it a secret meeting, but he certainly did not want to forewarn his opposition as to what was cooking in the way of campaign strategy.

MACK: Speaking of campaign strategy, there were also reports of developments at that 1960 Governors' Conference out in Montana that possibly had some bearing on Mr. Kennedy's nomination and election. I wonder if you could fill us in on what actually happened out there.

DISALLE: Well, there are a number of things, of course. In a presidential year the Governor's Conference is always covered by the national press and press conferences are very routine and they are staged regularly for the various governors. At that Governors' Conference I felt, and I stated in a press conference,

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that Senator Kennedy would be nominated on the first ballot. I think it was during that time that President Truman announced his opposition to Senator Kennedy's nomination, and I felt

impelled to issue a statement that this would not effect Senator Kennedy's nomination. The fact that this announcement came at that time was indicative of the fact that Senator Kennedy had strength and would very likely be the Democratic nominee. I think one interesting incident happened, and that is I was talking to John Bailey [John M. Bailey], who was handling Senator Kennedy's campaign, and Governor Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff], who had been the first governor who had come out for Senator Kennedy for the Presidency. He was from that neighboring state of Connecticut and had been close over a period of years. We were pretty well agreed that Senator Kennedy had the nomination. I was more optimistic, feeling that he would be nominated on the first ballot, and Governor Ribicoff was a little

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more conservative on that. He felt that he would be nominated, but that it possibly might to the second ballot or third ballot. But we were so confident that we were discussing the vice presidency. Governor Ribicoff said that he thought it should be offered to Lyndon Johnson. I said, "Well, I don't think you ought to offer it to him unless you feel you want him to have it." John Bailey said he didn't think Lyndon would accept the number two spot because as Majority Leader of the Senate he was the most powerful man in the country at that time. I said that this position would change if there was a Democratic President, and that Lyndon Johnson had been working under a great deal of pressure for a number of years and certainly stepping up this way would be a method by which he could leave the pressures of the Majority Leadership and get into the national scene. If he was ever to be a successful candidate for President, he needed exposure

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nationally. His exposure had been mostly in Washington and in Texas, and he was not known as a personality in the nation at the time.

MACK: How did Mr. Kennedy feel about a possible vice presidential running mate at that time? Did he have any choice?

DISALLE: Well, I didn't discuss this with him until Los Angeles, but at various times he expressed his admiration for Lyndon Johnson's ability. Whenever somebody would say he was too young and inexperienced, he would say, "Well, as I look at the other candidates, I only know one other man who I think has the ability, and that is Lyndon Johnson." So he had great respect for Lyndon Johnson's ability, and I think his selection of Lyndon Johnson was not only based on his feeling that it was politically necessary, but that he would have a man at his side who would have the ability to be President.

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MACK: Governor, you mentioned that you publicly announced your support for President Kennedy as the candidate early in 1960—as I recall you said

January 5<sup>th</sup>, and told us why you had to set the date up. Were there any other unusual circumstances surrounding that announcement?

DISALLE: No, except that it was difficult to really explain to the people of the state what was happening. You know, this is the first time, I think, that the people of Ohio really knew that a favorite son candidate wasn't a serious candidate, and who he was really for. This would have given other candidates a chance to come into the state and field their own slates, if they wanted to oppose Senator Kennedy. When they didn't, in effect they just gave up Ohio.

[Track II, Reel I]

MACK: Governor DiSalle, would you call this announcement here in Ohio, perhaps the first

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major state in favor of Senator Kennedy, a trial balloon strategy-wise?

DISALLE: No, this was a very flat declaration of support, indicating that I was going to do all I could to keep Ohio's delegates in line in support of Senator Kennedy and to try to attract delegates from other states. In effect, this is what happened when other states saw what Ohio had done. This was combined with the fact that Senator Kennedy had indicated already that he was going to be a very active candidate, and this helped soften up the situation for him in the states in which he had primary contests and in the conventions. I think this was a very, very telling factor in the eventual nomination.

MACK: It is a matter of historical record that you campaigned very actively on behalf of Senator Kennedy for the nomination in 1960. Did you limit your appearances to just here in the Buckeye State of Ohio?

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DISALLE: No, after the Convention I appeared in Indiana, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and West Virginia as well as Ohio. We didn't do as well in Ohio as we would have liked to have done, but we did a little better than we did in Indiana. In the other four states in which I made appearances, of course, Senator Kennedy carried. Not as a result of my appearances, but because he had a lot of natural strength in those states.

MACK: At the time, I recall press statements saying that, in all probability, you had promised Senator Kennedy that you would be able to carry Ohio for him in the Presidential election. Did you ever promise a state?

DISALLE: Of course not! You can't promise a state. Early in September of 1960 I had mailed to Bobby Kennedy a survey we had made in Ohio which showed that Senator Kennedy was in trouble here. The biggest factor was the religious issue. This we found was having great influence in the metropolitan areas

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as well as the rural areas of Ohio. We were quite cognizant of it, but there isn't much you can do about it, except we felt the more exposure Senator Kennedy could get into Ohio, the more likely it would be that he could dissipate that objection that people had since it was really an emotion rather than a reason.

MACK: He did campaign quite actively in this state, too, didn't he?

DISALLE: Yes, I think that he no doubt covered Ohio more thoroughly than he did any of the large states. This should have been an indication to others that he felt that it needed it.

MACK: Following the successful election of President Kennedy, from some quarters you received, let's face it, a great deal of criticism because he did fail to carry Ohio even though the polls and the political observers said that he perhaps might or would. I wonder if you could tell us about the Ohio campaign in depth and some of the other factors besides the religious factor that contributed to the loss of the state.

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DISALLE: Actually, I don't think there were any other factors. In Ohio our local Democratic candidates led the President in eighty-three of the eighty-eight counties, so there had to be a reason over and above, the reason that people were not voting for the President, to account for the fact that he didn't carry Ohio. But he did get forty-seven per cent of the vote. Two hundred seventy thousand votes sounds like a lot, but there were 4,200,000 votes cast in Ohio, which was the largest vote ever cast up to that time, and President Kennedy received 1,900,000 votes, which was quite a few. I don't recall exactly that any other Presidential candidate outside of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936 had received many more than that. President Eisenhower in 1956 had set a record in Ohio. But numerically President Kennedy had done extremely well. But after all, this doesn't get you the electoral vote. He attracted large crowds... Of course, I was

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criticized. Newsmen would ask me if I thought President Kennedy would carry the state. Even in spite of the fact that I had sent the surveys indicating that he was in trouble, I couldn't very well say that I didn't think he would.

I do want to say this, that after the first debate with Richard Nixon I campaigned with Senator Kennedy in Ohio. We started out in Painesville at 7:30 in the morning and traveled

through Cleveland, Lorain, Elyria, Akron, and Canton, and this lead me to believe—the crowds that showed up and the warmth of the crowd, the great enthusiasm of the people that were greeting the President all along this northern tier of counties—this made me feel that possibly we had overcome the deficit that had shown up in the surveys early in September of 1960. He was a great campaigner and it was a joy to be with him. We had laughs all day long, and it isn't easy to laugh on a

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long day like that when you are being pulled and tugged here and there, and where you are trying to keep up a schedule that seems almost impossible. It was an indication of his great strength and courage and his consideration of others.

MACK: There was one humorous incident that occurred on that swing across northern Ohio that I will never forget; I wonder if you could tell about the little girl and the flowers?

DISALLE: Oh yes! We stopped at a school in Cleveland, a girls' school, and they wanted to make a presentation of flowers to Senator Kennedy. As they did, the girl was very nervous and she tipped the vase and I got wet from head to foot practically and he got the flowers. I kidded him about it, I said, "What kind of a campaign is this? You get the flowers and I get the water!" He said, "Well, after all, who is the candidate for President?"

MACK: Governor, over the years that we have known each other you have many times told me about

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your appreciation of the President's personal warmth and his consideration and loyalty for those that he felt were his friends, both personal friends and those in the political field. I wonder if you could give us some instances of the reason or the basis for this feeling.

DISALLE: Well, I suppose we have to just bare the facts as they really existed. Certainly after my tax program, the pounding I had received from some of the newspapers and some of my political opponents in Ohio, I was not the most popular political leader in Ohio in 1962. Yet the President came into Columbus on January 6, 1962, to speak at a testimonial dinner being held on my behalf on my birthday. It was actually a fundraising dinner for the party in Ohio. That day it was a very bad day. There was rain, and it was doubtful that he could even make the flight. If he had wanted to it would have been very easy and it would have been understood by anyone if he had just said, "We couldn't get there." But at some risk to himself, he did come into Columbus and did make the appearance. Earlier, in November or December of 1961 he had invited me to attend the Army-Navy football game with him. Even after I was rather soundly defeated in 1962 his

door was always open and he was more than kind and offered to do anything he could in the way of appointments or things of that kind, but I was so filled up, at that time, with politics and public service that I felt I wanted some time to myself. He was extremely kind and extremely considerate and never seemed to forget. I used to enjoy just going in and talking to him because we would have just one laugh after another reminiscing. He had a great knack for describing people, both his friends and his enemies, very colorful descriptions of personalities and their characters.

MACK: Governor, you visited with Mr. Kennedy at the White House many times after he was

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inaugurated. I wonder if you could recall some of the outstanding incidents of those visits and point out some of the factors of his personality that you remember.

DISALLE: Well, I was in to see him just a few days after the Bay of Pigs incident and he was down. I asked him, I said, "How do you like your job now?" He said, "Well, it's the kind of a job that if you lose it you shouldn't complain." He at that time told me that—he had just the day before announced that he was accepting sole responsibility. This is exactly the same statement I had made the day after the election in Columbus, Ohio. I accepted full responsibility for his loss of Ohio. I said, "Well, this sounds like something I said last November." He said, "Once you have said that, what can anybody else say? What can they do to you? You have accepted the responsibility. I could try to pass it off here and pass it off there, but it would never come to an end.

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It was my ultimate responsibility; I could have vetoed it, but I didn't." He seemed to be quite upset about the fact that the information that had been passed on to him turned out to be not accurate, and I knew that from that time on he was going to be certain that that information was checked and rechecked. The plan had pretty well been laid out for him by the previous administration, and about all that was left for him was either go ahead with it or veto it. At that moment I think he grew up because he did have an urge to follow through with the planes and the Navy, and clean up on the island, but he realized that this could very well propel us into World War III, and he was terribly concerned about world peace and he was terribly cognizant of the forces that might be unleashed and the destruction of

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civilization that could very well result from an unthinking moment.

MACK: What type of decision maker was Mr. Kennedy in your opinion?

DISALLE: I think he tried to get all the advice and information he could, and then came to decisions. He made quick decisions, and history has proven that those decisions were usually sound.

MACK: He was a great family man, as you are, wasn't he?

DISALLE: Many times we would be sitting there and the nurse would come out with the children, out in the White House lawn, and he would say, "Oh, let's go out and see the kids," and we would go out and he would play with them for awhile. There was no phoniness about it; you could tell with the look in his eyes. Certainly when he would look at those children there was a great deal of pride and a great deal of real warmth. They were his children and he was going to do all

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that he could and spend as much time with them as was possible.

MACK: This, in that position, is a very difficult job.

DISALLE: It certainly is because no one knows except the people who lived through it how lonely you can be and how many demands there are on your time. Oftentimes, the people who ought to be the most understanding of the demands of the office are the people who are the least tolerant and who expect that they can walk in and out at any time.

MACK: Governor, you were associated with John Fitzgerald Kennedy for over a decade. What do you think was the biggest accomplishment of his too brief life?

DISALLE: I think that he had begun to develop on the part of the people respect for the office of the Presidency that they hadn't had for a long time. He was a new image for the people of America and of the world. I think that after his assassination the

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widespread mourning that occurred and the real tears that were shed throughout the world were evidences of the respect that he had earned for himself and for his nation. I think that people trusted John Fitzgerald Kennedy. They believed in him. They didn't believe that he could do anything mean or small; that he was dedicated to trying to develop a better life and to open better opportunities for everyone regardless of race, creed, or color, and that he couldn't harbor grudges against people. He recognized the problems of all people. He seemed to have sort of a common denominator to all, that John F. Kennedy is our friend and if we are in need, if we have troubles, he is a man that can help us solve them. I think that after the assassination and even today the people that are moving by the thousands into



Arlington to pay tribute to him and pay their respects at his last resting place all give indications of the great impact that he made on people throughout

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the world, even though he was President for a relatively short period of time.

MACK: And that concludes this chapter recorded for the John Fitzgerald Memorial Library, comments from a long time political and personal friend of Mr. Kennedy, former Ohio Governor Michael V. DiSalle. This chapter for the Kennedy Memorial Library was recorded November 24, 1964 in Columbus, Ohio. This is Ken Mack speaking.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Michael V. DiSalle Oral History Transcript  
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Appendix  
Radio Interview

With

MICHAEL V. DISALLE

Columbus, Ohio  
November 22, 1964

By Ken Mack

MACK: This is “Insight,” another in a series of programs produced and recorded by the WTVM Radio Department of News and Public Affairs to better acquaint you with the facets of life and living in Columbus and in Ohio. Reporting this is Ken Mack.

One year ago today, November 22, 1963, a date that is etched in infamy in the brains of all Americans. It was early afternoon when the startling and unbelievable news came over the radio! “We interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin from ABC Radio. Here is a special bulletin from

[-1a-]

Dallas, Texas. Three shots were fired at President Kennedy’s motorcade today in downtown Dallas, Texas. Here is some more information that is just coming in. This is from the Associated Press. It says President Kennedy was shot today just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas. Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] jumped up and grabbed Mr. Kennedy. She cried, ‘Oh, no.’ The motorcade sped on” Just a few minutes later Americans learned that John Fitzgerald Kennedy was dead. “Ladies and gentleman, the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, is dead. The President is dead. Let us pray.” The shock was unbelievable. Americans could not believe it. It hit some harder than others— among those, friends of the late President. Among those friends, who, like us, could believe

it, was former governor, Michael V. DiSalle. Governor DiSalle, where were you that day one year ago today?

DISALLE: I was entering Riverside Hospital to visit a

[-2a-]

friend who had had surgery. As I walked in, the girl at the desk stopped me and said, "Have you heard that the President was shot?" And I just didn't couldn't believe it, really. And when I went upstairs, television was on and someone said that Kenny O'Donnell had said that, he wouldn't say whether the President was dead or not. Then I knew he was and yet it was still an unbelievable situation to me that someone that I had known so well, who was so young and so vital could be gone.

MACK: I think probably, Governor, this was part of the disbelief for everybody, the fact that President Kennedy was such a vibrant, alive person.

DISALLE: Yes, but I'd seen him just a few days before and had had an opportunity of talking to him and we, as was the case anytime we saw each other, we had a good many laughs, reminiscing about different situations in which we had jointly participated. So this made it all

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the more unbelievable to me that someone who had been so full of fun just a few days before, was now gone.

MACK: Governor, you had known Mr. Kennedy for a long, long time, had you not?

DISALLE: Yes. It went back to 1946 when we were both candidates for Congress. It was the year in which he was elected and I had lost my race by 300 votes in the Ninth Ohio Congressional District. And then I got to know him much better in 1950, '51, and '52 when I was in Washington in the Price Stabilization job. In '52 we were both candidates for the United States Senate and four of us who were much younger at that time signed a round robin letter asking Adlai Stevenson to become the Democratic nominee for President. And over the years I've known him, and in 1956 I'd made the nominating speech for Senator Kefauver at the Democratic Convention. Senator Kefauver was the successful nominee for Vice President and I used to kid Senator

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Kennedy about it that as a result of my nominating speech he was kept alive politically, because he lost the nomination to Senator Kefauver that year. I spoke at a testimonial dinner for Senator Kennedy up in Boston in 1957, just three days before Caroline [Caroline Kennedy] was born. And we had seen each other a great deal over the years and had had a

great deal of contact. But I suppose the greatest contact we had was in the years '58, '59, '60, '61, and '62, during my campaign for governor and during his campaign for the Presidency.

MACK: Did Mr. Kennedy have his sights set on becoming President back in the '50s?

DISALLE: Well, he never discussed it. I'm sure that he did. I remember the night of the Convention in '56, as the Convention was breaking up; he had had quite the blow that day. He'd lost the nomination for Vice President. I was trying to console him by telling him that he was a young man and that being on the ticket that year might not have been necessarily

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of benefit to him but that he was young enough he could look at the future and be, no doubt, the Democratic nominee for President or Vice President four years from then or eight years from then. And, of course, after his fine showing—and he captured the imagination of the American people in 1956—I'm sure from that point on there was no question in my mind and I'm certain not in his that he was going to go after the big prize in 1960.

MACK: Governor, there have been already millions of words written about Mr. Kennedy and undoubtedly he will go down in our history as one of our great American statesmen. But what kind of a man was he among friends, in his informal moments.

DISALLE: Well, he had a dry sense of humor, a great capacity to laugh at himself. He had a great ability to size people up. He could spot a phony miles away. He had a way of placing people in different categories and he had a remarkable memory for what people had said

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to him and classifying what they had said. He could remember a speech that senator had made opposing him on a point of legislation longer than anybody that I ever knew and would be very frank to discuss the man's motives for making the speech. He had a great intellect. Politically, for example in 1960 before the Convention, he would know the political figures of every state: who they were, who they were for, who could be counted on, who could not be counted on. He knew more about this than anyone around him. And more than that, he knew more about the issues than anyone around him. So that later on when people began, after he was elected President, and as is always true in Washington you always hear someone say – this is the President's brain on this subject, the President's brain on that subject, or he talks for the President. I used to get a little exasperated because I knew different. He made his decisions based upon the advice

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he could get, but he had no reluctance to make decisions and to stand by them once they were made. But you know, Washington is a strange town anyway. When I was down there so much I used to get the idea that it was a lot of people walking around without heads because you go to a reception of some kind and someone was always pointing someone out as someone else's brain. Well, you knew that this man had been down there a long time and that some young fellow who is now his Administrative Assistant or PR man had not been around when he was elected, hadn't been around when this man was developing a career for himself. How could he be his brain now? So that it's a town where there are many exaggerations and President Kennedy stood head and shoulders above everyone that I'd ever seen or that you could possibly compare him to in the contemporary period in which he lived.

MACK: Governor, as a man who knew President Kennedy well, what would you class as his greatest

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achievement during the brief time that he was the nation's Chief Executive?

DISALLE: I think he gave the nation a feeling of vitality. We'd been dragging along for a while and he made us feel that we were great and that we were capable of great accomplishments. And I felt that there was a latency about his greatness that we didn't realize actually when he was alive, in spite of the fact that wherever you went with President Kennedy, he attracted great crowds and they were enthusiastic crowds and warm crowds. But some people were inclined to discount that as curiosity seekers, but you couldn't have been near him and watched the look in the eyes of people and the warmth that they had for him and the confidence with which they seemed to express this feeling and not realize that this man was touched with greatness and that he had the ability to inspire others to that same feeling of greatness. I think one of the most

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significant things that happened after the assassination was the fact that in every country of the world people seemed to feel the loss. I recall talking to people—one person who had been in Ankara on the day and how the maid who was cleaning his room broke down and cried. And people who had been in Rome and Genoa telling about people in the streets with tears streaming down their faces. And people who had been in London and Paris. It was universal. People behind the Iron Curtain felt that they had lost a friend, people in South America. He had projected what I always felt was the true American image to people throughout the world regardless of whether they spoke the English language, whether they agreed with us politically or philosophically. President Kennedy was a friend and someone that they felt they could trust and that they could rely on in moments of crisis.

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MACK: Mr. DiSalle, I understand that you are going to be contributing to perhaps the most memorable memorial to the late President Kennedy, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

DISALLE: Yes, a number of people who had contact with him have been asked to prepare taped interviews about the late President and personal experiences that they have had with him. And I've been asked to get mine ready and submit it before Thanksgiving. I don't know whether I'm going to be able to do it or not, but I'm certainly going to try.

MACK: I notice here in your office, Governor, that there are many mementos and I'm sure a lot of the pictures hold memories of the late President Kennedy. I notice facing your desk a picture of you and the late President and Jacqueline Kennedy. Could you tell us a little about that one.

DISALLE: That picture was taken the night that a White House dinner was held for the President of India and I was standing with the President

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and Mrs. Kennedy on the East Portico of the White House and the picture was taken by a photographer in color at night. It was a candid shot because the President's back was turned to it and he had just come up from bidding someone good night and was, as usual, in very good form and said something that had me really laughing, as you can see by the picture, and he and Jackie were standing there holding hands. This was before their last baby was born and the maternity gown you can see is a rather expensive looking garment. He had asked me to come over to the White House to see him about a week later about a matter, and when I went over there he and Jackie were there together and the picture had been framed and it had been autographed by both of them and he had it wrapped in some brown paper and handed it to me. I thought it was a document of some kind and when I opened it I really didn't realize how valuable it was going to be to

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me. It was the last picture I received from him and the last autograph. It's remarkable, you know, that Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], who was as close to the President as anybody could possibly be, didn't have an autographed picture of the President when the assassination happened. He saw him every day and always that when the time came he would have one.

MACK: It's rather ironic.

DISALLE: It sure is.

MACK: I notice on another wall here in your office a picture of you and President Kennedy looking a bit younger and another gentleman looking like you're walking between some crowds of people. What is that photo?

DISALLE: That picture was taken in Los Angeles the night he made his acceptance speech in the stadium and this was indicative of his consideration for others. After he had been nominated, I really didn't expect to be hearing from him and we were out that day from the hotel room. I got back and there was a message to call the President—the nominee at the time—and he asked me to come over with Governor Ribicoff to escort him to the platform, and when I got there to meet him at this car I said, "This is very kind of you," and he said, "Well, I wanted my two oldest supporters to be with me on this night."

MACK: Governor, while we have just a few minutes here, let's stroll out through other parts of your office and maybe look at some of the other pictures. On this wall right outside your office in your secretary, Millie Cunningham's office, Governor, is what appears to be a pencil sketch of Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy and what looks like Caroline.

DISALLE: Yes. A friend of mine, Bob Terhune, was overseas and saw this in Paris and picked it up, knowing of my great fondness for the President. He brought it back. And it's an excellent sketch of all three – the President and Jackie and Caroline. I think it's about as

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natural a picture as I've seen of them.

MACK: On the opposite wall, over here, is a group of four pictures. One of them is of the President by himself and two others—well, we in the business could call them two shots of you and the President Kennedy.

DISALLE: Well, this top photograph was taken when he came out to Columbus in January, 1962 for the birthday dinner that we were holding. Down below that is a picture taken at the Mansion before he was nominated when we were discussing strategy with reference to his nomination. The third picture was taken the day he was out here in January of '62; it was raining and snowing and you can see that he was in the midst of a snow flurry at the time and it's a rather unusual picture because it shows him waving but one of his eyes is covered by his hand. It's a very, very attractive picture of the President and it shows him looking more and more like an Irish pixie than anything I've ever seen.

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MACK: Were you ever able to explain to him why you picked such bad weather for your birthday party? [Laughter]

DISALLE: No, but certainly it was an unusual evening. It had been raining so heavily and just before his plane landed it stopped and after his plane landed it began all over again.

MACK: It did slack up for just about twenty minutes as I recall.

DISALLE: That's right, just long enough for the plane to get in.

MACK: Governor, in the reception area of your office is what I consider a very beautiful portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy.

DISALLE: This, I think, is my favorite portrait of him and he autographed it for me and I'm very happy to have it. But I think it gives both of them a very fine quality in appearance and this is, I think, the first picture I received from him after he was elected and inaugurated.

MACK: And, as I recall, that is also signed to you, is it not?

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DISALLE: Yes, by the President alone.

MACK: Governor, what is perhaps your fondest memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

DISALLE: Oh, I don't think I could pick one among so many. You know, he had such a tremendous sense of humor. We enjoyed so many laughs together that I was fortunate enough to be visiting him at the White House on several occasions immediately after some of the various crises that occurred. Right after the Bay of Pigs was one. Another time was just after he got back from Vienna when he first met Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev]. I recall so vividly some of his comments on those occasions.

But I enjoyed campaigning with him. You wouldn't think you could enjoy being with someone from 7:30 in the morning until 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night in the back of an automobile. This was the day after he debated Richard Nixon the first time. We started out in Painesville at 7:30 in the morning. He had gotten in about 2

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or 2:30 that morning and we'd covered northern Ohio, going through Cleveland, Loraine, Elyria, Akron, North Canton, Canton, and he was in fine fettle that day and it was one laugh after another. For example, at one time someone was presenting him with a vase of flowers and the little girl was all excited and she tipped it over. I got all of the water out of the vase and he got the flowers, and I was kidding him about it and he said, "Well, that's the way it

ought to be. After all, who is the candidate for President?" But he had just a great and quick sense of humor and he could poke fun at himself as well as at others and do it good naturedly and in good taste.

MACK: Governor DiSalle, thank you very, very much for taking time out of a busy day.

DISALLE: Thank you, Ken. I've enjoyed this very, very much.

MACK: On the day one year after a day of infamy, the assassination date of John Fitzgerald

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Kennedy, we've been looking back to see what type of man he was and see reactions of a man who was close to him over many years, former Ohio Governor, Michael V. DiSalle.

This has been "Insight," another in a continuing series of programs produced and recorded by the WVTM Radio Department of News and Public Affairs. Reporting, this is Ken Mack, thanking you for joining us and inviting you to be with us again next Sunday evening at this same time when once again WVTM Radio presents "Insight." This program was pre-recorded.

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