

Memo of meeting with John F. Kennedy, August 15, 1960. On August 15, 1960, Democratic presidential nominee John F. Kennedy visited ER at her Val-Kill home. Kennedy came seeking Mrs. Roosevelt's support in the general election. She had been a prominent supporter of rival Democrat Adlai Stevenson. In this memo of their conversation, ER assesses Kennedy and displays her keen political instincts. Eventually, she endorsed JFK and campaigned for him.

R. This is now in ER's copy for me.

KENNEDY

August 15, 1960

I had my talk with Senator Kennedy yesterday - an hour alone during lunch, and at the very end he called in Mr. Welton for a few minutes before going over to address the Golden Ring Clubs.

I want to report that, ^{at} the airport he was met by a very large group and the enthusiasm was great. I did not go myself to meet him but sent Edna and David. Edna circulated among the people and asked them if they were Democrats or just curiosity seekers. Almost invariably they answered that they were Democrats. The enthusiasm at the big house was tremendous, and I think he made a very good speech on the expansion of Social Security.

I did not ask the Senator for any definite promise as I felt that this would be almost impossible. But I told him that he needed the Stevenson votes in New York and California and that he had to carry these two states or he would be in trouble because he probably could not hold the Solid South. This was brought about by his telling me that he had not realized before the fragmentation of the Democratic party and the fact that the majority in Congress did not give the leadership that holds the party together, and that since my husband's time there was no unity. The newly elected governor of Florida came in to see him and said: "I want you to know that I am a conservative, I am against integration, and I am for the Right-to-Work law". Whereupon Kennedy said: "Why don't you join the Republicans?"

I gather that his understanding of the difficulties of the campaign that face him have matured in a short time. He told me that he had phoned Adlai this past week and asked him to set up a small group to do research in the area of foreign policy. I told him that this was not enough, that he would have to give the people who were for Adlai the assurance that they were working together. All of us know that unless Adlai felt their philosophies were similar he would not accept the Secretary of State post. Therefore, I felt that he had to prove by working in the campaign and appearing on the same platforms, and perhaps by references and quotation, that there was close cooperation. Bringing both Chester Bowles and Adlai in whenever he could would mean that these were the men he was counting on for advice. He agreed and said he would try to do this.

We then spoke about Chester Bowles and he said he had asked Chester not to resign. I had had a letter Saturday from Chester in which he gave me his reasons for resigning. He said he thought Adlai was the best man for the Secretary of State post, that he (Chet) would rather be in the executive than in the legislative branch, so he would rather work for Kennedy than be a candidate for Congress.

Kennedy likes Chester Bowles and finds him easy to work with. He also seems to realize that his own mind is so quick he may perhaps be hasty in making decisions, and he needs Adlai there.

Now, I have no promises from the Senator, but I have the distinct feeling that he is planning on working closely with Adlai. I also

had the feeling that here was a man who could learn. I liked him better than I ever had before because he seemed so little cocksure, and I think he has a mind that is open to new ideas.

I agreed that I would go on the citizens committee here as honorary chairman, and that I would do what I could here. Whether I would take any trips or become more involved would depend on whether or not I was happy with the way he progresses as a person in the campaign.

My final judgment now is that here is a man who wants to leave a record (perhaps for ambitious personal reasons as people say) but I rather think because he really is interested in helping the people of his own country and mankind in general. I will be surer of this as time goes on, but I think I am not mistaken in feeling that he would make a good President if elected.