

00:00.000 --> 01:10.000

<v President Kennedy>: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. In a sense, it is important and desirable that people feel this way about politics and politicians in a free society. A politician's power may be great, and with this power goes the necessity of checking it. But the fact remains that politics has become one of our most abused and neglected professions. It ranks low on the occupational list of a large share of the American politician. Yet it is this profession, it is these politicians who make the great decisions of war and peace, prosperity and recession, the decision whether we look to the future or the past. In a large sense everything now depends upon what the government decides.

01:11.000 --> 02:04.200

<v President Kennedy>: Therefore, if you are interested, if you want to participate, if you feel strongly about any public question, whether it's labor, what happens in India, the future of American agriculture, whatever it may be, it seems to me that governmental service is the way to translate this interest into action, that the natural place for the concerned citizens is to contribute part of his life to the national interest. Like many decisions in life a combination of factors pressed on me, which directed me into my present profession.

02:04.302 --> 03:31.000

<v President Kennedy>: I was at loose ends at the end of the war; I was reluctant to begin law school again. I was not very interested in following a business career. I was vitally interested in national and international life and I was the descendant of three generations, on both sides of my family, of men who had followed the political profession. In my early life, the conversation was nearly always about politics. My father, who had directed much of his energy into business, nevertheless, as the son of a Massachusetts state senator, was himself interested in politics. My mother, also, shared the interest. Her father had been mayor and a United States congressman, and both my great uncles were state senators and my father's first

cousin was mayor of Brockton, Massachusetts.

03:31.302 --> 05:08.000

<v President Kennedy>: For all the Irish immigrants, the way up in Boston was clearly charted. The doors of business were shut. The way to rise above being a laborer was through politics. So they all went into it, everybody in the Kennedy or the Fitzgerald family. But I never thought at school and college that I would ever run for office myself. One politician was enough in the family and my brother Joe was obviously going to be that politician. I hadn't considered myself a political type and he filled all the requirements for political success. When he was 24 he was elected as a delegate to the Democratic convention in 1940 and I think his political success would have been assured. I recall that I was a freshman at Harvard when Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. was elected to the United States Senate. I don't suppose I ever thought, in those days, that I would some day run against him and defeat him for the Senate. I suppose there's some freshman in college, today, who isn't aware that he's probably going to end up by defeating me sometime.

05:12.000 --> 06:14.500

<v President Kennedy>: My brother Joe was killed in Europe as a flyer in August 1944, and that ended our hopes for him. But I didn't even start to think about a political profession until more than a year later. When the war came I didn't know what I was going to do, and in those days . . . and for those few months after the . . . and I didn't find it oppressive that I didn't know. In '44 and '45 I had been in the hospital for about a year recovering from some injuries I received in the Pacific. Then I worked as a reporter covering the San Francisco United Nations conference, the British election, and the Potsdam meeting, all in 1945.

06:14.501 --> 08:11.200

<v President Kennedy>: So there never was a moment of truth for me when I saw my whole political career unfold. I came back in the fall of '55 sic - 1945 after Potsdam, at loose

ends, and the head of the Boston Community Fund asked me to help him during the drive. That was Mike Kelleher, who later became my finance chairman when I ran for the Senate in 1952. <Unclear> Kelleher or his assistant meant making speeches for the first time in my life, and they seemed to be acceptable. The first speech I ever gave was on "England, Ireland, and Germany: Victor, Neutral, and Vanquished." It took me three weeks to write and was given at an American Legion Post. Now, the speech went rather well. A politician came up to me afterwards and said that I should go into politics, that I might be governor of Massachusetts in ten years. Then I began to think about a political career. I hadn't even considered it up until then. Later in the fall, James M. Curley was elected mayor of Boston and a congressional seat became vacant. This was the eleventh congressional district, which my grandfather had once represented in Congress 50 years before.

08:12.000 --> 10:37.500

<v President Kennedy>: Suddenly, the time, the occasion, and I all met. I moved into the Bellevue Hotel with my grandfather and I began to run. I have been running ever since. Fascination began to grip me and I realized how satisfactory a profession a political career could be. I saw how ideally politics filled the Greek definition of happiness: "A full use of your powers along lines of excellence in a life affording scope." I might have gone to law school, which so many were doing after the dislocations of war, and become a member of a big firm and unclear or a divorce case, or been involved in an accident suit. But how can anyone compare that in interest with being a member of Congress, with trying to write legislation on foreign policy or on the relationship between labor and management. Or I could have taken part in an antitrust case against a great corporation, a case which might have taken two or three years. How can you compare in interest that job with a life in Congress where you are able to participate to some degree in determining which direction this nation will go? Even reporting has its disadvantages, and that was the first profession I tried.

10:38.000 --> 11:50.500

<v President Kennedy>: A reporter is reporting what happens; he's not making it happen. Even the good reporters, the ones who are really fascinated by what happens and who find real stimulus in putting their noses into the center of action. Even they, in a sense, are in a secondary profession. It's reporting what happened, but it isn't participating. I had in politics, to begin with, the great advantage of having well known name and that served me in good stead. Beyond that, however, I was a stranger in Boston to begin with, and I still have a notebook, which is filled page after page with the names of all the new people I met back there in that first campaign.

11:52.000 --> 12:34.500

<v President Kennedy>: I had several disadvantages as a candidate. I was an outsider, really. I was living in a hotel. I had never lived very much in the district. My family roots were there, but I had lived in New York for ten years, and on top of that I had gone to Harvard, not a particularly popular institution at that time in the Eleventh Congressional District. But I started early, in my opinion the most important key to political success. In December, for the primary election next June . . . [end of first tape].

13:12.000 --> 15:03.500

<v President Kennedy>: My chief opponents, the mayor of Cambridge and Mayor Curley's secretary, followed the old practice of not starting until about two months before the election. By then I was ahead of them. In 1952 I worked a year and a half ahead of the November election, a year and a half before Senator Lodge did. I am following the same practice now. I believe most aspirants for public office start much too late. When you think of the money that Coca-Cola and Lucky Strike put into advertising day after day, even though they have well known brand names, you can realize how difficult it is to become an identifiable political figure. The idea that people can get to know you well enough to support you in two months or three months is wholly wrong. Most of us do not follow politics and

politicians. We become interested only around election time. For the politician to make a dent in the consciousness of the great majority of the people is a long and laborious job, particularly in a primary where you don't have the party label to help you.

15:04.000 --> 17:32.000

<v President Kennedy>: Once I did start I worked really hard, trying to get the support of the non-professionals, who are much more ready to commit themselves early than the traditional politicians. In my opinion, the principle for winning a ward fight or congressional fight, really, is the same as winning a presidential fight, and the most important ingredient is a willingness to submit yourself to long, long, long labor. Halfway through that campaign the Mayor of Cambridge offered me the job of his secretary if I withdrew and he won. I refused. Finally, after a tough fight, I won with a generous margin. And almost immediately, politics lived up to the great expectations I had for it as a profession. The first thing I did in Congress was to become the junior Democrat on the labor committee. At the time we were considering the Taft-Hartley Bill. I was against it, and one day in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, I debated the bill with a junior Republican on that committee who was for it . . . his name was Richard Nixon. And now, here we are debating again, 14 years later. Why does a politician continually raise his sights and leave a job that represented complete satisfaction at one time for a higher position? Part of the reason lies in the normal desire to move ahead, the motivation that helps move the world; perhaps a more important part lies in the recognition that a greater opportunity to determine the direction in which the nation/world will go lies in higher office. The scope and power are bigger.

17:32.500 --> 18:15.000

<v President Kennedy>: When I was in the House of Representatives I was especially interested in my district, in the future, in the navigation, for example, of Boston Harbor. I still am. But in the House you are one of 435 members. You have to be there many, many years before you

get to the hub of influence, or have an opportunity to play any role on substantive matters. After I'd been in the House for six years, I made up my mind that there was a greater opportunity to function in the United States Senate. I prepared to move on.

18:16.000 --> 19:45.000

<v President Kennedy>: In the same way, during my years in the Senate I have come to understand that the presidency is the ultimate source of action. The Senate is not. It may have been in 1840, but it isn't today. Take the Labor Bill, for instance. In 1958 I had worked for two years on that bill. President Eisenhower made one 15 minute speech, which had a decisive effect on the House. Two years versus one 15 minute speech. I worked for a year on a proposal to send an economic mission to India. The State Department opposed it. It was defeated in the conference. I worked for a year on a bill to change the Battle Act to allow greater economic trading with countries behind the Iron Curtain, such as Poland. The President withdrew his support on the day of the vote. We were defeated by one vote. All of the things that you become interested in doing, the President can do and the Senate cannot, particularly in the area of foreign policy.

19:45.500 --> 21:52.200

<v President Kennedy>: There is, in fact, much less than meets the eye in the Senate, frequently. The administration controls, in my opinion, today and in the administration it's the President who controls and who can affect results, while we play in the vital issues of national security, defense, and foreign policy a secondary role in the United States Senate. The President, all public officials, today face serious and sophisticated problems unheard of in the nineteenth century, where political leaders dealt for several generations with the problems of the development of the west, slavery, tariff, and the currency. Today, politics has become infinitely complicated. One day we deal with labor law, the next with significant matters of foreign policy, the following day with fiscal and monetary policy, the next day with the problems of which new weapons

should we put our emphasis on. With the new complexity and intensity of political problems, I think the politics and politicians have changed. The "hail-fellow, well-met" extrovert is passing from the political scene. A good many of the politicians I know in the Senate are quiet and thoughtful men, certainly not extroverts.

21:54.000 --> 23:12.000

<v President Kennedy>: A successful politician today must have and communicate a sense of intelligence and integrity and he must be willing to work. Money helps, of course. It is desirable for anyone to have financial security in whatever they do, but it is certainly not an essential for success. The fact is that people with private resources who have succeeded in politics are comparatively rare. Most of them do not go into politics, and for some who have money has been a hazard. In any case, this is not the decisive question and I think our history has demonstrated this very clearly. Franklin Roosevelt had some personal resources. Lincoln did not. They were both successful political leaders and great presidents.

23:17.000 --> 26:25.000

<v President Kennedy>: In looking back, I would say that I have never regretted my choice of professions, even though I cannot know what the future will bring. I hope all Americans, men and women, regardless of what may be their chosen profession, will consider giving some of their life to the field of politics. Winston Churchill once said: "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all of the other systems that have been tried." It is certainly the most demanding; it requires more from us all than any other system. Particularly in these days when the watch fires of the enemy camp burn bright, I think all of us must be willing to give some of ourselves to the most exacting discipline of self-government. The magic of politics is not the panoply of office. The magic of politics is participating on all levels of national life in an affirmative way, of playing a small role in determining whether, in Mr. <v William> Faulkner's words, "freedom will not only endure, but also prevail."

[recording ends]