



Madison, Wisconsin, October 23, 1960. WHI IMAGE ID 8619

ship. In 1961, Nestingen left the mayorship to join the Kennedy administration as undersecretary of the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Vel Phillips: In 1960, thirty-six-year-old Vel Phillips was the first woman and first Black person to serve on Milwaukee's Common Council. Phillips would later become the first Black person to serve in Wisconsin's judiciary, as well as the first woman and first Black person to be elected Wisconsin's secretary of state. Though initially skeptical of Kennedy, Phillips eventually became a key ally, accompanying him to an NAACP rally days before the 1960 Democratic National Convention.

Charles "Chuck" Spalding: A writer, investment banker, and longtime Kennedy friend originally from Lake Forest, Illinois, Chuck Spalding dedicated much of the winter and spring of 1960 to helping Senator Kennedy win votes in western Wisconsin.

Karel Yasko: In 1960, Karel Yasko was the forty-eight-year-old Wisconsin state architect. He enjoyed two unique and memorable interactions with Senator Kennedy, whom he admired greatly. Later, Yasko served as the architect for the General Services Administration and credited President Kennedy for his impact on architecture and the arts.

This was a direct challenge to Humphrey, which the Minnesota senator was smart enough not to accept. New Hampshire's primary on March 8 was the first of the sixteen primaries that year, and it offered Humphrey certain defeat. (Jack would end up running more or less unopposed there, clearing 85 percent of the vote.)

A reporter asked Kennedy whether he considered himself the underdog in Wisconsin.

"Well, there are several polls," Jack said, cherry-picking the one that best served his purpose. "There's a poll I saw yesterday that was taken last fall by a magazine here which showed me running behind. I've seen some polls that I would say we're quite close, is my guess."

"Your own polls show you ahead," the reporter piped in.

"No," Jack insisted, "in fact they show me very close."

"The Harris poll—" tried another reporter, but Jack interrupted, dodging the question.

"I never attempt to put myself in any category," Jack said. "I would say it's a very tough fight for the obvious reason I've given. In the same way I would consider Senator Humphrey having a very tough fight if he were to come into New Hampshire. I am going into a state which is adjoining Minnesota."

Had he been pressed further on the Harris poll, Jack's claims of underdog status would have been put into doubt. And being viewed as such was essential for Jack. It was better to look like a loser and come out a winner rather than the other way around. And being the alleged underdog gave the Kennedy campaign more firepower when enlisting the support of donors and volunteers. Frontrunners risked growing complacent; underdogs didn't.



Vel Phillips arrived at the Pfister Hotel shortly after Kennedy's announcement. Duties at city hall had kept her from coming earlier, which was just as well, as some of her colleagues were beginning to accuse her of being too partisan. But this was politics, was it not? Didn't siding with your preferred candidates come with the territory?

FACING: Vel Phillips and John F. Kennedy, date unknown. PHILLIPS FAMILY ARCHIVE

Vel eyed the room to see that most of the fanfare had ended. The room had been bustling with reporters and well-wishers just minutes before, but now only a few folks remained, including the newest presidential candidate, who strolled her way from his place across the lobby.

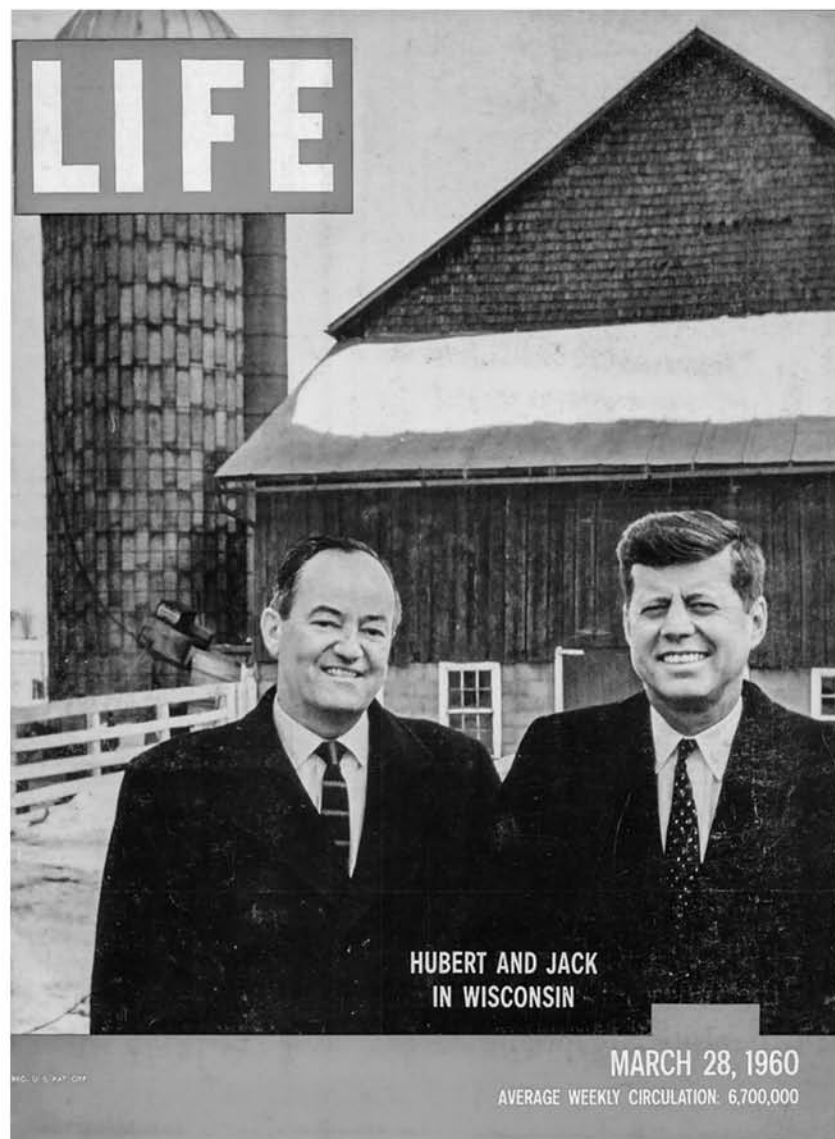
"Vel, it is so good to see you," Kennedy smiled. "I'm so glad you were able to come."

"Well, I'm sorry I couldn't have been here sooner," Vel said.

"I want you to know how very much I appreciate what you've done in coming out and endorsing my candidacy," Kennedy said. "I know you have done so under a great deal of pressure and strain, and Pat [Lucey] has told me some of the things, personally, that you have had to go through. And I want you to know how much I appreciate it."

Kennedy was right. Vel had paid a personal price for publicly supporting him. Humphrey's longstanding fight for civil rights was well known throughout the Black community. Vel's endorsement of Kennedy had hindered Humphrey's candidacy and imperiled her relationship with Humphrey, a man she considered a friend. Her decision alienated closer friends, too, including Frank Wallick, who had been a key advocate in advancing





The cover of *LIFE* magazine featuring Hubert H. Humphrey and John F. Kennedy, published March 28, 1960. STAN WAYMAN/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/SHUTTERSTOCK

morning, as Hubert shivered on his cot in the back of his bus, he'd heard a plane cutting across the sky. Whether it was the *Caroline* or not was irrelevant. In Hubert's mind, every plane belonged to Jack. To the surprise of his campaign aides, he allowed his exasperation to get the better of him. "Come down here, Jack," he'd hollered, "and play fair."

Humphrey's smile and receding hairline wouldn't much matter in the grand scheme. When *LIFE* magazine's nearly seven million readers peered at the cover of the March 28 issue from newsstands across the country, all they'd see was Jack Kennedy anyway. Years later, a humbled Hubert Humphrey would take stock of all the lessons he'd learned that winter and spring in Wisconsin. Among them was that style could be just as important as substance.

"I think I saw in the Wisconsin primary the great personal attraction of Kennedy to the young people," Humphrey would reflect. "I also think that I saw where a man's personality, his demeanor, his sense of being gallant, went over beyond the issues because he was close enough to being right on the issues so that you couldn't really get to him."

Humphrey concluded that Jack Kennedy simply possessed a "great personal magnetism." It was a magnetism that caused the press to swoon. While the news-obsessed Jack was known to agonize over bad press, bad press for him was rare.

"To this day it astounds me," Humphrey said. "You could go to the A&P store. You could go to any grocery store. You'd pick up a woman's magazine—there would be a wonderful article, good pictures, nice things, always, everything. From the *Foreign Affairs Quarterly* to the family magazine. It didn't make any difference what it was, it was a good, solid piece."

Humphrey's press was never so flattering.

"I would be interpreted as being brash or talkative or this or that," Humphrey recalled, "and [Kennedy] was always interpreted as being intelligent and delightful and meaningful and so on. And, needless to say, it would bother me."

Humphrey found Kennedy's political strategy self-serving: the man relied too heavily on his image and overlooked policy in the process. While Humphrey labored on the minutiae of his senatorial work, Jack focused on putting himself in positions to improve his political fortunes. But to call him on it would risk further tarnishing Humphrey's own image. As Humphrey learned the hard way, Jack Kennedy was like Teflon—nothing stuck.

Some factory workers were barely eighteen, while others were old enough to be their fathers (and in some cases were). Some had graduated from high school, while others had bypassed diplomas for a good-paying job at the plant. The plant employed thirty-two hundred employees—nearly a tenth of the city—and could churn out thirty thousand tires a day.

It was a hell of an operation, Ted knew. And if Jack could win these men over and prove to the hardworking, blue-collar factory workers of western Wisconsin that he was their candidate, then it was lights out for Humphrey.

“I’m John Kennedy,” Jack continued, “candidate for president . . .”

Ted stood to his brother’s right, his beige suitcoat in contrast to Jack’s long, dark overcoat.

“How you doing?” Ted smiled. “Here. Take some literature about Senator Kennedy . . .”

A slow afternoon drizzle was slapping the pavement around the plant, misting the notepads of the dozen or so journalists who’d joined the Kennedy campaign during one of the final swings through the state.

It was only three o’clock, but already Jack had covered about one hundred and thirty miles that day. They’d started early with a morning press conference in Minneapolis. Then off to a high school in Hudson, Wisconsin, then New Richmond and Ellsworth and several other small towns, and finally, the tire factory in Eau Claire. All things considered, it had been a pretty good day. During lunch, Jack had spoken to an enthusiastic crowd in a Methodist Church basement, followed by an impromptu street corner speech from atop a car. This deep into the primary, most of the speeches were beginning to sound the same. But Jack always made it seem as if he were saying the words for the first time, as if those gathered to listen were hearing something new. That was the trick: make everyone feel like an insider. Take the personal approach to campaigning, and let it ripple out.

Campaigning wasn’t rocket science, though some of Jack’s pollsters might’ve preferred that it be viewed in a more scientific light. Polling helped, of course, most notably by helping the campaign press the issues that mattered most to the people who needed to hear them. Such polling had lured them back to the ninth district, standing outside the tire factory in the rain.

To win Wisconsin—and the United States at large—they needed to build a coalition much like Roosevelt had built back in the 1930s: one that included the blue-collar vote, the white-collar vote, the urban vote, the rural vote, the minority vote, organized labor, conservative Catholics—hell, anyone they could get. If they got their crack at Nixon in the general, then every demographic was necessary, vital even, as history would soon prove.



Senator Kennedy, with Jackie Kennedy seated to his right, speaks to diners at Skogmo Cafe in Chippewa Falls, February 26, 1960. *EAU CLAIRE LEADER-TELEGRAM* (FORMERLY THE *EAU CLAIRE DAILY TELEGRAM*) AND FRED STEFFENS

Freeman, and the others had gathered. When Philleo entered the room, everyone began asking for his assessment. Philleo admitted that he liked what he was seeing. But as they all knew, the true picture wouldn't develop until the Milwaukee returns.

Philleo lingered alongside Humphrey, hopeful that proximity alone might comfort the old brawler. He knew Humphrey's entire political life had led him to this crucial moment. From his early days as Minneapolis mayor, then onto the Senate, it all came down to this. Hubert and Muriel sat side by side on the hotel couch, maintaining joviality as best they could.

At the start of the evening, it was all smiles and laughter.

But then the winds changed direction yet again.



Less than a mile away, Jack Kennedy sipped soup on the third floor of the Pfister Hotel.

The suite was crowded with Kennedy's inner circle: Jackie, of course, and Jack's sisters Jean and Eunice, but also Dave Powers, Kenny O'Donnell, and Madison mayor Ivan Nestingen, who was peering out the window at the city far below. Lake Michigan was all but invisible in the dark, but Ivan knew it was out there somewhere, the waves crashing relentlessly against the shoreline.

The phone kept ringing with some new detail to be analyzed. What did the high turnout mean? How many precincts remained? What on earth was taking so long in Milwaukee? They monitored the information as best they could, but in the end, all that mattered was the final tally.

It is easy to think that important history is made only in important places, like the halls of Congress or on battlefields. Yet sometimes history is made in more modest places, too: a third-floor hotel suite, for instance, in Milwaukee. A documentary film crew, led by director Robert Drew, had set up shop in the hotel suite to capture the moment. Drew's camera was positioned across the room, recording every whispered word and expression. Ivan did his best to avoid the camera, though it was hard to steer clear of its frame.

Ivan watched as the director kept his focus mainly on Kennedy. Jack managed to ignore Drew's camera and hold its attention all at once. If



State Democratic leaders greet Senator Kennedy at the Madison airport in October 1960. From left to right: Madison mayor Ivan Nestingen; Marvin Brickson, head of the Madison Federation of Labor; Senator Kennedy; Governor Gailord Nelson; and state party chairman Pat Lucey. WHI IMAGE ID 45434

tonight went as planned, Robert Drew would capture a new front in the battle for the White House—the first glimpse of a newly emboldened Democratic frontrunner.

Ivan couldn't help but feel partially responsible for whatever happened next. He had initially been hesitant about encouraging Jack to run in the Wisconsin primary, but after seeing the man in action during the Proxmire campaign, Ivan knew Jack had a chance. The longer Ivan followed Kennedy's career, the more he felt the senator owed it to the country to run. Sure, Kennedy was young and privileged, but those problems could be overcome with the right ground game. That was where Jerry Bruno had come in: fighting like some rabid dog to nail down every vote. Jerry, Pat, and Ivan himself—when coupled with Kennedy's team—had created the conditions for success.