

*The*  
PRESIDENTIAL  
RECORDINGS  
  
JOHN F. KENNEDY

➔➔➔➔ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO* ➔➔➔➔

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SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

Timothy Naftali and Philip Zelikow  
*Editors, Volume Two*

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Jill Colley Kastner  
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Ernest May

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Philip Zelikow and Ernest May  
*General Editors*



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tral Cuba. The flight was to be over Cuba for only 12 minutes but would come close to some identified SAM sites. The risks were high. The last time the CIA had photographed this part of the island was August 29 and new SAM sites might have been constructed since then. The President approved this mission.<sup>3</sup> The U-2 would make its direct over-flight on October 14.

### Wednesday, October 10, 1962

John McCone made an unscheduled visit to the White House on October 10. The Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) had just met with the House Appropriations Committee to discuss James B. Donovan's negotiations with Fidel Castro on the Bay of Pigs prisoners. McCone found some congressional uneasiness about these negotiations. Newspapers on Tuesday had carried front-page stories on Donovan's mission, a potential partisan political issue. Donovan was running for the Senate against the Republican Jacob Javits in New York. It was reported that the 1,113 prisoners were expected back in Miami by the weekend.<sup>1</sup> The DCI also wanted to brief the President on low-level photographs of the cargoes on the Soviet merchant ships headed for Cuba. Several ships carried crates that photoanalysts believed contained IL-28 bombers. This was the first hard evidence of the delivery of weapons that might be construed as offensive in character.

Kennedy did not tape this meeting; however, from McCone's detailed summary it is clear that the President was disturbed by these new photographs.<sup>2</sup> As he had done when the first U-2 photographs of SAM sites were developed, Kennedy asked that this material be withheld from the rest of his administration. His argument was that the domestic political situation was such that any leak of the information about possible bombers would reduce his independence of action. McCone argued against strict restriction and gained the President's approval to reducing the circle of the informed to the President's key advisers and those intelligence officers required to give expert analysis.

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3. Gilpatric "Notes on a Meeting with the President," 9 October 1962, described in *FRUS*, 11: 17.

1. "Final Parley Set on Cuba Captives," *New York Times*, 9 October 1962. James Donovan returned from Cuba on October 11 empty handed.

2. Memorandum on Donovan Project, Meeting 10 October 62, John McCone, *FRUS*, 11: 17-19.

"We'll have to do something drastic about Cuba," McCone recorded the President as saying. Kennedy expected a new operational plan for Cuba from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the week of October 14.

At some point during the day, the President called an old friend, Senator George Smathers of Florida. Like McCone, Smathers was a prod on the subject of Cuba. The President, Smathers later recalled, "always identified me with pushing, pushing, pushing."<sup>3</sup> The immediate reason for the telephone call was that the President had signed Smathers's Self-employed Pension Bill. The President so disliked his friend's bill that he signed it without ceremony.

### *Time Unknown*

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*I just don't want these guys around; particularly if this Cuban thing ever works out . . . So, we've got to get them out tomorrow night. Then everybody goes home, and, shit, nobody knows what the hell's going on.*

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### **Conversation with George Smathers<sup>4</sup>**

Wanting to avoid the imminent override of a veto he had hoped to deliver, Kennedy consented to sign H.R. 10, the Self-employed Pension Bill, only hours before its deadline, and three days before the adjournment of the 87th Congress. The bill's chief Senate sponsor, George Smathers of Florida, had warned the President on September 28 not to consider a pocket veto; Smathers pledged to keep Congress in session past the signing deadline to prevent just such a possibility. Though President Kennedy objected to the legislation on the grounds that it would reduce federal revenue by \$100 to \$125 million and would largely benefit wealthy attorneys and physicians, he signed it, reluctantly, and called Smathers afterward to break the news. There would, however, be no signing ceremony for this bill and Kennedy would ask Senator Smathers not to broadcast news of the signing that evening.

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3. Cited in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), p. 530.

4. Dictabelt 50.3, Cassette M, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection. George A. Smathers was a Democratic U.S. senator from Florida, 1951 to 1969.

Despite their differences over this bill, Kennedy and Smathers enjoyed a warm relationship marked by frequent golf outings and White House breakfasts. Ostensibly a courtesy call to inform Smathers of the late-breaking news, this conversation would meander, as well, into a discussion of the James Meredith–University of Mississippi crisis, the Donovan negotiations with Castro, and the lingering showdown over the handful of appropriations bills yet to be completed.

**President Kennedy:** [ *Unclear* ] Smathers that I'd do what you want to do, and I just signed that goddamned bill.<sup>5</sup>

**George Smathers:** Did you really?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, in spite of the fact that they tell me there isn't a quorum present up there. I just figured that a hundred were going to show—in spite of what Drew Pearson said.

**Smathers:** I was getting ready to say, that article by . . . Drew Pearson's going to be mad at you.<sup>6</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Well, I know that. He is going to be mad at me, but that won't be new.

**Smathers:** Yeah. That's right, well he's such a bad guy . . . But you really signed it?

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, I signed it.

**Smathers:** Well, I think that's fine. Actually, Mr. President, I—

**President Kennedy:** No, no, no . . . don't tell me how good it is.

**Smathers:** No, I'm not going to tell you how good it is; I'm going to tell you, politically, it'll be good. It'll be good.

**President Kennedy:** What about . . . can you get those guys out of there tomorrow night?<sup>7</sup>

**Smathers:** I think so. It's Russell now.<sup>8</sup>

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5. The Self-employed Pension Bill, H.R. 10, also known as the Keough-Smathers Bill.

6. Reference to a Drew Pearson column published that morning in the *Washington Post*, discussed in greater detail, below (see Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round: Sen. Smathers Puts Up Roadblock," *Washington Post*, 10 October 1962, p. D11).

7. A reference to the Senate and to Congress in general. On the heels of the first national elections during the Kennedy administration, the President is anxious to see Congress adjourn and head home for the last few weeks of the campaign.

8. Richard Russell, Democratic U.S. senator from Georgia, was in the middle of a fight with House conferees over the Department of Agriculture Appropriations Act, one of a handful of appropriations bills not yet completed. Jamie Whitten, Democratic U.S. representative from Mississippi and chair of the House Agriculture Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, had suggested that Senate amendments not previously considered by a House

**President Kennedy:** I know, but, God, can't we tell him we'll give it out of the contingency or we'll do it with something else? I mean isn't there something that we can do with that goddamned Jamie Whitten?<sup>9</sup>

**Smathers:** I know it, it's awful. But that's the . . . everything else is soluble—quickly . . . except that. I—

**President Kennedy:** Well, if we get everything else, I just don't want these guys around; particularly if this Cuban thing ever works out, we want them out of there.

**Smathers:** That's right.

**President Kennedy:** So, we've got to get them out tomorrow night. Then everybody goes home, and, shit, nobody knows what the hell's going on.

**Smathers:** Exactly . . . exactly.

**President Kennedy:** There's nothing that can be done with those god . . . Come on. You'd think those southerners . . . I thought you southerners were thick as thieves?

**Smathers:** Well, we are! We are! But not . . . but Jamie doesn't want to go home. The difficulty is—

**President Kennedy:** He doesn't want to go home?

**Smathers:** He doesn't want to go home. He wants to stay up here.

**President Kennedy:** That's a—

**Smathers:** And Dick Russell doesn't want to go. He told me this afternoon, he said . . . I said, "Dick, can't we get this damn thing settled?" And he said, "Well, not before next week." I said, "Well, Jesus Christ!" And he said, "Well, frankly, I'm not much interested in going home anyway."

**President Kennedy:** God, that's a selfish fucking attitude, isn't it? With a lot of guys running for reelection?

**Smathers:** Yes, it is . . . yes. I know it. It's terrible. But many southerners don't want to go home. This is a problem. Sam Ervin said,<sup>10</sup> "I've lost my enthusiasm for going home, now with this Mississippi thing."<sup>11</sup>

**President Kennedy:** He thinks he's going to get a lot of—

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committee or sent down from the President were to be excluded from the conference report and final bill. Angered on the basis of principle and by the removal of a \$1.6 million amendment for a peanut-marketing research facility in Dawson, Georgia, Russell intended to keep Congress working until he got his way.

9. See note 8.

10. Samuel J. Ervin, Jr., was Democratic U.S. senator from North Carolina, 1954 to 1975.

11. Reference to the crisis at the University of Mississippi following James Meredith's attempts to register from 25 September to 1 October.

**Smathers:** Sikes<sup>12</sup> and Herlong, all of these fellas ought to be running, and they're here.<sup>13</sup> Paul Rogers talked to him a little while ago . . . he's not going home!<sup>14</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Why? He doesn't want to listen to all that moaning?

**Smathers:** Well, they don't want to listen to all that moaning and they don't want to be put in a position where they've either got to jump on you or, you know, get with Barnett.<sup>15</sup> And they don't figure that either one is too good at the moment. So they're just trying to let it cool.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, yeah.

**Smathers:** And this is what I think is wrong—

**President Kennedy:** Of course, I think they ought to be able to get some middle position . . . just regret this—

**Smathers:** That's right. Well, the southern governors did very well.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah . . . yeah.

**Smathers:** They did very well.

**President Kennedy:** I think, why don't they just keep quiet about it and just say "Well, it's a regrettable incident—period." That's all I'd say if I were a southerner.

**Smathers:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Just say "I regret what happened, this is not very . . ." you know, and then just go on to something else. Shit, nobody's—

**Smathers:** Well, that's what I'm saying. We handled it all right—

**President Kennedy:** Then nobody knows whether you regret that Meredith entered or you regretted that troops were used or you regretted bloodshed or you regretted that you knew me.

**Smathers:** That's right. I deplore—

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

**Smathers:** —extremism. See, we handled it well in Florida, and it could have been handled with a little . . . exercised a little judgment and—

**President Kennedy:** Leadership.

**Smathers:** —and leadership, it could have been handled elsewhere. And then I'd move on.

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12. Robert L. F. Sikes was a Democratic U.S. representative from Florida, 1941 to 1979, and senior member of the House Appropriations Committee.

13. A. Sydney Herlong, Jr., was a Democratic U.S. representative from Florida, 1949 to 1969.

14. Paul G. Rogers was a Democratic U.S. representative from Florida, 1955 to 1979.

15. Ross Barnett, segregationist governor of Mississippi from 1960 to 1964, refused to register Meredith at Ole Miss, touching off a riot and President Kennedy's deployment of federal troops.

**President Kennedy:** [ *Snickers.* ]

**Smathers:** Thompson said he was pretty disturbed about the fact that . . . you . . . didn't take his word for it . . . said Thompson.<sup>16</sup> We're going to finally find the southern [ *unclear* ] that is going to say, "Thompson talked to me about going to the President." We haven't found it yet. And Drew Pearson gets you right over the barrel.

**President Kennedy:** What about Drew? He was pretty mean this morning, wasn't he?<sup>17</sup>

**Smathers:** God, he was nasty. Jesus!

**President Kennedy:** That comes out of "my shins are black and blue"?

**Smathers:** That's right. I eat your food and then I spit all over you and kick you in the shins . . .

**President Kennedy:** He doesn't know about all those votes you gave us?

**Smathers:** That's right. He doesn't want to know about them. He's going to stay with those four fellas, or eight fellas.

**President Kennedy:** Estes? He's got Estes.<sup>18</sup>

**Smathers:** Estes and Albert.<sup>19</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, Estes feeds him that stuff.

**Smathers:** Yeah, I know it.

**President Kennedy:** Estes and Albert.

**Smathers:** That's right.

**President Kennedy:** And Wayne.<sup>20</sup>

**Smathers:** And Wayne gives it to him. Wayne's up here raising hell again.

**President Kennedy:** Is he? About what? His public works?<sup>21</sup>

**Smathers:** Yeah.

16. Reference to William "Bill" Thompson, president of the East Coast Railway, who had recently joined President Kennedy, Smathers, and Bill Dale of the First National Bank of Orlando for a cruise aboard the presidential yacht, *Honey Fitz*. All three of Kennedy's guests were the subject of an acerbic Drew Pearson column in the *Washington Post* that morning and were cited as evidence of Kennedy's predilection for treating his political enemies better than his political allies.

17. Pearson, "Sen. Smathers Puts Up a Roadblock." "The interesting thing," Pearson noted, assaying the Kennedy-Smathers relationship, "is that the more the debonair Senator kicks him on the legislative shins, the more his old golfing partner comes back smiling."

18. Estes Kefauver was Democratic U.S. senator from Tennessee, 1949 to 1963, and the Democratic vice-presidential nominee in 1956.

19. Albert A. Gore was Democratic U.S. senator from Tennessee, 1953 to 1971.

20. Wayne Morse was Republican U.S. senator from Oregon, 1945 to 1952; Independent U.S. senator from Oregon, 1952 to 1955; and Democratic U.S. senator from Oregon, 1955 to 1969.

21. Public works projects for Oregon removed during conference committee on Interior and Other Agencies Appropriations Act at the behest of Representative Michael Kirwan, the chair of the House conferees.



**President Kennedy:** Jeez! We got that all fixed!

**Smathers:** I know, but he's still mad, and still talking about it, and he came in and made a big speech yesterday about how he told you. . . . He said, "I said, Mr. President, I'm not going to permit this to happen. I'm not going to let our Democratic party . . ." Have you ever heard anything so repulsive in your whole life?

**President Kennedy:** I know it. He never says . . . It doesn't matter to me, and here we got it all fixed with Kirwan and I signed his goddamned bill,<sup>22</sup> and I called him up and said he'll let it go on the Supplemental.<sup>23</sup> No, no, he wants to . . . he's sore at me because I took away his issue.

**Smathers:** That's right. That's right.

**President Kennedy:** But he comes . . . oh well.

**Smathers:** But he's making some more over here.

**President Kennedy:** Another speech?

**Smathers:** Yeah. He's got a speech on . . . I don't know what the hell it was. Something about the District of Columbia.

**President Kennedy:** Wait until he hears about H.R. 10.

**Smathers:** Oh, he'll die. He'll die. Well, I'm delighted you signed it, and—

**President Kennedy:** Well, don't say anything about it for a while. Until they get out of there tonight. OK?

**Smathers:** I won't say anything.

**President Kennedy:** OK. It'll come out soon enough.

**Smathers:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Gore will be coming in [*unclear*] up from Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

**Smathers:** Yeah. That's right.

**President Kennedy:** OK.

**Smathers:** Thank you a million.

**President Kennedy:** Righto.

**Smathers:** I really appreciate it, and best of luck.

After speaking with Smathers, the President called the House sponsor of the pension bill.

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22. Michael J. Kirwan was a Democratic U.S. representative from Ohio. See "Conversation between President Kennedy and Mike Mansfield," 8 October 1962, for additional detail on the Kirwan-Morse confrontation.

23. Supplemental Appropriations Bill.

24. President Kennedy had promised to inform Senator Gore of his intentions regarding H.R. 10.

*Time Unknown*

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*Oh, God. You are the greatest . . .*

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**Conversation with Eugene Keogh<sup>25</sup>**

Congressman Eugene J. Keogh, the third-ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee, had championed and cosponsored the Self-employed Pension Bill with Senator George Smathers.<sup>26</sup> After signing the bill quietly on October 10 and first phoning Smathers with the news, the President then telephoned Keogh, most likely to deliver the same news. What follows is a fragment of their conversation, in which Keogh endorses the Communications Satellite Act, signed by President Kennedy several weeks earlier on August 31, 1962.

**Eugene Keogh:** [*Unclear*] this communications satellite.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, God. You are the greatest . . . I just called you and Smathers. You, obviously have a direct line to each other, or else you've got one down here.

**Keogh:** No, I just cut him off to talk to you.

**President Kennedy:** Did you? Well . . .

**Keogh:** I do commend it though.

**President Kennedy:** I said to Smathers, "Don't—

Before the end of the day, the President had a conversation with an unidentified official about James Meredith's public criticisms of the racial composition of the troops sent to maintain order in Oxford, Mississippi. On October 9, the Army had begun withdrawing large numbers of troops from Oxford.

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25. Dictabelt 49.1, Cassette M, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

26. Eugene J. Keogh was Democratic U.S. representative from New York, 1937 to 1967. Keogh retired in 1967 after 30 years in Congress, though he was only 59 years old at the time.

*Time Unknown*

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*[A]pparently, we had no Negro troops on patrol.*

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**Conversation about James Meredith<sup>27</sup>**

On October 9, 1962, in a handwritten statement, James Meredith asserted that the U.S. Army had “reseggregated” the troops that remained on campus. As Meredith wrote: “The first two days of my stay at the University . . . the military units looked like American units. All soldiers held their positions and performed the task for which they had been trained. . . . Since that time the units have been reseggregated. Negroes have been purged from their positions in the ranks.” That same day, Secretary of the Army Cyrus Vance stated that when troops were “first employed in the Oxford area Negro soldiers were not used on patrols in order to avoid unnecessary incidents.” On October 6, when the situation was stabilized, African American troops were again used “in the performance of all normal functions in the units in all operations.”

**President Kennedy:** Now today, James Meredith charged that the Army was segregating them and I wondered what had been done with that discussion I had Friday night.<sup>28</sup> Do you know anything about it?

**Unidentified:** No, sir. Except that Cy[rus Vance], you know he’s out at the hospital, as you probably heard, at long last. Cy, he called me just a few minutes ago and said that he talked with your brother about this.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** And that he wants to put out a statement. Now what the facts are, apparently, we had no Negro troops on patrol.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** They were in the units, but they have been returned to their full duties within the last days, or day or so, something like that. We’re trying to find out exactly what Meredith said and we are fixing up a statement for Cy to put out, describing exactly what the situation is.

**President Kennedy:** Well, you better let me have it.

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27. Dictabelt 50.2, Cassette M, John F. Kennedy Library, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

28. “Meredith Charges Army Segregated Oxford Force,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1962.

**Unidentified:** All right.

**President Kennedy:** As I say, I assume that after I talked to him Friday, he began to put them back in again.

**President Kennedy:** The only thing is [Deputy Attorney General Nicholas] Katzenbach told me that on the patrols it was just the white soldiers . . .

**Unidentified:** . . . Yes . . .

**President Kennedy:** . . . so I didn't know what happened with that discussion I had had Friday.

**Unidentified:** No, Cy didn't tell me about talking with you, but I assume that's when they did it because I know . . .

**President Kennedy:** . . . Well, as of yesterday, they were still just white in the patrol cars.

**Unidentified:** I see.

**President Kennedy:** So I'd like to find out. You better call Cy again and ask him what he did after Friday, number one. Tell him, number two, to be careful what he says because evidently Katzenbach said yesterday it was just whites. And then let me know what the statement's going to be before you put it out.

**Unidentified:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** OK. Thanks.

**Unidentified:** Right. Bye

The President had at least one Mississippi-related meeting this day. Between 5:26 and 5:50 A.M. he met with the U.S. Army chief of staff, General Earle G. Wheeler. Kennedy did not tape it.

The White House was turning its attention ever more to the midterm elections. At 8:00 P.M. the President left for a two-hour visit to Baltimore. Thursday, October 11, would be a half day in the Oval Office. Following meetings with the U.S. ambassador to Guinea, William Attwood, and the journalist John Gunther the President signed the Trade Bill and left for New York City. From Thursday afternoon through Sunday night, October 14, the President would campaign in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.