

Preface

John Dennis Lane was born in 1921 in Norwalk, Connecticut. He came to Washington to attend Georgetown University, from which he graduated with a BS degree in 1943. He also received a law degree from Georgetown Law School, following service in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II. From 1949 to 1952 he served on the staff of Senator Brien McMahon, Democrat of Connecticut, first as executive secretary and then as administrative assistant.

Senator McMahon (1903-1952) had first won national attention as head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, successfully prosecuting criminal cases and frequently arguing before the Supreme Court. He won election to the Senate in 1944 and sponsored the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, which created the Atomic Energy Commission and asserted civilian control over nuclear energy and weapons. Senator McMahon then chaired the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. He also served as Democratic Conference secretary. Highly regarded by the national news media, he withstood potshots from the crusading anti-Communist Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and won reelection to the Senate in 1950.

When President Harry Truman said that he would not seek another term in 1952, Senator McMahon announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. Although the nation had not yet elected a Catholic as president, McMahon became a serious contender until he was diagnosed with an inoperable tumor. He died on July 28, 1952, shortly after hearing his name placed in nomination at the Democratic convention in Chicago from a hospital in Washington.

John Lane recounts Senator McMahon's brief but notable Senate career and his bid for the presidency. While on the Senate staff, Lane also came to know Senators John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, and during the Kennedy administration he served on a special presidential commission to study regulatory commissions. He was a partner in the Washington law firm of Wilkes, Artis, Hedrick & Lane, and chaired several committees of the American Bar Association, for which he also reviewed the qualifications of presidential nominees to the federal judiciary. From 1991 to 1992, Lane was president of the Federal Communications Bar Association, and during the administration of President Bill Clinton he worked in the White House vetting judicial nominations.

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980); *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991); *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001); *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford, 2005), and *Our Constitution* (Oxford, 2006). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.