

# My Days with JFK The Kennedy Sense of Humor Is Remembered by Celebrezze



**WHITE HOUSE CHATS**—President Kennedy frequently called his HEW secretary, Anthony J. Celebrezze to his office for advice on social legislation, revealing to the Cleveland cabinet member Kennedy's keen humor, courage and compassion. (UPI Photo)

By DICK McLAUGHLIN

It is Thursday, Nov. 21, 1963 . . . HEW Secretary Anthony J. Celebrezze looks over his calendar for the day and finds it is fairly routine . . .

He is to meet with Sid Eisenberg of Cleveland (now dead) about scholarship matters. In the evening he is to address the Democratic Women's Club of Montgomery County about the HEW legislative program . . .

And the next day his President will be in Dallas and give his life away while his wife scrambles across the car, on hands and knees . . . Big D . . . Big Death . . .

"President Kennedy's office desk was always neat," Celebrezze said. "He would sit in his rocking chair in another corner from the desk, near a sofa, and talk to whoever was meeting with him.

"He was a great doodler at cabinet meetings. (Ted Sorenson would always pick the doodled sheets up and carry them away."

Then Judge Celebrezze got to thinking about President Kennedy's sense of humor as well as his courage . . .

"I REMEMBER that he was very anxious to get Medicare passed," Celebrezze recalled.

"We were sitting in his office one day and he made a suggestion about changes in the proposed Medicare legislation that he thought were needed.

"Mr. President, if you make those changes you are going to have nothing but chaos," Secretary Celebrezze told him.

He half-smiled and said: "Tony, let's have chaos."

"And there was chaos," said Celebrezze, "But three years later we got the legislation passed."

Celebrezze remembered that President Kennedy was interested in education legislation that involved primary and secondary schools. But he was strong for separation of church and state.

"One day he asked me if there was any way to draft a bill (concerning parochial school aid) that wouldn't be a violation of the First Amendment.

"The only one that can help us is St. Jude," Celebrezze said. (St. Jude is the heavenly gentleman you apply to when all else fails.)

"You're a practical politician—get him on our side," President Kennedy laughed.

"We must have enlisted St. Jude," said Judge Celebrezze. "A bill was passed later that was upheld by the courts."



ST. JUDE

**NEXT: Assassination day.**