LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The LBJ Library Oral History Collection is composed primarily of interviews conducted for the Library by the University of Texas Oral History Project and the LBJ Library Oral History Project. In addition, some interviews were done for the Library under the auspices of the National Archives and the White House during the Johnson administration.

Some of the Library's many oral history transcripts are available on the INTERNET. Individuals whose interviews appear on the INTERNET may have other interviews available on paper at the LBJ Library. Transcripts of oral history interviews may be consulted at the Library or lending copies may be borrowed by writing to the Interlibrary Loan Archivist, LBJ Library, 2313 Red River Street, Austin, Texas, 78705.

# LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW XIX

## PREFERRED CITATION

For Internet Copy:

> Transcript, Lawrence F. O'Brien Oral History Interview XIX, 4/22/87, by Michael L. Gillette, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

For Electronic Copy on Diskette from the LBJ Library:

> Transcript, Lawrence F. O'Brien Oral History Interview XIX, 4/22/87, by Michael L. Gillette, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

AND

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Lawrence F. O'Brien

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Lawrence F. O'Brien of New York, New York, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on September 18, October 29, October 30, December 4, December 5, 1985; February 11, February 12, April 8, April 9, June 25, July 24, July 25, September 10, September 11, November 20, November 21, December 17, December 18, 1986; April 22, April 23, June 18, June 19, July 21, July 22, August 25, August 26, September 23, September 24, November 3, November 4, December 10, December 11, 1987 at New York, New York and Cotuit, Massachusetts and prepared for deposit jointly in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recordings to which the transcripts relate shall be in the possession of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and shall not be available for use or review of or by any source during my lifetime and for a period of time thereafter ending with the 10th year anniversary of the date of my death. At such time, access to the tape recordings by researchers shall be permitted but only for the limited purpose of background use, and researchers may not cite, paraphrase, or quote therefrom under any circumstances.

(3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in the transcripts shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts without my express prior consent in each case, but no other quotations from the transcripts shall be published, except with my express prior approval in writing.

(4) Copies of the open portions of the interview transcripts, but not the tape recordings, may be provided by the library to researchers upon request, subject to the terms, conditions and restrictions set out herein.

(5) Copies of the interview transcripts, but not the tape recordings, may be deposited in or loaned to research institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library or the John

Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, subject to the terms, conditions and restrictions set out herein.

Signed by Lawrence F. O'Brien on April 5, 1990.

Accepted by Donald Wilson, Archivist of the United States, April 25, 1990.

Original Deed of Gift on file at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705.

ACCESSION NUMBER 92-30

INTERVIEW XIX

DATE: April 22, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. O'Brien's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 3, Side 1

G: Let's start with some of the legislative developments in 1967. The Republicans gained forty-seven House seats in the 1966 elections, and the ratio in the Senate was sixty-four Democrats to thirty-six Republicans, so you still had a significant advantage there.

O: Yes, my recollection is that the forty-seven seat loss in the House in an off-year election would not be that unusual, if you go back historically to off-year elections, particularly off-year elections following a strong presidential victory two years earlier. The pendulum swings.

A loss in the 435 member House of forty-seven was disturbing. The statistic does not reflect what happened in that off-year election. Those forty-seven were members of the House who had supported the Great Society and President Johnson. I recall a fellow who was a freshman congressman from Iowa. He had come to Washington in 1964 in part because of the big Johnson win. He supported us 100 per cent over two years. In several instances his support was not helpful to him politically back home. He and a number of other congressmen in that category were defeated in the off year. So when you say a loss of forty-seven, you were close to a loss of forty-seven votes for your legislation.

On the Senate side, I believe that we lost four in 1966. That did not indicate we were going to have increasing difficulty in the Senate.

In the House, however, it became a problem quickly, and it was reflected in the head counts. As we discuss 1967, you will find as the months went by that our difficulties seemed to increase. The climate was changing, and that was due to the growing concern regarding Vietnam. You had a handful of members who were registering concern. That number grew as time went on, and it became particularly a problem when you had staunch supporters of the President's Vietnam policy expressing concern. So you have the situation of the drop in the membership in the House. You had the growing concern regarding Vietnam. That was the way the Ninetieth Congress kicked off for us.

But the President was sensitive to this, not sensitive to the anti-Vietnam feeling that would grow rather rapidly during the course of 1967, but to that specific loss on the House side. He wanted to keep the momentum going in his legislative program. Even though a major portion of the Great Society program had been enacted into law, there

were still elements that required further action to which he had a commitment. It was interesting to see how this manifested itself in the White House. The President became awfully concerned about the depth of involvement of just about everybody with the legislative program--in the departments, the agencies, and on the White House staff. As 1967 unfolded, more and more the President was demanding involvement of people who heretofore had not had any role in the legislative program or any direct responsibility for it. And so many members of the White House staff found themselves involved to a far greater degree than they had been. There are the people outside of congressional relations in the White House. That was part of the President's attempt to keep the momentum going. That was the climate of 1967, as we moved into the early stages.

G: What about your own involvement in the legislative program? Did that tend to slack up in 1967?

O: The hour-by-hour involvement was not as intense as it had been over the years from 1960. I had stayed totally involved with the program through 1966. At the end of 1967, I found that it became more and more difficult to balance responsibilities in the Post Office Department and my continuing responsibilities regarding the legislative program. However, it was not to cause me to step away from it or remove myself to any degree.

In 1967 I became a staunch advocate of postal reform, and that became a major project. It brought about the creation of a blue ribbon commission by the President [President's Commission on Postal Organization] to investigate procedures that could be undertaken to correct the major problems of postal service. The effort became one of heavy involvement on my part. I launched this, and it caught on nationally. Ultimately, in part, it was enacted in the Nixon Administration. That involvement obviously was time-consuming. Additionally, I had a legislative item on the agenda involving postal rates, which became a sticky situation. Pressure groups were in heavy action; it took a lot of doing to have some rate adjustments ultimately enacted.

Beyond that, the President was beginning to focus on the election of 1968, and I found that I was in conversations with him over 1967 more and more. Those conversations involved evaluations and planning and projections that would lead into 1968 in the primaries. It was a full plate. A number of White House staff people were brought in by direct assignment and direct involvement into the promotion of the program.

G: One of the press articles that I read in 1967 described your reduction in your own legislative activity in saying that this was really beginning to show, because the legislative program was bogging down as a result of a weakening of leadership. Would this be an accurate characterization, do you think?

O: Weakening of leadership from the executive branch?

G: Yes.

O: I don't know as I would characterize it as a weakening of leadership, and I don't suggest that the President's effort was to compensate for my lessening involvement on a daily basis in the legislative program. I think it was more a reflection of the President's concern when he reviewed the election results and what that would mean in creating additional difficulties in the House. For example, the twenty-one day rule in the House was repealed. Now, it's fair to say that because of the change in the make-up of the House, we had, by new assignments to the Rules Committee, a solid majority on the Rules Committee. Consequently, the loss of the twenty-one day rule would not adversely impact on our ability to move legislation. But it is also a fact, however, that we were not giving away the twenty-one day rule and that we were disturbed we were faced with this repeal when such effort had been expended in the first instance to bring it about. That's an indication that the
leadership in the House was softening a little bit in the intensity of their involvement.

All through my experience with the Congress, while we dealt with the leadership in the House and Senate, the so-called whip system in the House never was an effective system. Our encroachment into the rights and privileges of the House, as we discussed in the past, had reached a point where we had a very easy relationship that brought about free exchanges of views, voting habits, head counts. [But] I never felt it allowed us to demand of the leadership in the House that they reorganize the whip system. That's an internal House operation. Each region would select its own whips. When it came to head-counting over the years, it varied considerably from district to district.

That began to show in 1967, that weakness in the system. You're saying, "Things aren't moving as they used to move or as rapidly." You'd get the feeling that some of the leaders are getting a little tired, that this forty-seven member loss is really affecting them. All that was part of a cloud that was gathering, and would reach a point toward the end of that year where that cloud--Vietnam--was diverting the attention that you wanted them to direct to the domestic program. I would run into it. It became more and more a case of going in to discuss, say, truth in lending and finding the conversation diverted to, "What are we going to do about Vietnam?" Vietnam was impacting more and more as the weeks went by.

G: One question on the whip system: to what extent was it related to the personnel? One of the notes said that it had been somewhat effective or useful under Albert, but that by 1967--

O: Well, it would have to do with the leadership, but the fact of the matter is that McCormack, Albert, [Hale] Boggs, and others had fulfilled to the fullest their commitment to promote the New Frontier and Great Society programs. There was no way that we in the White House could quarrel about these fellows. At times you wondered if you weren't getting overly aggressive, if you weren't going to antagonize these people. Some of them might say, "Wait a minute. You've neglected to read the Constitution recently--the separation of powers." You always had to be sensitive to that. McCormack was devoted and directly involved; to a lesser degree some of the whips.

But with Carl's commitment to the program, and indeed, McCormack's--I want to be fair to both these fellows, but I also want to emphasize both played key roles in the success of our programs--they would become concerned about their own whips. They would be constantly on the backs of whips. They never felt that they should dictate who the whips would be. There's a plus factor and there are brownie points being a whip. You had fellows, when they would be called by Albert, saying, "We've got to move quickly, check out your people and give me the count," that he'd have to do it more than once. And oftentimes he and McCormack would do most of it themselves.

Now, I would say with all of that, however, it was a far more active whip system than it had been historically. It was a paper tiger, historically. At least some of these fellows were responding. Some of them might grumble and say, "I've got other things to do," but they'd respond to Albert and McCormack and Boggs. But to suggest that it was an automatic pressing of the button, you'd be deluding yourself. Perhaps we became more sensitive to the whip system than we had [been] in the past, because we had lived with it and things had gone well. Now things aren't moving as rapidly as they used to, and you have the feeling that there's been a slowing down. Obviously we in the White House are trying to determine why. And then you're apt to say, "That whip system isn't effective. It ought to be reorganized." And are you going to say to the leaders, "Fire some of the whips and tell your colleagues that these are the whips that you want"? You're not going to push the Congress that far, from the executive branch.

G: Did you have discussions with the President with regard to your increased difficulties on the Hill?

O: No, because they weren't that discernible. This is something that gradually began to penetrate. As I said, the best way to describe it is that through the whole New Frontier-Great Society, which now has been enacted, 90-plus per cent of it, it was a rarity to have any element of that massive program interrupted on that Hill by Vietnam. Now, more and more you'd have people you were dealing with say, "Oh, by the way. I'm getting constituent mail," and, "The President ought to bomb them off the face of the earth," or "The President ought to figure a way out of this," or "The President--" whatever. It was all being reflected by what was occurring in the streets. You had the riot in Detroit, and the riot in Newark, and all of this was just a matter of growing concern.

It was there, and I began to find it as I went along. I can't recall specifically a conversation which probably affected me on the Hill regarding Vietnam. There was a conversation I had with Mayor [Richard] Daley, initiated by him, where he expressed great concern about Vietnam, where it seemed to be tending, what it was causing by way of disruption and growing public concern. You wouldn't find a greater hawk than Dick Daley or a more loyal Democrat or a loyal Johnson supporter on the Hill or anywhere else--a man who did not have to be concerned about his political power being eroded by Vietnam. But he, as a loyal Democrat and a loyal Johnson supporter, became concerned to the point where he had a very candid conversation with me and said this was a growing

disaster and this was going to be devastating to the Democratic Party. "We've been candid with each other over the years, and I just want to tell you."

I reported that to the President and sent him a memo. I don't recall the memo specifically, but I know this, it impacted on me, because I said, "If Richard Daley has become that concerned about Vietnam, you've got to realize that this is not some passing cloud. This is something that has become of deep and abiding concern to a lot of people." And these weren't doves who were concerning me, but people who had been loyal supporters. They weren't saying they were going to leave Johnson or publicly denounce the policy. But in political terms they were saying, "Something has got to happen, because this is headed toward political disaster."

G: This view also seemed to be echoed on the Hill with people even like Richard Russell who would say, "Get in or get out. We ought to go all out or cut back."

O: Yes. People were flailing about. Russell would be a good example, but there were others: Danny Inouye, people like that, who were loyal supporters and had no problem with the policy, who were believers in the policy. But they're beginning to get more and more of this expression of concern of people in their states, and they're thinking more about it. But who has the answer? Who has the answer?

Again, it's the loneliest office in the world, the presidency of the United States. With the so-called experts on foreign policy when the chips are down, they are quick to say, "Mr. President, it's your decision, and I wish you luck."--prepared, of course, to Monday-morning-quarterback in the event you fail. That is the reality of the presidency under our system.

It's tough in terms of attitude and attention directed to Vietnam. It kept growing, and it becomes a problem if your attention is diverted in the midst of head counts.

G: Was Fulbright's opposition in 1967 noticeably more active?

O: Yes, that's my recollection. First of all, Bill Fulbright was an articulate, bright and able member of the Senate. He enjoyed an excellent reputation. His concerns seemed to grow as the situation seemed to deteriorate. It became disturbing to the President; he was very sensitive to Fulbright. He had Lady Bird and Mrs. Fulbright socially engaged, trying to keep Fulbright contained. Fulbright was a man of conviction, and he was not trying to destroy Lyndon Johnson; there was nothing personal about it that I observed in any conversations that I had with Fulbright. He was a man of conviction and he was persuaded that we were on the wrong path. And any socializing or attempts to recall old friendships were not going to deter him.

G: Before we get into some of the other issues concerning Vietnam that year, I want to ask you to go into the Hardesty operation. This was a new development, I gather, in 1966.

O: Yes. Bob Hardesty was on my staff at the Post Office Department, and he had a close association with Ira Kapenstein. There was a need to try to broaden our activities in terms of feeding the Congress, which is a term I think we used occasionally. We want these fellows to insert in the ***Record*** favorable comments about the legislative program. We want them to be making statements in their constituent newsletters that are favorable to the program. That ultimately resulted in Bob becoming full-time involved in this project, which was an inherent part of congressional relations. You're trying to funnel this in a systematic way and ensure that your friends in the Congress are cooperating. They are being provided with the tools, and the tools would be the material. You couldn't expect a friend on the Hill to be doing his own research to come up with a statement or insert. Let's get him these favorable comments and these potential inserts and whatever else we can give him, as part of serving him. Then you can depend upon him to make good use of all of this.

Then you realized that Bob Hardesty, who started as a one-man band, had to have additional assistance, and you had to have the fullest possible cooperation and involvement of departments and agencies. Bob found he needed more manpower. But he also needed the basic material, and this you expected and instructed the departments and agencies to provide. So then we started to place more and more emphasis on this in our meetings with the congressional relations people, with the cabinet, and the rest. Bob knew what he needed by way of organization and cooperation. He was frustrated on many occasions because he wasn't getting the degree of cooperation that he was entitled to. He and I would discuss that, and then I would, again, do some kicking around.

But all of that was part of our endeavor to broaden congressional relations. It was another significant element of congressional relations; it was a meaningful element, if you could get the cooperation on the Hill and from those who had responsibility in the executive branch. It was a well-managed, well-conducted activity, and it was a significant contributing factor to our congressional relations effort. I could sympathize with Bob when he felt that he was not getting the fullest degree of cooperation, because Lord knows I had experienced that from the time I became first involved. You were never totally satisfied, and you always had to come up with ideas that would keep these people with their feet to the fire, with an understanding that the White House was totally knowledgeable about what they were doing and to what degree they were doing it, and how effective they were and how cooperative they were. But with all of that, it became an integral part of congressional relations, a very important part of it.

G: Did it require some delicacy to get members of Congress to, say, give a speech or incorporate--?

O: Well, it would be the same as getting a member of Congress to support you, particularly when a relatively friendly member was being asked to vote with you or support you on a legislative proposal that was not overly popular in his district or state, and could even be politically harmful to him. Well, with Bob you had a solid list of people who would cooperate in this area. But, as I said, the key to it was not to have Eddie Boland or

somebody say, "Oh, gosh, you can depend on me. I'll be more alert to inserts in the ***Record***, and I'll make sure I make speeches that include favorable comments," and then in a particular struggle at a given time, "I'll be involved, and in addition to my vote you're also going to have my active involvement," and then walk away and leave it up to him to find out just how that is done. It wasn't that sensitive. It was the feeling that you could use all you could get together. There was a placement opportunity for all of it, and so the frustrating part of it was to find that you were running short of material while you had these willing fellows waiting to hear from you.

G: Wasn't the material actually speeches for the most part? I mean, wouldn't Bob and his group go ahead and write--?

O: Yes, they did. You do speeches, but you often did inserts or brief statements; you liked to get that ***Record*** filled. That was probably the easiest part of it, easiest from the member's point of view. You have a legislative struggle ongoing, and that member--I just mentioned Boland; he's an old friend of mine, he's still in the Congress, and it wouldn't bother Eddie a bit if you said to him, "Would you put this in the ***Record***?" Or, "Will you put this in a newsletter," or "Will you issue a press release giving your views on this particular matter?" even if that did not relate to Eddie's area of interest or his committee assignments. But Eddie is sitting there, and if he doesn't hear from the White House for a month or two, he's probably forgotten about this commitment. But he has no problem having somebody funneling this material in to him. You could also go as far as preparing full-blown speeches for some of these people.

The frustration was not finding people willing to participate, but finding that you haven't heard from the Interior Department in a month, and yet you've made six calls over there saying, "Listen, this legislation is coming up and we have people who can help promote it and get it in newsletters and elsewhere, but what do you expect Bob Hardesty to do? Write it for you?"

G: So ideally the departments themselves would do the writing, and it would just be transmitted, or maybe edited, shaped up, through--

O: Yes, that's right, because it was just too big a project. It's no different than our efforts overall in congressional relations. We have a right to expect these cabinet members to be devoting a great deal of their time and attention to the programs. Do they think a handful of us sitting in the White House are going to get it done for them? That was why we never had a cabinet meeting that the legislative program wasn't on the agenda. The emphasis of the President and all of us was on the legislative program, and this became an integral part of the promotion of it, the advocacy of it. And I expected from those people the same degree of attention and involvement, when Bob Hardesty and his people were asking them, as I would expect when I'm talking about their efforts on the Hill and their weekly report. That White House staff was a very small staff, and our constant effort was to engage as many as we could in the executive branch in promotion of the program. And there wasn't a member of the cabinet who wasn't totally aware that the first priority was

that legislative program.

Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

G: [Were some] departments better than others about cooperating with this--?

O: I think some departments probably felt a little differently about it. I think it had a lot to do with the head of the department. You would find that a department head who had political acumen would be as sensitive as we were to the legislative program. If he did not have that background, it was possible that it took a while for it to fully penetrate. You can't divorce politics from all of this. An Orville Freeman or a Stu Udall, they're politicians, and nobody had to explain it to them. But you had to educate some of the others, and the education wasn't that difficult, once they got lectured at a cabinet meeting by the President. The question would be directed right to that department and that cabinet member, and he'd have to explain to me before his colleagues and to the President why there hadn't been greater progress on the particular item. He'd have to be specific: who he had talked to; who had talked to whom, what were the assistant secretaries doing, how much time did they spend on the Hill--it never ended. So nobody could say, "I wasn't aware of the intense interest of the fellow in the Oval Office and my responsibility."

G: There's a story that one member of Congress was giving one of these speeches that had been written for him by Hardesty's group, and two copies were stapled together inadvertently, and the fellow didn't know that and gave the same speech twice; just in the middle of it started over: "Mr. President," and went all the way through it again. Have you ever heard that?

O: I don't know about that one, no.

(Laughter)

G: Were there some snafus in connection with this?

O: I don't recall. The frustration in that area had to do with the people who were supposed to be working with you in the executive branch--no matter what you handed a friend up there, he went with it. You had to use judgments and obviously not overextend yourself, but it was doable and it filled a void. You don't want to overlook any possibility and that, of course, went to the White House staff. Everybody became part of congressional relations.

G: The operation was considered relatively confidential, though, I gather, that this was not something that was advertised or--

O: We tried to maintain it that way; we kept it informal in terms of the White House. I mean, you couldn't look at a White House table of organization and say, "Here's a group that is feeding the Congress," for obvious reasons. Nor did you have it in formal context on the

Hill. These were people our friends on the Hill knew were part of our operation in the White House. We wanted to avoid any media focus on this activity, because it could be misconstrued and it could be embarrassing to people on the Hill.

You were dealing with friends. You're not going to somebody who is a borderline case and doesn't have a very good voting record with you.

G: Was there also an element of responding to the criticisms that other members had made--

O: Oh, of course.

G: --that this was a way to get out a rebuttal?

O: That was an integral part of it. You have to remember, this would start as dawn broke every morning, when Jake Jacobsen got through combing the ***Congressional Record*** and identifying every reference that would indicate support for the program, or favorable expressions regarding the President. He would then hand deliver to the President this ***Congressional Record***, marked so he could go to these various sections, and he maintained a daily overview. Adverse comments, of course, alerted us immediately, because you would try to get to rebuttal as rapidly as you could.

G: Was the operation limited to the Congress, or was this sort of research help prepared for people outside the Congress?

O: Occasionally outside. If you were, for example, on the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill, you had noncongressional sources. But the focus was basically on the Congress.

G: Yes. But you're speaking of educational groups or--

O: That's right, in that instance, where we had this unique alliance of the NEA and the Catholic educators.

G: What about the press? Was there any effort to get favorable stuff to them that friendly reporters might use?

O: No. No, we handled the press basically the same way throughout the years. My people were free to do backgrounders as long as they advised me of them. That was not an easy area because after all, you would be considered by most of the press as being self-serving. But you were more apt to await press contact, which was frequent. Obviously, there were members of the press in contact with you in one way or another as the program progressed, and we made every effort to disseminate our periodic reports on progress and our year-end report on the record of accomplishment. Our effort was to do as much of that as we possibly could and hope the reaction would be favorable.

I always recall one of Washington's top writers, Pete Lisagor, who wrote that there was minimal accomplishment in the Congress, that our program was not moving well. Then at the end of the session he was good enough to call me and say, "I misjudged this whole thing, and I'm going to go do a series of articles on real accomplishment this year, contrary to my articles during the year and my projections." But that was a rarity.

Through 1966 you didn't have a great problem, because the record was there. It was hard for anybody to find fault with it. The record was so impressive there was a point where some members of the media said, "This is a great record." Then some said, "Congress is nothing but a rubber-stamp." Some chose that course. Rather than to compliment the administration, they were apt to berate the Congress for passing so much legislation; there was something wrong with that, too.

G: Let's look at some of the Vietnam issues in 1967. There was early on a disagreement between Secretary of Defense [Robert] McNamara and General [Earle] Wheeler over the effectiveness of the bombing.

O: Yes.

G: My impression is that the bombing became increasingly an issue in 1967.

O: Yes, it did, and I think those who were opposed to the escalation of the bombing took great comfort in the differing views of the Secretary of Defense and Wheeler as to the effectiveness of the bombing. I don't recall that McNamara's testimony was the reverse of Wheeler's testimony and contentions. It was a matter of degree, where Wheeler was saying they were extremely effective and McNamara was saying, "I'm not claiming they're that effective." But the fact is there was a differing view as to the degree of effectiveness.

At all the cabinet meetings I attended during that period, reports were upbeat, and progress was detailed. And it was always progress. You could become rather a cynic yourself, sitting at the cabinet meetings. I guess I've mentioned it before, but I remember telling Henry Hall Wilson, who was on my staff, after one cabinet meeting, that I wondered how many thousands of bridges there must be in North Vietnam, because the hundreds of bridges each week I heard about that were disappearing, you wouldn't think there would be a bridge left. So I think I was sitting there taking this in and wondering myself about the accuracy of a lot of it. But it was all well-meaning, and there was a feeling things were going well, that we were having elections over there at some stage, that we were going to ensure that democracy was in place in South Vietnam, that there was light at the end of the tunnel. And it was a long time before that attitude began to change.

G: What was the President's reaction to these continued reports of progress? Did he show any skepticism in cabinet meetings?

O: He would listen attentively and perhaps pose two or three questions. But you have to

understand cabinet meetings that I saw in both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Johnson had more cabinet meetings than Kennedy, and they were more structured. The agendas were carefully prepared and back-up material was provided to the President, and the agenda was pretty much adhered to. How long do cabinet meetings last? An hour or two. And each person, or most everyone at the table, would have something to report. When it got to the Defense Department you had a summary from Bob McNamara, a progress summary. It would include some specifics such as the number of bridges or whatever. But I don't recall where we got into a prolonged, detailed discussion of Vietnam. It was more a feeling that the members of the cabinet ought to be updated, but there was no need to discuss substantively ongoing Vietnam matters with the cabinet.

G: I gather that the Tuesday luncheons were a forum much more for Vietnam than--

O: You mean the leadership--?

G: No, the Tuesday luncheons with McNamara and [Dean] Rusk and--

O: Yes. And rightly so, because, you know, at a cabinet meeting you'd have the secretary of agriculture, the postmaster general, the secretary of the interior and what have you, and this is not their area of expertise, but inasmuch as they are members of the cabinet, then they ought to be given an update or a briefing.

G: Senator Joseph Clark introduced a sense-of-the-Congress resolution to limit the air war over North Vietnam and also to limit the number of American troops.

O: Yes, he used early on in that session an authorization or appropriation, I guess, to see if he could tack on some limitations--number of troops and that none of the monies could be used for bombing in the North. It didn't get very far, and there was a Mansfield substitute. But at that point, it's interesting to note, you're talking about January, February, of 1967?

G: Yes.

O: Was it Wayne Morse, Clark? And there was a third senator.

G: I think Gaylord Nelson.

O: Yes, it was Nelson, who became involved in trying to establish a sense of the Senate on escalation. In that early stage of that Ninetieth Congress, you didn't have any takers. It was limited to those three, and Joe Clark particularly, I think, tried to pursue this further on in the legislative process. My recollection is on the House side there was little or no effort to try to limit or contain the President. So at those early stages of the Ninetieth Congress, the President was still in good shape with the Congress regarding Vietnam.

G: LBJ wrote secretly to Ho Chi Minh proposing direct talks, and this offer was rejected. Do you recall that? Did you have any--?

O: No, other than knowing that it occurred.

G: Then after the rejection there was bombing and mining of the navigable rivers.

O: Well, that was after the rejection when the bombing escalated. There was a feeling that Lyndon Johnson had turned even more hawkish, and there again, while you might have discussions of this on the Hill and expressions of concern, those concerns weren't being manifested by any actions or pronouncements that would be adverse. But the doves became a little more concerned than they had been. They interpreted that as meaning that Johnson had chosen the route of full escalation; that what Russell and others have suggested was about to happen. To this day people suggest that the failure of the Vietnam policy had to do with the failure to bite the bullet. You were trying to achieve an objective without the commitment.

G: Martin Luther King became more active in opposition to the war.

O: That certainly was a contributing factor to the escalation of the anti-Vietnam attitude. Once he succeeded in taking the civil rights movement into the anti-Vietnam movement, that had a considerable effect on congressional concern and public attitude.

G: Yes. How did LBJ react to this development of first urging the merger between the peace movement and the civil rights movement and then joining in a peace demonstration in New York?

O: I know our general White House attitude, which probably reflected his attitude, was one of resentment. Here's the Johnson Administration, in the forefront of civil rights, and we've been working in tandem, and he proceeds to arbitrarily take his following into the anti-Vietnam camp, or bringing them together, whichever way you describe it. And I think our first reaction was that we were not pleased at all with Dr. King. I can't verbatim recount the President's reaction, but I do recall that the subject was discussed on a number of occasions as this unfolded, and the President was distressed and disturbed.

G: Did he make any effort to reduce King's opposition, or--?

O: I don't recall anything specific in that regard. King's motivation, I suppose, was as pure as anything would be. But from our point of view, we considered this broadened his base. He was the leader of the civil rights movement, no one questioned his leadership, and this was a move on his part to broaden his base and increase his strength as a leader. So I think we were looking at it as rather a callous act rather than one motivated by conscience. Perhaps that was grossly unfair to Martin Luther King, but you can picture us sitting in the White House reacting that way, nevertheless.

G: How would you characterize Johnson's attitude toward King at this point?

O: It would be hard for me, and I don't think I should try to unless I could recall specific discussions with him. Dr. King had been a meaningful force in bringing about or forcing, if you will, the Congress into action. This was in our interest, any advocacy of civil rights legislation that flowed from the private sector benefited the effort that we were engaged in. But that didn't mean that you had a love affair between King and Johnson. They had a common interest.

G: Did you detect a spirit of rivalry between them?

O: No. Lyndon Johnson, as you know, had been the victim throughout of a degree of cynicism on the part of the civil rights stalwarts, who continued for a long time to question the degree of his commitment. It came into focus at the time of the home rule fight in the House, where the liberals gave up on the fight and Johnson continued to pursue the fight and the discharge petition. That certainly was evidence of his commitment in this area, whether it was voting rights or home rule or civil rights. And I don't know what more evidence was needed by some of the liberals and some of the leaders of the civil rights movement as to his commitment. I never had any question about his commitment, but I must say that the commitment I knew he had and that he expressed to me a thousand times was underscored by what I observed personally in that particular little sidebar struggle on home rule. Nevertheless, throughout
the civil rights struggle you were always coping with some question about commitment.

G: During this time, Ellsworth Bunker replaced Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador to South Vietnam.

O: Yes. Henry Cabot Lodge, in his initial acceptance of the ambassadorship when President Kennedy named him, was a surprise to us. I don't recall the specifics of his departure.

Somewhere in 1967 I noted in a memo that I was explaining to the President why I was so busily engaged in so many matters that I didn't feel I had the time to go to Vietnam as I had been asked to. There were a couple of incidents along the route where some people for some reason thought that I should be assigned to Vietnam on the organization of the election process over there. I had no interest whatsoever in that kind of involvement, but apparently this continued on until late 1967, and the memo does not recall the details to me, but it does recall that there were at least a couple of occasions when this cropped up. I know one of them was Henry Cabot Lodge requesting that I be assigned to Vietnam. I guess he admired my activity in the Senate contest in 1952, when Kennedy beat him in Massachusetts, and thought maybe it could be put to use over there, I don't know. But, in any event, I didn't go to Vietnam.

G: Did you feel that this political system was not transferable to Vietnam, or that--?

O: I don't know as I gave it that much thought. I don't want to suggest that I was oblivious to everything that was transpiring in Vietnam, but I was not privy to in-depth policy discussions or strategy discussions regarding Vietnam. I don't know if that was the

motivating factor in suggesting to the President that I go to Vietnam. I can tell you that I had a later experience in the Philippines, where I applied an American campaign procedure to Marcos' democratic election, and I felt quite good about it. I was obviously taken aback when democracy disappeared from the Philippines a few years later.

G: In connection with Vietnam, Rutherford Poats' nomination as deputy administrator of AID was confirmed--

O: After a real struggle.

G: It was a battle.

O: It was a real battle, spearheaded by the senator from Indiana.

G: Birch Bayh.

O: Birch Bayh, yes.

G: What was the problem with Poats?

O: Birch had a real hang-up in this case, and obviously had a lot of support among his colleagues. He took on this battle because he was totally disenchanted with his operation in his position with AID. I don't think it had elements of Vietnam policy as much as Birch's view that this fellow was inept, that he had functioned poorly in his position.

G: The recommittal motion failed by one vote. Do you recall how the administration was able to defeat that?

O: I knew that Birch, who was a friend and always a solid fellow with us, was not going to be deterred. Of course, we were left in the position of trying to block him. He gave it his all, and we had to devote time and attention to what shouldn't have been that attention-getting. But that's the sort of thing that can happen from time to time. You run into a situation like this, and all of a sudden you find that you're heavily engaged in a very time-consuming effort and that was what happened there. I suppose if we had known in advance that this would be this much of a problem, we probably would have found another way of handling the appointment. But we were caught with it.

G: The Glassboro Conference took place that June. Did you have any role in that at all, either from a distance or--?

O: It was limited to some activity in ensuring favorable reaction on the Hill, but that would be peripheral. That would be in the normal course of things, another presidential activity that you hoped would elicit favorable comments from the leadership and others.

G: What was the reaction to the conference on the Hill?

O: It was quite favorable. Image-wise it seemed to create a favorable reaction. As far as the President was concerned, he got solid marks and I believe that overall it was a plus. And it was a needed plus in the foreign policy area at that time.

Now you're moving more and more into this "anti" situation, as far as Vietnam is concerned. This was an indication of a very active and involved president in the foreign policy area, extending beyond Vietnam.

Tape 2 of 3, Side 1

G: Also in June, the Six Day War between Egypt and Israel occurred. Do you have any recollections [of that]?

O: Well, there again, it didn't have any impact on our legislative progress on the domestic side. It attracted a tremendous amount of attention throughout the world and in the United States, but it did not impact on us in terms of what we were engaged in.

G: You were not involved specifically in any discussions relating to this?

O: No. So you got midway in that year, and there's a rising concern about the cost of the Vietnam War, and the diversion, supposedly, of monies from anti-poverty projects and the rest. That, coupled with the riots in Newark and in Detroit at that time, added another dimension to this rising storm that we referred to that continued to increase in velocity as the year unfolded. Now you're at mid-1967, and then you have the Joint Economic Committee Report, which fueled the fire. It created an opportunity for those opposed to the Vietnam War or concerned about the war to point to the economic factor, which created another dimension and a further opportunity for the growing number of critics. They could in the economic area say, "Now let's stop talking about the policy for a moment. Let's talk about the domestic economic impact. That's something that we all should be concerned about. That's an added dimension to this problem." Which was a normal evolvement. After all, criticism was growing month after month in any event.

G: Certainly one of the economic elements here was the proposal for a tax surcharge--

O: Yes.

G: --that the President proposed in his State of the Union Message.

O: What was it, 6 per cent?

G: Yes, initially 6 per cent and then when it was reproposed it went to 10 per cent. Let me ask you to discuss this issue.

O: This flew right into the face of the procedure of the Chairman of the Ways and Means

Committee. The contention was that, first of all, we obviously had underestimated the cost of the war, that basically what you were trying to do was preserve your domestic programs and try to secure
additional revenue to overcome the shortfall that the war was causing, which was detrimental to the progress of the domestic programs. No matter what face you put on it, that's just where you were. It was a means of securing some additional revenue, increase taxes. And to accomplish that, you were going to have to convince Wilbur Mills. You're never going to get anywhere unless you convince Wilbur Mills. My recollection is that Wilbur followed pretty much his normal procedure: he was quite critical of the presentation by the administration; he found fault with witnesses, he found fault with the details, he found fault with the backup, every aspect of it. He was not enthusiastic at all about the proposal, and certainly not at all optimistic about any ultimate success.

This dragged on, and I believe that Wilbur Mills took it off the front burner. Then late in the session he decided to renew the discussion in his committee, and then ultimately it folded. The concentration was on convincing Wilbur Mills that he should accept the leadership role in the House that was required to bring this about.

G: I think perhaps housing starts had slowed down or something to indicate that the economy was slowing down.

O: That would justify giving it another look and a more serious look. But an awful lot of effort was put into that over many, many months, and there were times during the course of that battle where we, I think, convinced ourselves that we in turn could convince Wilbur. But the reality of it was we didn't come close.

G: One of Mills' objections was apparently the notion that the surcharge would be temporary. He challenged that.

O: Very much so, and he had the grounds for that. He pointed to prior surcharges that were temporary that never seemed to be removed. That was a pretty strong argument, that "I've listened to you telling about the temporary basis with total assurances, but I can tell you from my own experience it just doesn't happen that way. I'm not pleased with the idea of imposing a permanent increase in taxes, no matter what you tell me about your good intentions, because there's nothing built into the legislation that would terminate it on a given date. It's just your promises." I believe that was the way the debate went. And Wilbur, not being a staunch advocate in any event, knew that was a good debating point, that what you're really doing is enacting an escalation in taxes that will remain on the books.

G: To what extent was Mills' opposition simply opposition to the surtax rather than opposition to the spending level?

O: Basically, Mills--and I think the history of the Ways and Means Committee will prove the case--did not take kindly to chairing a committee that was going to increase taxes,

particularly if he saw that perhaps he would never get it done in the other body. He couldn't see the votes there. There was nothing, really, to encourage Wilbur to take this on.

Basically, what were we trying to have him do? Raise taxes. What you're talking about is trying to secure additional revenue for the conduct of the war. As I said, you have the shortfall; you have the disruption of domestic programs, you have the escalating costs of the war. So we weren't on strong ground. Under any normal set of circumstances, this would have been based on economics, and perhaps you would have succeeded. But here you had Vietnam. Wilbur Mills was a hawk, but not to the point where he was ready to put his reputation on the line to raise taxes. (Laughter)

G: Ultimately, Mills did go along with the surtax when it was coupled with a budget cut.

O: That speaks for itself. There's the handle.

G: Any insights on his deliberations with Johnson during this period? You had two strong men.

O: This extended over such a long period of time--months--the effort on our part was intensive. You hark back to Wilbur Mills, for example, on Medicare and the period of time that it took to ultimately bring it about, all the way from adamancy, Kerr-Mills and the rest.

You cannot underestimate the power of Wilbur Mills. He not only was chairman of that committee, but knew more on any given subject than any other member. He worked harder at it than any other member. He devoted his time and attention seven days a week to that committee and its affairs, and he had a very strong hand on the committee. No member of that committee, including senior Democrats who were friendly to us, had the temerity to take the Chairman on. We could wheel and deal till hell froze over. The fact is you had to get to the point where Wilbur Mills said, "I am prepared, after you prove to me that the votes are there, to stick my neck out and lead this parade once the parade is formed."

The record shows that every aspect of the New Frontier-Great Society programs that related to the Ways and Means Committee was enacted into law. You can say, "It should have happened sooner," but it happened. So Wilbur played an extremely important role during those years.

Now, Wilbur didn't say, "The President doesn't seem to be getting this Vietnam War resolved." That wouldn't enter into it. But I don't think you could remove Vietnam from everything at that time. Truth-in-lending had nothing to do with Vietnam whatsoever, but we couldn't get it across the finish line. Now, under the same set of circumstances, two years earlier or a year earlier, that legislation would have been enacted.

G: To what extent do you think the budget estimates that were conservative, the outlays ended up being more than anticipated, to what extent did this element, do you think, contribute to Mills' position?

O: An administration will go forward with budget estimates and exceed them. That's not something that would shock somebody.

G: He was accustomed to that.

O: He might use it in conversation with you.

G: Did you yourself feel that the administration was working with reasonably accurate figures on the cost of the war, or were the--?

O: I would say they were reasonably accurate, but it's like any cost projections. The escalation of the war became fairly rapid and would throw those figures out of whack. I don't think it was something purposely put together to try to fool someone at all.

G: You don't think there was any deception involved; it was just a--

O: No. I think that the events brought about the increases that necessitated some kind of action if we were going to maintain a domestic program. I think the record reflects that when Mills took another look at it at a couple of days of hearings late in that session, that was based on some kind of economic factors. But there were just two days of hearings and it was set aside again.

G: Shall we talk about the federal pay raise and the postal rate issue?

O: Yes. The proposal to adjust postal rates doesn't arouse great enthusiasm. Very little that happens in the Post Office Department arouses enthusiasm or interest. In an administration it's something that you have to live with. It's almost like talking about the debt ceiling or foreign aid; I mean, people don't get exercised about it, but complain a great deal about service.

In any event, this was a package that the President decided to list with his proposals for the Ninetieth Congress, and it ran into a buzz saw, which was anticipated. Third-class mail, so-called junk mail, is represented by a very strong lobby. They could be very aggressive, even overly aggressive, and there were indications that their aggressiveness was counterproductive in terms of their efforts to scuttle this. But then the real problem that occurred was that the employees' pay bill was a separate item, and the President had put a cap on it--there would be no pay raise extending beyond 4 1/2 per cent, I guess. The postal employees lobby, as I've said before, is a very, very strong lobby, really grass roots, with seven hundred thousand members across the country. So it was decided that perhaps they were going to increase the pay raise in the Congress, and how were they going to get that past a presidential veto? The idea was, let's couple the two

bills, the rate bill and the pay bill. I think it was rather remarkable that that bill wended its way through the House and Senate with all the lobbying against the bill, and came out in reasonably good shape. It also incorporated a provision on executive pay--the creation of a commission that proposed very significant increases from the cabinet level and that was put into effect at a later date. It was all started in this proposal.

What you had was the rate increase, which was an absolute steal. These people with great profit centers were having this service rendered to them at reduced or ridiculous rates. We were able to garner something meaningful. We wound up with the federal employee pay increase and an executive pay proposal. This legislation does not have a great deal of glamour to it. My recollection is that even though this was a considerably different bill than the original proposal, the end result of having legislation that made some significant impact on rates was pleasing to me. What we got I was reasonably satisfied with.

G: H. R. Gross introduced an amendment targeting the second- and third-class increases and was supported by Wilbur Mills and Gerald Ford. That amendment lost narrowly; I think the vote was 199 to 211. Do you recall that?

O: Gross was a member of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, and he was a very difficult member of the House. He was supposedly the expert on parliamentary procedure and utilizing it in a negative sense.

G: In the federal pay raise, OEO employees were excluded. Do you recall that issue?

O: They were initially excluded, I think, in the House. But I believe that they were included in final passage.

G: Yes.

O: It was a cheap shot, and it's rather surprising that it worked initially. I recall that we never felt it was going to stay in the legislation, and it didn't. I don't know how you could have justified that legislative action.

G: You also had the issue of the seating of Adam Clayton Powell.

O: That brought into play all the sensitivities in terms of the reluctance of the Congress to act against its members. But Adam had defied them to the point where it was unavoidable. We've gone through Adam's activities legislatively in the context of our problems with him as chairman of the Labor and Education Committee, and the problems the leadership had with him. He was a defiant fellow who enjoyed raising the hackles of everyone, particularly southerners. So he carried it to a point where even some of his--not necessarily staunch defenders, but people who did not have any personal animosity toward him, John McCormack would be one, were left in an untenable situation. While they didn't seat him, it resulted in a special election. Adam then won re-election

overwhelmingly and retired to Bimini, as I recall. That was difficult, because it had racial overtones and all the rest of it.

G: Did the White House have a position in this?

O: No, we tried to adhere to the separation of powers.

(Laughter)

We were respectful of the prerogatives of the Congress. There was a point when there were efforts made to engage us, but I remember walking a tightrope. The last thing I wanted to get involved in was this. I don't even recall discussing it with the President. Maybe I did, because obviously he was aware of what was transpiring. It was clear that if we could avoid involvement in this matter we were going to be the better for it. That might indicate some lack of courage, but I don't look at it that way. I was being realistic.

G: Did Powell seek the administration's help in this?

O: I don't recall he did.

Actually, Adam, who frustrated me no end, never reached the point of causing me to dislike him. I always succeeded in seeing good in Adam. He liked to be defiant and rather enjoyed stirring the pot. Those who didn't have the stomach for removing him, he gave no help to at all. He remained defiant and remained to the end a fellow who couldn't care less about personal views and didn't seem to appreciate the fact that there were people who wanted to be helpful.

G: Was the Powell seating issue an embarrassment to the leadership?

O: Yes.

G: My impression is that McCormack came out badly on it.

O: Yes.

G: It seemed to get out of control.

O: Yes. It was an embarrassment. It's fair to say that traditionally in the Congress there's a keen desire to avoid that kind of confrontation. They tried to cover over and say, "It could be me tomorrow." It takes an awful lot for the Congress to confront a situation such as this. And this had the added dimension of racial overtones. So McCormack didn't enjoy this at all. He had to accept the responsibility, and ultimately that's what happened. You're a loser in that sort of a situation no matter whether right and justice are on your side.

G: Were the civil rights groups inclined to stay out of this struggle?

O: Surprisingly, my recollection is that there was little effort on the part of the civil rights groups. That was due to the difficult situation of defending Adam. It was difficult even for the civil rights groups to strongly defend him. So that did not surface to the degree I think people in the House feared.

G: Let me ask you to talk about the censure of Tom Dodd.

O: There, too, that was an internal matter in the Senate. It didn't involve us and it wasn't that we were avoiding involvement. We were very careful in the Adam Powell situation not to be involved, and there wasn't pressure to involve us in any event. In the Dodd situation there was not the remotest indication there should be some involvement on the part of the White House. This was internal, which the House matter was on Powell, for that matter.

G: Were you surprised by the revelations in the Senate?

O: Yes. I knew Tom Dodd quite well. He was a solid Democrat, he was a liberal, and his record reflected staunch support. It surprised me completely.

G: Really?

O: Yes. You feel that wouldn't happen, because it's such a rarity. But it did. I thought that his son showed great courage and commitment to his father when he chose to seek the Senate. He was elected to the Senate--that's got to be a real difficult situation for the young man. In a sense he was defending his father's reputation by going to the people himself successfully.

G: Let's look at the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill passed that year, extending the authorization for school aid and the Teacher Corps through fiscal 1969. This bill was styled as the largest school aid bill in history.

O: It was. And it proved to be difficult. The efforts that were expended by [Albert] Quie and some of the Republicans to try to scuttle this took on a dimension that perhaps we hadn't anticipated. Everything was thrown into this in terms of negatives. The highlight, from at least my perspective, was our ability to bring together these divergent groups, divergent in their views on the role of education and separation of church and state. It was a heartwarming experience to find that the National Catholic Welfare Conference and the NEA could ensure the ultimate passage of this legislation, because it could have been so easily scuttled. It was particularly important to the President. This area of education was always [one he] was totally involved in and his commitment to education was so strong that it would have been most unfortunate if we weren't able to succeed. But the accommodations to Mrs. [Edith] Green, to the various elements of the bill, made it a long trip.

G: Quie had proposed block grants instead of the approach in the bill, and the block grants would have allowed for considerably more latitude, the states deciding how to spend the money.

O: It might give the states more latitude, but it also would severely restrict any private-school benefit from this. No matter what was said in the debate, that was what was involved. Obviously if Quie had prevailed, you would have lost the support of the private school area and, in my judgment, the support of any number of liberal Democrats, and, as we had experienced in the past, [have] the extreme difficulty of passing education legislation.

Tape 2 of 3, Side 2

O: The ability of the NEA, NCWC, and others to oppose the amendment, knowing that you had to follow that course to achieve legislation, was rather remarkable; it was a tribute to people who really were dedicated to education and were willing to adjust to ensure a meaningful federal role in this area. That was exciting--I don't often say that about legislative proposals, because much of it was sweat, blood and tears and you found it difficult to find the excitement quotient. But in this it was because we were so pleased to be able to work with these private-sector groups under difficult circumstances. I think that you got into the problem in the Senate with this, too, with Senator Russell, and in the House, the Fountain amendment. So it had civil rights aspects to it, and that accommodation was made by ensuring that anybody who might lose benefits by failure to fully comply with the law would be advised of the problem early on in a given year and not at the end of the year, so there was adjustment that satisfied people who weren't pleased with the legislation. Those people finally accommodated to the overall effort, which is a tribute to them. This had intriguing, interesting elements to it.

G: I wanted you to reflect on the Education and Labor Committee for a minute after Powell's chairmanship. You now had Carl Perkins and there's some suggestion, for example, that Perkins was not able to control Edith Green as Powell had been able to, that she was a lot more of an obstacle, or perceived as an obstacle by the administration, than she had been under Powell.

O: Edith Green had strong views and those views oftentimes were contrary to our interests and Elementary-Secondary would be an example. She felt we should rigidly adhere to the separation of church and state. This was something that she strongly believed in; it wasn't anti-anybody. And Carl Perkins was not Adam Powell. Adam Powell in his own inimitable way exercised a great deal of power and control over that committee, not only with Edith but with others. There was deferring to Powell, a toleration of Powell's on-again-off-again activities. The failure of the committee to perform its tasks without delays was to a great extent due to Powell. I would say that Adam Powell had a degree of influence over Edith comparable to the degree of influence he had over a number of members of the committee. Carl Perkins' style and his approach were not similar. So perhaps Edith Green's opposition to the committee would be less apparent under Powell than under Perkins. But I'm not persuaded that it went to the point where Adam Powell

could control Edith Green and Carl Perkins couldn't. I don't think either one of them could.

Key members were helpful to us through the Adam Powell period and into the Carl Perkins period, people like Jim O'Hara and Hugh Carey, and there were others who were strong people.

G: Thompson?

O: Yes, Topper Thompson or Frank Thompson. Those people really made it for us on occasion after occasion. While they wouldn't take on Adam, they would become as frustrated as we were. We were dependent on maybe six members of that committee who consistently fought the battle to see that we finally prevailed. The fact is that the productivity of that committee over those years was very impressive.

G: It looks like there was some sort of coalition on this issue between the southerners who wanted to alter the provisions cutting off funds to schools which discriminated, and Edith Green, for example, who wanted to have the state education agencies have control over the Title III funds. Was this in effect, as you saw it, an unholy alliance between--?

O: That was Edith's interests on the one hand and the southerners' interests on the other. So that's the way that evolved. It isn't that somebody said, "Let's form an alliance." It came about because it was a rather obvious procedure to follow.

G: Everett Dirksen introduced an anti-busing amendment which he withdrew several days later. Do you recall that?

O: I recall the introduction of the anti-busing amendment; I don't recall the motivation for withdrawal. That would be Everett thinking it over and deciding to enter into an accommodation with [Mike] Mansfield.

G: The Teacher Corps was controversial.

O: Yes.

G: What do you recall of that?

O: The strategy was to take it out of Higher Education and put it in elementary-secondary. The justification for that strategy could be debated, but our contention was that it was better suited there. Actually, we saw a better vehicle to assure passage. That was good judgment.

That got us into conflict with Edith. She resented having it removed from Higher Education because that was her province. Our strategy was to get it away from her and get it into a more responsive subcommittee.

G: I believe her opposition centered around local control over what the teachers were teaching in Teacher Corps, and just having some--

O: Yes. I don't want to misconstrue Edith Green's interests. She had a profound interest in education, and I think that has to be emphasized. I don't want to suggest that she was simply a spoiler coming up with frivolous actions or attempts to derail. That wasn't the case at all. She had firm views as to the role of government in education. This is something that you had to accept and understand. She wasn't amenable to maneuvering. What might happen sometimes where a person may not feel that deeply or be that involved, you'd say, "Come on. You can go along with us." You couldn't have that kind of discussion with Edith.

G: Okay. Truth-in-lending passed the Senate.

O: Yes, it passed the Senate, but I don't know that we've touched on Paul Douglas, my admiration for him, and our dependency upon Douglas as the leader of this truth-in-lending struggle. I could never understand why we were so long delayed and found it so difficult to pass legislation of this nature. We couldn't get across to the public the intricacies of how you establish interest rates or how large the print is on a loan form. That eludes everyone. The lobby was strong from so many lending quarters. This effort extended over a number of years.

G: Of course, one of the big issues was the disclosure of interest rates for revolving charge accounts.

O: That's right. I think I allowed that legislation to get to me personally. It struck a chord with me, not comparable to Medicare and others, civil rights and what have you, but I felt very strongly about it. I thought it obscene, the way business was conducted, and I clearly saw the need for legislation in this area. I could never quite get through my head why our base of support wasn't broader and the involvement of more people didn't occur. The power of the lobby against this legislation was strong, and yet we weren't able to build a citizens' lobby to cope with it.

There were people who suggested to us early that liberal Paul Douglas was not the right fellow to be the advocate, that it should have been somebody in the moderate or conservative wing that took on this battle, that this was another Douglas liberal idea. The substance of the argument seemed to be lost. I found it very frustrating. We brought the Senator in to testify in this go-around and did everything we could, but. . . . I'd suggest this was to some extent due to the climate of the time, but I don't think that that's accurate, either. I think this was in a unique category. It had a very strong opposition lobby through this session.

G: Were the lobbyists largely financial institutions?

O: When you think of it, all the way from the store-front lender to major New York banks. They found it very pleasant to hide the cold, hard reality of exorbitant interest rates on borrowers throughout this country. I found it revolting. However, it's only recently I read where people are not concerned about interest rates. We look at the credit card syndrome of today, 18 and 19 per cent interest rates, and nobody seems to get exercised about it. I guess perhaps human nature has always been that way.

G: You also had the whole question of the campaign subsidy, the check-off and--let me ask you to reflect on that.

O: That goes back several years, and we've talked of Russell Long's coup in getting it in the form of an amendment on the floor of the Senate when there were probably six senators present on a Friday afternoon. It goes back to the Carnegie Foundation. Jack Kennedy became enamored with this proposal early on. Now you find that you're prepared to put it into action, and the dismantling process starts. It turned out to be one battle that was on-again-off-again. I guess it was defeated on the floor of the Senate and adopted again and reconsidered. I was very much interested. This was legislation to affect American politics and what I thought was the most disturbing aspect of the process--that is the fund raising side. The fat-cat syndrome disturbed me no end over my years in campaigns.

I wasn't naive enough to think you could have a program like this and have it affect the Senate and the House. These fellows were not going to voluntarily give up their decided advantage as incumbents. I remember a conversation with Ev Dirksen on this subject early on and Dirksen saying to me, "If you think for a minute that I'm going to support legislation when we outspend you guys two or three to one, that I'm going to support legislation that eliminates that advantage in a presidential election the Republicans have, you're crazy." It led to Dirksen and I discussing an option. You could either take public financing or go the private route. That intrigued him. "If you have that option, then it is something that I might take a look at."

I felt strongly about the dollar check-off from the beginning, and I remember debates about friendly proposals that I just couldn't support. I was adamant and I was considered by some thickheaded about the dollar check-off. I felt the dollar check-off was the answer. It was a voluntary check-off; it wasn't even a dollar out of the taxpayer's pocket. It was an allocation of a dollar of his taxes. Give it a trial and that would determine public attitude. If you found a large percentage of participation on this voluntary basis, that would indicate the public is in support of this approach. The fact is that it's worked.

Now, that hasn't eliminated presidential candidates getting into financial difficulties and incurring significant debt, but it does significantly reduce the impact of the fat cat. It made sense to me--one man, one vote, one dollar. The problem is that in the process of accommodating various powerful groups to lock this up, you had the provision that COPE, the political arm of labor, could pursue its fund raising. Obviously Dirksen and others said, "If we're going to do that, the National Association of Manufacturers and the

others should have the same privilege."

Even with that, I think that it was a significant breakthrough in containing this appalling financing of campaigns that almost left a for sale sign over the White House. However, PACs came along, and the proliferation of these political action committees, these self-serving pressure groups have created a poisoning of the process. The members of Congress who never wanted to have any restriction by way of federal financing of House and Senate campaigns, most of them are engaged throughout their terms of office in raising money, getting money through PACs. The Senate now is engaged, I hope seriously engaged, in coming up with a program comparable to the dollar check-off. That at least would limit those kinds of contributions.

But to get back to this and election reform, Lyndon Johnson put our forces into this. We were committed to reforming the process. This goes back to the day we walked in the White House in January of 1961, when President Kennedy was completely committed to this. I must say that we sweated this, particularly on the Republican side. Because option or no option, it was a disadvantage to them. Look what's happened: Republican candidates have gone the route of federal financing. I remember one of the gimmicks to derail this was, "Where does it say that we're confined to a two-party system in this country?" At this point there happens to be two major parties, but candidates should be free to run without party label or create a new party and run--George Wallace. You can't pass legislation that effectively bars from the process any funding of the candidacy of a third or fourth party or fifth-party candidates. So we're going to build a formula that: if you've got five million votes, then you were compensated on a formula.

I think back on all the roadblocks and yet it became the law, with its imperfections. It's far better than the situation that existed prior to the dollar check-off, and the sooner this Congress passes comparable legislation the better. I notice even at the state level now there are discussions about similar programs. Someday, hopefully, we'll achieve perfection within the bounds of human frailty that will clean up the election process and might restore confidence in the process that doesn't exist today.

G: Where did the five million-dollar figure come from?

O: It was a matter of negotiations and checking on how many votes have been gotten by third- or fourth-party candidates, historically. I think
Wallace had a vote count in that vicinity. I think it was a matter of negotiations.

G: The idea was to keep it to so that the two major parties would be the ones to benefit.

O: If George Wallace established a party and it got this minimum of five million votes, he was entitled to benefits because it would become a legitimate and established party. It wouldn't be just a one-shot situation. The media was editorializing on this at that time, particularly conservative media, Republican media, pointing to this weak link. What were these two parties trying to do, effectively bar forever the establishment of another party?

You had to be alert to that and respond to it, and that's how you came up with the five-million formula.

G: Aside from Republicans, who else comprised the opposition?

O: There were people who legitimately felt that this was not a role of government. But you can see built into this the corrective measures. Most of the argument went to, would there be any kind of allocation mandated of taxpayers' money in this process? The voluntary check-off, there were many who chuckled to themselves when it was adopted, saying that this isn't going to happen. The first income tax form following this came out with the dollar check-off column toward the end of the form, pretty much buried in the form. Then we took on the effort of changing that, to put it up front in the form, at the top. It was buried and most people didn't even know it was there, and there are people who don't know it's there today. But I can tell you that with my income tax return each year, that's the first thing I do, check that box. But if a taxpayer didn't want a dollar of his tax money allocated, it wouldn't be allocated. So we finally took care of all the arguments of the opposition.

G: Okay, let's talk about election reform. This was a proposal that LBJ had made in 1966; however, the 1967 measure did not include the plan for disclosing outside income and gifts by members of Congress.

O: Lyndon Johnson's proposal was creative and on target. This wasn't the dollar check-off. This went beyond that. There was a tolerance of the dollar check-off because it wasn't going to impact on incumbents in Congress. But now you suggest that there be a disclosure and detailed limitations on income that might be related to their office. And this of course applied across the board to all federal elections and primaries, even pre-convention campaigning.

Tape 3 of 3, Side 1

G: Did the President ever talk about this measure with you; did he ever discuss it?

O: Oh, yes. We had extensive discussion of it.

G: What was his philosophy behind it?

O: He saw what I think everyone saw, that this was a freewheeling situation without accountability, that it left itself open to all kinds of devious activities. It was a contributing factor to what even then was the public attitude toward politicians and the process. His view was that somebody has to take the lead, and there's only one guy who can take the lead. This is not going to flow from the Congress. There has to be strong advocacy, and leadership, and a formal proposal. So the President will take the leadership in this. This went right to the heart of the political process, or at least certainly to an important element of it. The scurrying around on the Hill on this on the House side was

interesting. There was some sick humor. There were people running for cover and avoiding involvement. They were not comfortable with registering objection, just utilizing all kinds of internal procedures to delay and derail.

G: Can you give me some examples of what--?

O: The contentions of unfairness [that] somehow [were] inherent in this. The violation of a member's privacy was primarily the argument, and I hear it today. In the legislature of the state of New York the other day, people [were] fighting the governor's contention that there should be disclosure saying, "We're citizens and we don't ask other citizens to follow any prescription such as this. Why should we be singled out?"

Of course they should be singled out. An officeholder is not an average citizen, and the responsibility is inherent to disclose. Now, of course, it's automatic for top officeholders to disclose their income tax returns. It is an invasion of privacy in a sense, but I think it's essential if you're going to have knowledge of who these people are that are serving. It's a weak disclosure in the Congress now, but it's something. You're never going to see the time where you turn back the clock and I don't think you're ever going to see the time when you have a serious effort to repeal the dollar check-off. So I guess you have to be patient. But in this instance our friends on the Hill, and many of them were our friends, weren't about to be lulled into this kind of disclosure procedure. (Laughter) What are you going to say? "I'm against reform?" No, so you have to resort to activities to delay consideration. That's what happened.

G: Charles Goodell was quoted as saying that the bill was being opposed by an unholy alliance or coalition of liberal Democrats, conservative southerners and Wayne Hays.

O: That was probably fairly accurate. In this instance liberals and conservatives could have the same point of view. The conservative objection was the application of this to primaries. Liberals' objections were that this was a violation of individual rights. In each instance people were saying, "Don't misunderstand me. I'm for reform, but I don't think we're approaching it properly." So when Goodell describes it as an unholy coalition, I think he was underscoring that this issue crossed not only the aisle but all spectrums of opinion. Whether you were a liberal, a conservative or a moderate you might have personal concerns about this.

G: But why would they single out Wayne Hays like this?

O: I believe that Wayne Hays had something to do with it. Wasn't he in the committee position on this?

G: Maybe so.

O: I think so.

G: This was the House Administration [Committee]?

O: Yes, I think so. I think that's why he was singled out.

G: Do you want to discuss the rail strike settlement?

O: The record is clear on that--and it involved legislation, obviously. There were about three different occasions we had to ask for legislative action to terminate or avoid strikes. The President, because of transportation and what it means to the economy, must take on a battle of this nature, but he needs congressional support. That was an extended battle that ultimately was worked out. The final agreement was quite favorable to the employees, to the unions. But to avoid a national rail strike is a role of the president. Lyndon Johnson devoted a lot of time and effort to that.

G: Did he?

O: He had his sleeves rolled up. He was in the midst of it.

G: What about your own involvement in this particular issue?

O: There was involvement on our part. We had to come back three times, I guess, to the Congress. We were busily engaged in trying to get the back-up legislative action to support the President. Of course, there was a lot of pressure being exerted on the Congress not to act. That took on the same form as a legislative proposal; you had head counts and all the rest.

G: Okay. The rat control measure was initially defeated in the House. Do you recall that one?

O: I must say, that's the darndest title for a legislative proposal that you could ever come up with. That opened itself up to some sick humor. Some wise guy said why don't we just enlist all the cats in the program; we could save a lot of money. It was subjected to a lot of ridicule until we began to look at some of the appalling statistics regarding this problem.

G: It says fifty-one representatives switched their votes, forty-five of them Republicans.

O: I think Martha Griffiths says that she put an end to the laughter by noting that rats have killed more persons than all the generals in history. Then somebody else says that the day before we had passed an anti-riot bill and we couldn't pass a rat bill. (Laughter) Then the President got into the act. He said that the government spent money to protect livestock from rodents; it seemed that they could afford to do the same to protect children. Even the leadership conference on civil rights got into it.

Well, the switch of the Republicans came when they approached it from a different

direction. There was so much criticism about the House ridiculing this and acting irresponsibly that they finally got a provision in the Partnerships for Health bill for forty million dollars without specifying that it was for rat control, but with the understanding that it was available for that purpose. That's when the large number of Republicans switched.

(Interruption)

O: We're not really in a position to do it.

G: The [William] Manchester book [***The Death of a President***] was serialized in--I guess it started the serialization in 1967 and was published sometime thereafter. You said at the time publicly, or were quoted in the press as saying, that you thought the book contained factual inaccuracies, and--

O: My recollection is that there was some controversy between Manchester and Jackie [Kennedy] somewhere along the line.

G: Well, it had to do with the control of the material. I think that they had worked out some sort of agreement initially, and ultimately I believe the family wanted to exert some control over it and he didn't want them to.

O: Yes. There were some glaring inaccuracies in the book. I can't really go back to them now, but I remember that I was disturbed. It had nothing to do with Jackie. I wouldn't have felt compelled to avoid Manchester because Jackie was disturbed with him. I know that I had some conversation with Manchester at some stage. I don't know when the book was published or the serialization started, but I had voiced some public comment about the inaccuracies. My recollection is that Ken O'Donnell was totally disturbed with Manchester. He just was completely aroused about Manchester.

G: What was he disturbed about, do you [remember]?

O: He said he was just completely off base in the book, that it was more than just a few inaccuracies. He said it was a completely false presentation. I saw a letter from Manchester to me. It's a fairly recent experience. He sent me a letter expressing his concern about my comments on his book, and it was by way of apology for misinformation that didn't, I don't believe, go to the heart of the book. I remember particularly in the letter he said it is unfortunate that he had never had the opportunity to have serious discussions with Ken O'Donnell during the project, because much of Ken's objection could have been avoided, and he indicated in the letter to me that perhaps his objections to some aspects of the book were valid. But Manchester was saying, "That's because Ken never gave me an opportunity." So that's really all I recall about Manchester.

G: One of the things--I think you even wrote a letter to one of the magazines or newspapers at the time. Manchester maintained in the book that no male aide to President Kennedy

witnessed the swearing-in of Lyndon Johnson on ***Air Force One***, and I think in that case the photographs disproved this issue.

O: Well, I was standing there with the Judge [Sarah Hughes]. I was the fellow who brought Jackie out of the room to join in the thing. If he wrote that in his book, then that was a complete inaccuracy, but I can't believe that I would have confined it just to that. Maybe so.

I never saw Manchester again until the memorial service for Jack Kennedy in Washington. I was coming down the aisle and somebody jumped out of one of the pews and grabbed my hand; it was Manchester. So I don't know any more about it than that. I was intrigued with this memo showing all these phone calls, because obviously he was anxious to talk to me, and I guess the number of calls would indicate I wasn't as anxious to talk to him.

And the Doris Kearns letter is addressed to me on May 25, 1967, in which she expresses her deep concern regarding some utilization of her name in an article that had indeed been brought to the President's attention by someone, and he had been very disturbed.

G: Were you around him when he reacted to it?

O: Not that I recall. She asked me for my help, and she said, "I feel unable to leave Washington until I'm sure that the President completely understands how and why my name came to be attached to an article in the ***New Republic*** I would never under any circumstances have written." It's a lengthy letter, and it goes on from there. It closes by saying, "I recognize how insignificant this issue is to the President, given the magnitude of the problems he must face daily, but I write just in case there might be a chance sometime in the future for you to communicate my feelings to him." I did communicate this to the President. Attached to it is a page and a half specifying in great detail how all this came about and what her role was.

G: Well, you must have had some success, because she did stay around.

O: That's my recollection.

G: Do you think that if you hadn't intervened with the President she would have been removed from her--?

O: I don't really know, but I guess the third paragraph of this letter speaks to why she's addressing me: "I come to you because I think you above everyone else will understand how I came to be involved in this macabre situation in the first place, for it was your visit that crystallized my interest in the problem of student alienation from politics and that stimulated me to assent to Sandy Levinson's request that I make a critique of an essay he was writing on the formation of an independent political bloc. Ironically, Sandy's request

for my critique was based on his desire to have a criticism from one who shared your perspective. How from this critique I was tagged as co-author was the result of a set of circumstances described in the enclosed." I don't have any recollection beyond that. I discussed it with the President. I thought in fairness to her and under the circumstances the details of her letter and her attachment should be brought to his attention, and I did that.

G: Anything on his reaction?

O: I kind of lost track of things after that. This is May of 1967, and I don't recall any further contact with Doris or any further discussions. But it's a well-constructed letter and a very detailed attachment. Another memo in Miscellaneous is one I addressed to Marvin on July 10 of 1967. It was following a visit I made to Ireland, and I recall this very well. While I was in Ireland I met a number of officials of the Irish government, and I was with our ambassador, who at that time was Ambassador [Raymond] Guest, at some function during my private visit. At that time the Ambassador and officials of the Irish government made known to me their deep concern about a pending decision involving international air travel. My recollection is that it had to do with authorizing an American airline to have a schedule in and out of Ireland during the tourist season, which would be extremely adverse to the Irish airline activities. It turned out that Irish Airlines was one of the few businesses that were in place in Ireland and had fared well over the years. Apparently an American airline was seeking permission to move into their business.

I remember advising them that I had no involvement in this sort of activity and therefore I had no knowledge of it. But they were urging me to make their concerns known, if I could, in some way to someone. They had given me a brief outline of what the problem was. I attached it to a detailed memo I sent Marvin, which was in part to discharge the commitment I had made that I'd make this known, and secondly to have it lead to a discussion I might have with the President on political grounds. I had some thoughts on it. But I certainly did not want to get involved with the State Department and butt into other people's activities.

Following this memo I did bring the subject up directly with the President, and it was an interesting conversation; that's why I recall it. I told the President that this little country over there didn't have much going for it, certainly weren't beneficiaries of foreign aid or help of any kind, nor did they ever ask for any assistance from us. And this couldn't be an overly significant matter for whatever airline was involved, and yet it was awfully important to them in the progress of their airline business. The President, either at that point or subsequent to that, advised me that the recommendation from the State Department was awaiting his signature. He said, "When I think of the way the American Irish have supported the Democratic Party over the years, and how important it is to we Democrats, when I think of the Democrats in Boston and New York and Chicago, or the Irish Democrats and the Irish officeholders and their loyalty to the Democratic Party, you're right, Larry: we never have done anything for them. And I'm going to find out the details of this, and maybe there's an opportunity to do them a favor." It became a big

thing with the President.

(Laughter)

And I remember sitting there and thinking, "Gee, I didn't come in here to get all this aroused." Sure enough, he tore it up--

G: Did he really?

O: --and didn't give the permission to the airline. I remember him saying, "Why are they butting into their little business, why destroy them?" He was happy to have this opportunity. Apparently the president has to sign off on agreements of this nature that the State Department enters into. He stopped it dead in its tracks, and the Irish airlines continued to conduct their business in their normal way. Needless to say, I didn't discuss this with the Irish government; let nature take its course. I don't know what their reactions were.

But I have to say that President Johnson did one favor for the government of Ireland at that time. I thoroughly enjoyed his gut political reaction: "These people get nothing from anybody and we've never done anything for any [of them]." (Laughter) It was a real enjoyable moment with the President. I had forgotten about it until this memo.

G: It's a great story.

O: Yes.

G: It's interesting that he saw it in terms of domestic politics.

O: He didn't need any encouragement. The conversation became a monologue telling me what the Irish-Americans have done. And he said, "When can you ever do anything for them? They're friendly with us and it's a great little country. And look at all these voters."

(Laughter)

I know that none of those voters ever knew what he did, but he felt he was doing something meaningful, and he was pleased to have the opportunity.

This one intrigues me no end, this memo of November 14, 1967--I guess we discussed it earlier--from me to the President: "I feel I should forego my Vietnam trip due to the extension of the current session until at least mid-December. The significant legislation will not be considered until after Thanksgiving, and particularly the disturbing aspects of the discussion at this morning's leadership meeting in terms of our current goals." I don't know what that last sentence means, but the point is that apparently the President had at least suggested to me, if he hadn't directed me, to go to Vietnam to see if I could be of some help on the political side. I knew on one prior occasion Henry Cabot

Lodge had made the request to Dean Rusk and to the President that I go over at the time of the elections in Vietnam. I had no interest in going to Vietnam, and as I look at this memo, it seems that I'm busily engaged in avoiding the trip.

End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview XIX