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LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW XXI

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

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ACCESSION NUMBER 92-32

INTERVIEW XXI

DATE: June 18, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

Tape 1 of 4, Side 1

O: The 1968 tax surcharge battle evolved from the proposal that was made in 1967 by the President. He was anxious to deal with the rising costs of the Vietnam War and curb inflation because that was becoming a troublesome matter. The proposal was not submitted to the Congress until late 1967, August, and no action was taken until the next session. He renewed the request early in 1968. I recall the Congressman [James] Burke Amendment which, perhaps in the background, we supported in order to limit the reduction. The Burke Amendment failed and we had to accept a signification reduction that was part of the ultimate passage. The passage would not have taken place, however, if we had not been able to put together a solid business community effort.

G: How was this done?

O: To a great extent through efforts by Joe Fowler. He enlisted the support of Henry Ford and Stuart Saunders, who was at that time chairman of the Pennsylvania Railroad. You had two prominent members of the business community in the leadership. That was important in the overall lobbying effort because you were invoking some new taxes. There was a great concern in the business community in some quarters, so it was necessary to get business support. We succeeded overall to a considerable extent due to the lobbying of some business leaders.

G: Wilbur Mills seems to have been staking out a very nebulous position all during that. Did you have a pretty good feel for what Mills would go along with?

O: He was very cautious throughout and it was hard to determine where he would ultimately land. There were aspects of this bill, of course, that directly related to the Ways and Means Committee.

There was quite a battle in the Senate on this, too. There was a fair amount of resentment regarding the Senate procedure. Then you had the AFL-CIO, who were ambivalent, but concerned about the reductions in the bill, which they opposed. It was a touchy situation throughout, but the overall result has to be termed impressive under those circumstances.

In the midst of that, as this debate ensued and the maneuvering went on, the political aspect was heating up. It extended through that period of presidential decision.

G: LBJ issued some uncharacteristically harsh public statements on this matter. Do you recall those and the reasons?

O: He took the opportunity at a nationally televised press conference to somewhat berate the Congress. It was quite strong, but it wasn't that unusual for him. He would express his views strongly from time to time on legislative progress or lack of it over the years.

G: Did you sit in on any of the meetings with Mills?

O: I don't recall I did.

G: Anything on the conference negotiations?

O: The organized labor aspect was not aggressive support but a decision on the part of labor not to oppose strongly. That in and of itself was helpful.

G: Shall we talk about the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the open housing legislation?

O: It was a real accomplishment, particularly in view of the efforts that had been made in this area in 1967, I think back to 1966. There were attempts at cloture in the Senate. Amendments were offered on both sides of this issue. The record shows that Clarence Mitchell made a significant contribution in this.

G: Well, what was the key to passing the cloture vote?

O: The ultimate key was the attitude of [Everett] Dirksen. It was a surprise that he changed his position. There were people who suggested all kinds of reasons. I can't concur with any of those because if anything occurred along the lines suggested, it was unknown to me. It's more valid to conclude that he might have been concerned about losing control among the Republicans and that he didn't want, as the minority leader, to take a defeat. You had the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, which had an impact on this legislation, obviously. The key was to persuade the House to accept the Senate version, as it was tenuous because of the battle that was waged in the Senate. If you could avoid a conference, that would be certainly the best resolution. That was the pressure that was exerted off the Martin Luther King assassination.

G: Initially there had been an inclination to beef up the existing executive order rather than legislation.

O: We had been frustrated over a couple of years and there was a feeling of pessimism regarding our ability to legislate. As it played out it was a clear indication that, despite the President's other problems, he was still able to impact on the Congress significantly. Some felt that would not be the case, that it was the last year of his administration, therefore there would be less muscle. Most pundits were somewhat surprised that you were able to

enact further meaningful civil rights legislation under those circumstances.

Similarly, in the Housing and Urban Development Act it was a surprise factor, too, because it turned out to be relatively easy. It was landmark legislation providing for subsidies of mortgage payments for low-income families and it was far-reaching. The major dispute had to do with the income limitations and a formula was devised by way of compromise. That new town concept was intriguing. I don't think many felt that would survive the struggle. It was knocked out of the legislation and then restored. This closed with the Senate passing the measure by a voice vote and the House passing it overwhelmingly. It was again, as in the tax legislation, surprising that you could move with the Congress that well in 1968.

It was a much more successful session than could have been anticipated. Beyond that, when you think back on the long struggle to bring about meaningful truth-in-lending legislation, there, too, legislation was enacted which was far-reaching. A note I have says, "Nine years after the first such bill had been introduced," so that was a long struggle, a struggle that Senator Paul Douglas engaged in for a number of years when he was a member of the Senate.

G: Of course one of the big issues here was the disclosure for annual or revolving charge accounts.

O: That had to be compromised and it was. It wasn't all we wanted. That was the single significant compromise. There again the art of the possible came into play.

G: Was there a lot of lobbying by the department stores and banks?

O: With all we had going for us over those years, it's rather amazing that it took nine years to enact legislation of this nature. It clearly was indicative of the power of the lobby. They were able to fend this off and fend it off. Yet it seemed so significant and fair. I think the fairness aspect always frustrated me. I could never quite understand why we couldn't bring this about when I didn't consider it even debatable on the fairness side. They were able to stymie us for a long time. Finally, in the last months of the Johnson presidency this legislation was enacted.

When you take housing, taxes, civil rights, truth in lending, you've got quite a package of accomplishments.

G: You have talked in the past about the increasing influence of Vietnam on the congressional attitudes. Apart from that, was there an increasing reluctance of Congress, do you think, to promote Great Society legislation? Was there a feeling that the country needed time to digest the array of programs that had been enacted?

O: I don't think Congress was approaching consideration of domestic legislation in those terms. But you could not avoid noting that in 1967, more and more discussions with

members would involve expressions of concern about Vietnam. That increased in degree as time went on. But if you look at this legislative record in 1968, you were not being adversely affected by the growing concern regarding Vietnam. In the tax surcharge, the escalation of the cost of the Vietnam War was directly related. You would have people saying, "We're going through this because of Vietnam."

The rest of the major legislative enactments that year were not impacted. The Congress was continuing to be supportive of the President domestically.

When you say some were surprised with progress in 1968, that went to a feeling that he's not going to move the Great Society program, complete it, because he is carrying the burden of Vietnam, but that just wasn't the case. There was no observable reluctance on the part of our supporters in the Congress to pursue the objectives of the Great Society program.

Through this period, also, I had determined to make a major effort in the Post Office Department to reorganize it. That had led to a highly publicized proposal to create an independent postal service removed from departmental status. When it came to making a political decision, my major concern in leaving the administration was that I was leaving incomplete the effort that I had devoted a tremendous amount of time and attention to over a long period.

The Kappel Commission was in place; the President had named the commission. It was a blue-ribbon commission in every sense. It had not completed its report and recommendations, findings. I was deeply concerned about that. There was not White House enthusiasm for this. I had kind of dragged the President into it in a way. Yet, I was absolutely persuaded this was something that could be very meaningful, meaningful in terms of communication in this country.

When I left in April, this was unfinished. While I was engaged in discussions that had to do with the 1968 election, none of the people who were discussing my possible role understood that part of my reluctance had to do with my keen desire to see through what I had started in postal reform. However, there was nothing much you could do about that except try outside of government to pursue this effort. I resorted to talking to Joe Califano on a number of occasions urging him to be sure that the Kappel Commission was nudged to get its report and findings in.

A preliminary report was submitted by the commission. There were some aspects of it that were not in accord with my views. I had to try to ensure there'd be negotiations to refine those questionable areas and get to a final report. That ultimately occurred, but even then I found myself very frustrated. I'm on the outside. There is not presidential support or advocacy in the Congress. This went on through all of 1968. While I was quite pleased with the ultimate result of the commission's findings, I was not able to press for it from the inside. And that was frustrating.

Joe was cooperative with me. He was the source I had in the White House to see if we couldn't keep this alive. I did not want to see it die and it was on the verge of dying. It never was accepted and advocated by the President until his farewell address. We were able to get an insert into the address that was supportive of the commission recommendations. There was no real involvement in the White House. The President wasn't focusing attention on this matter. I have a feeling my successor Marvin Watson was not that enamored with it, either. I'm not faulting anyone. This wasn't something that excited people, so you had to keep fanning that flame if you possibly could. It would have been sad to have launched this, secure widespread public media support, come out with a very impressive set of recommendations and put it into a closed file. The best we could get was a reference by President Johnson, a favorable reference, in his farewell address.

To underscore that, it didn't take his successor long to note the value of this. I had the experience--by that time I was national chairman--to be visited by the designated Postmaster General, [Winton] Blount, designated by Nixon, who discussed this with me as a result of a detailed conversation with the President-Elect. The Nixon Administration ran with it. I was asked by the President to co-chair a citizens' committee to carry on this advocacy. I considered it totally non-partisan. I was very pleased that this was still alive and I did become actively involved, toured the country in support of it, testified in Congress in support. Ultimately, the legislation was enacted in significant part. Not in toto by any means, but at least I felt reasonably comfortable. The Post Office Department was removed from departmental status, given a considerable degree of independence and, most importantly, ability to self-finance.

That was very much in my mind at the time I was making political decisions in April of 1968. I'm not suggesting that if I had gone through 1968 we would have gotten it into legislation. I still feel that if I had remained I would have been vigorous enough in my advocacy to get a rapid decision from the Kappel Commission, a more rapid reaction from the White House and the President, and enlist advocates on the Hill who would have introduced the legislation in 1968 and not have it a Nixon proposal in 1969.

G: Well, likewise, do you think that as a result of your joining in the political activities first of Senator Kennedy and then Senator Humphrey that thereafter there was reluctance of the White House to push this measure through?

O: I don't think it was due to my political involvement. This from the beginning was the difficult task of directing attention to what some would conceive to be a nuts and bolts proposal that had no great glamour. It didn't light a fire. You had to light it yourself and keep fanning the flame. I launched it without direct approval of the President. The President was in accord and that resulted in the Kappel Commission. But you can't keep attention focused on a matter such as that unless you stay abreast of it yourself and you refuse to accept inattention. That goes to the nature of the department. As I have said, at cabinet meetings, after I was a member of the cabinet, the only change that occurred was instead of discussing the legislative program from my seat along the wall of the Cabinet Room, I was discussing the legislative program from my seat at the table. It was a rare

occurrence for any discussion to take place regarding postal service.

The fact that the Post Office Department, I think, was created as the third department of government, Benjamin Franklin had been the first postmaster general, the fact that the volume of mail was equal to the entire rest of the world, the fact that there were 750,000 employees in the postal service, the fact there was a tremendous dependency on the postal service on the part of every single American. . . . I can say all those things, but I tell you they wind up on deaf ears. I would have deaf ears to it also before I was postmaster general.

Then it came to the budget process and again the Post Office Department was low on the totem pole. The Post Office Department defrayed 90 per cent of its costs through revenue. The other 10 per cent had to be subsidized in one form or another. The postal unions were faring as well or better than any other civil servants because they were powerful entities with a great reservoir of strength in the Congress. You recognize that and so be it, so all right. You get to the budget, you get to this, but the postmaster general trying to arouse the White House and the administration generally regarding problems of the postal service was up against a stone wall.

I had the unique situation of becoming postmaster general with daily entree to the White House. That's why I went into reform. I felt this was an opportunity that was unique and I should seize it. And I did. I'm pleased that something happened, something quite meaningful. But I was frustrated during that period of months when I was out of direct action, trying to keep the spark flickering in the White House with Joe Califano and others. The record shows the President registered approval at the end and another President seized upon it and it ultimately came into being.

During those last stages when I was in the administration, we did finally conclude intricate and difficult negotiations with the several unions that represented postal employees. It was long and at times acrimonious negotiation but the threat of strike which was over our heads for months was avoided. We also tried to use our facilities to be helpful in the poverty-youth employment area. We did have some resources that could be put into that and we utilized them. We tied into the national organization of the Elks, for example, on youth employment. We were able to circumvent, against the union position, some of the civil service rules and bring in temporary employees that could be put into training programs that could ultimately lead to full-time employment. We introduced a number of these programs around the country and frankly, the postal service never received the credit it should have received.

G: Why did you think it did not?

O: There again, it's a big amorphous mass that nobody would pay any attention to until they failed to get their mail.

Along the lines I was discussing regarding the Kappel Commission, I sent a memo

on April 20, 1968, to Califano in which I said, "I have read the draft of the Kappel Commission report and I would strongly recommend against public release or presidential endorsement of the report in the form that it was sent." Joe Califano had arranged for me to review the draft and I had some problems with some aspects. I said, "It is totally senseless to base the recommendations upon a diatribe against the Congress and politics and upon a total denunciation of the postal service as it exists today." That was bothering me. After all, the commission is denouncing this administration, this President, for allowing these conditions to exist.

Tape 1 of 4, Side 2

O: "So we have done a very heavy editing job on the draft," I advised Joe, "while preserving the recommendations. If the commission is willing to accept the edited version which I am enclosing with this memo, I would endorse the report and I would urge its public release and I would recommend the President signify his approval." Then I threw a sentence in there. "I realize that that is a big 'if' but I will depend upon you, Joe, to get the job done." That's evidence of my frustration being out there somewhere. "I think it's important you return this edited version to [Frederick] Kappel making clear the recommended changes in the report are necessary or the report is dead. I understand that an editing committee, the commissioners, will be meeting Tuesday to go over the final draft. They should have the benefit of views prior to the start of that meeting." So that's just an example of the effort I was expending to try to keep this thing alive and keep it moving.

G: It demonstrates that you had good ties within the commission as well to keep up with--

O: Yes. Yes, it was a good commission. The commission members were not politicians and were not diplomatic in the language that was contained in the report. The basic recommendations I was in agreement with, but the tone of the report I was not. That would have caused a problem if you accepted it in that form. You would have had negative comment and congressmen would be saying that you don't need reform, what you need is the administration to straighten out the postal service.

But with legislation and postal reform, this was a period of concern politically. Back to the political events from November of 1967 through the election of 1968, there was a great deal of action and significant decisions were made. Early on in 1967 you had the normal procedure, committees endorsing LBJ for re-election. I became intimately involved in this process. There was a request made of me to develop a suggested campaign program.

G: Who made that request?

O: The President.

G: Describe the background in a little more detail.

O: This would come up from time to time. It's late 1967. You're a year away from election. It was reminiscent of discussions we had in the Kennedy period where we started to talk about 1964 a year and a half before 1964. You're busily engaged, but every once in a while those who have political responsibility would wake up to the fact that time was running. Occasionally the President would make reference to, "We're in 1967 and time will run rapidly." It was decided the President ought to start thinking about 1968, and perhaps the best way to focus on 1968 was to have a talking paper. I called it a white paper. It represented a great deal of thought on my part. It was a basic, in-depth proposal for a campaign organization. I submitted this to the President on September 29, 1967.

G: How did you develop this paper, first of all?

O: I developed it through my experience in various campaigns going back to the O'Brien Manual actually.

G: Did it draw heavily from the O'Brien--?

O: Yes, with refinements to update in terms of changes in campaign procedures. It's forty-four pages long and quite detailed. It does go into overall campaign organization and then it breaks down into the campaign structure itself, organization, polling, media, films, campaign literature, advertising, policy and positions, scheduling, finance chairman, federal agency liaison, use of the computers, issues. Then, looking at party weaknesses, looking at focal points, suburban voter middle-class American, lack of rapport with candidates to be concerned about splinter group hostility, youth, women, as we said in those days, the Negro vote. Republican strategy, we reviewed that, what we could anticipate. [I looked at] the presidential primaries and then the national convention. In a two-paragraph conclusion, I said, "At the start of this white paper, I stated that the goal is your re-election as president of the United States. I believe this goal is attainable and will be accomplished. We must not, however, lose any of the precious weeks and months that are needed to put into effect the organization of the campaign. It will take a full year, starting in November of 1967, to implement the recommendation of this paper. The time for decision-making is upon us." This was my effort to comply with the President's request that I detail what I conceived to be a campaign organization. Somebody had to initiate discussions and this was conceived by me to be a way of focusing attention on the campaign.

G: The white paper was critiqued by Jim Rowe. His critique was critiqued by you.

O: Yes. Jim Rowe critiqued the paper in some detail. He made some references to things he felt should be included that were not and also that greater emphasis should be put on some things. For example, he said, "I do not have comments on the substantive issues at this time other than to say O'Brien has spelled out the important ones with the exception of the farm problem." He went on to discuss the faults in the white paper as he saw it. Then [he] said, "If the President were to devote one or two evenings with a number of people in whom he has confidence, including O'Brien, to discuss the problems, beginning with this

paper would be most helpful. The sooner he does it the better," and I notice he had a yes or no and a check mark yes--I don't know who checked it but that was his critique.

Then November 7 I sent a memo to Watson giving my comments on Rowe. They were solicited; I was asked to comment on his critique. I said, "I find it difficult to relate a main committee to a working task force. My emphasis from the beginning has been on coordination. The task force [is] composed of coordinators with individual responsibilities who could also participate in general campaign planning. You will note this means coordinating all the elements of the campaign including the volunteer structure. I fear that the role of viewers versus the doers is misunderstood. It is easy to present a plan; it's extremely difficult to staff it. I cannot believe that a campaign can be waged by a committee of viewers. In that context, I felt that last Friday evening's meeting following the President's departure was a debacle."

I also sent a note to Rowe appreciating receiving his critique. He had suggested coordination with the national committee; I pointed out to him that I had included key members of the national committee. I went on in some detail. However, what is missing here--we have my white paper, we have Jim's critique, my critique of Jim. But, clearly, a meeting took place and the President was at that meeting, but he departed the meeting at some point on the basis of the November 7, 1967, memo to Watson. In the last paragraph I say, "I cannot believe that a campaign can be waged by a committee of viewers. In that context I felt last Friday evening's meeting following the President's departure was a debacle." Now, I don't remember specifics, but what I would term a debacle would be a group of people sitting around who are not going to play a full-time role in the campaign but have points of view which they want to express, running the spectrum without any specificity. I always considered campaign meetings of that nature to be debacles. I had lived through meetings where people pontificate and nothing was accomplished. Clearly, I reacted strongly to that meeting; clearly the meeting included the President. I guess you have to assume that the President said, "I'm going to leave now but, fellows, keep on discussing this and let's get things done." In my judgment at least I felt that the meeting ended without anything being done.

G: Do you remember who else was there?

O: No, I don't except I noticed that--I was looking at the bottom of this memo which comes out of the Watson file.

G: This is a memo from you to Watson, November 7, 1967.

O: Yes, but the meeting with the President had already taken place. In fact, it says specifically, "I felt last Friday evening"--whatever date that was--"following the President's departure was a debacle." That same day I sent a memo to Jim Rowe. The subject is Jim's memo concerning my white paper. I went through a great deal of detail on that meeting, too, making some general comments, reviewing the task force concept, registration, scheduling special groups, the farmers particularly which Jim had felt I did

not properly emphasize, polling coordinators, media, policy and positions, intellectual community. All of this I kept repeating. For example, intellectual community, so-called, "Once again, this area must be represented within the task force." My feeling was all of this had to be coordinated. I guess my conclusion to Jim Rowe, "Your memo does not recognize what the white paper envisions as the role and functions of the task force. The task force is not to be a public group officially designated in press releases and hoopla. It is to be a working coordinating group with adequate staffing. Its purpose is not to bring attention to itself but to organize, direct, and coordinate a presidential campaign. Your memo says that the white paper does not distinguish between the various stages of the campaign. This obviously would be one of the initial assignments of the task force, but it cannot be accomplished unless you have the people and the organization to do the job."

You'd have an inside group of observers and so-called experts, of which I would be one, who have these meetings and have discussions. But where was the working team? I didn't feel that you wanted this group of senior consultant experts and a campaign organization separated. If you were not going to be an integral part of the campaign organization and be familiar with all of its activities and totally involved on a day-to-day basis, I wasn't interested. That was never the case in any campaign I was ever in.

G: Why do you think there was a tendency to have this development in the Johnson election?

O: I don't think there was a formalized development. If you're going to have Abe Fortas, Clark Clifford, Jim Rowe or whoever, that's all well and good but what are they going to be doing? The tone of the meeting I objected to indicated to me that you could spend the next several months having conversations about how things should be done without any full involvement, knowledge of how this was unfolding or even a reporting system. This group would be close to the President and somebody else would be running the campaign.

G: Do you recall LBJ's input at the meeting? His reaction to your white paper?

O: All I can recall is that the initial purpose of the white paper was accomplished. For the first time in that meeting, that Friday before November 7, the President sat with a group to discuss a political campaign, a re-election drive.

G: But he didn't say anything about the white paper.

O: The white paper was basically the reason for the meeting and was available to everybody at the meeting.

G: Any other recollections of who else was there?

O: If my memory hadn't been jogged by the memos I probably would not have recalled the meeting.

G: How would you compare Jim Rowe to yourself as a political strategist, let's say?

O: Oh, I don't know. I never made an attempt to compare. Jim had been involved in national politics for a long time, had acquired, and rightly so, a reputation in that area, had had obviously considerable success. I'm sure it never entered my mind to make some comparison.

G: If you were making a comparison today, would you reflect that perhaps his strength was more oriented toward the West whereas yours might have been more toward the East?

O: I don't know. I think perhaps--and this sounds self-serving--that there wouldn't be anybody around at that time who had the experience I had nationally in every state in this union, and had as much direct contact with political leaders from the county level up across the country. That would be because I'd been through it more recently than Jim. Now, Jim undoubtedly had all that at a point, too. He had been through it and Jim and I were not in any conflict. My feeling was more "let's get on with it." I can remember being concerned about the Kennedy campaign for re-election and saying to Steve Smith and others, "We're all busy. We're all doing our thing, but before we know it we're going to be involved in another national campaign. We've just got to get with it."

I remember that meeting we had in the Cabinet Room in the Kennedy period. There were a number of us there who had been involved in the 1960 campaign and were now in government saying, "We've got to get with this." Get with what and when. And you go back to your office to catch up with your phone calls. That always concerned me. I never bought the idea that you peak at a certain time. I always felt in a political campaign you work harder and longer than the opposition.

It's nuts and bolts. There's very little, if any, glamour attached to it. It's hard, hard work. So I would get frustrated if you didn't get to the nuts and bolts. That really is all it amounted to. I felt that November of 1967 was not too soon to get people assigned, develop strategy. That forty-four page white paper is not something that can be implemented overnight.

G: Was there any doubt in your mind at this time that the President was going to be a candidate again?

O: No.

G: How about anyone else in the meeting?

O: I don't recall. I don't think frankly I would have involved myself in, even at the President's request, a white paper if I had doubts about it. At that point in September of 1967 you were just not contemplating anything but a re-election drive. And the re-election drive could turn out to be walk-through. It could be comparable to the Goldwater of 1964.

There was an attitude among some of the Kennedy people in early 1963 that

re-election was going to be automatic so why get excited or concerned? Well, I felt that Jack Kennedy never would have been president of the United States if we approached political campaigns--back to Henry Cabot Lodge--that way. It just doesn't happen. You have to work at them. A campaign that I'd be more accustomed to, obviously, would be basic O'Brien Manual nuts and bolts. It was not just sitting around discussing grand strategy, and that would be where I think I would feel some degree of frustration.

G: Now, you yourself I guess went through a change in terms of your own involvement with the President's campaign.

O: Yes.

G: From the standpoint of not being involved to a certain extent and then being very involved.

O: Like a roller coaster, I guess. Jim Rowe, incidentally, surfaced through this as a key fellow with Lyndon Johnson and I must say a creative guy. I could see why he had been successful in the political arena.

(Interruption)

O: You have November of 1967, and there were perhaps other meetings. I know that Jim Rowe and I, following this meeting, had a great deal of contact. I don't recall any meetings comparable to this one I referred to where we just sat and kind of pontificated. Jim wasn't that type of fellow either, incidentally. He had a great awareness of presidential campaigns so he and I wound up in pretty regular contact. It didn't take long before this organizational concept just disappeared because, as early as January of 1968, I have a memo to the President regarding the Massachusetts presidential primary. That's a far cry from establishing a broad-based national campaign organization.

He had asked me to evaluate the Massachusetts primary. I don't recall discussion with the President between November and January about organizational strategy across the country. This memo reports that I have evaluated the situation. I took the occasion to have a poll taken showing that any number of candidates could easily defeat Gene McCarthy in Massachusetts. But I also had a warning that whatever route might be taken regarding the Massachusetts primary it should be anticipated there would be an active campaign. You could not take this poll and assume that would be the end result when you have an extremely active Gene McCarthy with an organized campaign.

So, whoever was going to stand in, if that was what the President's decision was, would have to be prepared to organize and campaign vigorously in Massachusetts. I had thrown my own name into the poll and I pointed out to the President that I would be prepared to leave the administration and be the stand-in if that was his desire.

G: There was some interest in having Ted Kennedy.

O: Having Ted Kennedy would accomplish all kinds of things, but was it realistic? You shouldn't foreclose it. In fact, I discussed it with Ted Kennedy.

G: Tell me about that discussion.

O: I'll get to that.

All you're saying is, "Has the President made up his mind to enter primaries?" That's his decision. I, at one point, thought it was appropriate and at a later point thought it was most inappropriate. All we were dealing with at that point really was a Gene McCarthy situation. Massachusetts was particularly important because McCarthy clearly would enter that primary.

The reason that you felt Ted Kennedy could possibly be the stand-in, favorite son, was because he had a stake in the Massachusetts primary. My judgment was that Ted Kennedy would not be enamored with the idea that Gene McCarthy would be handed the Massachusetts delegation on a silver platter. Maybe that would motivate Ted. Here you have a serious look at the Massachusetts primary, how you're going to fend off McCarthy, how you're going to preserve the President's position.

I was at Bob Kennedy's house one evening and as the evening closed out, I made a point of getting Teddy in a corner as we were both about to leave. I put it to him directly. This was very close to the final date for filing for the Massachusetts primary. Teddy made it clear to me he would not be a stand-in in the Massachusetts primary.

G: Did you try to convince him to?

O: No. I asked him if he was prepared to and he said he didn't think so. I asked him if he would consider it. He indicated he wouldn't. I asked him finally if he would keep an open mind and he agreed to do that. Let's close it out that way, but I certainly didn't leave feeling there was any chance. That took care of that.

I had a conversation with the Speaker at which the Speaker made it very clear to me that he would not act as a stand-in.

G: Yet, he was in a similar position because he didn't want a McCarthy delegation either, I guess.

O: He didn't have as much at stake as Teddy had, as I saw it.

G: Why didn't Ted Kennedy want to do that?

O: Ted Kennedy had a pleasant relationship with the President. They got along well. The President's concern about Bobby obviously existed and we will get into that. Perhaps

Teddy could work with McCarthy to split the delegation--something short of putting his name on a ballot. Teddy wasn't enamored with the idea of being that committed to Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam. Now, none of those things were said, but you could come to such a conclusion. McCormack wasn't going to go to Massachusetts and campaign as a stand-in. If he had agreed to do it, it would have been a matter of simply putting his name on the ballot.

While all this was going on, there was activity in New Hampshire. Bernie Boutin was handling the President's interests in New Hampshire. I had no knowledge of what was going on in New Hampshire. At this time I'm not involved in discussing anything other than the Massachusetts primary. I thought that if it was the President's decision that he be represented in Massachusetts and you didn't have the availability of McCormack or Teddy--I had no ego in that regard--that in loyalty to the President I should volunteer to stand in. That would be his decision, and he understood that; that was clear.

But it became a matter of total indecision. I had a breakfast meeting with Bobby at some stage. Bobby was expressing his concerns about Vietnam. I believe it was at that meeting that he urged me to have a discussion with Bob McNamara. I don't know how the meeting was set up; I don't recall, but McNamara came to my office and proceeded to make a strong pitch that Bobby should run for president. I pointed out to McNamara that everybody shared concern about Vietnam. It was a growing concern. I was picking it up around the country and on the Hill. I felt in the best interests of all a major effort should be made internally to change the President's course on Vietnam.

Tape 2 of 4, Side 1

O: That was my position and I would continue to retain that position. Bobby, at some meeting during that time, made reference to a poll that was being conducted by Jess Unruh, who had been a long-time Kennedy supporter in California, to determine Bob Kennedy re: Lyndon Johnson in California. This was getting serious. Bobby decrying Johnson's Vietnam policy; Johnson complaining to me about Bobby's attitude toward him went on from time to time. He said he would advise me on the result of the poll. The result of the poll was discussed. There were three or four of us sitting around. I don't remember what was discussed in specifics. There were no copies of polls. That was the only knowledge I had of the poll. The poll results were never formally given to me. There wasn't a great deal of emphasis placed on the poll results, but nobody made a big issue of it and that was the extent of my knowledge of the poll.

I found myself deeply immersed in Massachusetts primary discussions, lacking any knowledge of what was transpiring in New Hampshire and sensing that the Bobby Kennedy matter was getting more serious. While the concern was at that point focused on McCarthy re: Massachusetts, re: New Hampshire and perhaps elsewhere, it was a strange position to be in. I had put on the record to the President that all he had to do was say, "I want you to stand in," I'll stand in, and let's get this done. I owe it to him. I will do it with no reluctance and give it all the effort I can.

But Bernie Boutin called me one day. He is running the New Hampshire primary. He said, "You probably would wonder why I haven't been in regular contact with you on what's transpiring up here." I said, "I have wondered how it's going." He said, "Well, I'm"--I think this is what he said--"under instruction not to be involved with you in this." I don't know who the strategists were that were making those decisions, but it did bother me to the extent that I have been loyal, yet whether it's the President or others, they distrust me. They just are not sure of me. That was bothersome because, with all of my Kennedy associations, I was adhering to a straight line, would continue to. Bobby and Teddy Kennedy would recognize that and understand that. They did. I never had a problem with them in that regard. They knew that I was not going to do anything but support the guy that I worked for and that was it. They could wish otherwise but that wasn't going to happen. Certainly the two Kennedys were not going to consider this some kind of an affront. In fact, interestingly enough, they appreciated that; nevertheless, there is somebody on the Johnson side saying, "I don't know about O'Brien." Be that as it may, we got to a situation in Massachusetts where it was decided that the President of the state senate, Maurice Donahue, would be the stand-in.

G: Who decided that?

O: I was involved in it.

G: Was Ted Kennedy involved in it?

O: No. Here's a leading Democrat in the state. He's president of the state senate. His attitude was "Fine, be happy to; just give me the signal."

Meanwhile, the President said he deeply appreciated the fact that I had volunteered to stand in for him, but he didn't feel that he wanted to have me do that. It meant leaving the administration, but he appreciated the offer. So at that point you have Maurice sitting in Boston, and we had conversations with the state chairman who came to me to discuss this.

G: This was Hyman?

O: Les Hyman. We discussed the various procedural aspects and the rest. So by process of elimination, if there is to be a stand-in, it's Donahue and he's ready. It got to the last day for filing. This information is available to Marvin Watson and I assume Jim Rowe. But I have no signal. I desperately try to get the signal while Donahue is on standby in Boston. I couldn't get Marvin Watson on the telephone. The day wore on and I kept [getting] back to Donahue saying, "Stand by." I never was able to make the contact; there was no filing. The decision obviously was made by the President not to have a stand-in. I hadn't been advised that was his decision so I played it out to the last hour. As I had been requested to be directly involved in the Massachusetts primary, I stayed involved until the closing of the State House. The Massachusetts primary has gone by the board.

G: Did you draw conclusions from this that perhaps the President wasn't going to run?

O: No.

G: Really?

O: No. Not at all. I concluded that the President was being very indecisive on how to handle this.

G: There was also a question with regard to the delegate slate for this primary.

O: Yes.

G: And it seems a lot of horse trading. I know Ted Kennedy insisted on Dick Goodwin, for example, and administration didn't seem to want--

O: There was a lot of that but really what it came to was, was there going to be a delegate slate or not. I don't remember Goodwin. If he insisted on it, I wasn't aware of it and I was deeply involved, I thought.

G: What was Hyman's role in all this?

O: He had [a] certain responsibility as state chairman.

G: That must have been a frustrating experience for you.

O: Well, it--let me--

G: This is February 2, you say.

O: Yes, 1968. There is a memo to Jim Rowe from me which underscores the activity that I was engaged in. In this memo, I report my current findings on primaries. I start with New Hampshire; no one had told me not to be involved in New Hampshire so it wouldn't enter my mind not to be. I point out that New Hampshire is well-organized and in good hands. I point out that I have talked twice to Governor [Hulett] Smith of West Virginia and he has noted that there is no interest on the part of anyone to get into the primary. He said he will stand by through the close of business today and in the event anything occurs, he is prepared to enter his name; in other words, if somebody else entered the primary. Ohio, confirming the arrangements with Steve Young as favorite son, with the release of the delegates prior to the first ballot, is firm. In Pennsylvania, we'll have a report shortly.

In Massachusetts I said, "For your information I attach a copy of the memorandum I sent to the President expressing my views." I discussed write-in problems with Bernie Boutin. It is only the city of Portsmith with voting machines. It's extremely complicated

and if machines existed through New Hampshire it would be impossible for him to carry on a write-in. I have reached the firm conclusion that the President's name be on the Massachusetts ballot. However, this must come about by a decision made by Chairman Hyman without any acquiescence on our part and accompanied by public support from the Massachusetts State Committee, all the state legislative leaders, as many Democratic leaders and other Democratic officeholders as possible and the congressional delegation. Obviously, this does not include Ted Kennedy who will remain neutral." Then I talk about raising money in Massachusetts. I say, "A write-in in Massachusetts is unrealistic and I'm now convinced a stand-in is also probably not realistic." Then I say, "I suggest you incorporate whatever portion of this report you feel is significant in your report to the President."

On February 22, I sent a memo to the President regarding the Massachusetts primary in which I said, "Jim Rowe and I conferred today with State Chairman Lester Hyman, Speaker McCormack and Eddie McCormack. For the first time I was given the opportunity to review the slate of delegates compiled by Ted Kennedy to be approved at the Democratic State Committee meeting in Boston. The list includes Professor Sam Beer, Jerry Weisner, Allan Sidd, who garnered four votes in leading the fight against the pro-Vietnam resolution to the Democratic State Committee, Adam Yarmolinsky, and Dick Goodwin. As best I could determine, all on the slate are clearly pro-LBJ. We discussed each of these assuming they oppose your Vietnam policy but [do] not necessarily oppose your re-election with the exception of Goodwin and the discussion centered on him. Hyman advised us that Ted Kennedy insisted Goodwin be on the slate."

I said I didn't remember it but here it is. "Further, the slate contains my name along with Bob Wood and Charlie Haar. It does not contain the name of John Roche and it was indicated he was traded off for not including [John Kenneth] Galbraith. I told Hyman I did not know what policy, if any, existed for presidential appointees as delegates. I further stated the selection of delegates was a matter for Ted Kennedy and the Democratic leaders in Massachusetts as they had clearly indicated that by not discussing this matter with us until now. We, in turn, would of course determine what, if any, position we would take regarding a candidate against McCarthy. Hyman reiterated his intention to place your name on the ballot. The McCormacks indicated approval of this procedure. Rowe and I were noncommittal. Stand-ins were discussed. McCormack was mentioned on the basis he would not be considered in any way a future challenge to the Democrats. Other stand-ins were discussed including Maurice Donahue, Kevin White and me." Kevin White was mayor in Boston. "All agreed that any stand-in would cause conflicts that would seriously lessen the pro-LBJ vote. Once again, Rowe and I were noncommittal except Jim suggested McCormack, but the Speaker seemed adamant. The Speaker expressed deep concern, as this would of course place him in a position of being pledged to McCarthy; he'd be a delegate. If he stayed under these circumstances he would not remain on the delegation. Hyman firmly stated he would also remove himself. Both of them pointed out that the leading Democrats on the slate would undoubtedly follow suit. In this area of discussion as in the others Jim Rowe and I were noncommittal except to indicate no name on the ballot had to be considered as a possibility along with the other

possibilities that have been discussed."

I summarize saying, "Apparently, the Hyman slate will be endorsed by the state committee. However, there will be a resolution presented urging your renomination and re-election which will complement the Vietnam resolution passed by the state committee last meeting." Then, "There is unanimity of opinion that you are strong in Massachusetts and we have staunch supporters at the leadership level." I point out that "last night Donahue and Kevin White both expressed their strong support for LBJ. The alternatives are a) Hyman pursues his course and files your name without any signal from us or b) the Speaker be persuaded and only you can do this, or c) a stand-in be selected from the remaining possibilities or d) not allow your name or the name of any official stand-in be presented thus permitting the delegation to be pledged to McCarthy on the first ballot which will result in decimating the slate Teddy has put together and leave the situation in a shambles." I suggested to him that they could anticipate a roll call at Chicago and it would be more impressive than simple acclamation. In other words, they stay on the record.

So Hyman was very much involved because that's February 22, and on March 4 I have a memo from Ira Kapenstein to me. "Lester Hyman called me this afternoon to present an angle on the Massachusetts primary. There is a line on the presidential primary ballot to write in the name of the candidate for president. Assuming the President's name is not on the ballot and a stand-in for the President is running against McCarthy, the more sophisticated voter on April 30 will realize that a vote for the stand-in will be a vote for the President. However, the less sophisticated voter could decide to write in the name of the President. This would split the vote for Johnson between stand-in and the write-in. These votes would be tallied separately, thus creating the possibility of a McCarthy victory because of the split voting. Lester said this angle had been brought to his attention by a reporter today and that he had not thought of it previously. This seems to be a valid concern and serves to re-emphasize the need for a highly-organized, well-financed campaign. If there is to be a stand-in, the campaign must get across to the Democratic voters that Mr. X is standing in for President Johnson."

On March 6, I sent a letter to the Secretary of the State of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts saying, "I wish to withdraw as a candidate for delegate for Massachusetts in the 1968 National Convention." Apparently I was on that roster of delegates. "When I was nominated for delegate at a meeting held in Boston on February 24, it was my hope that I would be able to vote at the national convention for the renomination of President Lyndon B. Johnson. However, the only name that will appear on the presidential preference primary ballot in Massachusetts is that of Senator Eugene McCarthy, which means that under the Massachusetts law the delegates will be committed to vote for Senator McCarthy at the national convention. I do not want to vote for Senator McCarthy as a delegate, therefore I must withdraw from the slate." So I formally withdrew.

On March 6, I sent a memo to Marvin Watson saying, "The attached is

self-explanatory. It represents my views and how best to handle non-presidential involvement in primaries in general terms." It is a background paper where I say, "There seems to be some misunderstanding as to the President's position concerning the presidential preference primaries." This is March 6. I point out that "only fifteen states have presidential primaries and of that number only three states have primary laws which make the president's name on the ballot mandatory unless he certifies he is not a candidate for re-election. Those states are Wisconsin, Nebraska and Oregon. At this time the President has made no decision concerning his candidacy for re-election and therefore he would not file the disclaimer in the three states mentioned above. Therefore, the President will avoid involvement in all presidential primaries this year where there is any option. That is exactly what happened in Massachusetts. If a stand-in for the President had been entered in the Massachusetts primary this would have indicated at least indirect presidential acquiescence. The presidential primaries are a totally valid testing ground for candidates in the party out of power. An incumbent president who has to rely on being active on the presidential primaries for his nomination would be operating from a position of weakness and be risking the antagonism of the American people for involving himself in political campaign activity long before the November election." This is an argument. "I present this as the background paper for justification for not entering any primaries."

G: Did this reflect your own actual feeling at the time?

O: We had gone through this Massachusetts debacle and it was clear that the President was not going to be entering primaries or preferred certainly not to enter primaries. You say, "Okay, if that is the procedure that is going to be followed, this is the justification for the procedure. It's weak, but it sounds fairly good." You reach a little, but you're talking about his attention to his duties.

G: But clearly the President's position aside, there was an impact on state politics if he forfeited entering primaries. As you said in Massachusetts, it left in shambles the delegate--

O: It did.

G: Well, which is preferable?

O: Well, at this point, if you have foreclosed Massachusetts and you are trying to do a write-in in New Hampshire, you don't have anything preferable anymore. You better come up with a rationale for non-involvement and let it fly. What else are you going to do? Are you going to say, "I didn't go here but I am going there" or do you have an overall policy? Your policy is forced upon you really at that point. You can't be talking about these other twelve or thirteen primaries beyond New Hampshire and Massachusetts. You have to be concerned that you may be stuck in Wisconsin, Oregon and Nebraska and you were in the Wisconsin primary. You have to forego seeking the nomination in order to avoid having your name on the ballot.

To reconstruct this, you go back to the white paper. That white paper obviously assumed a lot. It assumed that this man was going to seek re-election, that we weren't going to make any waves about it and we were going to proceed in all aspects of the campaign. That obviously would have built into it the primaries. But that's in September. There's a meeting in November. Now in January I find myself spending time in the nitty-gritty of a Massachusetts primary, including a slate of delegates. Then you find that you can't get a response to determine whether or not you're going to have a stand-in, within hours of the closing of the filing; the closing at five o'clock goes by and you've never been able to talk to anyone. So it was clear that nobody wanted to talk about it. That was the mess we were in.

G: Did you ever discuss that point with the President later?

O: I don't recall that I did.

This document to Marvin Watson that I put together says, "The debacle has occurred. The game is over. There is no point in discussing stand-ins, primaries, from here on out. There has to be a position that justifies your decision not to be involved. Why? That's because you wanted to attend to your duties." It's weak, but all that's available.

Now you get to the notes of a meeting that took place on February 9 that included Jim Rowe, Crooker.

G: John Crooker, probably.

O: And me. And at that meeting Boutin reports 1,600 volunteers are working in New Hampshire. It was agreed two steps should be taken. First, "O'Brien will make some opportunity to dedicate a post office or honor a postmaster so that he may visit the state, and John Dow will have some occasion to be in New Hampshire and will seek to take a reading of feeling among younger people." And I did go to New Hampshire. "With respect to Wisconsin, it was suggested by Rowe that Ralph Hewitt and John Holden be asked to coordinate efforts, that Kapenstein could develop a great deal of helpful information about matters in Wisconsin. O'Brien will contact [Clement] Zablocki to ascertain whether he'd be willing to serve as a co-chairman. During the meeting [Richard] Cudahy called from Wisconsin to report on the initial work being done at the headquarters in Milwaukee. As the deadline for filing in Pennsylvania is only a few days off, O'Brien agreed to appraise the situation in that state over the weekend, especially as he has a speaking engagement there on Saturday night, February 10. Governor Price Daniel visited with the group and reported on suggestions that certain Democratic governors and former governors become involved in campaign efforts. Rowe will be leaving for California on February 10, will contact key leaders there and will relay to [Edward] Breathitt all important information and permit Breathitt to size up the situation by the time he goes to California about February 14. Brief reference was made to designate certain individuals who would have primary responsibility for contact with several states and also for

geographical regions or groups of states but this topic was deferred until a later meeting in which possibly [Samuel] Kanell, [Russell] Carter and/or [Erwin] Griswold might be present." I don't know. All that indicates is you're playing around with this on February 9.

Over St. Patrick's Day, I had a schedule in Massachusetts. It wasn't confined to March 17. March 16, I was in Massachusetts the day Bob Kennedy announced his candidacy. At some point during that thirty-six hour period, March 16, 17, by sheer coincidence I am with Teddy Kennedy at a function in Everett, Massachusetts and I'm the speaker. Teddy said he wanted to talk to me after the function or at some time during the function. However, he left before we had any conversation. He left early for some reason and a fellow on his staff, Jim King, told me after the function that Teddy wanted to get the word to me that Bobby was, I guess the following day, announcing his candidacy for president. That's how I learned of it. I was in western Massachusetts the next day at several functions during the day and I, at some point, heard Bob Kennedy's announcement. That's all I recall about it.

I came back to Washington and on March 18 I sent a memo to the President reacting to a proposal made by Rowe that he and I quickly send a telegram to hundreds of Democrats around the country, which I construed as a serious overreaction to the Bobby Kennedy announcement. Apparently, it had caused hysteria. In that context, Rowe was pressing me to enter this joint action with him. I didn't particularly appreciate Jim Rowe making that decision, which I considered not sensible. An overreaction would be picked up by the press and we would get the hell kicked out of us. If Rowe had taken it on his own or whether it had been at the urging of the President, I didn't know. But if it had been something that the President was interested in directly, he could discuss it with me directly. I should not be thrust into something like this willy-nilly.

G: Do you think it was Rowe's idea to send that out or do you think it was the President's?

O: I assume it was his. You have the Bobby Kennedy announcement and out of the White House comes this rash of telegrams across the country which in substance say, "Restate your loyalty to the President immediately." I believe that Rowe in the context of that recommendation suggested I be immediately designated chairman of the campaign. If anything would be construed by the press that the President didn't sleep last night and won't sleep ever again because of Bobby Kennedy, that would do it. I thought it amateurish at best. In any event, I reacted rather strongly to it, I guess.

G: Your notes also indicate that Ted Kennedy had dinner at your home that night.

O: That was March 18. Yes. He came to my home. It was just he and I. It took him a long time during the course of what was a social occasion--split a bottle of wine; have a leisurely steak--to get around to suggesting that maybe I ought to give some thought to joining Bobby.

G: How did he phrase his suggestion, do you remember?

O: Chuckling and laughing and kidding around. A little reminiscing. It would be like old times; I would direct the campaign. Why did I want to be bothered with that Post Office Department? It was light, a lot of humor. But he didn't persuade me.

G: What was your response?

O: In the same vein: "You've got to be kidding. You know what my position is and will continue to be." He didn't press the issue but he sure brought up the subject. I'm sure that was orchestrated as part of Bobby's announcement. The coincidence of Teddy having made arrangements to have dinner with me on March 18. "Why didn't he drop by to my place and we have a pleasant evening?" If you look at the timetable, it couldn't have been more fortuitous from his point of view. In any event, nothing came of that and Teddy didn't express any animosity whatsoever. He indicated that he understood clearly, but why not try it? I believe the very next day Bobby called me.

G: That's the date on your--

O: What date is that?

G: The nineteenth, the next day.

O: Bobby called me at my office. He was obviously totally aware of what transpired the night before and he carried on in the same vein, saying, "Well, we're not going to give up. This won't be the last of this," that sort of thing. Coinciding with that I was scheduled to address the National Press Club.

G: The twentieth, yes.

O: Bobby took occasion that morning to call me. Normally, Bobby would have been disinterested in my speaking at the National Press Club. I got a kick out of the call because he said, "I understand you're addressing the National Press Club and I was wondering what you were going to say about me." My response in a rather jocular vein again was, "I'm not going to say anything about you, but I have my prepared remarks and I'll give you a section"--which I read to him in which I strongly supported LBJ.

G: What was his reaction?

O: "Well, I just thought I'd check. I thought maybe you'd have something nice to say about me." One of those typical conversations I had over the years with the Kennedys. Nevertheless, this was going on all the way back to Bobby expressing his growing concern about Vietnam and the President's position, the Bob McNamara conversation, the lunch or breakfast I had with Bobby, dinner at Hickory Hill, learning Bobby was announcing while I was sitting at a banquet in Everett, Massachusetts, Teddy by more than sheer

coincidence scheduled to have dinner with me at my home, Bobby calling me the next morning to follow up on Teddy, and then the National Press Club. It was always in a light vein; nevertheless, the pressure was there.

But the pressure did not affect me at all because you shouldn't be affected. Because--"Are you loyal to the President?"--if I had preached all my life loyalty and I felt so strongly about it in the White House in the Kennedy period and the Johnson period and always said if you have some problem with loyalty, you have one action to take: leave. That went back to problems I had with a couple of members of the Kennedy Administration in the earlier days when I put it to them. So I had no problem whatsoever. I wasn't losing a moment's sleep and my course was clear. I was going to remain loyal to that President and fulfill my responsibility to the end of his administration. I should say it in all fairness, that the Kennedys knew that there was no way they could pressure me. It would have to be a matter of cajoling me or reflecting on friendship and that sort of thing.

Tape 2 of 4, Side 2

O: They conducted themselves in a proper manner but they made the effort.

(Interruption)

O: At one point in all this, before Bob Kennedy's announcement, in a session I had with him--one of these dinners or luncheons or breakfasts--I urged him to contact the President. I felt very strongly about it. Bobby can tell me until hell freezes over all his problems regarding Johnson's policies. Johnson can tell me until hell freezes over all his problems as he perceives them with Bobby. But, for God's sake, stop telling me, both of you, what your problems are concerning each other. Why don't the two of you sit down and see if there is any way you can work out these problems? Talk to each other. I urged Bobby to do that. I urged Bobby to just pick up the phone, make an appointment with the President, sit down, see if anything can come of it. As I recall it, he indicated he was going to seriously think about it. It never happened. He did not have the meeting with the President. However, in that period, Ted Sorensen, on Bobby's behalf, reportedly met with the President--this was unknown to me at the time--and presented a proposal to form a committee to review Vietnam policy. I have always felt that that was Bobby's way of moving with the suggestion I made to him. He took that circuitous route that he felt would mean the President would sit down and talk to him about it, rather than Bobby asking the President to meet with him. He used Ted as the emissary. The President, as I understand it, dismissed it out of hand, which I think in retrospect was a big mistake. Again, nothing probably would have come of it, but this was a reaching out by Bobby to LBJ. He made the gesture. And I will say that's all it was, a gesture. It was far from my suggestion that he meet directly, request the meeting. I think if I had been Lyndon Johnson under those circumstances I would have said, "Let me think about it. I'd like to discuss it directly with Bobby. Why don't we have Bobby come in?" Who knows what persuasive powers he might have had at that point that would have ameliorated this situation, but it didn't happen.

Meanwhile, I had a problem, the only problem I ever had with the President, and it occurred at some point in this whole primary/non-primary, nonparticipation/participation area. There was an article in the paper that quoted a top official that Johnson was not going to enter any primaries. Johnson reacted very strongly to it and he called me. We had a tough conversation. He said that he assumed I had been the source of that story and, by God, he'd make up his own mind whether he entered primaries and all this sort of thing.

G: Why did he assume that you had been the source?

O: I don't know. I think probably that was what Boutin indicated to me. I don't know.

G: In your book I think you said that Ira--

O: I learned that Ira Kapenstein had inadvertently made that comment to somebody. I was unaware of it. Certainly he was under no instructions from me, but I wasn't about to send Ira down the drain. Ira never made another mistake that I can recall in all the years he was with me. I wasn't about to tell the President that--I think probably by the time of the phone call, I had found out. Maybe Ira volunteered, which would be like him and he said, "I goofed. You may have seen this article and I did it. I'm sorry." Well, I got hot. I said, "Do you have anything further to say on this subject?" or something to that effect, and the silence or "No" when I hung up. That is the only occasion I had in my years of association with him when we had words.

G: Did he question your loyalty on that occasion?

O: Well, I don't think he got that far, if he intended to, because I hung up. I think really I hung up because I had been adhering rigidly to the line. I had no problem with it. I keep repeating that because people would assume I must have been going up the wall because of Bobby Kennedy. I wasn't, and the Kennedys knew that because they knew me intimately. They knew I was an independent guy. They had indications of that through my years with Jack. I was not concerned. I was in place and I was staying in place. Perhaps the President or some around him were thinking, "Can you be sure of O'Brien? Sure, he had the white paper. Sure, he volunteered for the Massachusetts primary and all that but he's a Kennedy guy." I was the only Kennedy guy left. All the others had disappeared long ago. "Can you really be sure of him?" I think that item--he's not going to enter any presidential primaries--was an indication to Johnson that, yes, that's O'Brien. "Why would he say that? He doesn't want me in any primaries. What's he doing, positioning me? What's he"--I don't recall we discussed it beyond that phone call but I do remember that I was upset, because I construed the phone call really to be questioning my loyalty and I resented that no end. If that phone call had gone on, the chances are pretty good that I would have told him to shove it.

G: What was the follow-up to the phone call?

O: I don't recall any.

G: The next time you spoke with Johnson, he was amiable?

O: Yes. I think probably he was a little bit stunned with the way the phone call terminated. I chose to forget it. He obviously chose to forget it. I never heard of it again.

G: But he had, in effect, chosen not to enter any of the primaries?

O: I guess by that time he had. I don't recall the time frame. We've really been talking about a relatively short period of time here where a lot of things happened.

In the meantime, you're trying to go about your business. Concern regarding Vietnam on my part became an increasing concern and more personalized with me in the short time following these incidents. The fact is that we found ourselves with Bobby as a candidate pursuing his course, Lyndon Johnson suffering what the media determined was a defeat in New Hampshire. That fell into place at some point. Clearly, Bobby was not going to wait any longer to be a candidate when he saw that there was a basic Johnson weakness exposed in the New Hampshire primary and there was Gene McCarthy, who Bobby had no regard for, picking up the marbles. So he was not going to stand by and see that happen.

Meanwhile, you were going to have the confrontation. Maybe you could get past the New Hampshire primary, but you couldn't avoid Wisconsin. That was the problem faced by the President. At some point he asked me if I would meet with cabinet members to explore a more aggressive effort to promote his position around the country; that I convene the cabinet members with the exception of the two or three you don't involve in politics.

G: The three being the Secretary of State, Secretary of--

O: Secretary of State and Defense and there is some other one. There were six or eight of them in town that I called. We had a long session in my office in the Post Office Department. The hawk of the session was Orville Freeman. Orville was a strong supporter of the Vietnam policy. Stu Udall and a couple of others were expressing concerns. But the pitch of the meeting was not to review the policy, the pitch as I conducted the meeting was, "We've got to get out and do more. We've got to coordinate our efforts and be selective in speaking engagements to see if we can't make a contribution to favorable impact." Everybody agreed on that. Orville had been in Wisconsin and spoke and had been booed by some college group, which didn't deter him a bit. He, with some glee, talked about that. He was a real fighter. When the meeting was over Stu Udall hung back. He wanted to chat privately. He said he and I shared a lot in politics back with Kennedy and that he was deeply concerned about Vietnam.

I had chosen to express my concerns in the political context. It sounds crass but I felt that was the direction I could speak from. I was not a policy maker; I don't discuss strategy in Vietnam. I could discuss it or reflect on it in the political context. I had made my views known to the President in writing. There was a day when I was talking to the Vice President and I revealed to him the views I expressed to the President. It turned out that Hubert was concerned and we discussed it in a political context. He said, "We are involved in so many things over such a long period of time, and I've never known what view if any you might have about what's happening." I said, "I didn't know about your attitude." He said, "Well, of course, neither one of us is ever going to express concerns publicly, but I wish we could figure something out."

G: These views didn't come out at cabinet meetings?

O: No. There was a cabinet meeting where the President said that he wanted the views of the cabinet, that he was becoming concerned about some reactions on the Hill. I'll get to some of those meetings which indicated the rising concern on the Hill. I responded to the President by sending him a memo. This was March 21. I said, "At the last cabinet meeting, you suggested that any cabinet member who had views on Vietnam should present them. Through this memorandum I want to express my thoughts. At the outset, let me say that while all of us cannot hope but have an eye toward the consequences of our policy in terms of next November, my concerns in this area are not in any way politically motivated, viewing our challenge in human terms. We must with all deliberate speed shift the burden to the South Vietnamese where it belongs." And I do say, "I'm not suggesting withdrawal. Apparently, it is unrealistic to expect meaningful negotiations. Conversely, significant escalation would in all probability be matched by a similar increase in the other side. What I am suggesting is a phasing out of the tremendous American responsibility for the conduct of a war and a phasing in of a far greater responsibility by the South Vietnamese themselves."

And I go on, "I feel another escalation would be futile. I do believe that you can publicly enunciate the disappointment and unhappiness of this government with the failures of the South Vietnamese government. You can pledge support to their efforts to fight their war and win their peace. You can project to the American people you believe far greater sacrifices must be made by the people of South Vietnam." I conclude by saying, "I do not believe from my observations and contacts the American people continue to retain confidence in an administration which they feel is rigidly fixed into a position brought about by past judgments going back many years. I feel the American people would support an administration that lessens our involvement based on the realistic assessment that the government and the people of South Vietnam have not fulfilled their obligations."

That was an honest response to his request. It was the best I could do because I was neither a military expert nor a foreign policy expert. Clearly, what I'm saying here is that this doesn't wash. You can anticipate further deterioration. It's a hopeless situation over the long haul.

(Interruption)

G: There really wasn't much discussion within the cabinet about Vietnam, is that right?

O: No, not in terms of candor or expression of personal views. I think over those years the cabinet was in about the same position as the leadership. There is something about the president and the presidency that inhibits people in being totally forthcoming. At this point when the President told us that we should feel free to give him our views, it was not in the context of, "Let's talk here." It was, "If you have some thoughts, feel free to express them to me." I construed that to mean that you should communicate directly with him, and I chose to send that memo.

The deterioration in the public acceptance of the Vietnam policy was escalating through late 1967 into early 1968. Entwined in that, of course, was the President's concern about his own political future, which is reflected in many of the things we've discussed. We talked about the ultimate decision not to enter primaries. It became apparent that there was no other decision that could be made by the President. This was reflected in the memo I sent to Watson in which I attempted to spell out a position to justify non-participation. The advent of the Kennedy announcement of candidacy coupled with the existing McCarthy candidacy, of course, compounded the situation.

As I said earlier, I met at the President's direction with the cabinet members. Even in that context, you could detect a certain degree of reluctance to speak out, express your thoughts, but it began to occur. The fellows felt a little more comfortable; there was no president sitting there.

G: Let me ask you to elaborate a little on this. Was this, do you think, more or less the case with Lyndon Johnson in particular or all presidents in general?

O: I think it probably applies to presidents generally because I know that people who had an opportunity to meet the President would find themselves inhibited. I think it was a normal human reaction. There is something awesome about it. The Oval Office and the president of the United States. It does inhibit. And to some extent that applied to the members of Congress, even some of the more senior ones. It was difficult to get expressions of views. Meetings that were of extreme importance--the Cuban missile crisis would be a significant example--found the President soliciting views and finding that there was little or nothing being said in response to his solicitation. A session of this nature would end with a restatement of support. In the Cuban missile crisis, members of Congress weren't anxious to become involved in a crisis of that nature. They would resort to "It's your decision, Mr. President. Whatever your decision is, you have my support."

So Vietnam, as it moved along, became much more troublesome. I often reflected on a conversation I had--and there might have been more than one--with Mayor Richard Daley. I was taken aback when Daley expressed concern about Vietnam. He expressed it

in human terms, his deep concern with the loss of life, then ultimately in political terms, his wonderment about the ultimate political fallout. Mayor Daley was not, I would assume, considering this in terms of policy and strategy in the foreign policy area. But it had gotten to him.

We resented the media reaction to the New Hampshire primary, contending that under difficult circumstances the President had defeated McCarthy in New Hampshire. Why didn't media just so state? The fact is that it was a disturbing result and caused considerable reaction in the White House.

G: What did the New Hampshire primary mean to you?

O: We took it seriously at the time of Jack Kennedy with a nonentity on the ballot, some pen manufacturer who was taking a flyer. Even that was a source of some disturbance to us. You felt it was politically important to have the highest vote you could attain. We worked at it as if it were a contest. That is what New Hampshire meant and still does in terms of the presidential quest. An incumbent president having to look at an opponent being proclaimed a moral victor wasn't a pleasant situation and was evidence that this was a situation that could get worse as time went on. With all of the indecision that existed during that period, you are going to have to face the situation. You can say, "We won the primary and the President wasn't involved. He didn't campaign, so we don't consider this a defeat in any sense." But what were you going to say after Wisconsin?

G: In terms of New Hampshire was there a percentage that the administration needed to get in order to make it appear a moral victory as well as a numerical?

O: I would say that under the circumstances, the press would not have reported it as a victory for an incumbent president with anything less than 60 to 65 per cent of the vote. That would be my judgment.

G: Were you surprised by the results of the--?

O: I don't recall reacting one way or another. I think primarily because I wasn't that close to it. I had been so involved in Massachusetts and there was such uncertainty about my role I didn't feel intimately tied into the New Hampshire primary as I would have been otherwise.

G: How did the Kennedy's react to--?

O: The reaction of Bobby Kennedy was one of nudging him very much toward seeking the nomination. He was deeply concerned about Vietnam and LBJ and certainly concerned about McCarthy. He'd better make his move if he's going to make it at all before McCarthy got further down the track.

G: Did he feel that he should have made his move sooner so that it didn't feel that he was

coming--?

O: I never discussed it with him. I never had, up to the time of his announcement, any serious discussions with him about campaign strategy or anything else. The fact is that the last direct conversation I had with him was one where he was emphasizing more his concern about Vietnam policy than his possible candidacy.

My recollection of one evening at Hickory Hill that I've talked about was that the one person in the room who was an avowed supporter and made the out and out statement that Bobby must run was his wife. Others were not pressing at that time.

G: He was accused by critics of being a usurper for having waited until after the New Hampshire primary, after McCarthy had demonstrated Johnson's weakness, to enter the race.

O: I don't see that particularly.

G: You don't think it worked against him that he waited until after the--?

O: No.

G: Or that he wished he had gone in [before that]?

O: I'm sure that he had not made a decision until the New Hampshire primary. It wasn't a matter of Bobby saying, "I'm going to go into this but the time isn't right." There had to be a significant element of McCarthy in his decision. You have Bobby's concern regarding Johnson. Then you have McCarthy. At that point, there was no one suggesting that Johnson would not seek re-election. Bobby wasn't going to let McCarthy inherit the Johnson opposition. He was going to try to usurp McCarthy's position.

G: How would you assess McCarthy as a presidential prospect?

O: Well, I--

G: In the context of 1968.

O: McCarthy was obviously the beneficiary of the mounting anti-Johnson attitude. McCarthy was due to defeat Johnson in Wisconsin as it turned out. It could have been a continuing Johnson deterioration and McCarthy could have ultimately been nominated. I don't think you can just assume that, because incumbency would have a great impact on a convention and you had a limited number of primaries. The non-primary large states would still be under nominal Democratic control, and I think the Democratic Party would have not had an alternative but to renominate Johnson. He could deny McCarthy regardless of these primaries in my judgment. It is somewhat comparable to Teddy Kennedy taking on Jimmy Carter. There was no way the Democratic Party could prevail denying an incumbent

president the renomination. I think the same thing would have happened with Johnson and McCarthy.

G: What were McCarthy's weaknesses as a candidate?

O: I think McCarthy was basically somewhat of a loner. He had latched onto a cause. He was a bright intellectual. He really was at his best with his one-liners and quips and occasional poetry. He marched to a different drummer.

G: Really?

O: I had a lot of contact with him over a number of years. We were not close friends, but I certainly had an opportunity to observe him at close hand. He didn't impact on me in the sense that he would be an outstanding president.

G: There has been some suggestion that as a member of the Senate Finance Committee, he was willing, too willing, to compromise in order to win supporters or votes.

O: I think Gene's approach to politics was somewhat different than most. He didn't fit the mold. Gene, I think, enjoyed the role of a crusader for a cause.

In any event, the cabinet members say, "We're going to revise our schedules." I was scheduled to go to Wisconsin, in any event, so I would be fulfilling my responsibility. The Wisconsin venture was relatively brief. It was fast-moving, however. I basically covered the state in three or four appearances in twenty-four or thirty-six hours. I was in contact with the right people. It was while I was postmaster general, and tied into the schedule was enough postal involvement to justify it. The fact is, it was a political trip.

Tape 3 of 4, Side 1

O: It gave maximum exposure in a short period of time. And a chance, most importantly, to observe and make some judgments.

G: You had been in touch with various people--

O: I had knowledge of what was transpiring. The people working on behalf of the President were familiar to me. A long-time congressman who was held in high regard in Milwaukee--Clem Zablocki--was not a staunch supporter of the President. What brought about discussion with the President over the ensuing few days was my appearance at a function in Milwaukee. It was a function that really had been undertaken by postal people. What was shown on national television was O'Brien speaking at a rally of a thousand, fifteen hundred people in a ballroom with banners and balloons. A snippet of that on a news program would give the distinct impression of a very enthusiastic audience in support of the re-election of President Johnson.

Something that concerned me occurred after that function in Milwaukee. When we were going back to the hotel, I said that I'd like to swing by the Johnson headquarters. Drop in and take a look at the Milwaukee headquarters. We got to the Milwaukee headquarters and it was locked, lights out. There was no activity at all. I knew that was highly unusual if there was any meaningful campaign.

G: What time of day was this?

O: This was the evening. There were signs outside the storefront, but it was inactive. That led me to ask where the McCarthy headquarters was. I wasn't going to go in but I wanted to see what was happening. We went to McCarthy headquarters and people in there--perhaps a hundred of them--were busily engaged. The usual headquarters scene. Lights blazing and all the rest. Well, I had my worst suspicions verified. There is an enthusiastic McCarthy effort here and the Democratic pros are not motivated. Coupled with everything else I had heard in the state, I left quite depressed.

In any event, my schedule called for me to go to Springfield, my home town, for an appearance directly from Milwaukee. I stayed that night with my sister and as I was leaving to catch my plane to New York, my sister called out, "Dean Rusk wants to talk to you." I said, "Tell him I don't want to miss my plane and I'll call him as soon as I get to New York." I didn't envision anything of great significance. It was a little unusual for Dean Rusk to seek me out on the road but I didn't put it in a political framework.

I came on to New York and when I walked into the Plaza Hotel, the manager was waiting to tell me that the President had been trying to contact me. He was quite exercised and nervous about it. I said, "Well, I've already talked to the President." I thought I'd relieve him of his agony. I wanted to get to the room and then call the President, which I did. The President said that Rusk had been trying to contact me; he wanted Rusk to brief me on some new elements of the Vietnam problem. The thrust of it was that I would be getting some reassurance and some good news from Rusk.

The President also told me that he had seen this piece out of Milwaukee on television and he was impressed with the enthusiasm. It's not a comfortable situation, but I felt I just couldn't allow the President to have reached that conclusion. So I told him candidly that I was very concerned about the situation in Wisconsin. I explained to him that this was really a postal function and they were sort of compelled to be there and applaud. I may even have mentioned my distress in seeing the lack of activity of the Johnson people, which led him to specifically ask me what I thought the result would be. I told him that he was going to suffer defeat in the Wisconsin primary and it went beyond that. "To what extent?" And I told him that I thought the defeat would be substantial. This was a judgment but I had seen enough. It would have been unfair to him and irresponsible on my part if I had tried to color that over. So I told him.

G: What was his reaction?

O: I was trying to think. I don't recall. This was pretty blunt and straightforward. I said I would call Rusk immediately. Then he said, "No, don't. Hold on, and I'll get Rusk." I held the line for a while and then Rusk and I were in conversation. Rusk told me that the President had directed him to brief me on very sensitive matters that were transpiring at the moment, as the President felt I should know about all this. Now, I assume that was to shore me up or whatever. I don't know. It was a dilemma for me because my son was departing for Vietnam. We were going to have dinner that night in New York. I was not about to leave the Plaza and go to Washington. I asked Dean, "Is it possible that you could fulfill your obligation on the telephone?" He said, "No, I just wouldn't dare." I said, "I'm not going to be back in Washington until tomorrow," which would be Sunday. I had been on the road for a few days. He advised me he wouldn't be available on Sunday and it was left that Nick Katzenbach would brief me. I didn't get from Rusk a feeling that it was of such great moment that it couldn't wait another day. It was low-key.

That evening I spent in New York. At Toots Shor's Restaurant I ran into Jess Unruh. Jess, an avid Bobby Kennedy supporter, joined us. He started to express some very strong views regarding Johnson and Vietnam and all the rest. I responded in kind, and it got testy--responded in defense of Johnson. Jess at one point made the unfortunate comment, "Well, if you feel that strongly, why isn't your son in Vietnam?" I said, "As a matter of fact, this is a goodbye dinner we're having; he's on his way." Well, even Jess Unruh had to be set back. I recall Jimmy Breslin, the columnist, was sitting with us. It bothered me; it obviously bothered Jess. We went back a long way together politically. The next day he contacted me to express his apology for his conduct the night before.

So to Washington. I had been away from the office a few days, and I had arranged with my executive assistant to be in the Postmaster General's Office. I would go directly there and pick up loose ends, having in mind I'll give Nick a ring. I got to the office and Phyllis Maddock was there and there were a couple of others; perhaps Ira. I was there a short period of time when I received the call from Marvin Watson asking if I could come by the White House later in the afternoon on my way home. Well, Nick Katzenbach went out of my mind. I was curious about the White House. This is Sunday afternoon. I went to the White House and there was a small group there. The President wasn't there.

G: Was not there?

O: Terry Sanford was there. Perhaps Jim Rowe. There were three or four.

G: Was Arthur Krim there?

O: I don't recall now. I do recall Terry. And the discussion was about what might be done in Wisconsin over the next thirty-six hours by way of radio or television, this sort of discussion. It went on for a while, and I don't remember the details. I did not mention to those present that I had that conversation with the President.

G: Did they ask you how things looked?

O: Yes, and I presented a negative report on that.

G: I want to ask you something here. Was your evaluation based solely on a comparison of those two headquarters in Milwaukee?

O: No. In Green Bay and elsewhere in Milwaukee, there were no good vibes. You had to be pretty thick not to realize that you were in the midst of a very negative, depressed situation. No one was saying flat out, "LBJ doesn't have a prayer," but there were all kinds of comments about lack of participation and a lot of fault-finding. References to the national committee. . .and the press was being very negative. It was a depressing tour, culminating when I observed our locked headquarters. That underscored the strong feeling I developed during the period I had been in the state.

G: Was this a local headquarters or was it a--?

O: It would be the major headquarters in the state. At the White House no one was contemplating other than a possible defeat. It was a last-minute meeting to consider "What could we do quickly that might be helpful?" It added to the depressed state I was in.

As this unfolded, I still haven't called Nick. Only after the fact did it penetrate with me that the President considered this Rusk-O'Brien meeting to be of extreme importance. I had a responsibility to get hold of Nick. Dean Rusk had the responsibility to brief me and Nick was going to do it.

But as the White House meeting was breaking up Marvin wanted to speak to me privately. He said, "I just wanted to ask you where are you going to be this evening?" I said, "I'm going home from here. I'll be home for the evening." He said, "I wanted to be sure I knew where you would be." I did think that was peculiar.

At some point in the early evening I received a call from, I believe, Larry Temple. He said, "I have been asked to advise you that when the President completes his speech"--incidentally, the President was scheduled for a national address on television that evening. I had made no attempt to contact the President at the White House at this meeting I referred to. I was sure he was preparing for the evening's speech. He said, "At the end of" or "Immediately following his address, he is going to announce that he will not seek re-election."

I was absolutely stunned. In fact, I limited my response to, "Gotcha," and I hung up. This was shortly before the President was going on the air. There were two or three people with Elva and I, including Phyllis Maddock. We were watching the President. I had said nothing until toward the end of the speech. I couldn't restrain myself and I blurted, "The President is going to announce that he's not a candidate." I had thought that he was going to do it in the context of the speech. The message delivered to me hadn't

penetrated fully. The speech was reaching its conclusion and I thought, "Did I have my leg pulled? Did I dream that phone call?" Then, of course, he made his announcement.

When you thought about it there was probably no alternative. Wisconsin was on the immediate horizon. The result in Wisconsin was predictable. You could pursue this course, as I said earlier, with a Wisconsin defeat and indeed other defeats in primaries. Perhaps the President would have been renominated, but that probably would have been a Pyrrhic victory. So the President had to weigh all this. I can't conceive that Larry O'Brien tells you you're going to lose in Wisconsin, you then decide you're not going to run. I think, however, it had some weight. Nevertheless, the President had something on his mind politically when he urged me to get together with Rusk for a briefing. The briefing that I would have received from Rusk I have to assume was politically significant. But the briefing never occurred.

I sent a letter to the President the next morning and I meant it. I guess all of us were in a state of shock. I think it's the next morning, April 1. "I am very proud of my president and of my association with you. I simply wanted to take this means to express my deep respect and admiration for the position you so courageously took last night. I know from the reactions you expressed to the recent memos I sent you and from our other discussions of your deep concern and your total dedication to a peaceful resolution in Vietnam. Certainly, no American can question your sincerity of purpose. You have the support of all our citizens in your valiant effort."

I talked to him probably that same day or probably the next morning, I forget, but it was soon after his speech. He said at that time he felt he had to take any step available to him that might bring about a resolution of Vietnam; he concluded that this was the one last additional step he could take and that he could devote his attention for the remainder of his time in office to trying to bring about a peaceful resolution. As he put it, "I have put my last chips on the table. There is nothing else to put there. And having done that, I'm not at all confident it will succeed." That was a fast-moving few days and I often thought about it afterward. Nothing probably other than my keen desire to see my son one more time would have deterred me from leaving the Plaza and going to Washington and meeting with Rusk. Whatever you call it--selfishness or being self-centered--I chose to delay and go through with the evening I had planned. Sunday wore on and there was no point in calling Nick Katzenbach, because clearly whatever Katzenbach had to tell me supposedly would impact on the campaign or potentially so.

G: I had one other question about the New Hampshire primary. There was some indication that at least some of the McCarthy vote was actually hawk-oriented vote that felt Johnson was not doing enough militarily in Vietnam. Did you have any indication that this was the case?

O: It strikes me as something that would be quite far out. If I'm a hawk in New Hampshire, for the life of me, I don't know what I'm accomplishing supporting Gene McCarthy.

G: Well, simply as a protest.

O: There could have been an element of that but if that were the case it was minuscule.

G: Now, you talked about the cabinet in Vietnam. I wish you would expand on McNamara, not only from the standpoint of that conversation you had with him but his own change in terms of Vietnam. If you saw that coming, were you surprised that he tells you of his own doubts about the war?

O: No. My exposure was limited really to cabinet meetings, leadership breakfasts. You would hear from the President at the leadership breakfast; you'd hear from the President at the cabinet meetings. At each cabinet meeting at some point the President would call upon Dean Rusk, who would give a brief overview of foreign policy, including Vietnam. He'd call on McNamara who would give a detailed--which he had great capacity to do--report on Vietnam progress. And it became from meeting to meeting a basic statistical report.

Bob had a reputation for [being] a very intelligent, articulate fellow who impressed the Congress in his early years. He was utilized to the fullest by the President in that regard when we had briefings for the members of Congress, which occurred with regularity. Bob would use charts at times. The President would open those meetings. There would be a brief agenda and McNamara would make his presentation in a very impressive manner. We all felt comfortable. Then he would take questions.

I don't recall any cabinet member ever questioning McNamara. Somebody might ask a light question, but you did not have give-and-take among the cabinet following his presentations. You accepted it; this was coming from the expert, and there was no one more knowledgeable.

As time went on I became a little cynical. I recall a comment I made to Henry Hall Wilson one day, "I don't know how many bridges there are in North Vietnam, but there must be thousands of them because if you added up all the bridges that are destroyed from one cabinet meeting to the next." But so be it; who am I to question?

When McNamara decided things were not working out and we were in the midst of a disaster that called for a total change in direction, I don't recall. I do know this: he was beginning to wear thin on the Hill. Members who were so respectful of Bob and so impressed with him began to make carping criticisms of appearances on the Hill or briefings at the White House. Nothing momentous, but the bloom was a little off the rose. You can maintain a level of acceptance for a period of time. Inevitably, it's going to wear a little thin, no matter who it is. I didn't see solid evidence that it was causing harm.

I felt Bob was running into some thickets and life's a little more difficult for him. That's not unusual for a cabinet member when he is dealing with the Hill or, indeed, somebody in congressional relations dealing with the Hill. I sensed this. This was all. I

can't recount with any specificity now comments that the President started to make. As support was beginning to lessen, you picked these up and there were memos in my records reporting to him on comments made. For example, Senator [John] Pastore suddenly we find is very concerned about Vietnam. You would automatically count him as a staunch hawk and there were others in that category. It was one thing to have Bill Fulbright expressing concern but then it seemed to broaden. I have to assume that as that occurred on the Hill, that probably contributed to McNamara's increasing problems.

Tape 3 of 4, Side 2

O: Bob did not have a political background. The only problem I had ever had with Bob McNamara was when he felt we should shut off the advance reporting to friendly members of Congress of defense contracts before the Defense Department formally announced. He got some heat on the Hill in that regard, and he went to the President and demanded that not be allowed any longer. The President and I discussed that and we decided we would continue and Bob had to accept the continuance. He was all that was attributed to him in those Kennedy years and those earlier Johnson years, and a thoroughly decent guy. I've described some of the concerns I was picking up and some of the concerns I was beginning to have myself. At some point it became apparent to us that Bob's impact on the President was lessening.

(Interruption)

G: You were saying one incident occurred.

O: I received a call from Bob and he asked me if I would speak to the chairman of a subcommittee. He was a conservative member, as I recall, from Virginia. This was an unusual occurrence, and I asked Bob for specifics. He said this fellow was causing him problems and he just wasn't relating to him any longer. He had tried to correct it but he failed, and could I discuss it with the member, which I did. I talked to the member, who claimed it was Bob's imagination. But it was there. I knew it took a lot for Bob to call me to help resolve his problem.

When it came to his departure, I had no conversation with the President. While it might indirectly relate to our activities on the Hill, it was none of my business. When the World Bank opportunity presented itself, the President took his action. Bob wanted a change. The President decided to accommodate him. The President stated he was reluctant to do it and would miss him in his role as secretary of defense greatly. That was the thrust of the East Room ceremony.

G: [Arthur] Schlesinger in his life of Robert Kennedy, [***Robert Kennedy and His Times***], has a radically different version of that. His scenario is that basically there was a leak that McNamara was out and McNamara really had no--the implication is that he really didn't have any knowledge, in essence, ahead of time that this was all moving forward.

O: The President put on quite a show at McNamara's departure. None of us were surprised.

G: This was just the way it was scripted at the White House.

O: That's right.

G: But not any--

O: My conclusion--I was present at the ceremony and I thought it was a great show but a little bit like promoting Arthur Goldberg from the Supreme Court to the UN.

G: By the time he left the cabinet, did you see McNamara as a dove or at least a dove on some of the issues?

O: No. He obviously had altered his position, but I wouldn't be privy to it. The President had Clark Clifford in the wings. McNamara's predictions had not come about. As articulate as he was and as dedicated as he was and as loyal as he was, it wasn't happening. So Clifford would be, I would think, in the President's view a pretty ideal replacement under the circumstances at that time. Clifford pursued a course that McNamara would have pursued. He was trying to work out means of disengagement.

But I wasn't aware of the extent of Bob's feeling, the depth of his feeling, until the Bob Kennedy incident I've referred to. I was taken aback that Bob McNamara had, unknown to me, become a very close associate of Bobby's. I knew they had maintained a friendship of a social nature. When Bobby suggested I meet with Bob McNamara Bob Kennedy obviously felt that I would be very impressed. I said to Bob McNamara in that meeting, "I still say this has to be worked out internally and I refuse to conclude that it is impossible." I remember the conversation. I just am not going to conclude that we have to have a revolution; it can still be done internally. The effort [is] from all sources and the President will react accordingly in time. After all, he understands this. He has a feel for what's happening to him politically.

His contention was there's no alternative. Johnson has to go and Bobby has to be the next president. I remember thinking, "Bob McNamara has gone one long way in the few years I've known him." But we didn't have a prolonged discussion. My position was, "I refuse to accept that as an alternative. I have not given up having this resolved in due course." I was taken aback with the intensity of Bob's presentation to me that day. He had gone the distance to the point where this President had to be removed from office. Now, maybe that's an unfair conclusion I reached. He probably didn't put it in words quite that harsh, but he put it in such a way that you could have no question about his strong view.

G: How long did he continue to argue for the effectiveness of the bombing? Do you know how late in his tenure as secretary of defense?

O: No, I don't. My knowledge of the inner workings of the Vietnam policy was probably less than some reporters. The extent of my focus would be on its impact on the domestic legislative program and its political impact. I never had, that I can recall, a discussion of Vietnam one-on-one with Bob McNamara.

G: I mean just in terms of his presentations in cabinet meetings.

O: Well, I don't recall I detected an altering of his views.

G: So, the first indication came after he left, presumably.

O: Yes.

G: Okay.

O: The first meeting, morning meeting--I can't envision who took these notes or how they came into my possession. Anyway, attending that meeting were Bobby, Teddy, Steve Smith, Ted Sorensen, Fred Dutton, Helen Keyes, Tom Johnson, Ken O'Donnell, and Don Gifford [?], I think his name was. He was a close friend of Bobby's. Then you go through--well, T.C.S. is Ted Sorensen, I gather.

G: Well, I assume that those are his remarks.

O: Yes. So, what that first sentence means, I don't know. "With RFK and LBJ. Politics, keep all options open but will stay out. Could administration people work for whom they want? Decide later. Harmonious, regret past differences." What's this "HHH, next visitor." I don't know what that means. "TCS feels LBJ will not go all the way with HHH. Off-the-record meetings say that conversation was issues but not politics. TCS to talk to Murphy." That's C. Murphy. I imagine that's Charlie Murphy. "Lay ground rules of comment." "O'Donnell to see Humphrey if he can." "Sorensen"--I'm assuming this is Sorensen--"saw Kampelman, told him same thing." Apparently this is a meeting where they are talking about maintaining a friendly relationship with Humphrey. Apparently Bobby makes a comment about something McCarthy said. Bobby is concerned about Humphrey. "Bobby and Steve Smith"--I assume that means--"to see what Humphrey wants. Probably not VP; how about secretary of state, UN? Bobby wants to do something for Humphrey." Then it goes on and on and on. Then somebody--Ted Kennedy reports on Indiana. This is all on April 3. Various people at the meeting are designated to talk to various people, such as O'Donnell is to see DiSalle. Pat Lucey and Louis Martin will be in Indiana. In every congressional district we have a good person. Up front--Bobby talk to Dick Daley. "Daley will wait for June"--whatever that means. "He'd be interested in how Bobby does in the primaries. Bobby thinks Indiana is the key." I am really trying to put this in the context of the date of the meeting, April 3. Let's see. That would have been two days after Johnson's speech. It certainly is prior to any conversation that I had with Bobby and Hubert as to what I might do.

G: Is that right?

O: Yes, because that didn't occur until Saturday following the speech. Is that right?

G: Your notes show April 4. That's right. The day after this meeting.

O: Now, wait a minute. I don't think that--

G: And Humphrey called on the fifth.

O: So these minutes are notes from this April 3 meeting--cryptic and not very informative--I just can't gather a great deal from it. It wasn't a meeting I attended. At some stage the notes of the meeting were given to me and it might have been after the time I joined Bobby. I don't know. But there was another meeting at Hickory Hill on April 19. This meeting doesn't include some of the key Kennedy people. It starts with Seigenthaler who was key but there are any number of names here. Some of them I recognize. Bob Troutman; he was from Georgia. Ed Reggie from Louisiana; Ted Sorensen was there. But as I look at this, they're going through a report of states. South Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, Kentucky, Georgia. They even get into various possibilities contesting the unit rule, whether to have a speakers bureau established. It sounds disjointed. It probably wasn't, but not being the beneficiary of direct involvement in this, I'm at a loss on these two. Neither memo seems to amount to much. The fact of the matter is that following the President's speech that night I commented to my wife something to the effect that "I have a feeling I won't get to bed this evening without a couple of phone calls," and sure enough it wasn't long after the speech that Bobby Kennedy called me. I believe he was in New York.

G: What did he say?

O: He said, "Now, this is a new ball game." In other words, he was getting across to me "if you haven't thought about it yet, you're relieved of your duties and responsibilities, and you have discharged your loyalty, and now I'm going to really talk with you." And he also said, "Did I get to you first?" I said, "I think I know what you mean, and, yes, you did." He said, "Now this is"--and he repeated--"This is a new ball game. We're starting from scratch. This conversation starts a new era. We're really going after you." It was that kind of a conversation. He said, "Will you promise me you're really going to seriously think about this now? You can think about it now because you shouldn't feel at all inhibited." "Yes, I'll think about it Bobby. Nice talking to you," something like that.

It wasn't until the next morning as I recall that I received a call from Hubert Humphrey. Hubert was, I believe, in Mexico at the time of the Johnson withdrawal. It was a similar conversation; now I feel I can really talk to you and I want to tell you right up front"--that sort of thing. So, I did receive the two calls promptly.

G: What did Kennedy say about Johnson's action itself?

O: I don't think he dwelled on it at all. I think he felt a sense of relief. This opened up the whole process. You've got McCarthy out there. You can anticipate Hubert in. It was a new ball game. You are starting from scratch.

G: Did this have an influence on the relationship between RFK and LBJ? Did it improve their relationship any?

O: I don't know. I think it lessened the intensity. You had an entirely new set of facts here. You were going to have a three-man race for the nomination. There's a note that Teddy Kennedy was supposed to go to my home that night--now we're at Monday. I know the Vice President called me that Monday. I don't recall that Teddy was to be at my home that Monday night or was coming to my home and didn't--I have no recollection of what that could be about. I also have no recollection I talked to him on Monday. But he called me on Tuesday and his comments were similar to Bobby's on Sunday night. Everything was in place; they were waiting, they wanted me to take over. But he didn't ask for a decision that I recall. Or if he did, he certainly didn't get one. Then Bobby called me the next day or Thursday. This unfolded during that week. There again, "Have you thought about it?" "Come on," just what you would anticipate. Teddy called me that evening. Hubert called me on Friday night, and he summed it up, "I have three words. I need you."

So by Saturday, I had determined I would make a decision, an important decision for me. I would actively support one of these two fellows. That meant I would have to leave the administration though I had looked forward to being with Lyndon Johnson through his term. I was reluctant; it bothered me. It was disruptive. I had an unfinished agenda, and that was the reorganization of the postal service. I had become very friendly with Hubert over the years. I admired him greatly, but more than that, he and his wife, Muriel, and Elva and I had become close friends. We saw a lot of each other; had a lot of fun together. He was a great fellow to be with, and [I] probably [had] become closer to Hubert than I was with Bobby although I had known Bobby for seventeen or eighteen years. We saw more of each other and I enjoyed him immensely. So there's Hubert. I have no doubt in my mind about his ability. I understand him well.

With Bobby, while my relationship was much closer with his brother Jack, my relationship with the family was long-standing. It went back to 1951. And that was something to think about. My memories of Jack, my great regard for him, fondness for him went into the equation and it wasn't easy. I had dwelled on it from the first Bobby Kennedy call. I probably started to dwell on it right after the Johnson speech because I knew damn well there was no way I was going to avoid this. That just wasn't going to happen.

G: Why wasn't that a viable alternative when you had two friends competing for the office? Couldn't you just sit it out?

O: That was the easy out and I thought about it a little. I'm the only member of the Johnson cabinet that's being put upon to leave and join a presidential campaign, the only one that's being pressed hard. Secondly, I'm the only member of the Johnson cabinet with a son in Vietnam. So I have a sensitivity to Vietnam and what was transpiring on a personal basis. But the option of staying for the duration really was not in my judgment a viable option because in a real sense it was a cop-out. Other members of the cabinet--they weren't being pressed to leave--said to me, our responsibility is to fulfill our obligation to the President. They preferred not to make a choice. With me I probably would have placed myself in the same position except that in the real world I was going to be pressed to make a choice sooner or later. So you might as well work this out in your own mind, which I did during that week, phone calls or visits notwithstanding.

Finally on the Friday night of that week, Elva and I discussed this at length. I must make a decision to support one or the other; I have very strong feelings and good reasons to support Hubert or Bobby. Hubert on a more personal basis, Bobby in terms of long association with the Kennedy family all the way back to the first Senate contest. We'd been through a great deal and it had a tremendous effect on my life. So the ultimate decision was I would go with Bobby.

G: Did you weigh into the equation which one would make the better president?

O: There were some pluses and minuses that you could apply to both. With Hubert, the pluses are pretty obvious. He was bright, intelligent, experienced. The minus might be Hubert had been faulted for not being tough enough. On Bobby, the reverse. Bobby is a bright fellow. He had experience as the attorney general; in the United States Senate. You could lean toward Hubert on experience, toward Bobby on leadership qualities. Qualities that did not, in my judgment, attain the level of Jack's, but were clearly there. What it came down to was, would you feel comfortable with either one of them being president, and the answer was yes. So it was a wash in that regard.

G: What about electability?

O: Electability--

G: I'm not just talking about November. I'm talking about first getting the nomination and--

O: I would weigh the nomination aspect of it toward Hubert. I think that if you were starting from scratch Hubert, as the incumbent vice president with the resources that he would have, would have a somewhat better shot at the nomination than Bobby. On the Bobby Kennedy side, however, you have to weigh it the way you weighed Jack Kennedy. He was going to travel the primary route. That would be the route available to him. Hubert would travel the establishment route, the primary avoidance route, because that would be in his best interest. So they were going to travel two different paths in the quest, but in competency, ability, leadership qualities and all the rest, it was pretty even. What finally weighted my decision toward Bobby was my long relationship with the Kennedy family.

G: Did any other members of the family call you?

O: No. There wasn't anyone that was in a position to call me. I don't know who they would be.

G: Did you weigh in your consideration the Lyndon Johnson factor and how he would regard your support of one candidate or another?

O: No. I had a feeling that that should not be put on the scale. I knew Lyndon's view of Bobby and also Lyndon's view of Hubert. Lyndon had failed to indicate on different occasions that he was totally enamored with Hubert. The fact is the decision should be on the basis of which of these two guys I knew very well I would support. I didn't feel that the President would be overly concerned about what I did nor should I be overly concerned about the President's reaction to what I did as long as I fully complied with my responsibilities to him and maintained my loyal position and support of him to the end.

What was extremely difficult was not only to make the decision but to advise the parties. It was not something I relished. In personal terms it was difficult.

G: Was the desire not to have to choose between either man perhaps balanced by just a real love of political campaigns or--?

O: I'd like to say it was but I don't think that was in the equation. Frankly, I couldn't see from that date in early April through November that I could peacefully go about my business as postmaster general. That wasn't going to happen so let's make this decision now. You're not going to be sitting in the Postmaster General's Office through this election. These calls and discussions will never end.

So that Saturday I called Hubert. He was in his office. I remember Hubert asking, "Where are you?" I was in the Postmaster General's Office. He said, "Let me come over and we'll visit. I'll come over." I said, "No, I'll come to your office." I felt it was unseemly to have the Vice President come to my office. I realized why he had suggested coming to my office when I got to his because there were a number of his supporters in an adjoining room and he was with them. Hubert and I got together alone. It was one of the most poignant experiences of my life.

G: Really?

Tape 4 of 4, Side 1

O: I don't know how to describe it but you're not talking about "Let's go to a ball game next week."

G: Did he try to dissuade you from your decision?

O: He talked about the merits of joining him, our relationship and our ability to get along, all low key. The conversation finally concluded with Hubert saying, "You know how much I regret your decision; how anxious I was to have you join me. I think it would have been a great experience for both of us to be together with you running the campaign. But I respect you for your decision and I understand your decision." "But," he said, "now I'm going to ask you to consider something else. I don't want to go through another battle with a Kennedy as intense as 1960. I'm going to test the waters; Bobby is going to test the waters." McCarthy didn't come into the discussion at all. He said, "Down the road, I may find this isn't working out for me. Bobby may find that it isn't going to work out too well for him down the road. You and I will always retain our friendship. This is not going to impact on that at all." He was great. I had all I could do to maintain my equilibrium through this. But he said, "Because this is different--"

(Interruption)

G: It seems to me that you could be--

O: ". . .the person who could maintain contact between the two of us." He said, "At times down this road, we ought to communicate and see if there is something that we can work out in a sensible manner to avoid serious conflict, come to the end of this road in a unified fashion." He made it that specific. He said, "Bobby is going to be hitting primaries; I'm not. I'm going to be out delegate hunting." And he said, "Maybe the time will never come when either Bobby or I would be willing to say, 'I think you're the better man in the sense of accomplishment in securing this nomination.'" But he said, "I think in the unique position that you're going to be in, I'd like to have you and I agree on that and I would hope Bobby would be in accord." So we closed out the meeting with our arms around each other and I pretty much staggered out of there; went back to the Post Office Department. Phyllis was the only one there, I believe. It was a Saturday afternoon.

I called Bobby. Not immediately. I had to catch my breath and think hard. But I called Bobby and said, "I've made a decision." I told him what it was. He, of course, expressed enthusiasm. I said, which I had mentioned to Hubert, too, "This decision is to be held in confidence. It just would be absolutely unfair for me to allow this to be a public matter without first presenting my resignation to the President and advising him." I said, "I will do that as quickly as I can but I want to do it in person as I want to thank him for a lot of things." So Bobby, of course, agreed and Hubert agreed. In the same conversation--I recounted to Bobby in detail the conversation I had had with Hubert regarding maintaining communication. I said, "This is part of my decision, that I have your total assurance that we're going to keep that door open and that I can somehow play a role in this because I think I'm in a position to do that." He accepted it with enthusiasm and said what I knew was the case "You know the high regard in which I hold Hubert. I think he's a terrific guy and there's no fun in running against a guy like Hubert but this is what's happened to the two of us." He said, "I'm not surprised that he would make that suggestion and you have my assurance, as you want to play this out as we move along, we

maintain communication." Elements of that occurred as time went on in the campaign.

The difficulty was this was a Saturday afternoon. I realized I've cut the cord, but there is an equally important aspect to this. I had envisioned, without thinking carefully, that I would be able to meet with the President no later than Monday. The President was at Camp David but was expected to return on Sunday afternoon. My recollection is he delayed his return. I believe that was the weekend of the Camp David meeting with [William] Westmoreland. In any event, as quickly as I could establish a meeting time, I did. I don't recall whether it was on Monday or Tuesday, but it was as soon as he returned and I was able to see him. I met with him and told him I had made this decision to leave. I handed my resignation letter to him. He read it very carefully. I remember he took the time to read it. I told him how appreciative I was for the opportunities he had given me and everything I said, I meant. He responded in kind.

We got to "Do you have a suggestion for your replacement?" I don't know whether he or I mentioned Arthur Krim. We're in April now and there's just a few months left but that could be an honor and recognition of someone. I don't mean to suggest that whoever I might recommend if I had someone to recommend would have been accepted. It was just conversation. As I recall, "While Arthur is a good fellow, loyal fellow and he's done a lot"--this is the President talking--"he probably wouldn't be interested." Something to that effect. I don't know how it came about; we started to discuss Marvin Watson in the context that Marvin deserved this honor. His service to Lyndon Johnson over a long period of time; his dedication to him. I was in total accord. In fact, I thought that was just great. This couldn't have been more appropriate. I'm thinking now of recognition. I'm not talking about the Postal Service or the Kappel Commission or anything else. This was a basic matter of having an opportunity to recognize somebody and the President underscoring his regard for him. The conversation ended with the President not saying he was going to name Marvin Watson; I don't recall that, but with a discussion of Marvin and the merits of going in this direction. And our meeting ended. The President said to me, "Are you going with Bobby?"

G: Did he?

O: Yes. I said, "Yes, I'm going with Bobby." I don't recall that he commented beyond that. He kind of smiled.

G: He didn't seem to resent that?

O: No. But I had to feel in his own mind that probably O'Brien, the Kennedy years, what else? I don't think he envisioned how deeply involved I had gotten with Hubert. I don't think he would have recognized what I had gone through in making the decision because he would just assume it was Bobby. In any event, I left and headed back to the Post Office Department and I couldn't have been there fifteen minutes when the phone rang. It was the President. I always appreciated this. He said, "Have you looked at the ticker?" I said, "No. Why?" "Well, after you left, I went into the press room." He said, "If I missed

an adjective describing my regard for you, it's because of the limit of my vocabulary." He said, "You've got to look at that ticker. I hope they ran everything on it." He was ebullient. He couldn't have been greater. He said, "I want you to remember and I wanted to put it on the record. It would have been one thing for me to be telling you, just the two of us, but I wanted it on the record. I went out myself," which he did. So, I got somebody to check the wire and sure enough the accolades were all there.

I then had to have the formal departure. So in the auditorium they had the marine band and "Auld Lang Syne" and I departed.

The President wanted to have a party for me. Just a little gathering of the cabinet, cabinet wives, staff. So he did, within two or three days. I could invite any friends I wanted to. We had it in the living quarters. It was a very pleasant cocktail party and all of that. They presented me with a sterling silver platter, which I promptly returned because they wanted to have all the cabinets' signatures engraved on it. We had a very pleasant evening and I went on to Indiana.

G: While you were weighing your decision--Humphrey or Kennedy--was it made clear in each case what your job would be?

O: Yes. I didn't negotiate any job with them but I would be the campaign director in each case.

G: Did each campaign have sort of an acting director at that point or simply an interim guy?

O: I don't know. I gathered all the people in Indiana, all the staff, on arrival and gave them my initial thoughts about the campaign. We had had a lot of contacts in Indiana--the Kennedy people--because we had gone through the Indiana primary in 1960. It was really a renewal of acquaintances and you had the situation with [Roger] Branigan, McCarthy and Kennedy. Branigan, in a sense, was a stand-in for Hubert. He was a favorite son. I moved right into it. I came back from Indiana after a couple of days and cleaned up a few things and then headed out on the road from Indiana to Nebraska to Oregon.

This was in a sense a replay. It didn't have the attraction to me that the Kennedy campaign had in 1960. The years have gone by; you've done a lot of other things. You're back in a campaign. It didn't have the drama to it, the excitement to it that I had experienced at an earlier stage in 1960. There was an element of kind of pushing yourself a little as you went along. But I had made the commitment and I'd see it through.

End of Tape 4 of 4 and Interview XXI