INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Representative O'Neill's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Why don't we start, Representative O'Neill, with the 1960 convention and your vantage point there.

O: The 1960 convention, of course, was held in Los Angeles. I was a delegate to the convention from Massachusetts as a delegate for Jack Kennedy. I had been an advance man on the campaign. Kennedy came out with a real innovative system of sending people into the areas who did not know the area, but he would be in full command. For example, I was sent to the state of Missouri. I stayed out in Missouri probably for fifteen to twenty days.

(Telephone interruption)

O: During the time out there, any disputes between the politicians as to what was going to happen in the campaign, I had the sole decision to make. In other words, [being] from outside of the state, I knew none of the politicians. I told them where the parades would be after making a survey, where his speaking engagements were going to be. For example, I recall that we couldn't get into Columbia the day of the Kansas State-Missouri State football game; where would we have Kennedy on Saturday? I decided that he would go to Joplin, Missouri; it was my decision. Kennedy was a hot item,

and everybody wanted him in their section of the state. An innovation took place: advance men in politics. They would send probably twenty people into the area. They would handle the news press, they would talk to the local politicians, but they actually ran the campaign. Completely innovative; something like that had never happened in American politics before. It worked tremendously.

Well, we got to the convention. The Massachusetts delegation was at the Statler Hotel; we had our headquarters there. All the delegates were stationed there, but we had our headquarters for the Massachusetts delegation. We had a special room for John McCormack because he was the Majority Leader of the Congress in those days. They had a private office for him. I would report every morning at 6:30 to the Kennedy headquarters where Bobby Kennedy had a setup. I would report to him the delegates in Missouri and how we were going on the delegates. I was also doing some work on Pennsylvania as to how the delegates were going. They had a chart and they would take a count.

Now it came to the day before the convention, the day before the voting would take place on the [convention] floor for the presidency. I went to the meeting and I came back. It's so many years ago and I really haven't checked my figures, but anyway, they were going to win on the first ballot. The Kennedys would win on the first ballot. I think the figure was something like 905 votes the Kennedys would get. Johnson was going to get somewhere around 500. There would be

a scattering, but the plurality would be reached by the time they reached Wisconsin or Washington, or something like that. The advance men were there, giving their reports and so on and so forth. Now they knew they were over the hump; they knew they were safe. The meeting used to go from about seven o'clock in the morning till about 8:30. Every morning we reported for about ten days before, contacting delegates and things of that nature.

I came back to the Massachusetts suite. John McCormack was sitting in there with old Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House, and Wright Patman, the Texas congressman. I was very friendly with all three of them by virtue of the fact that I was a protege of John McCormack's. Old Sam had what he called his Board of Education, a little room down there, and only seven people were allowed in the room, but they were entitled to bring a guest. On many occasions John McCormack would bring me down there. That's where I first became very friendly with Lyndon Johnson because Lyndon would be over there practically every afternoon.

So John McCormack said to me, "Tom, report what happened over there." I said, "It's all over. They went over the quota this morning." They had about fifty more than whatever the plurality was supposed to be. So Mr. McCormack said to Speaker Rayburn, "Well Sam, it's all over. You know, I told Lyndon of the long arm of Joe Kennedy, of the strength of the operation, of the new innovative ideas, of the freshness of

how they worked, of the diligence with which they worked. You know, Lyndon never could believe that Kennedy was going to go anywhere. Tom says it's all over, and with the accuracy in which they do things, then it's all over. Kennedy's going to win on the first ballot." Old Sam said, "Well, tomorrow they'll have the nominations and the vote, and Lyndon no doubt knows that it's all over." By the way, that afternoon as I recall, Kennedy and Johnson had their famous debate. Kennedy, in my opinion, never would have agreed to the debate excepting the fact that he knew he had the votes all locked up and he was doing it as a magnanimous thing. Sam Rayburn said, "Well, if Kennedy wants Johnson for Vice President, and if Johnson, knowing the situation as it is--and he must know it by now--if he allows his name to go to the convention, if he allows his name to be nominated and to be voted on for President of the United States at this convention . . . Or anybody that does, once he allows his name to be put in nomination he has an obligation to that convention. If Jack Kennedy wants him on the ticket for Vice President, then he has nothing else he can do but to be on the ticket for Vice President." To John McCormack--this is Sam Rayburn speaking--he said, "You tell Jack Kennedy that if he wants me to talk to Lyndon Johnson, I'll tell him exactly that. Here's my telephone number. You give that to Jack Kennedy, and if he wants to get in touch with me, he can get in touch with me." McCormack turned to Rayburn and he said, "I won't be seeing Jack Kennedy, but Tom will deliver the message." McCormack, by the way, was

the only person other than my wife and my father that ever called me Tom; everybody else called me Tip. He said, "Tom will deliver the message." Mr. Rayburn gave me the telephone number, and he said, "If Jack Kennedy is interested in Lyndon Johnson being the vice-presidential nominee, you have him call me and by golly, I'll insist on it." Now in the conversation he said, "Yes, I have strong feelings that once a man's name is placed in nomination, he is obliged to do whatever that convention wants him to do." Wright Patman spoke up and said, "Oh, I don't think there's any problem there. History shows that never has the mantle been placed on anybody's shoulders for Vice President and he turned it down. A lot of people said through the years that they could have had the nomination for Vice President, or that they were offered the nomination, but that's their own vanity. If ever the mantle has been placed on a man's shoulders, he has always accepted it. If Kennedy wants Lyndon, Lyndon won't turn it down, either," said Wright Patman. Anyway, [Sam Rayburn] said, "You tell Jack Kennedy what I said. Here's my private telephone number in my room. And have him contact me."

That night I went to Chasen's Restaurant. I got in touch with Bobby--I can't think of his last name right now--who was Kennedy's chauffeur in Massachusetts, up in his Boston office, and a fellow by the name of Eddie Ford, who was very close to the Kennedys. I said, "I've got to locate Jack Kennedy." Bob had Kennedy's schedule for the day. The best place to

catch him would be in Chasen's Restaurant about eight o'clock at night. We went out to Chasen's Restaurant and had supper. The Steel Workers were running a buffet and cocktail party for John F. Kennedy. Kennedy arrived, and I went over and spoke to him, because I've known him for years. I took his place in the Congress in the same congressional district. I was Speaker in the Massachusetts legislature, and I ran for Congress, and he ran for the United States Senate and defeated Lodge in 1952. I said, "Jack, I have something I have to tell you." I told him the conversation. I said, "Are you interested in Lyndon Johnson for the vice presidency?" He said, "Tip, go outside and stand by the car, will you? I want to go over this whole conversation with you."

So about three-quarters of an hour later, after he had moved through all the crowd and everything, when he went outside, I went outside. He and I stood talking on the sidewalk. A circle of 3,000 people were pushed back twenty feet from us while the police held us. The spotlights were on us. I told Jack the story of what Sam Rayburn said. He said, "Of course I want Lyndon Johnson. Of course I want him. The only thing is, I would never want to offer it and have him turn me down; I would be terrifically embarrassed. He's the natural. If I can ever get him on the ticket, no way can we lose. We'd carry Texas. Certainly I want him. I'll call Sam Rayburn. You tell Sam that I'll call him after the convention tonight."

Sam was sitting in a seat at the Texas delegation. I walked over to the Speaker and I said, "Mr. Speaker, I delivered that message. That gentleman has your telephone number. He will call you tonight." I just kept walking. That was all I said to Mr. Rayburn.

When the convention was over and we came back. . . . It was my habit every morning to come into the Speaker's lobby some time between 8:00 and 8:30 to read the newspapers. It was a habit of Sam Rayburn's he did it every single morning. Just the two of us would be in that lobby together, and through the years I had developed a close friendship with him. The first morning I walked in after the convention, he looked at me and he said, "Well Tom,"--he called me Tom, too--"I guess we played a part of history that will never get in the history book." That was his only comment. I know the history of what happened. I know the conversation between McCormack, Wright Patman, and Sam Rayburn. I know Sam's feeling. I know I delivered the message to Jack Kennedy; I gave him Sam's telephone number. I told Sam that he was going to call him. And Sam said to me, "We played a part in history which will never be in the history books." I never questioned Jack Kennedy or anybody else about it. But that is my dealing, as far as it's concerned.

Later that night I met a girl who was writing for the Quincy, Massachusetts newspaper. Her name was McMasters, and

she was young. She later went to work for the Boston Herald. As a matter of fact, she's Mrs. John Finney now. John writes for the New York Times. I said to Miss McMasters, "I'm going to give you an exclusive story for your newspaper tomorrow. The ticket is going to be Kennedy and Johnson. You can be assured that Kennedy will win it on the first ballot and Johnson will accept it, because Mr. Rayburn will be one of the factors that will be pressing him." She wrote the article, and it appeared in the Quincy paper I think the day that the election was going to be. I said, "Don't give me any credit. You're going to make yourself look good. You write this and say, 'Sources say that it looks as though it's going to be Kennedy and Johnson.' That's the background on the story." I can remember talking with the AFL-CIO delegation from Massachusetts. Bill Bolanger was there. He was state president, I guess on those days, of the AFL-CIO. He and I were sitting while the balloting was going on. I said, "It's going to be Johnson for Vice President, no question about it," by virtue of the conversation that I had had with Sam and the conversation that I had had with Jack Kennedy that if he were certain that he wouldn't be rejected, he really wanted him. That's part and parcel about the story there.

G: There was some resistance to putting Lyndon Johnson on the ticket, too.

O: I think there was resistance on the part of Bobby Kennedy. I only know that from hearsay. I'm only reporting to you the

actual fact of what took place. I've talked to Kenny O'Donnell about this afterwards. As a matter of fact, I talked to Kenny O'Donnell only recently. I was telling him the story, and Kenny said to me, "Gee, Bobby was bitter about it. Bobby really didn't want him on." I have a feeling that he wanted Scoop Jackson on, from Oregon.

G: There was some speculation that FDR, Jr. had also been offered the vice-presidency--

O: I don't believe that. I never heard his name mentioned.

G: --and that Symington was a consideration, too.

O: Well, I don't think so. I would have to say from what I gather from the Kennedy people that I knew, that Scoop was very much in contention. But the way I analyze it is, once Jack knew that Lyndon Johnson would take it--and he knew that Lyndon would take it if old Sam put his imprimatur on it, and said, "Sam will get it." Because [LBJ] was a political child of Sam Rayburn. As a matter of fact, he was a political child of John McCormack. There was no question that he would do what old Sam asked him to do, in my opinion.

G: From the subsequent campaign, how important was it to have Lyndon Johnson on the ticket?

O: Oh, I don't think that Kennedy would have won without Lyndon Johnson. There's no question about it: Lyndon Johnson was a tremendous factor in the whole campaign. He made a great impression. I remember him coming up to Boston. Shortly afterwards it was "Austin to Boston"; we had big signs up. As a matter of fact, I think it was his first

official stop after he had received the nomination as Vice President. We looked at it kind of timidly, to be perfectly truthful. What kind of a crowd were we going to draw in Boston for Lyndon Johnson, a Texan, who had been the main opposition to Jack Kennedy. You've got to appreciate the fact that I don't think any man in the history of American politics could have been more popular in his own locale than Kennedy was. He was the new look of the Irish, of the Catholics, of everything that they had ever hoped for, a race that was downtrodden through the years. Particularly in an area where all this had taken place--they had been second-class citizens for so many years--to see a fellow whose grandfather was born in the Old Country emerge as the President of the United States was just unbelievable. As a matter of fact, in a period of fifteen years, the city of Boston has changed from a great Irish bed to far more cosmopolitan now, because the Irish with affluence have moved out into the suburban areas.

When Lyndon came that day, we brought him to the Copley Plaza Hotel, or was it the Statler? I forget which now. It was five o'clock at night. Both hotels are down in the insurance area. The crowds came along, and he just drew a tremendous crowd. We had some mounted police there. The policeman got off the horse, Lyndon got aboard the horse, and he had a big Texan hat. The crowd went wild; the crowd absolutely went wild! What an enthusiastic reception they

got! They really cheered him. He felt as though, "Hey, boy, I'm accepted as part of this team." That night, I can remember, we had blocked off part of the hall because we had feared that we wouldn't be able to fill the hall. We had called all the union people and senior citizens people to get them into the hall. We had to tear down the part of the partition that we had blocked off [part of the hall with] because the crowd was so huge that came to see Johnson that night. [They were drawn by the magnet of his personality more than anything else. He was a great handshaker; he moved through the crowd. And it was really beautiful. It was just absolutely a thing of beauty. Of course, after the death of Kennedy, when he became President of the United States, [he got] I guess the biggest plurality yet in the country. He carried Massachusetts by about 1,200,000 against Goldwater. That was even twice the victory that Jack Kennedy had had himself against Nixon.

I first met Lyndon Johnson when I got elected to Congress, and Mr. McCormack brought me down to the Board of Education that old Sam had.

G: Who were the seven people?

O: If I can remember, there was John McCormack, Sam Rayburn, there was Carl Albert and Hale Boggs, and there was Bill Arbogast I think his name was. He was the AP man in charge of the House. And Homer Thornberry, the Congressman from down there [Texas].

G: Wright Patman would have been one, too, I guess.

O: And the parliamentarian. What was the parliamentarian's name?

G: Joe Duke?

O: No, no, the parliamentarian of the House. I'll have to find out. Lew Deschler. So let's see, there would be Sam Rayburn and John McCormack, Carl Albert, Hale Boggs, Bill Abogast or Aberthor--he was the AP man, Lou Deschler, and Homer Thornberry. I would say that those were the actual seven. Two others were allowed in: one of them was Wright Patman and the other was Dick Bolling. Dick was a young fellow that Sam took under his wing. I'd have to say the closest fellow in the House in those days to Sam, of course, was Homer Thornberry. Now those seven always would allow Wright Patman or Dick in; it seemed that way. But no other member of Congress could just walk into that room, and no other newspaperman could, [either]. A guard stood at that door. If I were to go in there, I would have to knock on the door and ask John McCormack to come out and talk to them, or something like that. Neither I nor another member could go into the room. I could go in if one of them brought me in as a guest, so I went in on many occasions with John McCormack. They used to sit around, these fellows in public life. They'd discuss the Congress, they'd discuss history, they'd discuss politics throughout the nation, discuss the program of the week. They'd talk sports. But mostly it was American politics, it was a lot of history, but it was what was going on. Old Sam had a rundown on every political leader in America. I can remember

going in there. He loved to talk about [James Michael] Curley. Of course, Curley had served in the Congress with him. Curley was one of the great orators in the history of this country but never showed any inclination to really be a congressman. His heart was in being mayor [of Boston] or governor of Massachusetts. When he was out as mayor of the city, he would come down here and serve as congressman, waiting for the next mayor's fight to come along so he could get back into it. Old Sam recognized his talents and his speaking ability. When Curley would take half an hour for a speech at the end of the day, a special order--on two or three occasions he did it--the galleries would be packed and the memb ers of the House would remain on the floor because of his oratorical ability. We had a fellow by the name of Ed Hart from New Jersey who was tremendous the same way. If Ed Hart took a special order, you would have have two hundred Members stay on the floor to listen to Ed Hart because he was such an orator. As a matter of fact, in my days here I would have to say that Ed Hart without a doubt has been the greatest orator that we had. He was really tremendous, and that's in the last twenty-four years.

It was there that I first met Lyndon Johnson and became friendly with him. He used to ask me more questions about Curley, more questions about Massachusetts politics, more questions about young Kennedy and the Kennedy regime and the Kennedy operation in Massachusetts. Lyndon and I became

very friendly because we were both proteges of the same type of people, he of Sam Rayburn and myself of John McCormack. So we had a close-knit affinity.

A couple of little items along the line that I can remember when we get to talking like this. I can remember going out one night to Griffith Stadium and seeing the Red Sox play Washington. Pinky Higgins was the manager of the Red Sox and about the fifth inning it rained. I went into the Red Sox dressing room. A fellow by the name of Jack Burns was the third base coach, and he was a neighbor of mine. I knew most of the Red Sox ball players from having been a baseball buff. I went in and sat there, and we were waiting to see whether the game was going to be called or whether it was going to be played. A knock came at the door. This fellow opened the door, he looked at the fellow, he came out and said, "Hey Tip. There's a guy out here. He says his name is Senator Johnson and he wants to talk to the boss," meaning Pinky Higgins. I said, "Hey, that's Senator Johnson. He's the leader of the Senate. You better get Higgins for him in a hurry, because this guy may be President of the United States some day." I'll never forget it because so many of the Red Sox ball players later reminded me of the incident. They opened the door. Homer Thornberry was with the Senator. They came in and they went to the little office that the manager, Pinky Higgins, had. I had never met Pinky before, or I didn't know him well. [Johnson] took me in and he

introduced me to Pinky Higgins. He was telling me then in front of Pinky, "His brother Ox was the greatest athlete in the history of Texas, Ox Higgins. He is the fellow that originally put me in politics and elected me to Congress. I owe so much to Ox Higgins." I don't know whatever became of Ox Higgins or anything like that, but it was Pinky Higgins the third baseman, the manager of the Red Sox. That was just an incident that night. I don't know whether Ox Higgins is alive or dead or what part he really played, but Johnson gave him a tremendous amount of credit for starting him on the road of public life.

Another incident that I can remember. It was the Tuesday before March 17 in 1960. I don't think he had announced at that time, but we were at an Irish party over at the press club.

Shut that off for a minute.

(Pause in recording)

Old Mike Kirwan had this Irish party. It was a fabulous deal, as a matter of fact. Everybody in town used to like to make Mike's parties. He had great entertainers. Phil Regan would be the master of ceremonies, and he would have these great Irish entertainers. Corned beef and cabbage dinner. There would be 600 to 800 people at it. A big contingency of the House and the Senate and a lot of lobbyists would go there, substantial Irishmen from all over the country. Mike would invite them to this party. Members of the Supreme Court would be there. The President would no

doubt be there if he were a Democrat at that time. Kennedy was at it, and Johnson was at it when they became President. It was always a great party.

That particular night Lyndon Johnson said to me, "Tip, I would like to sit down and have about half an hour of your time." I said, "Okay, when?" He said, "Tomorrow." I said, "Fine. I'll come over to your office." He said, "No, I'll come over to your office." I said, "Okay."

I was in 317 of the Cannon Building, and Lyndon Johnson came in about one o'clock in the afternoon. He said, "You know, young fellow, you and I have been good friends ever since the day you came down here. Old John I love--meaning John McCormack--and old Sam I love. They tell me how dependable you are. You're on the Rules Committee; you always can be depended upon,: and so on and so forth. "I understand you are the first Speaker of the Massachusetts legislature, and McCormack tells me that some day you'll probably be governor up there if you want it, that you have more power and still follow local politics better than any other congressman and that you'll be a power in the convention. Now I know that you're pledged to the boy. Let me ask you to be with me in the second ballot. You and I know the boy can't win; he's just a flash in the pan. He has no record of substance to run on. Tip, I want you with me on the second ballot." Now all the time we had this conversation, never once did he refer to John F. Kennedy as Senator Kennedy, as Jack Kennedy,

or Kennedy. He never mentioned the name Kennedy, always used the term "the boy." "You're practical enough. You know enough about politics that the boy isn't going to do this, that I am ultimately going to be the one. . . ." and I don't think he had announced at this time. I think he was going to announce about a week later, or something like that. I don't remember the date. I guess he wouldn't announce until some time later. I said to him, "Mr. Leader, let me tell you something. Jack Kennedy is going to be the nominee for President of the United States. He's going to win on the first ballot. One of the reasons he's going to win is because of new style, new operation, innovative methods, the long arm of Joseph Kennedy, the untold wealth that they have, their ability to organize, their ability to move, their determination, and their hard work. They are going to out-work, out-spend, out-maneuver everybody else along the line. All these attributes, plus the fact that you don't even give them consideration. You down in your heart don't feel that he can win. You are all overlooking him. Believe me, he will win this on the first ballot." [Johnson said,] "Tip, you know better than this. You know better than this. I am just telling you that the young fellow is going to die on the vine. I am asking you to give me your second choice along the line, give me some help, some aid and support in New England after the boy fails." That was our conversation that day. He always underestimated him. He underestimated the

durability, the diligence, the long arm, and the manner in which these people worked. They worked as though it was a fever.

G: JFK's people proved to be better vote counters too, I think.

O: Oh, no question; they could count votes. They could do that from the day that Jack Kennedy got into public life. Jack Kennedy ran for Congress in 1946 in the Eleventh Congressional District. That's the district that I represent even today, and I made reference that I took his place six years later in the Congress. But when he announced that he was a candidate for Congress, it was very interesting. It was then known at that time [that] his father wanted to get him into public life. His father groomed Joe [Joseph Kennedy, Jr.] to be in public life, and Joe was killed in the service. He wanted his boys in public life, so Jack was next in line. It was questionable as to whether Jack would be a candidate for lieutenant governor or whether he would be a candidate for the Congress of the United States.

Maurice Tobin was the governor and he was a candidate for reelection, and he got from Paul Dever, who had been in the service, a promise that Paul would run as lieutenant governor. Paul Dever had been beaten for governor by [Leverett] Saltonstall by 3,000 votes. He was the most popular man in the state when he came out of the service. Tobin was governor, and Tobin elicited a promise from Paul Dever that he would run for lieutenant governor. Then when Dever got out of the

service, he wanted to practice law, he wanted to make some money; he was broke. Young Kennedy's name was being floated about as a candidate for public office. Dever went to Joe Kennedy and talked to him. Dever wanted to get off the ticket. He went to Morris Tobin, and he said, "I've got a young, able fellow for you with a great war record. His old man's loaded with dough. Young Kennedy has a political background. John F. Fitz[gerald], his mother's father, had been mayor, and on his father's side was Pat Kennedy, the old leader from East Boston. So he's got a good family background and his father's got a great reputation, the kid's got a good war record," and so on and so forth. So Tobin agreed that he would take Jack Kennedy as the candidate for lieutenant governor. Dever was delighted because that gave him an opportunity to get off the ticket, number one; and number two, Mike Neville, who was to be mayor of Cambridge and was the Democratic leader of the House, was running for Congress and looked as though he was a lead-pipe cinch to win. He had worked through the field and in the vineyard, had been in the legislature and the city council and was the leader of the legislature--used to be Republican in those days. He already was an announced candidate.

Kennedy made up his mind--it was the June primary--that he would run against Mike Neville. Then there were about eleven in the field; they put about eleven in the field.

You would have bet ten to one that John Kennedy had no chance. Finally when the campaign was over, he had beaten Neville 22,000 to 11,000. The rest of the candidates all got some votes, but he probably got forty percent of the vote cast. But he beat the second man two to one. You just couldn't have imagined it happened that Neville was so strong in the area. But it showed the long arm of the Kennedys, the power of the Kennedys, the manner in which they operated. Everything was so thorough; nothing was left to chance. Six mailings in the district and things like that. I explained all of that to Lyndon in our conversation. I said, "You underestimate him. Let me just tell you what he did. I've seen this fellow run against Lodge. He had no chance in the early days against Lodge. [But they had] sheer hard work, determination, setting up their own committees. Each town had a Kennedy secretary. They had people working at the polls and distributing literature who never had participated in politics before. He had that charisma that was something new in public life, to be perfectly truthful. The truth of the matter is that Lyndon just underestimated him along the line.

When Lyndon became President, I heard a story about how all the liaison people from the various departments and the White House people used to have a Friday morning meeting with him. This particular day he was dressing them down that they hadn't done some job. He turned and he said, "Now every one

of you have done some favors for those people. GSA, you know what their needs are, what they want. You're always doing favors for them." Whatever bureaus were there, you know. "You ought to be able to work on congressmen. City guys like Tip O'Neill who have been through the mill: don't worry about him; I handle him myself. Jim Delaney from New York: I handle him myself. And those others of you, if you get hard guys to do business with, just leave the name here and I can handle them myself.

Interestingly, I used to get calls from him often. One particular day I went over to the White House. There was a strong feeling that the Boston Naval Shipyard was going to be closed. I don't recall what the legislation was; I'd have to check it out, but Lyndon wanted it out of the Rules Committee. In those days we had twelve Members in the Rules Committee, eight Democrats and four Republicans. Old man [Howard] Smith, I think, was the chairman. Two members of the committee are [William] Colmer [and Smith]; two members of the committee were Southern conservatives with the four Republicans, [which] made the committee a six-six committee. There was a piece of legislation that he was vitally interested in. One day one of the Republicans was missing, which meant we could get the legislation out. Just before the vote came, I walked out of the committee myself, so it left it five-five. I got a telephone call from Johnson; he was furious. I went over to the White House. [LBJ said], "Jeez, we had an opportunity to get that out, and you walked

out. Why did you ever walk out?" I said, "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. President. I was so busy trying to keep the Boston Naval Yard open, I had to leave the committee room in order to trace down these stories about the Boston Navy Yard." He said, "You stay in there and do the voting. Let me worry about the Boston Naval Shipyard. If that's all you're worried about, you're not going to worry about it as long as I'm President." So he and I saw each other beautifully eye to eye.

G: What was the bill, do you recall?

O: I don't recall what the bill was. I know the next day that I was going to vote for it anyway. I did it very deliberately knowing that I was going to get a telephone call from him and that I had to get my point home about the Boston Naval Yard, which was in my congressional district. I knew that, getting to him, he understood politics and he was a very easy guy to talk to.

I never will forget one day we went over to see him. The entire Massachusetts delegation went over--and I won't mention the fellow's name--on behalf of a fellow. The head of GSA had resigned, and there was a vacancy. The third man had been appointed by Kennedy, a good man, also the liaison man; came from Massachusetts. We all liked him. The whole Massachusetts delegation went over to see Lyndon Johnson about five o'clock at night. We went in, Johnson came in and sat down and said, "Boys, I know what you're over here for. You're over here [because] you want to promote such-

and-such to a top GSA job. You tell that son-of-a-bitch for me he's lucky to have the third spot. Every time I look up and see that big elongated son-of-a-bitch with that Kennedy pin on, that PT boat, I almost go through the roof. No way is he going to get that job. No Kennedy man is going to get that job; I'm going to give it to a Johnson man. Now that's it. Now what can we talk about?

Now Jack [Valenti]. We sat around with Jack, and we talked about politics, we talked about the economy of Massachusetts, and each one of us talked about a problem that we had. He was so easy to talk to. We went into that room where the Cabinet people meet; we had a drink. We didn't get what we went over to originally accomplish, but everybody came out happy that they were able to get something else that was second in their mind when they went over there.

One of the most interesting things that happened with me with Johnson was on the war. I had been a strong advocate of the Vietnam war. I followed the Johnson policy. As a matter of fact, I can remember going to the White House to a briefing one day when President Johnson and Rusk spoke. And I moved that we give Rusk a rousing vote of confidence for the way in which he was handling the State Department, on which Lyndon Johnson personally called me afterward to thank me for having done it. I knew at the time it was the political thing to do.

Time went on. I used to go out to the various colleges;

I have twenty colleges up in my district. Almost every Friday I would speak at a different institution, giving the Administration's viewpoint on the war, in other words, it turned out to be hawkish later on. Before I would go over, on a Wednesday the Pentagon would brief [me]. On a Thursday they would send a team over from the State Department and the Pentagon. They would go over your whole talk that you were going to give to the students. Then you would get into questions and answers, and they would anticipate the questions. The question that was asked at the University of North Carolina was the same one that was asked at Berkeley, was the same one that was asked at the University of Wisconsin; it all set a pattern up, and we had stock answers for them.

This particular day I am speaking at Boston College, and I had been briefed. During my dialog with the students, I said to one of the boys, "You know, I think I know more about this than you do. I have been briefed forty-three times by the President of the United States, by McNamara, by Westmoreland, by Rusk, by everybody along the line. I think I have a better understanding of it and more knowledge than you do." The young fellow said, "Well, you haven't been briefed on the other side of the coin." I was in bed that night and I thought, "You know, I've never been briefed on the other side." So I went around and I talked to assistant Secretaries of State, undersecretaries of State, generals, admirals, different people along the line. General Shook of the Marine

Corps had just retired. I talked to him, General Gavin, I don't know how many I spoke to. They convinced me that the whole thing was wrong. Number one, it was a civil war. Number two, we were fighting the wrong war at the wrong place; we were quagmired in the conditions that we had set ourselves. We had no right to be over there; it was a disaster.

An interesting thing happened. I got a telephone call from a fellow. I went to a home down in P Street and I met with a group of CIA agents. They told me that they had been sending reports to the White House about the American participation in the war, how it was run, how we weren't getting anywhere, how we couldn't win, how we were involved, how the sentiment even in Vietnam was against us. The CIA claimed that their messages were not getting through, and they blamed people who were at the White House close to the President: Walter Rostow, whom I met the other day; John Roche and people like that; McGeorge Bundy. I have never discussed this with these people. But [the CIA] said, "Our reports are not getting through.

Well, time went along, and I changed my viewpoint on the war. I wrote a letter and sent out 160,00 letters to my constituency in a newsletter saying I was opposing the war. It was a civil war, I couldn't justify being for it. I felt we were fighting the war wrong, I believed in the Gavin theory, so on and so forth. So I [changed] overnight from a hawk to a dove. I sent out the 160,000 newsletters,

but it was never printed in the paper; this is, I think, August of 1967. About September, I went out and played cards one night at the Metropolitan Club. I parked the car down in the garage, I came upstairs, and Eddie Boland said to me, "Jeez, where have you been? The White House is looking for you, the President is looking for you, the Secret Service have been over here looking for you. As a matter of fact, there are two Secret Service men waiting for you downstairs in the lobby." So I called down there--it had to be three o'clock in the morning. [They said], "We've got a message that whatever time you come in to call the White House." I said, "What the hell's this all about?" He said, "Did you see the Star tonight?" I said, "No." [He said], "There's a double heading with a column about that wide that says, 'First of the Establishment Leaves Johnson. Protege of Congressman McCormack and close personal friend of the President is the first of the Establishment to leave and become a dove. He is not in agreement with the war.' " I said, "Gee, I did that three months ago." What happened was, a fellow from the Star was walking down through the rooms down there where they print these newsletters. He happened to pick up an old letter of mine, said, "Nobody ever printed that," used it as a front-page story, and it hit every newspaper in the world. "No matter what time you come in, call the White House." So I called the White House. "Mr. O'Neill?" "Yes." The President wants to see you at nine o'clock in the morning." "Okay."

So I went on over at nine o'clock in the morning. The President was a little cool. "Tip," he said, "Jesus, I never thought you'd do this to me. Those other sons-of bitches up there I don't have any concern for, but you've been my good pal since the day you arrived in Washington. How the hell could you do this to me?" I said, "Gee, Mr. President, I've got to tell you the story." So I told him the story about making the speeches, and the kid questioning me, my meeting generals and admirals and assistant Secretaries of State and Secretaries of State. I told him about the incident with the CIA. I told him about different people I met. I said, "You know, I have talked to people who apparently sit down with you and make policy who tell me you're wrong. I have talked to people who advocate your theory publicly on radio, television, and on the campuses around the world. But they don't believe you're right; they think you're wrong. I'm just in heart and conscience--I think you're wrong, Mr. President." He said, "You really do?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You think you know more about this war than I do? Do you think that I don't roll and toss up in that bed every night? Don't you think I would like to get this thing over with?" I said, "Gee, Mr. President, I understand exactly how you feel. But [in] my conscience, I just don't feel as though I have any other way to go but to be opposed to the war. I am opposed to the war." He put his arm around me, and he said "Tip,

I thought you did it for political reasons. I thought you did it because you had all of those students up there. I thought that you were frightened of the students and that you did it to be in swing with the kids. You really did it from your heart and your mind." I said, "Look, let me tell you something. There's a minority of students up there." The student thing hadn't really flared at this time. "There's a minority of them. When I walk down the street at home, people cross the street on me. I've got to sell to the people in my own area that I am right. My strength doesn't come from the university; my strength comes from the people in the back street. They think that I've joined the students like you do. In my heart, I just think that the whole war is wrong. I don't think there's any way that we can justify it. I think we ought to get out of here." He said, "Let me say this to you. As long as you feel that way about it, I'm delighted to know how you feel. Just let me say this to you: you and I will always be friends. I am so happy to know that you didn't make this change for political reasons. As far as those CIA papers are concerned that you say I don't get on my desk, that's the first thing I'm going to ask for and look for every morning.

Time went on. He left the White House. I saw him many times, you know, when he would come down and visit here. I think last time I ever saw him was at the memorial services for Hale Boggs. The Boston Patriots went down to play football at the Dallas

Stadium. He was there, and he was talking to the Boston reporters. "I've got two great friends in Boston: John McCormack and Tip O'Neill. Tell them both that I was asking for them." The television announcer came on: "Well, we met the former President; he's down in the box down here. It was a delight. What a wonderful person he is to meet. He says to the Boston audience [he has] these two great friends, John McCormack and Tip O'Neill, and he wants to be remembered to them." Lyndon I loved. He was just a great guy. Of course, he effectuated all the programs which I think Kennedy tried to put through. Kennedy had a rough time. He put through a manpower bill, and the second time it came around, it lost in the House by nine votes. The train got derailed, and he was never able to get it back on the tracks. When Johnson became President of the United States, Johnson never left anything to chance. The Kennedys lost that bill because they hadn't done the proper work. In a campaign they did the proper work; in the legislative halls they didn't follow through in the same manner in which they campaigned. In the legislative halls, Lyndon was different; he left nothing to chance. He followed everything through. In the field of campaigning, particularly in the incident where he ran against Kennedy, he underestimated his opponent and didn't do the proper work. That's part of the way I look at it, having been on a first-name basis with Jack Kennedy and with Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon didn't have the charm and the

charisma that Kennedy had, but he sure had style, and he sure had personality, and he sure had character.

G: He could be persuasive, I suppose.

O: Oh, he was the greatest persuader you ever saw in your life, no question about it.

I'll tell you an interesting thing. I remember when the Education bill came up in the Rules Committee. There was a lot written about it, as a matter of fact; the Federal Aid to Education. It was kind of innovative; they were moving the field of education. More Federal funds were going to it. At that particular time, the Catholic bishops were moving hard on Federal aid to parochial schools. Adam Clayton Powell was the chairman of the Labor and Education Committee. He said he would report two pieces of legislation; he reported one, and he didn't report the one on parochial schools. So Jim Delaney and I decided that we'd hold up both items until such time as Adam Clayton Powell reported the parochial school education bill.

Well, all hell broke loose. Jack Kennedy sent over a fellow by the name of Donahue, who was one of the liaisons. He said, "The President sent me over to see you, Tip. He wants your vote. You've got to vote for this bill." I said, "Look, you tell the President of the United States I represent the same district in Congress that he represented, and I'm voting exactly the same way on the Rules Committee as he would have voted had he been there. I've got opposition

coming up, and that's it." I was later to change. But you could talk to a Jack Kennedy through a mediary. He sent Donahue over to me. I knew Jack Kennedy better than Donahue did, if you know what I mean; I took his place in Congress. Lyndon never would have done that. Lyndon would have picked up the telephone. He would have called you directly on the telephone. Let me say to you, when the President of the United States calls you, he can say, "How do you override a veto? How do you don't override a veto?" When the President of the United States calls you, it's awfully hard for a person to say no. Particularly if you had the persuasiveness of a Lyndon Johnson. That's why he got his program through; he did a tremendous amount of work himself.

G: You indicated that he worked with you directly rather than, say, using his legislative liaisons?

O: Yes. I think he did that, number one, because he knew that I had a strong political background. I had been the first Democrat ever to be the Speaker of the Massachusetts legislature. When I was Speaker of the House, it was 122 to 118. I knew strong disciplines. I knew how much you could accomplish by the call itself. Secondary people I never paid too much along the line because I had to do too much of the work myself. I think probably when I came here, I expected to be called by a John McCormack or a Sam Rayburn rather than having somebody second hand doing it. Lyndon Johnson appreciated the fact that I was born in the school of politics, I was young when I

was in leadership, and he acknowledged the fact that "the way to handle this guy is for me to talk to him personally." But I think most of it emanated from the meetings that I had with him at the 'Board of Education that Sam ran, the stories that I would tell him about Curley, the stories that I would tell him about Boston politics, the stories I would tell him about city organization, the stories I would tell him about the Massachusetts legislature and how it functioned, and things like that. The Massachusetts legislature would function, in those days, so differently than the Congress of the United States, whether the Republicans were in power or the Democrats were in power. You tread on the toes of the other fellow. If the Republican leader's wife died, and a delegation of Republicans were going to the wife's funeral, that was the day the Democrats put through their program. If the Republicans were in power . . . I can remember one day Chris Herter was the Speaker of the House. The Democrats were having caucus. He said, "The House will be in order at two o'clock. The Democrats are in caucus from one to two." We didn't come back till quarter past two. By the time we came back at quarter past two, he had put the program through that we were caucusing for for an hour and a half, reconsidered it, moved it out of the way, and just walked out of the chamber. They respected nobody's rights whatsoever; that's the hardness and the toughness of that type of politics. I was born in the 'Tough' school of politics, and it doesn't work down here.

Well, of course it doesn't work anywhere I guess today because of openness in politics, but that's how politics took place 25 years ago. Lyndon knew it and Lyndon appreciated it, and Lyndon was tough himself. But he was a great persuader; there's no question about it.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you.

(End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I.)

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Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.
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