INTERVIEW XVI

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INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

G: I want to start with a few miscellaneous questions. First, do you have any insights as to why [John A.] Gronouski was made ambassador to Poland and you postmaster general? I realize that LBJ had made a commitment to you to allow you to leave your White House job and this was a way for him to honor that commitment and yet still keep you around. But do you think there was any feeling that Gronouski was having some problems?

O: No, I don't think that existed at all. It had to be solely the President determining to retain me in the administration and at the same time saying "I'm not violating any agreement we made."

His whole approach underscores that. He was at one point going to announce me without any notice to me in a press conference. [He] told me later on that was his intention that morning at the press conference in the East Room, but during the prior evening Dean Rusk, who had been charged with the responsibility of notifying the Polish government regarding Gronouski, had been unable to contact two leaders who had to be notified. He had to forego that announcement. Finally [he] made a brief off-hand comment on naming a postmaster general; "Come on down to the Ranch and we can talk about it." Going to the Ranch and not having any discussion. Having Gronouski at the Ranch to be announced ambassador to Poland. I can't speak for Gronouski, but there was hardly any advance notice to me as to what the President intended to do. To sum it up, the President felt there was a very logical step he could take and that was naming me postmaster general.

John Gronouski was postmaster general and had acquitted himself well. I never heard any adverse comment regarding him in the White House. Ed [J. Edward] Day as postmaster general really did not have a political involvement. There wasn't a tendency in the White House to focus on the Post Office Department, unfortunately. So that was the obvious spot for me. Johnson could make that move and rightly say to me, which he did, "I didn't violate any agreement we had. But I told you one day that I was going to win."

John had a Polish background. He doesn't, certainly, deserve to be just dumped in order to take care of this O'Brien problem. I suppose the President came up with the idea, well, Polish background, make him ambassador to Poland. But I'm absolutely sure it had nothing to do with his performance as postmaster general.

G: We were talking about stamps yesterday and one stamp that was issued was a beautification stamp. Do you recall that?

O: I recall the stamp.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson have a role in that at all?

O: I believe so. Her keen interest in that area, I'm sure, led to discussions relative to a stamp. She may or may not have participated directly in the discussions, but let's put it this way: I don't think there would have been a beautification stamp except for Mrs. Johnson's keen interest.

G: Did you ever have any problems with violations of the frank by members of Congress and senators? If so, did the Post Office Department get involved in investigations here?

O: I have a vague recollection that something of this nature did crop up perhaps once or twice, and that there was a need for the Post Office Department to confer with the member of Congress. There were some citizen challenges, but I don't remember them in specific terms. I'm sure there was a little of this on a couple of occasions.

G: Okay. Some of the innovations that you instituted had to do with manpower. One thing you did was to institute a recruiting program to fill about twenty thousand positions with new talent, and a five-year college recruiting plan. Do you recall these, the specifics of your efforts?

O: I recall the plan. It was an effort to bring more talent into the department, trying to interest people in a career opportunity in the postal service.

G: When you would recruit these college-trained people, at what level would they begin?

O: Under the rather severe restrictions imposed by civil service regulations, you were obviously limited in opening up opportunity. You had to convince people that they had to start at the bottom, but that there was greater opportunity for advancement that would appear. There were occasions when you could bring people aboard, people of unusual talent that you were able to recruit. You could put them on the rolls in a temporary status, and try to find some way down the road to place them in a permanent position.

While you were attempting to recruit them, it was difficult. There was a civil service procedure. There were limitations imposed on the patronage side too. Most of the time they were circumvented in one way or another, by delay, by new lists, new examinations, and you had veterans' preference. Veterans' preference, of course, went a long way. Where you had two people, one a veteran and one a non-veteran with close to equal abilities, that veteran would get that job. There was no way you were going to by-pass veterans' preference.

So all of that created situations in the area of patronage that really were somewhat restrictive. There were eligibility lists and they would expire, and you would have a new

list. That did not totally inhibit patronage, but it was not just a simple matter.

At the federal level, you're looking at decent jobs with pretty well-assured careers. The benefit side of it was generally overlooked and the benefit side was liberal.So the fellow might not have stature, but there are opportunities to move up.

Like any federal entity, the federal civilian establishment contains a wide variety of jobs with step increases and creates a pretty decent opportunity for stable employment and good benefits at a relatively early age. I think it's more than comparable to the private sector. I've always had the feeling there are some significant advantages to federal employment.

G: You also instituted a Post Office Department trainee program.

O: Everything we were doing was to upgrade the department. Plus [we were] trying to come up with ideas that might improve the opportunity to move up. You could say on-the-job training, or, "Are you interested in participating in this program that could be helpful to you on the promotion side?" You were attempting to do that because you had a heavy turnover. There was a large number of new arrivals annually. It was an effort to upgrade the quality of new employees and improve the abilities of employees within the civil service structure for advancement in the service rather than, "Spend twenty years and you've put in your time." It had some impact.

G: Did you have trouble getting funds from Congress for this training program?

O: Yes. You had a slight opening for a diversion of funds for these programs, too. There was a little elbow room. We also found in stating it up front in hearings in presenting these programs that there was a good attitude. They in fact would be complimentary because they liked the idea that you were trying to do something, so the tendency was to try to help you in terms of the budget.

G: Let me ask you to talk about the temporary employment situation, Christmas and summer jobs.

O: Well, those were basically patronage. You would get requests, most of them not to the postmaster general or the headquarters, but at the local level. Postmasters had a lot of leeway putting people on. They dealt with their congressman or senator in that regard. Summer employment and particularly Christmas employment gave young people who were in school an opportunity to pick up some fairly significant money in a hurry by working sixteen, eighteen hours a day at a good pay level. So those were sought and it was a form of local patronage. You had this hiring authority locally to move that mail; it was imperative that it be moved, the Christmas mail. We wanted to proudly proclaim that, come hell or high water, you did get the mail delivered--particularly the Christmas mail. That did open up thousands of temporary jobs--summer replacements on vacation periods. There was some of that too. Many would go to their local post office and apply. Many

more, however, would go to the local congressman and make his or her interest known and the congressman would invariably have a good relationship with the postmaster to accomplish it. Most of those people who picked up a few hundred dollars during Christmas accomplished that through political contact.

G: Were these programs designed to hire underprivileged rather than--?

O: No, it didn't work out that way.

G: But was this the intent, do you think?

O: You would proclaim this was an opportunity to hire people who were unemployed, who needed this work, but by the time you got through the political process, it wasn't necessarily true. There were any number of young people from middle income families who worked in post offices across this country at Christmas time.

G: My impression is that this caused some negative publicity for John Gronouski, your predecessor.

O: I don't remember that.

G: Did you have any publicity problems with the--?

O: I don't recall I did.

G: Well, these jobs ended up going to middle class people and even sons and daughters of congressman and--

O: I don't remember the sons and daughters of congressmen. The sons and daughters of congressmen generally wound up in some other congressman's office on the Hill in the summer and they still do. But on the post office side, it would be a matter of the congressman's inability to place them in a little better position than carrying mailbags at Christmas time.

G: Did the unions object to this form of--?

O: It was temporary. They weren't overly concerned about it. If you ever stretched it, I'm sure you would have had problems. If you decided that maybe you needed them in January or February too, there would have been a lot of problems, for obvious reasons. But it was a rather traditional procedure and was accepted. Reality was that you couldn't claim temporary Christmas employees were solely people who were in desperate financial circumstances. It just didn't work out that way.

G: One of your first actions was to appoint an equal employment opportunity task force within the Postal Department to look at the hiring of blacks and see what could be done to

increase the number of black employees.

O: Yes.

G: Can you describe this problem?

O: We were aggressive in this area. I like to think we were in the forefront of this activity at the federal level. We recognized our responsibilities. You must remember that among these unions there were black unions.

G: National Alliance of Postal Employees.

O: Yes.

G: Anything else on the hiring of minorities?

O: No.

G: Was there a problem with underemployment of minorities within the Post Office, the fact that they did seem to occupy lower grades?

O: It would follow the pattern of federal employment. I don't think it was unique in the Post Office Department. If you started developing statistics, which the black unions of course did, you could identify that there wasn't any meaningful balance and recruiting ought to put heavy emphasis on blacks.

My White House Fellow was black, and I placed him in a key role at my right arm on the staff. In fact, he was on the task force developing a new approach to the postal service and he became well-known throughout the postal service. He had requested to be my White House fellow when I was at the White House. Before he came aboard, I became postmaster general and--Ronnie Lee was his name--I told Ron, "You would have found it more interesting, I'm sure, to be in the White House, but I'm not going to be here so you can make your judgment." He chose to go to the Post Office. He found many interesting areas of involvement and activity in the Post Office Department and he became, in a short period of time, very expert and highly visible. He had a lot of direct communication with employees in general, employee unions and particularly black unions.

G: Any other aspects of the White House Fellows Program?

O: No. I didn't share the view of some, when it was established, who thought it was just a gimmick. It turned out to be a very worthwhile program. It was a marvelous opportunity for a young person. The head of the department would make a real effort to include that White House fellow in the day-to-day activities of the department. I certainly did, and I think it was a great experience for Ronnie Lee.

G: You had a different one each year, is that right?

O: He stayed with me.

G: Let me ask you about the issue of curb versus door delivery.

O: You would determine eligibility for door delivery. [We] found that there were probably over a million homes entitled to door delivery that were still getting curb delivery because of, again, the budget factor. These people were greatly disturbed, distraught. You have the right, but somehow or other it doesn't happen. There was delay in providing this service. The backlog built up significantly, and the entitlement was there. So you had to switch around the day-to-day operation of the Post Office I've described and say, "Now, can't we put some resources and focus on this and try to clean up that backlog?"

G: Door delivery was considerably more expensive, I gather, because it was slower.

O: Sure. It requires much more manpower.

G: Was beautification a factor here, the fact that the mailboxes out on a post were not as--?

O: Every once in a while you'd get letters saying they had neighbors who had these crazy mailboxes and they distorted the neighborhood. The fact is that door delivery is far more satisfactory than curb delivery. I can see you would be aggravated if you knew you were entitled to door delivery and it just didn't happen. But the expense factor of course was significant.

G: You also experimented with places like Columbia, Maryland, the kiosks or central delivery point where people would go and--

O: Yes. You could somewhat improve the situation. It was experimental; not awfully expensive either. It would be better than what currently existed. Columbia, Maryland, presented an ideal situation, because of this man-made town aspect, to try that out.

G: Do you feel like more should have been done in terms of trying to centralize the pickup of mail?

O: Yes, but you have to go back to square one, where you were way behind in research and development and modernization of facilities. You had these people who weren't getting door delivery. You tried the kiosks. The fact is that the only way you were going to have meaningful mail service, updated and adequate, was to modernize the service. How long could you go on using bandaids and adhesive tape or this or that gimmick? It was a dead end. You couldn't revise the entire concept of postal service and place that department in a position to move into the modern world, to have an ability to finance new facilities, to put monies into research, to take advantage of new developments and mechanization. It was very depressing because meanwhile, while you were trying to move into the next

century, you were trying to have this archaic system function somehow on a day-to-day basis.

You had the Chicago disaster and you were going to have that across the country at some level as the years went on. Meanwhile, the volume is dramatically increasing every year. It was unbelievable; 10, 20 per cent increase in mail volume and the Post Office Department is the same department it was thirty years earlier. There is no light at the end of this tunnel. So we had to act drastically. It had to be a complete change of approach and that was the frustrating aspect.

You breathed a sigh of relief after Chicago. You had trouble with your trucks; there were all kinds of breakdowns. While you're trying to attend to all that you're thinking, what does it require to focus attention on the need to dismantle this existing service, close the door to it and move on into an entirely new era?

G: One criticism of the Post Office Department at the time you moved over there was that in the past, the Post Office Department had advocated modernization and automation but had not, in fact, spent the funds that Congress had appropriated for that purpose anyway.

O: I can speak definitively to that. The ability to innovate didn't exist within the department. There wasn't any creativity in that regard. The most appalling aspect, after you got a look at it for thirty to ninety days, was that there wasn't any R & D [research and development]. Therefore, whatever modest budget allocations were made in this area, the Post Office Department was bereft of competency to utilize that money in an effective manner. I can assure you that that money, if they were utilizing it in an effective manner, would not have made any great impact because it would have been so minor an amount of money. But where the department could be faulted was you haven't utilized the money, or where you have, it doesn't appear to be effective. You've got zip code and yet zip code can't be totally effective if you don't have the backup to fully utilize zip code.

You don't have to be very bright to figure that you have a department that is a multibillion dollar department with seven hundred thousand employees trying to deliver sixty billion pieces of mail or whatever, and you don't have creative talent to work on development, in concert with the private sector, to move this department forward. The financial resources were limited, but as limited as they were, they weren't properly utilized in some instances. There was no focus on it. It wasn't even considered important enough to be on an assistant postmaster general level.

G: You did initiate some contracts for research and development with several universities: Dartmouth, Michigan State, and SMU--such things as transportation difficulties, motivation, automation, things of this nature. Any recollections of these?

O: Yes. There again, it was putting your toe in the water; recognizing the inadequacies that existed internally and trying to move to the private sector to utilize that expertise on a contractual basis to bolster our situation. As R & D went forward and was quickly

expanded and placed at the level where it belonged, there was more and more private sector joint effort to compensate, at least in part, for loss of time over a long period. We were reaching out wherever we could to find any help to aid us in resolving our problems.

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G: [Were] these contracts successful, would you say? Did they provide you with the--?

O: They were successful in what they agreed to provide, but you were faced with the onerous task of implementation. Some of these proposals and innovative programs were to a considerable extent stuck with the implementation aspect. To move your budget allocations in that area from ground zero to something reasonable was like climbing a mountain. The void was so great; you were not going to do it overnight. You weren't going to do it in a year or even in a few years, particularly if you had to divert your attention to maintain facilities and cope with the needs of facilities where you had no financial resources at all. You had to go out and enter into contracts under the gun.

If you have a piece of land and the post office has asked for submissions of sites for a building, you can go to the local bank and be totally financed if you've gotten a long-term lease from the Post Office Department. You have an assured tenant that will pay. You haven't had to expend a great deal of your own financial resources and you have a nice thing going. Through that whole process, you know we don't have an alternative. Perhaps the alternative is that it's not John Smith, it's Joe Jones because the site is better.

The net result is your bargaining position on the square foot costs is limited. You would talk to the Congress about this and the only answer was that you had to have substantial funds to do this structuring yourself. You were not going to get it, and you couldn't borrow. You couldn't go out in the marketplace, therefore you had to have independent status. One fundamental reason for independent status from day one was to finance these activities which you were absolutely unable to do as a department.

G: Did it also mean that you would be able to have more suitable space because you could tailor the kind of buildings and location to your exact needs?

O: Since postal independence, if you will, you've had facilities built, massive structures to handle bulk mail and process it. There has been an amount of modernization and a number of new facilities, all of which, if that action hadn't been taken would, in my judgment, still be non-existent.

G: The press reported that early in your tenure as postmaster general you created an office to draw up a master plan for improving postal service in the immediate future and also for preparing for the long-range needs and challenges. Was this a task force or group that was different from the one that [Ira] Kapenstein--?

O: Yes. The immediate future aspect included a good number of career postal people because you weren't talking about total change. This was sort of travelling two roads that

paralleled, as I described: trying to attend to the problems of today, next week, next month and next year, and meanwhile trying to dismantle and start over again.

G: Did big labor and railroads prevent you from transferring more mail service from railroads to trucks?

O: There was a big to-do in that area. It was the declining rail situation. The over-the-road delivery system was growing. The trucking industry was replacing the declining railroads. It was a quest on the part of two major industries to determine how they could maximize their business with the Post Office Department, so they wound up in a competitive situation.

G: Okay. One of the things that you pressed for was cycling the issuance of government checks. Do you recall this issue?

O: Yes. We became part of an overall effort in that regard. I don't think it was confined totally to the Post Office Department, but it seems to me that bridged other departments, didn't it?

G: Yes.

O: I recall it.

G: Well, Social Security and--

O: Yes.

G: Another effort of yours was directed at getting the government agencies and departments to use the zip codes.

O: I vividly recall that. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. There we are in the private sector saying, "You've got to be good citizens," and you look over your shoulder and your own departments were not complying. That was an aggravation. Believe me, a lot of pressure was exerted and I utilized White House pressure in that regard, too. You have departments in your own administration failing to cooperate while you are busy with the mail users and the citizens in general, pleading. We got that corrected.

G: The coast guard was the worst, apparently.

O: I recall something--(Laughter)

G: Why do you think that was?

O: I don't know.

G: Did the President get directly involved in that?

O: I believe there were some kind of orders issued. There was some clearly defined procedure that made it known to all that they were to comply and to comply forthwith, because they weren't listening to me very much. (Laughter)

G: Okay. You were concerned with providing overnight delivery of mail. This was a goal that you had--

O: Yes. That was the stick-out in the delivery process. You found your focus on that overnight delivery aspect--the price paid for failure to maintain a level of improvement over a long period of time. London and Paris were able to accomplish same day delivery. It just was not acceptable that you couldn't accomplish overnight delivery. That was the focal point of every activity you were engaged in, and you would fight the statistical battle. You would have an evaluation made. The statistics were quite impressive, but not quite believable as far as the general public was concerned. I'm not suggesting they were doctored, but if you were accomplishing 90 per cent-plus overnight delivery that probably wasn't a bad record. When you're talking about billions of pieces of mail, up to 10 per cent of that not delivered on a timely basis is a crisis.

This was compounded by the attitude of some of the members of Congress who felt that it was great publicity for them when they responded to some constituent complaining. Send out a hundred letters and check out how rapidly they were delivered. Then come back with their statistics and berate the Postal Service. This congressional activity was grossly exaggerated in terms of failure to accomplish overnight delivery.

There again the service was an easy target. I remember some Congressman, I think it was Ted Weiss, deciding to go on horseback around his district. Well, of course, you're subject to national ridicule. I remember Mel Laird, whom I had a friendly relationship with, calling me one day and saying, "I'm going back to Wisconsin"--this was when he was in the House--"and I've had some constituent complaints about the postal service so I'm going to kick the hell out of you. I just wanted to tell you up front." I said, "I understand. Be my guest."

There weren't many people making favorable comments regarding postal service. You'd have people with the occasional story of remarkable delivery that was made in some crisis situation. Once in a while articles would appear that would make the Postal Service look like it was expected to be, a dedicated entity of public service, but you were fair game.

With all of your problems, under the circumstances, postal delivery in this country was pretty darn good. It really was. And is. But boy, it doesn't take much, a misdelivered handful of letters and some citizen screaming to his congressman and you have a story of deplorable postal service. The amazing part of it all, in everything we've been talking about, was that somehow you were able to deliver 50 per cent of the mail in

the world on a reasonably timely basis. That is the other side of the coin.

G: Did you have some sort of built-in mechanism within the department for monitoring the time it took to deliver--?

O: Yes.

G: What sort of system was that?

O: There were experts in that area who worked on that. They would do these checks and surveys and there was a high degree of accountability. This wasn't something you did sporadically when you were put under the gun; this was something that was ongoing. You tried to monitor delivery service in great detail nationally. There was obviously a considerable dependence upon the people who were part of this reporting system. They were indeed reporting accurately in all aspects. Our numbers would be presentable and far removed from a considerable public perception that we were inadequate. Actually, that was part of the frustration of it all. It never was going to be what it should be with the system that existed.

One per cent failure isn't acceptable. I waited two weeks for a letter that was important to me that was mailed on Fifth Avenue to Third Avenue. It was received yesterday. I could be calling my congressman, screaming and hollering about postal service, but since I've been in this office we've had less than a half a dozen instances of misdelivery. It could be that I am a subtenant, therefore, the carrier of the moment might have a problem determining just where I'm located. Those things occur, but because of the sensitivity, errors could be built up far beyond reality and you paid the price in terms of public perception.

By the same token, we would get reams of mail approving of service. They would take the pains to drop you a note and express their appreciation for the service. It wasn't all one-sided. But that was not of much help to you if you wanted to put those together periodically and call a press conference. The press might sit and yawn and say, "So what?" That wasn't the real story. The story was your failures, as it always is.

Walking to the office this morning I saw a sign on a bus: "New York's Detective Force, The Greatest in the World," with the union's name. I thought they spend money to promote themselves and only the record will show whether they are the greatest in the world. Every individual makes his or her determination in that regard. The Postal Service's "Neither Rain nor Snow" became the credo of the Postal Service--that army of over seven hundred thousand. From my observations, there was a high degree of dedication, a high degree of acceptance of responsibility. Thousands of them were subject in their own area of activity to the same frustrations I was subject to. It was tough and they were berated as I was berated as the postmaster general. There was overall a good spirit and a great sense of pride, I found, as I toured the country.

G: Did the emphasis on prompt overnight deliveries hurt local deliveries?

O: I don't think so.

G: Another thing that you did early on was to increase the postal window hours.

O: We did that particularly in urban areas. I don't remember specifically what the hours were generally, but it didn't provide an opportunity for service for a working person. We tried to stagger some of the hours, have "X" number of windows open to provide opportunity for people after working hours. This is a public service. How can you provide that service if you don't have some provision for people who are in no position to go to the post office in the normal working hours? There should be Saturday provisions, as well as extra hours. That was important because there was a lot of comment, and rightly so, about the inability of people to get to a post office during its normal open hours.

G: Another thing you did was to restore six-day parcel post delivery service.

O: Yes. I found it necessary to mandate restoration, and that got us into some conflicts with the unions. But we got it done.

G: The whole parcel post issue was something that required a good deal of legislative work.

O: Yes.

G: The opponents felt that your proposed legislation would cut into the business of the REA Express.

O: That was a brawl. It was a bloodbath, because the REA had very effective lobbying. I remember two [committee members] specifically I didn't identify who were front and center flailing away to preserve the business of REA. Any attempt to improve our service that could have some cost factor with the "private sector" they were going to fight. It was a mean fight and it involved back room activities.

G: Really? Any specific recollections of these back room--?

O: I've been in politics all my life and I've been in a lot of back rooms, but I've never seen anything as sleazy as that was.

G: How did you become aware of these?

O: It wasn't hard. The information came to us and we had been able to identify the people on the Hill who were involved. In a couple of instances their staff people were involved on a full-time basis. The good guys, who were the overwhelming majority, aren't focusing their attention on a problem of this nature.

G: Oddly enough, UPS, I guess the biggest competitor, came out in favor of the bill. Why was that?

O: Actually, what [we] were doing in expanding this service was not going to be an overriding negative factor to the private sector. One of the problems of the Postal Service over the years was its continuing attempt to preserve its turf. There were a number of occasions when private entities would be established. In every instance, they would focus on the cream, the aspect of service that was financially rewarding. None of these organizations were prepared to provide overall service in competition with the Postal Service. They would pick off some of the better aspects of service and take it on as their own. The only way to describe it is to take the cream and leave the rest with us. That happened and we would vigorously oppose it. The Postal Service is in the position to provide equal or better service at a lower rate and it's highly competitive.

G: Before the measure was passed there was a provision put in that the Post Office Department would have to hire any private carrier employee who was displaced by this new capability.

O: Yes, that was part of getting the legislation. I don't recall that we moved very vigorously in that area. But that was--

G: During this discussion over this measure you cited the example of your wife trying to mail a package and she was unable to mail because it didn't match the size requirements.

O: That was about as complex as anything you've ever run into, the size requirements. There were limitations imposed there that were favorable to the private sector.

G: Where did the unions stand on this issue?

O: The unions saw opportunity for increased employment, so they would stand aside. I don't remember it impacted on the unions.

G: Mail-order companies also supported the bill.

O: Yes. There was a service aspect that would [be] helpful to them.

G: What was the effect of the bill on REA Express?

O: It would have taken a period of time to determine whether there was any adverse effect. It was a matter of greed on the part of an organization that wanted to retain everything. They had no interest in the public service aspect. What disturbed me was the cast of characters. They were at a level that I frankly didn't enjoy having any involvement with.

G: Was it simply a question of observing the interest groups operating out of a congressional office or was there something more overt than that?

O: It was the level of the effort they expended to block us. It was at a level of sleaziness that was despicable.

G: Was it negative campaigning or was it--?

O: From our position we were convinced it involved expenditures of monies in an illegal manner. Let's put it that way.

G: Offering bribes and such?

O: I'll just leave it there.

G: Now, in late May there was a controversy over a bulletin that you issued to all of the Postal Service decrying delays and rudeness and urging the entire Postal Department to provide the best possible service. Apparently some of the employees were defensive about this.

O: Yes, they were. It was in response to an increasing number of complaints about basic service. They were not localized in one area. It seemed to take on a national scope. There was an inordinate number of them so you had to conclude that this was not just crank mail. It concerned us to the point where we let the whole department know about our concerns. I would make demands as the postmaster general to straighten up and fly right. The postmasters and local supervisors across the country were going to be held responsible and I wasn't going to tolerate this. It seemed to be escalating, treating patrons in an uncivil manner and that sort of thing.

[I] should've anticipated there would be some adverse reaction. You would have union leaders contacting Dick [Richard J.] Murphy saying, "This is unfair," and "This spotlights something that doesn't exist and the Postmaster General is overreacting." I didn't mind that reaction because at least [I] had gotten their attention.

G: Did the public appreciate this sort of effort to--?

O: It was a responsibility to the public. I don't know whether there was any discernible reaction.

G: Did it have a positive effect on the--?

O: I believe it did. Supervision in my judgment had become lax and it was totally unacceptable that a clerk or a carrier should not fulfill responsibilities by being, at a minimum, courteous to a patron. You wouldn't accept that procedure in the private sector and certainly it wasn't acceptable to us.

G: I have a note here that you were booed at Louisville at the postal clerks convention. Was

this a result--?

O: I don't recall. Was that in the same time frame?

G: Yes.

O: Well, it probably was then.

G: It was that summer, at least. Okay. Let me ask you about efforts to hire the handicapped.

O: We made a special effort in that area. It was all part of our attempt to focus on responsibilities that were inherent, whether we were talking about minorities or we were talking about summer employment. Hiring the handicapped was something that we could move aggressively into and take a lead position.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: Was this something that was unique to the Post Office Department or was it an administration-wide [effort]?

O: I know we didn't borrow it from someone else. It was something we initiated on our own.

G: Do you think there was sufficient attention given to hiring women? Or was the Post Office Department a male-dominated--?

O: It was male-dominated. At that stage in the mid- and late 1960s I couldn't say that the appropriate attention was being paid.

G: I have a note that you laid down the law to trucking firms that had contracts with the Post Office, insisting that they hire black drivers. Do you recall that?

O: That was part of our effort in terms of minorities; we felt that we had a handle there. We were customers and we were significant in that regard; therefore we did have an opportunity and we seized it.

G: How did they respond?

O: Reasonably well. They were forced to show some meaningful response or they would be in continuing trouble with us. That would have an economic impact that would be significant to them. We had something going for us in terms of being able to press in that area.

G: Were any contracts ever canceled?

O: What we found was that there was a degree of response that certainly justified the effort in

the first instance. That was the extent of it.

G: Now you had, I'm sure, been to cabinet meetings before you became a member of the cabinet.

O: I'd been to all of them.

G: As the head of congressional relations.

O: Yes. It was automatic on all cabinet agendas, [in] both [the] Kennedy and Johnson periods, that I would be present. All that changed in the cabinet meetings was that instead of taking my usual seat along the wall, I moved up to the table. But I played the same role. There was very little discussion regarding the Postal Service at cabinet meetings before I was postmaster general or while I was postmaster general. Most of it would be initiated by me in my effort to push our cause, and it would receive the same general reaction that you always got when you talked about the Post Office Department. When I sat along the wall awaiting my turn to discuss the legislative agenda, it really never focused on postal problems, so I couldn't expect to sharply change that attitude. I had a chance to make my points. Although I sat in the postmaster general's chair at the cabinet table, when my turn came I was still in the role of discussing the legislative program--its progress or lack of it.

G: Tell me how the cabinet was used, how it functioned in 1966.

O: There was more attention directed to agendas for cabinet meetings. At some stage Bob Kintner came in as a coordinator or secretary of the cabinet. There were efforts made to have the cabinet members report in detail regarding their departments in advance of cabinet meetings. Tight agendas were developed that were all-inclusive in terms of what should be on an agenda. There was a conscious effort on the part of the President to make the cabinet meetings as meaningful as possible. There was an opportunity in that context for each cabinet member to have his moment. I would say overall that the meetings, therefore, were more structured as time went on.

G: Really? Was there less give and take, do you think?

O: There was a closer adherence to an agenda, less drifting from an agenda, therefore, you may conclude it was more businesslike. That continued until I left the cabinet. I found that the cabinet meetings were reasonably productive.

G: Really?

O: What are they meant to accomplish, really? When everything is said and done, the President needn't call his cabinet to discuss major decisions. It gave each cabinet member an opportunity to have a better understanding, a recognition of the problems in other departments or agencies. You felt involved and the President's objective was to utilize the

cabinet members as fully as possible in the promotion of the Great Society program.

In the earlier years, cabinet meetings were not called on a regular basis in the Kennedy period. They would be called at the discretion of the President without any established timetable and an agenda would be developed through telephone conversations. President Kennedy, in my judgment, was not convinced that cabinet meetings were very productive. Consequently he didn't have them on a regular basis. In the Johnson period they became more structured and more effort [was] expended in developing agendas.

G: Was it an opportunity for candid discussion of issues?

O: There was no lack of candor, but all of us recognized that you weren't to go off on your own particular area of interest to an inordinate degree. It was all well and good if you were expressing a concern or making a statement in the context of seeking help. We would appreciate having them focus their attention on being helpful and that would be the President's thrust.

The President moved through an agenda well and would state in emphatic terms his distress that progress wasn't more forthcoming. He would question members of the cabinet on recent visits to the Hill and what they had experienced there. He would question them on delays or lack of progress at the committee level or any level of the legislative process. A good deal of the Johnson cabinet meetings were focused on the Great Society program and legislative progress. Foreign policy and problems of that nature would be referred to, and there would be a brief statement by [Robert] McNamara or Rusk or whoever. The cabinet meeting was primarily an opportunity for the President to restate he expected full cooperation with me, with the White House, with the administration as a whole. It was everyone's program no matter what element was on the front burner at the moment. It was not only expected but demanded that this mutual effort be always present. You would be hard put to it to leave that cabinet meeting and not understand what he meant.

G: One of your memoranda reflects a report on the travels of cabinet members in helping Democratic candidates who were up for election in the fall of 1966, and clearly a feeling on your part that they were not on the road enough, that their travels were ill-timed, or they were going abroad or doing things that were not helpful to Democrats who needed help. Let me ask you to go into this in some detail and talk about how--

O: It was the situation at that time that caused me to do that. I was very concerned that there didn't seem to be an understanding that the time and effort were to be expended to enhance our position in terms of an upcoming off-year election. I became so exercised about it I decided that I would put it on the table and spotlight it. It wasn't something that was occurring because people purposely wanted to avoid it. But some travel was not at all productive in terms of what we were trying to accomplish politically and it wasn't well understood.

It was my responsibility as the department head to go to the clerks convention or dedicate a new post office somewhere, which is non-partisan. But you should utilize that time to the fullest by seeing if you couldn't make some political impact.Do a little promotion of the Great Society program or the President's Vietnam position. This seemed to be overlooked in some of the domestic travel. Oftentimes a cabinet member would be speaking to some business group and the text of the speech would be appropriate, but he seemed to neglect thrusts on behalf of the President and the administration and the program. I thought it was a failure to fully utilize these opportunities. So I focused on it.

G: The context was the congressional elections, though--the fact that not the President but members of Congress and the Senate were up for re-election. Was part of the strategy to boost your supporters?

O: Oh, certainly. I probably approached it a little differently than some of the cabinet members. Now you take an Orville Freeman or a Stu Udall. With their political background they were sensitive to all this and they knew how to maximize, how to take advantage of an opportunity. But there were others, and you didn't fault them because they just didn't understand. They didn't have sensitivity to this. In addition, there seemed to be travel on the part of some out of the country at a time when I thought if they were traveling they ought to be focusing domestically. The bottom line was: "Listen, you have a handful of fellows who have some stature by virtue of position. If they go to Cleveland, Ohio, or Louisville, Kentucky, or any city in this country they are going to have media attention. They should have a press conference. They should incorporate in their comments matters that might be of some help in terms of the off-year election and not just confine themselves to some dissertation on a particular subject that they are experts in. It's pretty obvious, pretty straightforward. So let's get together and try to coordinate."

There's another aspect of it. If you found three cabinet members were in Cleveland within sixty days of each other, maybe that wasn't the right approach. But there was some utilization of cabinet members and visibility that should be helpful and it was up to them to make sure that they were making contributions.

G: Did your emphasis here adjust the situation any?

O: The time factor eludes me--it might have been later than 1966--but at some stage the President asked me to have a meeting of the cabinet in my office at the Post Office Department, excluding the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. I called the meeting at the direction of the President. We met at the Post Office Department and we kicked this around. It might have been at a later date that we really got that far into it. I think it probably was, as Vietnam escalated. I do recall the context of utilizing your position to the fullest to the advantage of the administration and the President; [it] was a continuing subject. It might have been at a much later time that it really got to the point where we sat and made certain commitments to exchange information on schedules and time frames and to be more aggressive in moving around the country.

G: Why were McNamara and Rusk excused?

O: The sensitivity of the two departments and the political context.

G: Okay. Now, there was a lot of speculation in 1966 that you were going to take over chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee after the elections, before the elections, that whole year.

O: Yes, there was speculation. I think it was simply a matter of assumptions that were made on the part of some press people that it seemed like a natural or obvious step. I don't recall that it was more than that. I guess people would say, "O'Brien's there; it would be logical for him to be national chairman." I don't recall it going beyond that.

There was a time when the postmaster general also was national chairman. I believe that in addition to [James] Farley in Truman's time, there was that tradition for a period. But a long period of time had elapsed when that had not been the case. By virtue of holding both positions, of course, the Democratic chairman attended cabinet meetings, and there was some talk about including the national chairman at cabinet meetings. That was never formalized. I remember a conversation such as that on two or three occasions, but I don't recall that we ever got beyond discussing it briefly.

G: Actually, at this point so much of the patronage was handled through John Macy and the President's Club was the chief financial arm of the party. Was the DNC on the decline?

O: The mistake that had been made on prior occasions we continued. I think there was a failure on our part and that failure would have to be shared by the President--both Kennedy and Johnson, particularly probably in Kennedy's time--a failure to focus on the national committee and ensure it retained the stature as the party entity that it should have. There was neglect to that. On the patronage side, it drifted along through the Johnson period. Macy would gather the information, develop the list, check out the recommendations, but he was not a decision-maker. It was not in the political context. John would await instructions and implement whatever instructions he got from the White House.

The President's Club was reasonably active. There were people in and out of the DNC on staff level from time to time. There were attempts now and then to bolster the DNC. There were people who went there and attempted to develop programs, registration programs or relationships with county and state chairmen. But the reality was [that] there was little attention from the Oval Office and from the immediate staff. I plead guilty because I had been longer involved in national politics than anybody on the staff, and I should have been more aggressive in trying to ensure that the national committee was at an appropriate level. I'll have to say that I did not focus on it either and I've regretted that neglect. The significance of the national committee is apt to be higher when the party is out than when the party is in. Once the party is in, all flows from the White House, and that includes the politics. It's in the nature of things; consequently, the

national committee can be neglected.

Additionally, in my own experience as national chairman, you had very little support from the Congress. It was always troublesome to me to be coping constantly with a serious debt without any real vehicle to raise significant money. Yet the Congress would have annual fund-raisers where they would tap everybody available across the country for the House and Senate campaign committees. The national committee was not party to that. You were limited to simply being invited to the dinner. As an entity you didn't have much by way of resources to do any meaningful fund raising. The end result, obviously, was that the debt grew larger; the effort to keep the committee active and appropriately staffed became more difficult.

When the party took over the White House you were in a considerably different position. You were in a position to achieve some financial support, but you were not in a position to deliver to people because the party is now the in-party and the White House runs the show.

To sum up, and I guess I've mentioned it before, John Bailey was a top-level pro with a lifetime of political experience, a strong leader at the state level in Connecticut and really ran the show. He was left by us, thoughtlessly, and we would think of John only when there was something negative to be announced and John would have the responsibility to do it. We would hold everything of a plus nature within the White House. That left John sort of hanging.

(Interruption)

G: Let's talk about your political activities in 1966. First, let me ask you to describe in some detail the political aspects of your work that year.

O: It was an off-year election and my role was pretty much the role that others in the cabinet would have. I did a fair amount of traveling and speaking, and I would try to incorporate in those travels meetings with the party leaders in whatever area of the country I was in to get an update on attitudes, reactions to the President and his activities. I reduced it to writing and advised the President on my findings. I would get invitations because I was postmaster general and then I would get invitations because of my political activities. Those speaking requests would for the most part be from members of Congress who were having a fund-raising dinner or a testimonial dinner. When they occurred, you tried to get a feel of political opinion, public opinion.

So during 1966 I engaged in that activity. It was the beginning of an unraveling of support for the President's Vietnam policy. My first exposure to this softening was in California. In California Democrats generally were very liberal and would be more inclined to react more quickly than Democrats in other parts of the country. My effort was to be as supportive as I could to the President in any comments I made at press conferences or speeches, in addition to the pointing with pride to the Great Society

program and his record of enactment.

Over those months, it was becoming apparent that the negative factor was growing. There were supporters who were becoming concerned, disturbed, in some instances distraught, and worried about their political futures in terms of continuing to be avowed Vietnam supporters. I believe the congressman's name was [Jeffery] Cohelan. That was an early stop and I had been advised in advance that Cohelan had a real contest on his hands and he was moving away from supporting the President. So I took it upon myself to incorporate in my speech, to a large dinner audience that was honoring Cohelan, my support for the President's Vietnam policy and the need to support him on a continuing basis. Cohelan refrained from any suggestion of support for the policy and perhaps more than that, gave some peripheral indications of personal opposition.

So there was a sensitivity in what I had to say. On that same trip I found that Congressman [John] McFall, which was my next stop, didn't share Cohelan's view.In fact, he was disturbed that Cohelan had taken this route. He told me his support continued strong and that I should not be inhibited at the function. I would be speaking in his behalf, and be as strong as I wanted to be in that area.

G: What would they say when they were talking?

O: They felt we should get [out] of Vietnam, that this was a loser, that it was a bottomless pit, and the President didn't seem to be making a sufficient effort to bring it to a resolution. It reflected a desire to see this go away, to see it end. But it hadn't erupted to the point where pundits and others would say the Democratic support for the President in foreign policy had significantly deteriorated. You have to remember this goes from relatively early 1966 through the off-year election, and the disintegration of support was more pronounced into 1967 and 1968. But it was a situation I perceived for the first time. Perhaps it was the first time I was sufficiently involved in the upcoming off-year election to have serious discussions with old friends or political activists. There was enough there in those early travels in 1966 for me to be candid with the President in memoing him as to where I had been, what I had been doing, what my findings were concerning Vietnam.

Coinciding with that, the President was becoming more concerned about possible erosion of support. We were constantly trying to provide statements and information to the Congress for utilization in the ***Congressional Record*** or elsewhere. The President became more concerned as time went on, even in 1966, when he would learn about party leaders or members of Congress questioning the policy. He would try to blunt that, urge people to speak to those members, urge them to avoid anything negative and hang in there.

So that was the climate of 1966, and the reason that I underscore it is that was the first spark and the first alert.

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G: Were these political leaders that you had known in the 1960 campaign?

O: Yes. They were not only people I had known in the 1960 campaign, but people I was dealing with on a regular basis, members of Congress. By the close of this activity, I had traveled extensively and had met with many political leaders, political activistsI gave the President a report on November 7 and stated that during my campaign travels I had been in forty-two congressional districts and made appearances for sixty-seven candidates for the Senate, House and governorships. Then I attached the detailed report of every congressional district I was in and every candidate that I had been involved with. I also, that same week, gave him my evaluation of the election and my predictions concerning it district by district.

I stated, "It would appear we will have a net loss of thirty-two seats in the House." We had a net loss of some forty-seven seats in the House. I went on to say, "It appears we will have a net loss of one seat in the Senate." I believe we had four. And then I said, "It would appear we will have a net loss of four governorships," and we had a net loss of about eight. So while I predicted losses, it was a more serious setback than I had concluded it would be.

As early as February of 1966, a congressman by the name of John Dow was expressing soft views on Vietnam and he was a real dove. But I had looked upon John at that stage as being an exception to the rule. In fact, in my report to the President I pointed out that Dow was dominated by his wife and he's a peculiar fellow anyway. So I obviously felt John was one-of-a-kind. It didn't penetrate.

In that same tour I had gone into the district of Congressman Jim [James] Hanley in Upstate New York. Jim was a solid, lifelong Democrat of Irish-American heritage and there was no indication that Jim had any problems with the Vietnam policy. That underscored that perhaps Dow was the single exception. Then I went on to another district, Joe [Joseph] Resnick's, and spoke at his function and confined my report to the President to the contest he was engaged in, seeking re-election. I went on to discuss the Roosevelt stamp, which I mention only because that's the way you tied in some of these things--the issue of the Roosevelt stamp with the Roosevelt family. It was an impressive ceremony and I really was able to move into the politics of the area by virtue of being there to launch the stamp.

Further into February, into New Jersey, in talking about Bob [Robert] Meyner and reviewing the congressional seats, I suggested to the President that four or five seats posed serious problems. All of the problems had to do with the candidate, the strength of his opposition, the nature of the district, not national issues and certainly Vietnam wasn't a factor. It was more a reference to Bob Meyner, the former governor, being a candidate against Senator [Clifford] Case and my view that he was the only potential candidate who could give him a tough race.

I came to New York in March. I was in Newark for a testimonial dinner for Congressman Paul Krebs and I tied it into breaking ground for the new FDR postal installation in Manhattan. I make a reference there to Vietnam but I haven't, other than in my first report, run into anyone who seems to be overly concerned regarding the policy. I pointed out to the President I had felt my remarks had been well-received. So we're still comfortable and there is no concern, really. Then in New York I had lunch with the publishers and editors of the ***New York Times***. I noted to the President that in a two-hour Q & A, the luncheon focused primarily on Vietnam policy and the ***New York Times***. It was apparent that while there wasn't unanimity of view at the ***New York Times*** regarding the Vietnam policy, there were a number of people at that luncheon who were becoming distressed and disturbed with Vietnam. At the luncheon you had [Harrison] Salisbury and [Harding F.] Bancroft and [Turner] Catledge and Cliff Daniel and [Lester] Markel and [Charles] Merz and [John B.] Oakes and [Daniel] Schwarz and Bill [William] Shannon. So you're really talking to the top echelon. As I said, a significant portion of the two hours was devoted to Vietnam. It wasn't mean or bitter, but it was clear that these fellows were not at all convinced regarding the policy, or they were certainly not pleased with, as they saw it, a lack of progress. I reported I didn't detect any degree of warmth toward the administration at this meeting.

Interestingly enough, I had a follow-up luncheon with the editors of ***Newsweek***. They were younger than the ***New York Times*** group. They focused more on Bobby Kennedy's activities regarding New York. They did, as the ***New York Times*** suggested, indicate they felt we were going to have a tough time in November, but they were not suggesting that we deserved it. The tone of the ***Times*** had been "You're going to have a tough time in November and you've got it coming to you."

Then I mentioned the contrast between the two groups. And I say, "the ***Times***, an older group, obviously impressed with its role in our society and in its history; ***Newsweek***, young, vigorous, interested but with no show of ego or indication of power to mold public opinion."

So we go into March of that year and other than Congressman Dow and the climate of that lunch at the ***New York Times***, it hasn't hit you, particularly.

G: In addition to that element that was, I guess, more represented in California than elsewhere, of a dovish nature, did you find an element as you went around the country that felt that the administration was not doing enough militarily?

O: To put it in a little different context, I didn't have people saying, "Why doesn't he escalate the war?" They were saying, "Why can't he win the war?" But they weren't urging escalation, only negotiations.

In March I was the speaker at the Indiana Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, an audience of six thousand. It was the largest dinner in the history of Indiana. Both senators were there; [Vance] Hartke came by and the Governor introduced me. Hartke

was worried about being booed because he had indicated some opposition, apparently locally, to some of our activities or programs. I wasn't clear and the memo isn't clear as to exactly why he was concerned, but he was greeted by polite applause, I reported to the President, far less enthusiastic than greeted [Birch] Bayh. He made the pitch that he always supported the New Frontier and Great Society and he referred to the President as a great president. But then he suggested that all this progress could be destroyed by a nuclear holocaust, and made references to setbacks in Vietnam and how Vietnam was bleeding America and diverting our attention from our social problems. Then I say, "However, I followed Hartke and I had rebuttal time. I went strongly into the Vietnam aspect." It had become so sensitive with Hartke that he suggested that he and I have lunch back in Washington. He wanted to talk in detail about his concerns. He hoped that we had not concluded he'd left the reservation, but obviously he was well on his way out the exit door. Birch stated in his remarks that the nation must meet the challenge and accept its responsibilities, internationally as well as here at home, but I noted that otherwise, references to our foreign policy were avoided. So you're getting a touch of it now. You have a senator who has started to move out.

That brought me in April into California and the Jeff Cohelan business I made reference to. Again, I made a strong pitch on Vietnam policy and I note that the audience reaction was extremely cool to my comments. Cohelan was a liberal Democrat who was off the reservation. That was in Oakland. Then in San Francisco I had an off-the-record luncheon with sixty Democratic leaders in northern California. I opened the meeting to questions, and I have to report to the President, "I found expressions of deep concern on Vietnam and a strong tendency to move away from your position." As with Jeff Cohelan, several of the people present at this luncheon obviously wanted us out of Vietnam now regardless of conditions. That probably summed up what was occurring, certainly in that part of the country. You have sixty Democratic leaders who can let their hair down. I know them all and they wouldn't consider me an adversary, but felt obviously that this was an opportunity for them, off-the-record and privately, to express their views candidly. And they did. So there you are.

Then I get to Congressman [John] McFall in Stockton where I am going to address his testimonial dinner. He indicated his concern relative to Cohelan's handling of the dinner and his campaign, and told me to feel free to discuss Vietnam in any terms I cared to. To summarize, this is April, 1966. Now this encompasses observations from some New York-New Jersey based political functions, postal functions and in-depth meetings with the ***New York Times*** and ***Newsweek***. In this report I say, "The extent and depth of concern regarding our Vietnam position in northern California surprised me." I was told this was the case in California, but I felt it was probably for the most part confined to southern California rather than the North, which is more basic[ally] Democratic. Then I point out that, "I campaigned California intensively in 1959 and 1960 and am intimately acquainted with just about every political leader and activist in the state. If these findings of mine are accurate . . . this certainly means political trouble in the near future," and that was April, 1966.

There were other stops into Oklahoma in May. I did some post office dedications there. And--not to get into a lot of detail--I met with the President's Club members. I addressed the Chamber of Commerce and I talked to a number of party leaders. [I] found that, interestingly enough, for the first time in eight years the Democratic Party was reasonably united in the state and there was real optimism about the governorship as well as re-electing the congressional delegation. But I do say, "While one would expect strong support for your Vietnam position in Oklahoma, I do recall a poll recently indicating a fallout of support. I endeavored to determine this in individual conversations, and I believe there is a degree of uncertainty and concern. I nevertheless did not have it forcibly presented to me, as was the case recently in California."

Then apparently in a response to a presidential request in mid-1966, I talked to Jack [John] Gilligan who had been quoted in a Scripps-Howard piece by Ted Knap. I don't have the quotes, but apparently we were concerned in the White House regarding Jack's comments. I sat down with him and he emphasized his dislike of the situation that existed. He said, "When the draft is breathing down the necks of the sons of many, it's very difficult to maintain support for this cause." He says that Taft was repeatedly demanding of Gilligan details of his position on Vietnam while not advocating any position himself. He reviewed with me a tentative proposal involving the July 4 recess, namely that nine House members with outstanding war records, six Democrats and three Republicans, be sent by the Speaker to Vietnam to report back that our troops were in good spirits, no segment of the South Vietnamese desirous that we leave, anxious we stay, and that sort of thing. Those he suggested, in addition to himself, were Congressman [Teno] Roncallio, [James] Corman, [Thomas] McGrath, [William] Hathaway, [John] Murphy and Republicans [Tim] Carter, [Edward] Gurney and Bill [William] Bray.I asked him what assurances he had the Republicans would join in something of this nature.He said he felt confident about Carter and was waiting further word on Gurney and Bray. I concluded that Gilligan was sufficiently supportive of the Vietnam policy at that time.I dismissed the quote attributed to him, which brought about this meeting in the first instance, and attributed it to the fact that he had a difficult re-election coming up.

But there were others who were surfacing here and there that we were observing. One was Lester Wolff, Congressman Wolff. I said, which is a fairly accurate appraisal of Lester, "He's a pleasant but unrealistic fellow." He probably was a realistic fellow but I didn't note it. I tried to point out to him that comments of a relatively insignificant nature could be blown out of proportion when they appear in print, but he was not comfortable with the discussion. I let it go at that.

Then Lee Hamilton said, "Vietnam could wreck us but I really don't detect any deep resentment presently in my district. I do, however, believe the President's position has deteriorated back home; I can't cite specifics." But he had no personal concerns politically. He was pretty relaxed about it all.

Then I summarize, "The ebb and flow that is bound to take place with Vietnam will of course in turn affect these members in varying degrees."So I guess, as you reflect

back on it, we're in mid-1966 and beginning to detect it. I guess you wouldn't call it an unraveling at that point but a new development. Fellows were not only privately expressing concern; they were beginning to give public indications of their concerns, and we're talking about Democrats.

G: Do you think it depended to any extent on who they were running against if they had--?

O: In a couple of instances, as the memos reflect, the difficulty of the contest had something to do with it. For example, one of these candidates, I notice, pointed out his opponent was a right-wing Republican who was well-financed. Obviously, in political terms, he didn't have to be concerned about Vietnam particularly because his opponent wasn't going to make a big issue of getting out of Vietnam. So he was more relaxed about it. Others who were in serious contests and probably felt personally concerned about Vietnam were clearly either softening their positions, avoiding comments or even edging toward negative comments to enhance their re-election possibilities.

G: To what extent can you read public opinion on Vietnam as a cause of the outcome of the 1966 off-year elections?

O: I think [it was] a factor, but not overridingly. We really were faced with the pendulum swing from a major 1964 victory; political history will prove that pretty well--that occurred often. Eisenhower suffered a significant loss in one off-year election, comparable to this one. It certainly was not a major issue that contributed to the losses. It hadn't reached that level of discussion or national concern, not at all. It was beginning to percolate.

G: In addition to your memos to the President, did you talk to him about it in person?

O: Yes. We had discussions. The President was always intrigued with this sort of thing. He was a political animal. As in 1964 when I was in a different role, observing the organizational aspects of the campaign, he was most anxious to get the quickest, the earliest reports he could of my findings and views. And he would absorb it. We had occasions throughout this to make references individually. I'm sure the memo I quote referring to my conversation with Gilligan and Lee Hamilton was in that context. I didn't receive some written directive from the President. It flowed from a conversation I had with him and his expression of concern about some of the comments that had been brought to his attention that were being made by nominal, staunch Democratic supporters on the Hill. He had the benefit for what it was worth--isolated as it might be and spotty--of observations I had been making that encompassed a portion of the country.

In June I made a trip to California again, and I spoke at Jim Corman's testimonial dinner. Now I'm getting the feel of southern California. I state, "He has a stiff contest; Vietnam is a political problem to him." But I said, "More than that, he's a member of the Judiciary Committee, and that had gotten him into some local difficulties on housing legislation." He was well supported and there was a big dinner, but he stated to me that

Vietnam was posing a problem to him.

Then I went to Town Hall in Los Angeles and addressed a thousand people at an award luncheon. The emphasis of my speech was again Vietnam. I point out--maybe it was the nature of the audience--that in the half hour Q & A following my remarks, most of the questions were on the economy and the budget. And then I say, "This is a conservative business group and on the basis of audience reaction, supports you on Vietnam." Really, their reservations went to federal spending; they weren't really that concerned about Vietnam.

Otis Chandler at the ***Los Angeles Times*** had a reception for me with his top staff and we had an extensive Q & A. Their focus was more on [Ronald] Reagan and his progress. It's interesting that in June of 1966 I say, "The current view of the staff, the ***Los Angeles Times*** top staff, which includes political writers, two of them I have known for years, is that Reagan has done awfully well." Repeatedly they mentioned that he had gotten to the middle of [the] road without alienating the right, and that his performances generally were better than could be anticipated. They were particularly impressed with Reagan's visit to Eisenhower and the reports on his appearance before the National Press Club. They mentioned they felt [Governor Edmund "Pat"] Brown had been around too long. Their observation of Reagan at that stage is interesting.

G: Prophetic.

O: Yes, in view of what has occurred since. But I don't indicate that that luncheon brought forward any meaningful comments regarding Vietnam. Apparently the luncheon stayed pretty much on Reagan and California affairs and the governorship.

Then I met with Pat Brown and Jess Unruh, Carmen Warschaw and Gene [Eugene] Wyman. Pat expressed concern that he hadn't heard from the President and about belatedly receiving a telegram congratulating him on his primary victory. Jess Unruh went on to say he was going to support Pat whether Pat wants his support or not. And Warschaw was going to fight vigorously to be state chairman. All of this was local politics, state politics. That was about it on that trip.

Then I get to an interesting memo in September 1966; a letter from Bill Bundy is worth reflecting on. I had sent a memo to Bob Komer. I don't recall the specifics in the memo but he makes reference, "Bob Komer passed your memo of August 22 over to me with the request that I send you documentation on North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist references to the dissent on Vietnam, which will provide convincing proof that this dissent is supporting the enemy's will to fight." Obviously what I was reaching for was evidence that comments being made by some of our friends regarding the Vietnam policy were being utilized by our enemies. Therefore our friends should be made not only aware of this but told that they were making a contribution unwittingly to the enemy. He points out that they went through all recent broadcasts. Most of them were straight reporting and proved nothing beyond the obvious fact that the communists are happy to

exploit such grist for their propaganda mills. "Enclosed--"and I don't have them--"are a few quotations which seem to go beyond this. Before this material is used in the manner you suggest I recommend that careful consideration be given to the two-edged nature of this material. While some of the material would be effective and convincing, the officials quoted are all Democratic senators."

It's very interesting to reflect back on that, because it's another piece of evidence of our rising concerns about support and loyalty to the President from fellow Democrats. Now you're going to deride these people. You find that to utilize this for the purpose I had in mind is probably worthless. All you're doing is pointing with disdain to fellow Democrats.

G: So, what was the answer?

O: Obviously, we didn't pursue it. I don't have any indication we did and that was a little bit of an off-the-wall idea anyway, but at least we checked it out. I think it was interesting--along the lines of the off-year election and efforts to be helpful--the September memo from Bob Kintner to me. He points out that he had reviewed the travel schedule of the cabinet members and other presidential appointees and, as I indicated, "They are disappointing. With the exception of Secretary Udall and Secretary Freeman, travel by other cabinet members is very limited in terms of being helpful between now and November 8. That same holds true for sub-cabinet members." He goes on to say, "I am sure you have noticed that a number of the travel schedules show trips out of the country during this crucial period. Appearances at events within the United States will not be meaningful in terms of what we hope to accomplish in the coming weeks." Then he discusses the need to develop two lists, one showing federal officials, cabinet and otherwise, whose travel schedules can be filled in in a meaningful way, and the other showing the congressional districts and states in which we want to concentrate. All that information was available and had been available to cabinet members and it was a matter of whether they were utilizing it or not. He said, "You know, of course, where the crucial areas are. Concerning the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and others who might be considered off-limits for partisan appearances, there is no reason why they cannot make an impact in important areas around the country in speaking from non-partisan platforms and giving non-partisan talks. Secretary Rusk, in particular, did this very well in 1964." It hadn't been up to our hopes and expectations, the cabinet and sub-cabinet participation in the off-year election, and there is a belated attempt to restate it at that time, which we followed through on for whatever it was worth.

There is no point in restating the statistics of the losses we suffered that year. I've suggested that I don't relate this in any meaningful way to Vietnam concerns, that it was more of the swing of the pendulum, the historic switch that occurs in an off-year off a big win. There might have been a little of Vietnam in it because the losses on the basis of my projections were somewhat higher than I had projected. I had said that thirty-two House seats would be lost, forty-seven were. In any event, that was the politics of 1966 and my personal involvement.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XVI

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

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

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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

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

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

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

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