INTERVIEW XX

DATE: April 23, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

Tape 1 of 1

O: We have a white paper dated late September, which was a detailed presentation of a campaign in the form of a campaign manual. You have my additional comments in October as to personnel--a campaign task force. You have Jim Rowe's comments regarding my white paper and my response at the end of November. Clearly at that time, November 7, nothing has been done. We're still just talking. Why? It probably reflects the focus of attention on Vietnam, the disruption that occurs when you're busily engaged in other matters, the legislative program. Vietnam has flared up as a national issue of great concern to a lot of people, including the President.

That's partially the answer to why you would be sitting, knowing that, potentially at least, there were candidates considering running in some primaries. You're into November of 1967 and [neither] the President nor any of us, I guess, have focused to the point where any action had been taken. Conversations took place of an informal nature, but anything in an organizational sense had not occurred. That is awfully late. So it has to be people in their spare moments giving some thought to a campaign, including the President in his spare moments. It may even indicate some waffling as to where he was going at that stage.

G: Do you think it reflects the possibility that he would not seek re-election?

O: Not really, because I don't think there's anything in these notes that indicate I had the remotest thought he was not going to go forward.

Now, the President's feeling towards me in this regard is that it was well and good in 1964 to have me the person that had responsibility to coordinate the campaign. What campaign? I recall the President saying, "You've got to get out on the road. You've got to find out what's going on. You've got to advise me. We've got to find out where our weaknesses [are]." Go out on the road in the midst of a very intensive effort being made on the Hill.

I remember particularly negotiations I was engaged in with Wilbur Mills.Yet, I had to find some way, so I took trips out in the field. I organized these meetings. I took a team with me and we'd go out for three days or so and then come back and go out again. If you logged the time I devoted in the White House and on the road dealing with the

Democratic leaders regionally and at the state level across this country you probably would log six weeks. I was the only one involved, really. So that was the extent of the campaign.

Now, to the approach of 1968. To what degree there was a recognition at that point of a Gene McCarthy or Bobby Kennedy candidacy, I don't specifically recall.The President's concern and sensitivity toward Bobby was apparent to me. We had had conversations on the subject. I found myself in the middle of the Bobby Kennedy-LBJ situation. Bobby Kennedy would give me his views and tell me his problems and concerns. The President would in turn ask me what was wrong with Bobby, what was Bobby's problem. I think both Johnson and Bobby felt I was a go-between, that matters would be ultimately resolved and that Bobby wouldn't go the distance. I found myself in this very unusual or unique position because I had a long-time association with Bobby. I had now several years of association with Johnson. Johnson trusted me and supported my efforts with the Congress.

How do you account for going into November talking or starting to nit-pick a white paper which is the basic document that's going to govern the organization of the campaign? Whether you find one paragraph somebody doesn't agree with or another, this is the document. And there's no one else around Lyndon Johnson who's going to develop a document that detailed, that extensive and that thoughtful. There it is, and it has apparently been sitting around with the President since September.

I think there's another aspect. I believe the President chose to take a different direction and that surfaced in planning the New Hampshire primary. But I do recall that I had little or no discussion regarding the New Hampshire primary, that the President did not call upon me to discuss it in any detail. My involvement is peripheral and that would indicate that the President wasn't prepared to turn over to me the activities of his re-election campaign. Nevertheless, he had requested this input on my part. The white paper was not a voluntary effort or any attempt that I undertook to move into a 1968 campaign. It was a response to his specific request that I present to him my views on what kind of a campaign should be waged, not only organizationally but in terms of issues, policies and the rest. That's where we were in November of 1967. I had been on the road occasionally during the year.

What had happened as far as my activity was concerned was that I launched my postal reform proposal publicly in March or early April. It was a very revolutionary proposal--the removal of the department from departmental status to create an independent entity. And there were good reasons for it. This launching occupied a great deal of my time during that period because there was a tremendous amount of public, press, media interest and a great deal of interest on the part of the Congress and people that had a particular interest in the postal service. That included talking to the President about creating a blue ribbon panel to review the proposal and come up with recommendations. The President issued an order to that effect and the panel was created.

Beyond that, there were serious problems in several cities, riots and the rest, that had an impact on the postal service. I had to direct my attention to that and see if I could be helpful as the White House made an effort to contain these problems in Detroit, Newark and elsewhere.

We reviewed the degree of my involvement in the first session of the Ninetieth Congress. On the political end, I endeavored to undertake some activities that might be helpful: trying to have a more effective effort on the part of top members of the administration promoting the administration, promoting the President across the country.

We ran into conflicts because the President assigned Governor [Farris] Bryant to work out the utilization of members of the administration. Bryant, at that suggestion of the President, created a program. Meanwhile, probably unknown to me, the President said, "You've got to get into it and the Vice President's got to get into it." So, we undertook this and found there were crossed wires; so we got that resolved. Then, when I would get a chance to go out around the country, particularly in the key states, I made a conscious effort to ensure that I maximized that opportunity politically. And memos that I sent to the President over those months recounting my findings in Ohio, Michigan, and particularly in California, reflect attention to the politics of 1967.

In reviewing those memos, there's one thread through them. That is the rising concern expressed by Democratic local and state leaders across the country regarding Vietnam. [In] speeches I made in California and elsewhere, while presenting the administration's position on the Great Society legislative program, I also was very supportive of the administration's Vietnam policy. And in meetings with people that were important to us and would be important in 1968, I found I was on the defensive a great deal of the time. More and more it was apparent that there was an uprising. We mentioned that yesterday and that's the climate of 1967. The impact in this area that impressed me the most was Mayor Daley's position on Vietnam, which was revealed to me by Dick Daley at some point during 1967.

The President had old supporters and friends--Jim Rowe would be typical of them, I guess Abe Fortas, [Clark] Clifford, probably others--who had been involved with him over the years. Obviously he would be eliciting their views. Here is a president who has to have some concern about the political fallout from Vietnam. This could cause difficulties within the Democratic Party. I can't account for it in any other way, other than it drifted and the formalization of a campaign certainly drifted over a period of time. When Rowe or whoever it was said, "It's awfully late," I certainly concurred because of my experiences in prior campaigns. That was awfully late when you're only, by that time, three or four months away from the first primary with a clear indication that it was going to be competitive.

G: In June 1967, according to a press story, LBJ was flying on ***Air Force One*** from New York to Washington and a Democratic congressman from New York asked him about your role in the campaign. The President was reported to have responded that you were

going to be running his campaign. Then you were quoted as saying that the President hadn't talked to you about that.

O: I think that would be accurate.

G: Do you remember that?

O: I don't remember that comment at all but certainly in June of 1967 the President had not talked to me about the 1968 campaign. I'm sure of that.

G: But he evidently had a role for you in mind.

O: Yes, I think so and I think that perhaps that's reflected in the memos I sent to him--my observations and suggestions as I made my trips around the country. Certainly the white paper was responding to a request by him because I would never have deigned to prepare a detailed white paper including every possible element of a national campaign on my own. That would not have made any sense. That was responding to him. You're talking about his comment in June and we're in November.

At some point, there was an indication that he had chosen a somewhat different route in terms of handling his New Hampshire problem. I cannot recall anything beyond that. Bernie Boutin, former mayor of Manchester, New Hampshire, was our key fellow. He was a top fellow in the Kennedy campaign in New Hampshire and he had joined the administration in some capacity. Bernie became very active back in his own state in trying to work out the Johnson problem. We did have a couple of meetings. It must have been prior to the end of 1967. I remember sitting with Marvin [Watson] and Rowe and probably others to discuss the campaign.

But along with that, there was deep concern about the Massachusetts primary. It became important in discussions I had with the President and he was trying to determine what he would do. You could have Bobby Kennedy in the Massachusetts primary, certainly [Eugene] McCarthy, [so] how you would handle the Massachusetts primary was sensitive. A poll was taken to see who could be a Johnson stand-in in the Massachusetts primary. My name was included in the poll and as the poll came out, it looked like I should be the stand-in. Even though I hadn't been in Massachusetts in years, the name identification was there.

All of that brought me to the conclusion that I had a responsibility to discharge. Johnson wasn't going to be on the ballot. It would have to be somebody on the ballot in his interest. So I volunteered. If it came to that, and we couldn't get a local fellow like Morris Donahue, I would be willing to step into that role. The President was very appreciative and mentioned that on several occasions and, of course, that petered out. But there was that kind of peripheral involvement.

G: Why did it peter out?

O: Well, it never came to that because the result of the New Hampshire primary was quite negative. It's the old moral victory aspect and the press nationally were declaring McCarthy the winner of a primary that he had probably--I've forgotten--gotten 35 per cent of the vote or something like that.

Whatever primary they're talking about, I have memos to the President that indicate that I was deeply involved in trying to structure a slate in California and made the determination after meeting with the man to have Tom Lynch, the attorney general of California, head the slate. Under the unique laws of California, his name would be the only name that would appear and the rest of the names on the slate don't appear on the ballot. He was a popular fellow who wasn't directly aligned with either wing of the Democratic Party out there. So that had been pretty well determined. We had met with all the Democratic congressmen, met with all the Democratic leaders. I had intensive meetings in California and on the Hill. We had moved that far.

But I don't recall this being part of an overall program nationally. We have the unique situation in Massachusetts and the Kennedys; maybe we ought to focus on that. California clearly is awfully important. There's a peace movement out there in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, the so-called CDC, the Alan Cranstons and the rest were indicating they were going to have a peace delegation, an anti-Johnson delegation, on the ballot. So there was a great deal of attention directed to that.

I don't remember the specific date of the Wisconsin primary, but prior to that it was at the request of the President--would I find some way of spending some time in Wisconsin. I chose the route of setting up in three different cities with postal officials, the justification for being there, and then tying that into some very intensive political discussions. That is when the President watched the evening news and saw this rally with the balloons and O'Brien addressing the rally and all the enthusiasm. He called me to say, "That was great." I had to point out to him that the rally was composed of postal workers. I had to tell him the cold facts, and the cold facts were that he was in bad shape in Wisconsin. He was going to lose the primary and probably lose substantially. That report was given to him within probably three days of his speech saying he wouldn't be a candidate. That speech was given on a Sunday prior to the Tuesday primary in Wisconsin. So things started to fall apart, obviously, in New Hampshire.

There was an uncertainty throughout all of this. What was being done, what was being planned, who was planning it. So it all ended.

G: Going back to your role in the campaign, one of these documents details an organizational structure for the campaign and at the very top is the campaign director, or at least under the President and Vice President. And that's the only blank in the slot. This was something prepared by you.

O: I think the top was the Vice President.

G: Yes, after that, though.

O: Yes, he would be the--

G: But my point is that the campaign director slot was left blank and all the others down the line were filled with names of individuals.

O: Yes.

G: I was wondering if it was assumed that you would fill that role.

O: That was in response to the President saying to me, "I'd like to have your recommendations on personnel for the various key roles in the campaign and I suggest you do not make reference to the top role." That was not an indication that my name would be filled in the blank. It could have been one of his old colleagues, supporters, I don't know.

G: So it was his suggestion?

O: Yes. But he said all the major elements of the campaign so, as director of organization, I put Marvin Watson in. And then for good solid reasons, I went on to Dick Murphy and Jim Reynolds; in the women's activities, Orville Freeman's wife [Jane]; and the senior citizens' registration, get out the vote, minority groups, Louie Martin; polling coordinator Dick Scammon; media director Leonard Marks--these are people available to us that we knew intimately who had the expertise--policy, position papers, Joe Califano; scheduling, Bill Connell; and then finance, the obvious fellow, Arthur Krim, assisted by John Criswell. That meant that John Criswell was the working guy on the finance side and Arthur Krim would be the fellow who could establish the contacts. Then we had Joe Napolitan and Claude Desautels and Ira Kapenstein. This represented my best effort to respond. But in the context of this memo, I'm telling him, "You know my views on the organizational structure." I refer back to my September 29 white paper where it's all there.

G: One of the themes that seems to run through a lot of these documents is the impotency, the powerlessness of the DNC.

O: In fact, my comments about the DNC around the country probably, if anything, were lower key than with what I was hit. You're getting close to talking about individuals, which I studiously avoided. But there was a lot of negative comment about the DNC and its operation. Now the fact of the matter is, and we've discussed this before, the DNC and its operation probably deserved all these negative comments. But why did this situation exist? We were at fault. The President was at fault. Going back to the first day we walked in with Jack Kennedy, with John Bailey at the DNC, we were not supportive of the DNC. Traditionally the DNC receives no support from the Congress; they have their own financing, their Senate and House Campaign Committees.

The role of the Democratic National Committee in a period of incumbency was an experience I've never had. It is a different role when you're chairman of the Democratic Party and the party is out of the White House. That was the role that I had and that's when I tried to be a spokesman and go on the attack against the administration of Nixon. Now, that's an understandable role. You can dig your teeth into it and have some degree of effectiveness. But now you have a Democratic president in the White House, that chairman is sitting there. Not purposely so, but you just go on about your business.

In 1967, you'll note that there's limited reference to the DNC. There are names on that table of organization that are DNC people and that wasn't to have representation. In my judgment those two or three people that were at DNC actually had great capabilities and could perform very well in the role that I was suggesting for them.

But it used to hit me when people talked about the DNC what little attention we paid to the DNC. It bothered me; it had come up from time to time. I'd express concern and we'd say, "We've just got to do something. We've got to show more support of John Bailey," particularly because I felt along with Ken O'Donnell direct responsibility during that Kennedy period. What are we doing? John was over there, a lost soul in a sense. You thought of John Bailey when something negative was going to happen. When an appointment was not going to be made, poor John would be the contact; we'd say, "John, call this fellow and tell him it isn't going to be done." In the meantime, anything of any value politically, of course, was in the Oval Office, and rightly so; it was all in the President's name.

The role of national committees has varied over the years. A strong chairman probably can overcome some of that natural tendency to forget about the national committee. It isn't that you're purposely trying to divorce it from the process. You're engaged in whatever assignment you have; you're in the administration; you're in the White House. Then you'd get out into the field as I did in 1967, having these meetings with Democrats holding responsible party positions or elected positions at the county, state level. Invariably, they'd get to the ineffectiveness of the national committee, their inability to receive support or assistance from the national committee. I'd try to be a good listener, but it bothered me. It bothered my conscience because I knew I had to take some responsibility for this. I hadn't made any great issue in the White House of a strong national committee.

G: Do you think that the committee was downgraded because of feelings that John Bailey was not as able as, say, some other chairman had been?

O: I don't think there was that much thought given to it. John Bailey was a visible chairman and was well known in the political world. John had retained his leadership of the Democratic Party in Connecticut. He had always played a very important political role in Connecticut, but he had a keen desire to stay on as chairman. In 1960 at Los Angeles, Bobby Kennedy--I remember a comment he made to me, "John won't be there forever."

The indication was, "At some point, you ought to be chairman." And it never went beyond that. But John wanted the position. He enjoyed it. He was a good guy, certainly had paid his dues, and certainly had been a loyal Kennedy supporter from the beginning.

Well, to 1968. Bailey was still chairman. I remember when I became chairman in Chicago, Hubert Humphrey made some comment that John would like to continue as chairman. There had to be a new approach to that campaign of Humphrey's, in view of all the problems the party had. But it was no reflection on John.

G: Did LBJ have a particular distrust, do you think, of Bailey--

O: I don't think so.

G: --or the DNC as an institution?

O: I think he felt he had a couple of his people over there, that he would expect them to be active. That bothered him when he looked at some of these reports. He focused on his own people who were there. Why weren't they maintaining a close relationship with party leaders? The bottom line is obvious: who's going to finance all of this? Who's going to fund a committee that has to pay office rent and has a staff of forty or fifty people? Who's doing that? The committee has to struggle along and contributors do not have the national committee high on their agenda. I remember when I was chairman, I would be invited to the Senate and House Campaign Committee's annual fund-raising dinner.I'd be introduced for a bow and that was it.

Not one nickel was funneled to the national committee from those fund-raising efforts. What were we doing in the White House at the beginning of the Kennedy period? I don't recall that we were doing anything to help finance the national committee. We weren't saying the President ought to make political appearances around the country. We ought to make some effort through the President and others in the administration for fund raising to ensure that these people can function and perform. To a great extent the complaint about the committee and their failure to perform these services was simply that the committee was in no financial position to perform services in a meaningful way.

You utilize media. That doesn't cost money. See if you can make an impact for the party. On the part of the in-party, there shouldn't be any problem. You'll find the Republican National Committee has never had that problem. My guess is that there's no debt. They had financial resources. How well they performed was something I can't comment on. I don't know. But certainly they had the underpinning financially to carry on the basic functions of a national party. It's an entirely different role when it's the out-party or the in-party.

In any event, we have a drift in 1967. We got to formalization of concepts of a campaign; we got to the point of talking about slots and individuals who were to fill those slots. Then it fell into a defensive effort, whether it was New Hampshire, or potentially

Massachusetts, or potentially California, or actually Wisconsin. I don't think any of that--the New Hampshire primary, what was going to happen to Lyndon Johnson in Wisconsin on that Tuesday--has anything to do with organizing a political campaign in the true sense. I don't believe that we ever got to anything meaningful. I remember Terry Sanford became involved in the campaign, and others. We talked campaign and we did more than talk. To say everything was in place, all signals are go, to the best of my recollection it never got to that.

G: In September, when you were out in Detroit and Columbus, Ohio, you recorded that there was an almost desperate desire for leadership from Washington.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

O: There again, in each one of those meetings I reported on, I was talking to the top people in the Democratic Party in those respective states: Ohio, Michigan, California, for example. You remember first of all that you talk to elected officeholders. You, obviously, also talk to county chairmen and state chairmen. But the structure of the Democratic Party at the state and county level was not very impressive. I think, if you're a county chairman or the state chairman, you'll probably have difficulty financing your operation. The state level contributors probably focused their attention on individual candidates and little or no attention on party structure. It's very difficult. In a sense, they were experiencing the same situation that the national party was experiencing. Some of them would say, I don't know who to contact in Washington, or I asked for registration advice or material or a speaker, but did not get any response.

In the White House, there was no specific point of contact. That's the guy who is the "pol" in the White House. He can get you the speaker, he can do this or he can do that, or he can nudge the national committee to be more responsible. It was in a state of drift and there was little attention focused on it. These people are having their own difficulties and they'd like to feel there's someone to whom they can go. They had this feeling that there was nowhere to go in the DNC and for that matter, probably the White House. They didn't have the sense that anybody cared.

I arrive on the scene and they all know me. It was a splendid opportunity for them to express their concerns and disappointments. You'll note those reports to the President had a heavy input regarding Vietnam, which permeated the atmosphere at those meetings and dinners. If you're talking about lack of coordination at the Washington level, you can be sure that that reflected a concern they had regarding Vietnam and the future of the party.

It's difficult to recognize that existed at the grass-roots at the heights of the greatest legislative program in history. There was little reference to that. It was Vietnam.

G: Let me ask you, what was the political fallout of the riots in 1967?

O: To what degree, I don't know, but it certainly was a contributing factor in the increasing negativeness and increasing loss of confidence. These people are engaged in the business of politics. What's going to happen with their county ticket, their state ticket? Are we going to have a burden that we can't cope with? On the riots, I don't think that added a significant dimension to this growing negativeness. But it was there and was part of the climate.

G: Were you involved at all in the Detroit problem and the communication between Governor [George] Romney and the President with regard to sending out troops?

O: No.

G: The riots, in the area of your involvement, the Post Office Department, must have created an enormous headache for you.

O: It did. We had had a crisis in Chicago, which came close to closing out postal delivery. That didn't relate to riots but an element of postal employee attitude regarding equal rights in promotions. But in Detroit, we were asked what we could contribute by way of assistance.

G: Yes.

O: I responded as best I could. But in the response, I took the occasion to point out that the Post Office Department was having difficulty, as a result of riots, in terms of mail delivery and servicing the public. Well, we contributed by way of resources and facilities. We were prepared to do it.

But at that point, in our own area, we were coping with problems that were created by the riots. There was a lot of absenteeism. Some areas of Detroit were unable to deliver mail for a period of time. We weren't in much of a position to be of any great assistance in resolving the overall problem.

G: You discussed the California political scene and the problems. Let me just ask you to elaborate on a couple of aspects there. Let me ask you to describe Sam Yorty's role. One memo characterized him as the real problem. He had supported Nixon over Kennedy and Reagan over Brown.

O: He was a continuing problem. He was a renegade. He had no interest at all in the Democratic Party. He was a troublesome fellow. He created all kinds of problems in California.

From our point of view, in Washington, we'd like to fold under that tent everybody we could, and that would include Yorty. On a personal basis, I did not look kindly upon Yorty. My past experiences with him, dating back to the 1960 campaign, would indicate my attitude toward the fellow. But I couldn't allow that to cause me not to make an

effort.

G: Did you deal with him directly?

O: I don't recall how direct the dealings were.

G: How about Jess Unruh?

O: Well, there were indications, at the time of my visit to California, that Jess was on the way off the reservation. Jess had become a strong supporter of the peace movement. The Jess Unruh I had known over the years as we formed our organization in California in 1960 was an entirely different Jess Unruh.

Jess was a consummate pol, played hard ball and was capable of getting things done. Even though I had some assurances earlier from Jess that he wasn't going to cause any commotion, as time went on he became deeply involved with Bobby.He became a confidant of Bobby's. It was clear he was seeking ways to urge Bobby to seek the presidency. Jess arranged for polls in California that showed support for Bobby which he would discuss directly with Bobby.

G: Is that right?

O: Yes.

G: Did the fact that you were associated not only with Johnson but with the Kennedys create a difficulty for you in dealing with people like Jess Unruh?Would he see you as a conduit to Kennedy rather than an agent for Johnson?

O: No, I don't think it caused me any great difficulties. The reason was that Bobby was completely understanding of what my position was. We had discussed it as old friends. There was no question in his mind that I was going to remain totally loyal to the President. I was part of the administration. He accepted that and respected it.

So while Bobby made attempts to convince me to leave the administration and join his campaign, it was never a major effort on his part and it was with the understanding I was not going to do that. I never would have. I would have remained with Johnson until the end of that year. All of this blew up on that Sunday night when the President made his decision. I sat there, watched it, and as the program ended, my first comment to Elva was, "I wonder how long it will take before the phone rings." I'll tell you it was within minutes.

G: Was it really?

O: I don't know who got there first. I think Hubert was in Mexico. But as the night unfolded, between Hubert and Bobby, I was not going to get another night's sleep until I

acted. In fact, Bobby's comment was "Did I get to you first?" (Laughter)

There was a resentment on the part of some people that I stayed with Johnson. None of them had the guts to confront me. It's the people on the periphery who engage in that sort of thing. The principals are classy enough and professional enough so they don't.

I had experienced that. Bobby was totally aware of it. I must say that I appreciated Bobby urging me to stay. He couldn't have been more pleased. When I was designated postmaster general, he was pleased. Bobby was quite different than Jack. But I must say, he was a solid fellow. I never had a problem with Bobby.

So in the context of California, to try to put together a delegate slate that would bridge the various Democratic Party elements, I had no problem. They were saying, "How can he carry on this role? He has a close relationship with the Kennedys and all the rest." The reason it never caused me difficulty is because of the clear understanding I had with Bobby.

G: John Roche wrote in a December 1967 memo that with regard to Robert Kennedy--this is to LBJ--"Your actions," meaning President Johnson's actions, "play an active role in his,"--Bobby Kennedy's--"decision-making." Is that a fair statement, do you think?

O: I read that memo and I guess what John was referring to, in his judgment, [was that] Bobby was simply reacting to Johnson and that Bobby didn't have his own game plan.I became aware as time went on that Bobby was becoming more interested in actually taking Lyndon Johnson on. His concerns about his Vietnam policy--in conversations I had with him--were more intense. He'd never personalize it with me saying, "I don't like the s.o.b." or anything like that.

He became immersed in the peace movement, completely adverse to Johnson's Vietnam policies. That feeling, as he expressed his views to me, became stronger as the weeks went on. That was his ultimate decision. You could see it coming.

G: Did his relationship with Lyndon Johnson have any bearing on Ted Kennedy's decision not to stand in for Johnson in Massachusetts, if in fact Kennedy was asked to stand in? You had suggested Ted Kennedy.

O: Yes. I talked to Ted Kennedy about it one evening at Bobby's house. At that time, Bobby had not reached that point of no return. It was a social occasion and I took Teddy aside. I told him flatly that's what I felt he should do. He should accept that role. He did not just flatly say no, but clearly he wasn't going to do it. Teddy, in his inimitable style, tried to kid around about it saying, "I've got to think a lot. I've got a lot of things on my mind." I left with no thought that Teddy was ever going to acquiesce.

G: Why do you think he didn't want to do it?

O: I think it had a lot to do with Bobby's strong attitude.

There were occasions when Teddy would come down in the evening and meet with Lyndon Johnson. I was a participant. I'm not suggesting it was once a week or anything like that but there were occasions. Inevitably, Johnson would discuss his meeting with me. It was always in the context of, "I really like Teddy. We get along. We had a great conversation last night. Why is it that Bobby dislikes me so much and yet I get along well with Teddy?" Well, I didn't have any answers to that.

(Laughter)

But Teddy had to be a little uncomfortable with his brother's views regarding Lyndon Johnson. It was clear to me that he preferred having a comfortable relationship with the President, not any adversarial situation. The President could never quite understand how he could have these pleasant sessions with Teddy and yet Teddy's brother was causing him loss of sleep. I had no answer.

G: Another political event of 1967 was in March 1967 there was a meeting of the Democratic National Committee in Washington which David Broder termed a success due to the contributions of Hubert Humphrey and yourself. Do you recall that and what you--?

O: I don't recall that, but I recall being the principal speaker at the Western States Democratic Governors' Conference.

G: That was later. That was in August.

O: Oh, was it that late?

G: Yes.

O: Even then in August, as I got my report to the President on that conference, there had been minimal opposition to Vietnam. I was engaged in some pipe dreaming, apparently, because I felt that was a good sign and appropriate resolutions had been adopted. I was the invited guest, I guess, to represent the administration at the conference. You're referring to a meeting in April in Washington.

G: March.

O: March. I don't recall the details of that but I do recall that in August, I apparently was thinking that this could be contained. The best evidence I had in August is, "Look at how well the Western Democratic Governors' Conference went. No problems." I guess we were all kind of lulled into that.

G: Here's a memo from you to the President in November 1967, November 3, with regard to whether or not he should announce, and that is the memo that he apparently requested for

discussion at a meeting that evening. Do you recall the circumstances of that?

O: This indicates a serious meeting in terms of the upcoming campaign and it is November 3. It's probably the first of its kind because it's a meeting the President's going to play a role in. I don't recall who attended.

I tried to anticipate the areas of discussion and the points that should be made and that he should be prepared to respond. That's what this reflects: Should the President be an announced candidate at an early date or not? What, if anything, does the President do about the key presidential primaries? Does he make any direct efforts in the important primaries? The recommendation of mine was no, he should avoid direct involvement. Your best position in a campaign is to be busy as president--the hard-working president, concerned about the problems of the nation and the world, devoting all of his energies to the solutions of these problems. He's above the fray.

Assuming no direct presidential involvement, this was the key to what we've been discussing. Should any efforts be encouraged in the President's behalf? Yes, in certain states where the outcome of the primaries would be interpreted as a measure of the President's popularity, regardless of whether any efforts are expended. In New Hampshire, for example, I mentioned that Governor [John] King and Senator [Thomas] McIntyre are taking the lead. Another example is Wisconsin and the best I could come up with was that the State Chairman, Dick Cudahy, and the Attorney General, [Bronson] LaFollette, could be encouraged to organize a Johnson effort. That was probably as close as you'd come to anything meaningful in Wisconsin at that point.

Then you go to the issues: why four more years, what's the President's vision of the future, how do we handle the charge it's time for a change, how do we handle potential Republican candidates during the next several months? Then I recommend ignoring the candidates as much as possible, by promptly refuting their charges through administration spokesmen whenever necessary. How and when should a campaign organization be established? Can a full campaign organization be put into effect several months before the President announces? Yes. The major elements of the campaign organization need not wait on formal announcement. You have my detailed views of organization by White House paper--I refer to it again--on September 29.

"Are there any overriding reasons for a full campaign organization now?" I guess I was saying this is November. This will be a difficult year, some media aspects, all that go into it. Voter registration--what are the major elements of the campaign organization? Then I proceed to list all the various elements. There were many of them, obviously. Then, when should the campaign organization be formed and fully manned?This is November and I say, "Recommendation: January 1, which gives us just eight weeks to accomplish the job."

It's an interesting memo because I made, obviously, a conscious effort to not dwell on where we'd been and why have we been so inactive. Let's grasp the opportunity at the

moment. The President's prepared to get into some detail on this. That was 1967. On the political side, there was clear evidence of drift, considerable drift. Pieces of evidence that things weren't as you'd like to see them. Going back to November, 1966, we lost forty-seven seats in the House and dropped four Senate seats. Ongoing problems legislatively we would overcome; it was just a somewhat more difficult task, particularly on the House side. The repeal of the twenty-one day rule was a danger signal early on. The efforts that were being made to respond to this by trying to broaden the base of congressional relations, include more people in the White House, all of that went on.

On the congressional relations side, there were indications that concern regarding Vietnam was growing on the Hill. As time went on and I had opportunities to do some traveling and get more grass-root response, it was basically the same. There was a growing concern. First, a spark here and there but then a fire. It wasn't until late in the year that we finally focused on re-election. Even that never got into a full organizational status--the way you would traditionally conduct a national presidential campaign.

The President's focus on Vietnam became more and more intense. His concern regarding Vietnam became more and more obvious. You closed out the year in some disarray. By then it became quite apparent that Gene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy were going to be very much involved in the 1968 campaign. And it became obvious that some of the traditional supporters were wavering here and there.

It was a long session. We did close the session in good shape. I think the session went to mid-December, probably one of the longest, I guess, in history. You closed out 1967 without really recognizing that these problems would increase rapidly. The problem of the continuity of the President in office would become a matter of question. That had not reached that point by the end of 1967. It grew as you moved into 1968.

I accomplished what I had set for postal reorganization in terms of launching it. I had participated in the legislative process to a considerable degree and was reasonably satisfied with the end result. And I had an awareness that there was a growing political problem. We were to the end of this first session of the Ninetieth Congress in that position.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XX

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

AND

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY LIBRARY

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

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

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACCESSION NUMBER 92-31