

## INTERVIEW XXVIII

DATE: September 24, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

Tape 1 of 3, Side 1

G: Let me just go back to yesterday. You discussed [Hubert] Humphrey's pre-inauguration visit to you. Did he talk about why he thought he had lost the campaign?

O: He did not. The visit was to express appreciation for my efforts. It was a somewhat emotional meeting, but we did not Monday morning quarterback the campaign.

G: One other thing about that period. Did you have any part in LBJ's departure from Washington, either going out to the airport or attending any of the parties?

O: No. As a matter of fact, on the day of the inauguration I came to New York to plunge into my new activities.

G: Now, let me ask you to talk in more detail about the equal time initiative, the effort to have the party receive more television time.

O: Let me preface that by again stating at the time I again assumed the role of chairman, not only was the Democratic National Committee in dire straits financially but the schism of Chicago in 1968 was very much present. It clearly indicated there were great difficulties ahead. During the [Fred] Harris period, as a result of actions at the Chicago convention, commissions were formed, particularly the so-called [George] McGovern commission. It was an ongoing activity that would probably increase rancor and dissension as time went on. Indeed that was the case. The reorganization of the national committee had to be attended to promptly.

The reorganization of the staff, which I undertook immediately, brought some new people aboard. Some left. I established the position of vice chairperson of the national committee, a woman's role, with for the first time a full-time vice chairperson, Mary Lou Berg from Wisconsin, who had achieved distinction as a party activist. Though we had serious financial problems, clearly we should establish a woman on the national committee at a full-time high level, and that was accomplished.

Also it was clear the committee should establish closer relationships with the Congress. Traditionally, the committee and the Congress did not have such a relationship. There was very little communication between the two entities. I felt my involvement with the Congress in the past lent itself to working in this area. We established divisions within

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 2

the national committee with authority given to those in charge of these various divisions. We felt we had to place emphasis on youth activity, and we did by establishing a specific entity. We had to establish a closer relationship with members of the national committee on a continuing basis, and we put that in place. It was essential, I thought, to also establish close relationships with state chairmen and people at all levels in the party. We wanted to have Democratic governors and other officeholders around the country involved with the national committee. Vice chairmen were named. Governor [Robert] McNair became a vice chairman to be liaison with the governors. Congressman [Charles] Diggs was named a vice chairman. Bob Wagner, the former mayor of New York, and Senator Mike Mansfield agreed to be vice chairmen. In each instance, it was necessary to ensure that these people were activists in the national committee.

G: Anything else specifically aimed at the Congress?

O: Yes. We thought the first stage of rapport with the Congress could best be established by affording support in the 1970 off-year elections. Members of Congress in contested districts should be approached and we should provide whatever we could by way of service to them. Stan Greigg was doing that coordinating. He was a former member of Congress. We met with them and we were able to do a fair amount to persuade the Democrats in the House and Senate that we were sensitive to their political problems and willing to do whatever we could to be helpful. That worked out quite well during 1970. There was an increasing attitude of acceptance that was helpful in establishing the DNC as a viable entity. This whole process was internal; it was structural. It was re-organizing and opening it up in terms of communication and contact with elected officials and party leaders at the state and local levels.

We revised the O'Brien Manual once again. The manual was widely used in the 1970 off-year election. With this reorganization, we were able to have regional meetings around the country. I traveled extensively in 1970 on behalf of candidates seeking election or re-election. In the fall of 1970, the early fall, we put together a closed circuit television conference that was detailed and extensive, including all the party leaders in the country. There were some eight thousand Democratic leaders from the state, county and local levels across the country who participated in that closed-circuit activity. Nothing like that had ever been undertaken.

G: What was the advantage to using closed circuit in terms of--?

O: To reach out quickly to a large number of people in order to impact on the November 1970 election. That took a lot of doing. We were very pleased with the result. There was a fallout in the sense of recognition across the country of an active DNC. That is the role that I envisioned for the DNC. I'm not suggesting this was a 100 per cent effective effort, but it was a good effort.

There is another role I envisioned for the DNC when the party is the out-party. I had felt for a long time that a chairman should play an active role in the issues area and

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 3

should speak for the party.

I found during 1970 that Nixon had free reign. That was not unusual. A president has great advantages. I had seen that in my days on the other side. But what was disconcerting was that he seemed to be on television constantly. There didn't seem to be any effort on the part of Democrats on the Hill and around the country to question him, debate him; he was having a free ride.

When I returned as chairman, I didn't envision I was simply going to be a nuts and bolts chairman. I could become a spokesman. I could express my views in the interest of the party, and my concerns with the administration. I was responsible to the party and its leaders in terms of not doing anything detrimental, but I didn't feel inhibited. I had been with two presidents. Then you would feel inhibited because you always felt responsibility for what you said or did in terms of the president. Now, I felt a sense of freedom in that regard. But you were concerned about funding to support these activities. You could be creative, but the problem would be implementation. That would be dependent to a great extent on financial support.

G: Was there a dilemma between, on the one hand, raising money to support activities, and, on the other, raising money to retire that nine million dollar debt?

O: Frankly, we didn't focus on the debt. The priority had to be on continuity. The Democratic National Committee was perilously close to closing its doors and going out of existence. After all, the Democratic National Committee had been in existence for decades. So your initial focus had to be on continuity, the needs of the moment. You would have to set aside discharging the existing debt. That caused a problem in and of itself because, obviously, creditors were on our back constantly. I should say that, to a great extent, they were on Bob Strauss' back. Bob took on the burden and tried to keep me removed from it as much as possible so my attention wouldn't be diverted from the various activities. But it wasn't a pleasant situation.

G: Did he raise money to fund the activities or to pay off the debt or--?

O: What money he was able to raise went almost totally into the funding of these projects and programs. There was very little available in those early months of 1970 for negotiating the existing debt.

G: How successful was Strauss in raising money and how did he do it?

O: He established this membership program. Those who traditionally contributed to candidates--and there were many, even in the climate at the time--who might be persuaded to participate to some modest degree with us. Obviously, we were a low priority with people who were contributing to the House and Senate Campaign Committees, contributing to candidates for governor or preparing to contribute to candidates for the presidency. That left us pretty much saying, "Would you become a member of the DNC

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 4

and that would be a hundred dollars a month?" or "a commitment to contribute a hundred dollars a month." We were able to bring aboard a number of people who, out of the goodness of their heart, without any advantage to them, said, "You can count me for a hundred dollars a month." In addition to that, we aimed at those who might make small donations, life-long Democrats who might, through a variety of activities Strauss introduced, contribute ten, fifteen, twenty-five dollars. It was very difficult and I don't recall any great fat cat contributions. By the same token, Bob and I had an agreement at the outset that he would vigorously pursue his end and I would concentrate on the chairmanship.

We had exchanges of a humorous nature from time to time. "Bob, it's your job to raise the money and I'm the fellow who will spend it." Bob would say, "Larry, you're just not a fund raiser." We had a nice relationship and we were able to keep going. "Keeping going" didn't mean we had even a two-lane highway. As a matter of fact, we got into greater financial difficulty to fulfill our responsibility to conduct the national convention in 1972. It was baling wire and adhesive tape. It was a terrible struggle to see that convention through and fulfill the responsibility to run a national convention.

G: What happened to the President's Club?

O: I don't recall that the President's Club remained very active, if at all.

G: Did it cease to exist or did--?

O: I think it became quiescent. I don't recall the President's Club being particularly helpful to us. Frankly, on fund-raising, Bob was very circumspect about taking up my time or effort on the fund-raising side. He carried that out on his own. On some occasions he would say, "It's necessary. I'm bringing this fellow in for you to sit down with us and give him a pitch" which, of course, I willingly did. So my specific knowledge of fund-raising through this period, certainly in the early months of 1970 and into 1971, is limited.

All I know is there were occasions when it was touch-and-go to meet the payroll, but we never failed to meet it. We did not engage in mass firings, but we were not able to bolster the staff particularly. We were able to retain an able, dedicated staff that accepted long hours and the rest without ever quibbling. That's the way we lived. It was a hand-to-mouth existence but, to a reasonable degree, we were able to carry out these programs.

How do you get to a point in fund-raising where you can make a mass appeal? You'd have to gamble on that--a mass appeal, perhaps a television appeal, to see if you couldn't get to the small contributor. Bob and I concurred to use some resources and really gamble to buy television time, to make a massive hard-hitting, hopefully productive fund-raising pitch.

There was a problem with that. Could you work out with the net-works some

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 5

accommodation to buy time for spots or limited television pronouncements? We were stymied. We felt we had to go to the FCC. Fred Harris had made some effort in this area while he was chairman. I decided to pursue this. What we were faced with was tying in television in terms of equal time, the loyal opposition, utilization of television for fund raising. We were dealing with the FCC and we were dealing with the networks, trying to pressure the networks to see it our way. You had the FCC chaired by Dean Burch, Nixon's appointee, who was a former chairman of the Republican National Committee. Realistically, you couldn't be optimistic about the FCC. You had reason not to be because we were stymied throughout this effort with the FCC. Meanwhile, we had hoped that in the Congress there would be a vigorous effort launched by the Democrats to try to bring about some semblance of loyal opposition and equal time. We were disappointed that we weren't able to enlist members of Congress, particularly on the Senate side in this effort. They felt comfortable with their exposure to television. They didn't feel that this was as serious a matter as I was claiming it was. They did not share my intense interest in this area. There were people of goodwill. They weren't negative but it was hard to build a fire under them and have them become really aggressive. So the battle went on. Finally, the negative decisions by the FCC, of course, released the networks from any problems. We were not going to get into any major television fund-raising effort.

The equal time side of it was another matter. There was one breakthrough during 1970, during the campaign period. One network did agree that the President's repeated national exposure--for example, the invasion of Cambodia came about--did justify some response on the part of the loyal opposition. Jim Hagerty of the ABC network contacted me and said, "We are in agreement that you can respond on the Cambodian issue and we're giving you twenty-five minutes of prime time for that purpose." That coincided with the speech I would deliver in Milwaukee and I took that occasion to debate the Cambodian issue.

G: It was that speech that was televised?

O: That's right.

G: Who wrote the speech for you?

O: I don't recall. I imagine it was probably a group effort. John Stewart played a significant role in the writing. He was well equipped to do it. The speech was hard-hitting. I felt anything short of that was a waste of national television time. I might as well be provocative and create attention of the media to the speech. That was a single breakthrough in this process.

G: Tell me how the speech was received.

O: It was received well by the audience, but you'd expect that. It's the Democratic Party chairman making a speech attacking a Republican administration, specifically Richard Nixon. As far as general press reaction, my recollection is it received a fair amount. It

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 6

was worthwhile in that regard. It was applauded in some quarters by Democratic leaders, applauded in the sense they approved the thrust and content of the attack on Nixon's Cambodian policy. And it caused dismay in some other quarters. Very limited in the area of dismay, but there was some. I remember specifically Bill Connell, who was a long-time associate of Hubert Humphrey. Bill and Jim Rowe had rather adamantly opposed the Salt Lake City speech in 1968. Bill sent me a lengthy memo suggesting that I was overlooking the basic issues involved in the campaign, that the soft under-belly of Nixon really went to the economy, to domestic issues, that you had a Hubert Humphrey at that time urging the Democratic Party to focus on crime in the streets to show Middle America we were sensitive to their problems and concerns. Bill clearly shared that view. George Meany was deeply concerned with the party's continuing movement to the left. The Cambodian speech was obviously accepted by those who you would construe to be dovish.

The agreement with Hagerty was I was getting the twenty-five minutes of prime time for the express purpose of responding on Cambodia. In any event, we utilized the time. And more importantly perhaps than the content of the speech, we had established a precedent that you could have response opportunity from the networks. They accepted the proposition that this was conceivable under a certain set of circumstances. They were far from saying it should be built into the process.

Meanwhile, as I became more active, I focused on the role that [Spiro] Agnew had assumed on behalf of Nixon. He traveled the country extensively. He was riding high in 1970 and so was Nixon. They envisioned making a significant breakthrough in the off-year elections which, as it turned out, they didn't. But Agnew proceeded to take me on on a personal basis. He and his cohorts or the Republican National Committee started to circulate questionnaires to the media saying, "These are the things you ought to be asking O'Brien," trying to create further divisions in the party and position me as best they could. Agnew did refer specifically to my presidency of McDonnell and Company and how it had gone broke under my presidency. In fact, that was not totally accurate, but certainly it hadn't made any progress under my presidency. I accepted that because I felt the more Agnew focused on me the better opportunity I had to make an impact in what I would say or do. I felt it was a great advantage, in terms of trying to move this into some media attention, to have Agnew attacking me personally on a regular basis, which he was.

But you also had the guts of this; equal time and opportunity to convince the networks there should be a loyal opposition concept in the two-party system. Now, all of this I was engaged in, we must remember, wasn't costing any money. You were spotlighting the committee's efforts and activities and could engage in it to the fullest. It wasn't like many of the projects in the national committee that required funding, whether it was voter registration, youth efforts, women's efforts, the closed circuit television programs, the regional meetings, the communication system to be helpful to congressmen and senators. All of that cost money to maintain. In this area, you could be aggressive. It was something that you could engage in and you were beginning to get the attention of the networks and you were causing concern in the networks.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 7

Meanwhile, the committee that I had established to focus on the location of the next convention had been activated. They were visiting cities across the country to determine interest and financial support. This activity took some of my time. I visited various cities with the site selection committee to have discussions with local business, political and community leaders.

I was in Louisville, which was a potential city, for the presentations. I returned to my hotel rather late and there was a message for me and a telegram. It was from Frank Stanton in which he said that CBS had determined that the loyal opposition concept was viable and they had, in the public interest, a responsibility to go forward with it. He regretted that he was unable to communicate directly with me during the day and he resorted to the telegram to advise me. We would have four prime-time, half-hour loyal opposition programs over the next few months. I was stunned. I hadn't anticipated we would have a breakthrough. I had hoped, but I hadn't been optimistic. Frank Stanton had really taken on something.

G: He had also agreed to sell you some segments, too.

O: Yes.

G: Sixty-second spots.

O: Sixty-second spots. So this was a tremendous breakthrough. And the first program was established. It would be one of four.

G: Why do you think Stanton agreed to do this or CBS agreed to do this?

O: I found throughout these discussions over those months, that Frank Stanton had a keen sense of responsibility to the public. He personally felt that way; he had to convince himself that the network should take that direction. When dealing with all three networks we had the sense that Frank Stanton reacted favorably to our claims of equity in communication. Be that as it may, I was still surprised at his decision because it meant he was personally undertaking something that could be difficult for him down the road. Nevertheless, we had the date and we went to work. John Stewart and others put together a format for the utilization of that time.

Our difficulty on a program of this nature was that I had to foreclose utilizing any actual or potential candidates for president. I found that there was very little interest in participating on the program on the part of officeholders and I was barred, of course, from the obvious bigger names who could have national impact as in every instance, as you reflected, they could be presidential candidates. I could find myself in a terrible bind in my role of exercising fairness to all candidates and treating them equally. A rather innovative concept was decided upon. We would take film clips of Nixon and Agnew where the President or in a couple of instances the Vice President made specific pledges and commitments.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 8

Tape 1 of 3, Side 2

- O: I would take on the role of citing the true record. The agreement was that CBS would have a commentary for five minutes at the end of the twenty-five minutes and that would accommodate the half-hour. They reserved the right to make comment regarding the program.
- G: Let me ask you before you get into this. Why did the non-candidates not want to participate?
- O: Some would undoubtedly participate if the format intrigued them. We were going to have four programs. We did not have a lengthy time span from the agreement to the first program. I felt the format we came up with in the DNC was an intriguing one. We would devote the first program to that effort and then, of course, move on to programs two, three, and four, which would not have included my personal involvement. We would have an innovative format, not just using the twenty-five minutes to make a speech that would bore the country. We had to proceed with this one quickly as best we could. As it turned out, using the film clips and then citing the record item after item for twenty-five minutes was extremely effective. Not because I was a participant in it. It was an extremely effective format and a fair one because the record was replete with Nixon failures to fulfill pledges and commitments in a number of areas, particularly in domestic matters.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that the program enlisted considerable media attention. In fact, it was a page-one story in many major newspapers the following morning. But, also, it enlisted a great deal of interest, concern, and bitterness in the White House. I had no personal problem with the then Republican national chairman, Rogers Morton, who was a pleasant fellow. There had been no personal attack either way and the White House was concerned that Morton didn't seem the tiger they wanted after me. I was causing them problems, far greater than I envisioned I was causing them, at least from their perspective. So they enlisted Bob Dole, Senator Dole, who later became Republican chairman during the period I was Democratic chairman, to go after me. Bob was very well-equipped for that role. That caused some pretty tart and harsh exchanges. But a demand was made by Morton following this program. The accusation was that it had been purely a political program not responding to issues, that it was crass and scurrilous. They contended there should be equal time response for the Republican National Committee. They proceeded to the FCC and made that claim. It is unbelievable the FCC could come to the conclusion that my loyal opposition half-hour in turn gave the Republican National Committee a right to respond. The fact is that the FCC agreed with the Republican National Committee. The former Republican national chairman, who was chairman of the FCC, was happy to announce that this was a valid complaint and an opportunity should be given.

Their objective--the obvious one, to disrupt CBS and put fear into the hearts of the other networks--was accomplished. Unknown to me and not revealed until several years

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 9

later, the White House assigned Charles Colson from Nixon's staff to take on CBS specifically and put the fear of God into CBS. There was direct communication between the White House and Frank Stanton and Bill Paley, which was all revealed in Watergate several years later. So you have the FCC activity and the clandestine activity.

Now Frank Stanton had, in the judgment of fair-minded people, risen to the occasion. Things happened to Frank Stanton. One, of course, the FCC decision that the Republican National Committee should have an opportunity to respond. Two, the attack on the network by the White House under the President's direction. And three, which was a sad commentary, the attack that Stanton was submitted to in a hearing on the Hill by the Republicans without any support afforded him by the Democrats on that committee. I believe it was [John] Pastore's committee.

G: Why didn't the Democrats support him?

O: The Democrats were pretty relaxed on the Hill in terms of their relationship with the networks. They were getting their share of the action. They were on television regularly. They were on the various talk shows.

G: Was there anything that you could have done or other party leaders could have done to have rallied the Senate Democrats?

O: I should have made a more vigorous effort to get these people to be supportive of Frank Stanton, not sit in a committee hearing and have him berated by the Republicans with nobody on the Democratic side coming to his defense. What all of this ultimately led to was a call I received from Frank Stanton. He wanted to put together an immediate luncheon, which occurred.

G: You were in New York at the time?

O: I believe so. Obviously his keen desire to meet as promptly as possible got your attention and you could assume what the subject would be. So I contacted Joe Califano, our general counsel, and I might add, a very effective one. He made one terrific contribution in this difficult area and in a variety of matters we coped with in the DNC through 1972. In any event, the two of us arrived at CBS in Frank Stanton's private dining room and Frank in turn had the counsel for CBS.

The conversation became a little intense as the luncheon unfolded. Frank made no reference to having heard from the White House and that's understandable. That never surfaced until years later. He chose to express the concerns of some of his affiliates regarding the program. Putting that program on in lieu of programs normally scheduled, some of the affiliates had said wasn't good business practice. He mentioned, as I recall it, that I had to understand that many of the affiliate owners were Republicans and just on political grounds they weren't happy with this program. The bottom line was that programs two, three and four would not, as had been originally agreed to, take place prior

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 10

to the election in November. But program number two would be authorized by CBS after the election and we could talk about three and four at a later time. What he was saying is, "You've had one program. The heat is too intense. I'm not going to allow another program. I regret it because I did commit to it. I'm not going to allow it prior to the election; however, I made the commitment so, in some way, after the election we will try to work it out."

There weren't any mean exchanges and Stanton made a couple of good points. Beyond his affiliate problem, he said he was very depressed as a result of what had occurred at a hearing he had attended where he was berated by the Republicans and received no support from the Democrats on the committee. He had received no avowed support or comments from Democratic leaders from the time he had initiated the loyal opposition idea and he had been left naked. I told him that I regretted it and I took some personal responsibility for it, that I should have put in writing our thanks to the network. I should have made some public comments regarding the statesmanship of Frank Stanton and I should have been sensitive to or alert to the need to encourage the Democrats on the Hill to speak favorably regarding the actions he had taken. Having said all that, I then said, in substance, as I recall it, "We, in view of this, intend to pursue an appeal of the FCC ruling and pursue this in the courts--the right to equal time--and Joe Califano, our general counsel, will prepare the necessary documents. We're in a fight."

G: What was his reaction?

O: He thought that was overreacting on our part, that the loyal opposition concept was not in total discord, that there would be other programs at some future time but not before the election, and that, in a sense, he was suggesting this was on a personal basis unfair to him. He was the fellow who stepped out, was now taking the rap and, in addition to that, we were going to be suing CBS. The luncheon closed out on that note. The door was closed. CBS, as I recall, also did not have to pursue the FCC suggestion that they owed time to the Republican National Committee. They just closed the door for the time being. And we did not, as I recall, pursue what we told Stanton we were going to pursue, that is, further action in the courts at that time.

G: Did Stanton comment on the program itself?

O: He had commented on the program almost immediately following the pro-program very favorably.

G: Did he?

O: He had commented, not in the sense of being a partisan, but said we had utilized that twenty-five minutes very effectively and he was impressed with the format and the presentation. I'll say we were darn pleased with what we put together and, of course, the reaction to it proved the case. It wasn't just another speech. It had caused a media reaction and it certainly had caused terrific reaction on the part of Mr. Nixon.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 11

G: Who had been responsible for producing that program? Had Tony Schwartz been involved or did you use another firm?

O: I can't recall who we enlisted on the technical side. I recall we devoted half a day to putting it in the can the afternoon of the night it was going on the air, but I don't recall the participants on the technical side. I recall John Stewart specifically. I should not limit it to John; there were others on the staff and we had to obviously reach out for some professionals on the technical end.

G: Well, did Stanton at this luncheon revise his opinion of the thing or merely point out that affiliates were upset with it?

O: The latter, and understandably. After all, I couldn't fault Frank Stanton years later when I learned all the facts. He and his network were just whipped by the White House. He leaned on two aspects of this in trying to explain why, at a minimum, there was going to be a postponement. One was the affiliates and his concern about the failure of the Democratic leaders to give him support. He had been creative and responsible to the public interest but he was left completely naked on our end, berated by Republican members of the Senate committee and taken to task by a number of affiliates. The combination caused him to tell me he could not pursue the other three prior to election but to assure me that "In some way--we will work out the details later--there will be three programs but only after the November election." Well, the three programs after the November election were of no current interest to us. We knew we had launched something that had made some impact and we were anxious to pursue two, three and four. In fact, with Bill Welsh, John Stewart, Sam Greigg, and Ira Kapenstein in the DNC, there was discussion and planning of program two. They were busily engaged in considering the format and content of the next program.

G: Did you have any sense of Bill Paley's role in this as opposed to Stanton's?

O: No. When you consider what Stanton did that day I received notice from him in Louisville, it was far-reaching. It was really the action of a man who felt a deep responsibility and was positioned to do something regarding equity and fairness in terms of the two-party system--that the out-party should have some opportunity for response. The advantages of the presidency were too overriding in terms of public exposure and it was an unfair situation. That, in the same decision, we could purchase sixty-second spots for fund raising was a far-reaching decision that neither NBC or ABC remotely contemplated, even though we were aggressively pressing the issue.

ABC's reaction to the issue was to do a one shot prime-time twenty-five minutes on a specific subject, Cambodia. That was a breakthrough, but was far from developing a long-range procedure for loyal opposition response. Stanton had undertaken that with the four programs and the sixty-second fund raising. And if it had moved through four loyal opposition responses, it is very probable that procedure would have become part of the

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 12

process on a permanent basis.

G: What did you do with the sixty-second spots? Did you produce some spots, buy the time?

O: No. At that stage, while we had the right to purchase the spots, the climate had been clouded by my rather aggressive statement that we were going to start lawsuits.

G: Could you have raised the money to pay for the spots if you--?

O: Possibly not. I recall that Joe Califano joined in this discussion on legal procedure; in turn, Frank Stanton's counsel joined in the discussion, and Joe and the CBS lawyer had a detailed exchange on the legal aspects. Joe was, of course, in accord with what we contemplated and saw possibilities of success legally. But I'd have to say that it was more in the context of a strong reaction to Stanton's decision rather than the realities of pursuit and the time and money that would be involved.

The off-year election was on. The Cambodian aspect sort of faded. My recollection was that Nixon, prior to the November election, took actions and made statements that were strengthening his position. It dwindled as an issue and we weren't in much of a position to make political gain from it. We finally got into debating the speed of withdrawal, the time frames and the rest. I found myself having to make statements basically in support of Nixon's withdrawal procedures, saying this wasn't a political issue and that we hoped he would fulfill these commitments promptly. The issues in that off-year election became the economy and law and order.

G: Going back to the speed of withdrawal from Vietnam, there you did have a difference of opinion within the Democratic Party. The Democratic Policy Council on the one hand setting a deadline--I think it was eighteen months or some period of time--and the Democratic leadership in the Congress on the other hand taking a more conservative approach. How did you deal with these two factions in your own effort to maintain unity in the party?

O: I made a conscious effort not to inject myself in the midst of these somewhat differing points of view on withdrawal. I let nature take its course--these two areas of disagreement really focused on time frames--and let it be. My position remained that the President had announced a withdrawal procedure with a timetable and it was my hope he would adhere to his commitments.

We tried to pick up on the domestic issues. In my travels around the country I found myself focusing more on insisting that the Democratic Party was sensitive to law and order; the Democratic Party was deeply concerned about the economic state of affairs, inflation, unemployment. I adhered to that and diverted from foreign policy issues.

I utilized that time in Milwaukee in adherence to Jim Hagerty's offer of time for a specific purpose and under a certain set of conditions. There hadn't been an opportunity

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 13

for the loyal opposition to express views on Cambodia and Nixon had had an inordinate amount of air time to express his views. We had been strong in our opposition to two of his appointees to the Supreme Court. They both had been turned down. That we considered a political plus. The economy, in our judgment, was in pretty much of a mess. Of course, we were still contending he hadn't ended the war although he had committed to do it.

G: Did Hagerty catch any flak from the White House for allowing--?

O: I don't recall.

G: Was the Democratic Policy Council something that you regarded as a nuisance or an interfering body in terms of the--?

O: I don't recall I considered it a problem for us or that it inhibited us. It certainly didn't inhibit me and it had no impact on what we were engaged in.

We got into another equal time situation, however, that's worth noting and it was another contact by Jim Hagerty. He called me. It was the weekend before the November elections. Hagerty advised me that the Republicans had contacted ABC and asked to purchase a half-hour of prime time on election eve. He offered to split the half-hour if we were prepared to purchase fifteen minutes. In fairness we should be given an opportunity. If we did purchase the fifteen minutes, he'd limit the Republicans to fifteen minutes. I felt Jim Hagerty suspected we were in no position to buy fifteen minutes of prime time, but I was faced with the offer. My response was to tell Jim Hagerty that the half-hour should be fifteen minutes Republican, fifteen minutes to us as free time. I didn't have any other argument to present, because I knew we couldn't pay for it. I'll have to say, if he had agreed to do that just prior to the election, I would have been in a dilemma. I couldn't have arbitrarily given that fifteen minutes to Muskie or Humphrey or any presidential contender. Probably I could have gotten Mike Mansfield or Carl Albert. I assume I could. At that time there was a group headed by Averell Harriman.

G: Would you give me a little of the background of that group?

O: It was basically, to the best of my recollection, an Averell Harriman informal group, including a few others surrounding him.

G: It wasn't necessarily designed as "Support Muskie," is that correct?

O: Not that I was aware of. Averell Harriman was in a position to be financially helpful to the Democratic Party over the years and, consequently, due deference was always paid to him. Averell Harriman had not contributed to the Democratic National Committee, nor was there any indication he had any interest in doing so. But you could enlist Averell's support for some cause or policy position and this fell into that.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 14

I failed in my effort to secure fifteen minutes of free time. The Harriman group purchased the fifteen minutes and their decision was to have Muskie. Muskie did an outstanding job with the fifteen minutes. His appeal to reason, his style contrasted beautifully with the arm-waving film that was used by the Republicans. This is just prior to the election where Nixon and Agnew and their cohorts truly believed their law and order, arm-waving approach would have a tremendous impact on the election results. They made prognostications that turned out to be excessive as to what they would gain in the House and Senate.

The result was far from the Republican sweep that was predicted. The Republicans lost twelve seats in the House and picked up only two seats in the Senate, far short of the number needed for control. We scored impressive net gains. We had a net gain of eleven governorships in that off-year election. Most interestingly, on a district-by-district basis, an analysis of the vote showed the Democratic candidates ran an average of 3 per cent better nationally than we had in 1968. So we had an overall 3 per cent pick up and they had House losses. They had a meager gain in the Senate and lost a significant number of governorships.

So, all in all, 1970 was a good year for Democrats. Particularly when you consider that at the start of 1970 the pundits were proclaiming our party politically dead. The same pundits were now suggesting that maybe Nixon would be a one-term president. I think off that 1970 election fear was instilled in Nixon's heart regarding 1972. I feel his reaction to the November 1970 results played a significant role in his determination to act in the manner he did over the next two years, which brought about Watergate.

G: I want to ask you some of the details about your role in the 1970 election, but first, anything on [G. Harold] Carswell and [Clement] Haynesworth? Any role that you had in generating opposition to--?

O: We had discussions with Carl Albert, Mike Mansfield, and other leaders in the Senate and House on this matter. We did not have a coordinated effort in opposition to the nominees, but we shared a common interest and we had a total understanding that we would be vigorous and, hopefully, other Democrats around the country would join in opposition to these two nominees. In both instances, there was a lot for us to work on. Interestingly enough, there were serious problems with both these nominees that were brought to public attention and not solely by us, by any means. So as time went on, the nominees were found to be mediocre at best. In both cases they had serious problems, and they turned out to be very poor choices on the part of Nixon. The end result in pure political terms was to impose a defeat on Nixon.

G: Also that year you had Chappaquiddick. What did that do to the Democratic Party?

O: I had no personal involvement at all in Chappaquiddick.

G: Did the Kennedy people seek your advice on how to deal with it?

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 15

O: No, they did not. It was assumed by some members of the press that I would be involved in the aftermath. I was queried by several press people when it surfaced that some Kennedy allies were called into consultation at Hyannis. That involved several of my former colleagues. But I received no contact, directly or indirectly, from any Kennedy source throughout the entire Chappaquiddick incident.

G: Did it surprise you that you weren't consulted?

O: I don't know as I thought about it particularly. Certainly I had no resentment that I wasn't consulted.

G: How should it have been handled?

O: I think it's difficult to comment. It's easy to say, "Simply step forward and state the facts," if you're not the person involved. You had a Kennedy position, for example, in the Bay of Pigs that I applauded. You had a position taken by President Kennedy in the Cuban Missile Crisis that I applauded. Individual reactions to circumstances such as this are difficult for me to judge. I don't think it is appropriate for a nonparticipant, completely removed, to make a judgment. There are many who have stated over the years the only way to handle that was to step forward and present the facts immediately. That seems to be the prevailing view, but we don't yet know all the facts of Chappaquiddick. I knew the people.

Tape 2 of 3, Side 1

G: You said that you knew the people involved.

O: Yes, who were gathered at that cottage. That was an annual event. It was really a reunion of the boiler room girls of 1960 who happened to be the boiler room girls of 1968 who I was able to enlist in the Humphrey campaign. I had known them for years. They were a marvelous group of young women and each year they would get together for a reunion during the summer. It would be appropriate to have Teddy if he could do so to pay them a visit, to participate in the reunion.

I have no knowledge of what occurred following his departure from the reunion. Anyone who has experienced tragedy must live with it for the remainder of your life. In the instance of Ted Kennedy and Chappaquiddick, it continues to arise in discussion and I have to assume that it will never end.

The Teddy Kennedy I knew was a man with whom I had a fine relationship. I've always enjoyed his company. He was younger than I. There was that void. He was dedicated to his brothers and from what I've been able to observe during his years in the Senate, he has acquitted himself well. He continues to have the overwhelming support of the people of Massachusetts. He can stay in the Senate for a lifetime. Whether or not he

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 16

has continuing ambitions to be president, I don't know. I've had no discussion with him in that regard.

G: If it had not been for Chappaquiddick, would Kennedy have been the Democratic nominee in 1972, do you think? How would he have fared against Nixon?

O: If there had not been Chappaquiddick and he had an interest in seeking the presidency in 1972, he would have been a strong candidate. But I think you have to remember that 1972 was very unique. The delegate selection process that we'll get to, the whole McGovern approach represented a revolution in terms of the party's procedure in selecting a nominee. It's conceivable that if Teddy had been with Hubert and Muskie and others in that quest, he could have suffered as the others did in terms of McGovern's ability at an early stage to take full advantage of the new rules and have a broad base of support on the part of young anti-war activists who had the vigor and drive to lock up a nomination before a convention. So I don't know whether Teddy could have overcome that, but I considered Teddy a potential candidate in 1970 and 1971.

Once the election was over, the off-year election, I had to look ahead to the 1972 convention, the presidential election, and to focus on the role of a party chairman trying to maintain peace and harmony among contestants. There were obviously numerous potential candidates on the horizon in January of 1971 when I thought it out. Was there anything that I could do to keep these candidates from tearing the party further apart in 1972 in what was obviously going to be strongly contested primaries and caucuses? I decided to go forward. So on February 9, 1971, I convened what was certainly an unprecedented meeting of those I considered to be presidential contenders without notice to them of the purpose of the meeting or who would be present.

G: How did you get them all to come?

O: By extending a personal invitation to each one saying that I wanted to discuss party matters. The invitation was extended individually. In no case did I suggest who the other guests would be. I kept my fingers crossed that I could really get a full complement of those who I would like to have present. I wanted no forewarning, because I truly didn't believe I could put it together. There would be "no, thank yous" around. I tried to carefully orchestrate this, and these people started to arrive at my apartment. As the doorbell rang in each instance, the earlier arrivals would look toward the door. One by one the new arrivals would appear and everyone was looking at everyone else. It was interesting to observe the reactions.

It's worth noting those present and it did represent everyone I thought should have been invited at that time. There was total attendance. In addition to my presence, I had Bob Strauss and Ira Kapenstein from the national committee. Then the other guests were House Speaker Albert, Majority Leader Mansfield, and seven senators who were potential candidates for the Democratic nomination of 1972--Hubert Humphrey, Ed Muskie, Henry Jackson, George McGovern, Harold Hughes and Fred Harris. Senator Birch Bayh was

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 17

invited but he was out of the country so that was one absentee. It was tricky to put this together. You had no idea what the end result would be by the time the evening ended. And there were perhaps some who thought it was pretty presumptuous.

G: At the time did they say so?

O: No, none of that was said at the time. I think that each person in the room decided to remain close-mouthed as to the purpose of the meeting until they had more evidence of what was going on. So there was just small talk until it was time for dinner.

The only announced candidate at that point was McGovern. He didn't say it to me directly, but I think I learned there was some indication that Teddy Kennedy felt I had taken advantage because his posture contrary to the others was that he was not considering seeking the presidency.

G: And this put him in that posture.

O: Yes.

G: Well, tell me about the conversation at dinner.

O: Well, before that I recall that Gene McCarthy's friends afterwards complained because he wasn't invited. And I saw no reason to invite McCarthy under these circumstances. It just didn't add up. Sam Yorty, who I wouldn't seriously think of, took the occasion for publicity after the fact, calling for my resignation because he wasn't included. I invited Ted because, despite his disclaimers, he was widely viewed as a logical candidate. I had a second meeting later to which I invited Wilbur Mills, who had not come to my attention at that time but was later discussed as a dark horse contender.

I maintained top secrecy. There was no advance notice or no press knowledge of this meeting. The staff, other than Bob and Ira, in the DNC had no knowledge of the meeting. I had feared that if I told them I was calling a meeting of potential candidates for the presidency, they would assert their non-candidacy and that would end that. As I said, no guest knew who the other guests would be so there was a lot of head-turning and joking each time the door opened and another "contender" arrived.

G: Still, just the logistics of getting all these guys on the same night must have been formidable.

O: It was extremely difficult because I felt there was no way I could reveal the purpose or I would not be able to do it. So, it took a lot of careful planning and individual contact.

G: Was it a stag affair?

O: Yes. I opened the discussion over dinner by saying, "Now, of course, the DNC has a

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 18

responsibility for the 1972 convention," and I want to ask their cooperation in the planning of the convention. That was easy. And I wanted their support for the party's delegate selection reforms. That wasn't quite as easy, but the fact is they were in place. I hadn't initiated them. The national convention in 1968 had set the stage. Then I went on saying I wanted to minimize intraparty bloodletting in next year's primaries, and that opened the discussion. I went into some considerable detail, making a plea to help me discharge my responsibility as national chairman. There was nothing that I said in those preliminary remarks to which anybody could take affront. "I'd like you to help me in planning the convention. I'd like to have your commitment to adhere to the rules and procedures in delegate selection. I have a responsibility to avoid bloodletting and I need your full cooperation in order to accomplish that."

The meeting opened up and there was enthusiasm. It was amazing. You didn't know what was going to happen. This could break up at a moment's notice. There was a great deal of tenseness as dinner started. Nobody in that room other than Strauss and Kapenstein had any idea what to say. Was this the Chairman trying to have a little social event? They had to feel that couldn't be the case because as they looked around the room there was a common interest in a particular objective. We had a great session. Enthusiasm to the point where Hubert Humphrey noted this was a private session, but it was so productive, it had great potential, there was much enthusiasm and harmony and he wanted to compliment the Chairman. Everyone joined in this.

He said he thought it was a shame if we didn't have a picture of this unprecedented gathering. Ira then had to try to locate a photographer because I hadn't anticipated the extent of favorable reaction and there had been no provision made to record this for political history. He telephoned around. In a rather desperate move he had called the *New York Times* photographer, George Tames, at home and prevailed upon George to hustle over. It was a long session. We went on late into the evening. I joined in the enthusiasm. I thought it was terrifically productive. George Tames finally arrived and took the picture. Then it was brought up for discussion and agreed that I was authorized and should inform the press that the Democratic contenders for the presidential nomination 1972 would concentrate their fire on the Nixon Administration, not on each other. They would support the party reforms; they would assist the DNC fund-raising effort which was a little bit of a joke, I think, and they would work with the Democratic National Committee in its fight for loyal opposition access to television, which was a fight I envisioned would be continuing. The meeting ended on that note. The only photo or record of the meeting that exists was George Tames' which, of course, the *New York Times* ran the next morning. But we had no other, and Ira advised the press the meeting had taken place and what the general subject was.

We had a later meeting in which we came to a specific agreement which was more meaningful than probably the general discussion of the first meeting. In this we presented a ceiling on each candidate's media spending. It would be five cents per registered voter in the primary states and three cents per voter in the non-primary states. This, of course, would be helpful to everyone concerned. That meant the money saved in the spring could

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 19

be used against Nixon in the fall. I must say it was closely adhered to. It finally came into play during the primaries. The only charge brought up by any candidate against another that he violated the O'Brien agreement was an exchange between Humphrey and McGovern in the last days of the California primary. Even thinking back on it now it represented solely an effort in the interest of the party. I was taken aback that there was that degree of success as a result of that effort.

I've often reflected on that first meeting; it was extremely interesting and we often talked about it. Obviously, I was extremely pleased with the unbounded enthusiasm, the end result, and I was greatly relieved that I hadn't created a situation that would cause some eruption and difficulty that I'd always regret. A specific agreement on capping expenditures for television was helpful and it was adhered to. That represented an effort to fulfill my role as chairman in the first week of February in 1971.

G: What was Tames' reaction when he showed up?

O: I don't recall because Ira was waiting at the door. We had dinner in the dining room of the suite. We had gathered initially in the living room. Ira's in the hallway, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Tames. We all embraced the idea and naturally we were anxious. I was anxious to have the picture and if the party broke up before Tames' arrival I would have been distressed. I never would have deigned to suggest we have a picture or issue a statement. I would have been perfectly satisfied to have them say, "We appreciated the invitation and we assume you're going to adhere to your commitment that this was private." If that had been the resolution of the evening, I would have obviously accepted it. I had no intention of playing games with them to publicize it. It was their suggestion. In fact, Hubert's suggestion was joined in around the table and we unfortunately weren't in a position to take full advantage of it in terms of media attention.

(Interruption)

G: Okay. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the off-year congressional elections in 1970. First of all, with regard to your own travels, you spoke at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington. Do you remember that? Anything significant about that occasion?

O: I vaguely remember that. I guess I did. (Laughter)

G: You went to Indianapolis and spoke there.

O: I don't recall specifics of the stops, even the ones that you have listed. There were many more than that. It was a basic speech. The situation would be generally a meeting of party people or labor people or a joint meeting or often a fund-raising event for a candidate, such as Ohio for [John] Gilligan. It would be on request that I make myself available. I was anxious to get around the country in any event. I had gone to the Democratic Governors Conference at the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri when I first took the post back--hadn't even settled in the office. I didn't seek opportunities, but it's always

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 20

difficult to get people to commit to making appearances. It's difficult for candidates oftentimes to get some highly visible person in the Congress.

So these occasions arose. There were a number of them and oftentimes it would be a two or three-day trip where you would have a luncheon stop and a dinner, so you had a basic speech. A basic speech you would sandwich with the opening remarks directed to those present, to the candidate that was being honored or whatever the situation might be and an appropriate close. These stops always included a press conference. You would try to have a meeting in the form of a cocktail reception where you would meet the various local party officials and officeholders. Then to the next stop. I certainly was available to do as much as I could for Democratic candidates. There was considerable contact with the national committee requesting speakers. And there would be these occasions when the request would be made for me. I can't suggest that there was anything particularly unique in these appearances. They were basically party advocacy, opposition to the administration, straight-out politics.

G: Your speech in Minneapolis for Humphrey, your appearance there. Anything in particular about that?

O: I don't recall specifics on that. In fact, as we're talking I'm having some difficulty even recalling the stops. Nothing unusual that I recall. There is a traditional annual event in North Carolina that evokes the memory of a couple of Democratic leaders of the past. It's somewhat comparable to a Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, and the governor of North Carolina, who I believe was Governor [Robert] Scott at that point, would introduce you. It was a large statewide dinner. There was a tour I made in New York on behalf of the ticket. It included stops in Upstate New York, Albany and Syracuse as well as an appearance with Congressman [Richard] Ottinger in his district--a swing through the state that had several stops in it. That would be typical of the type of thing I did.

G: [James] Buckley won the New York Senate race. Any insights on that?

O: No.

G: Bella Abzug was elected in the House.

O: No. I'm sure of one thing. I wasn't invited to her district.

G: Louise Day Hicks was the seat vacated by John McCormack, House seat in Massachusetts.

O: She was a very controversial lady in Massachusetts and it was a simple matter of a Democrat succeeding a Democrat. . . stop--

G: The [Adlai] Stevenson stop?

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 21

O: It's worth noting because of the unusual aspects of an appearance in Cook County. My recollection is that this was a different format than you would find as you crisscrossed the country. When you arrived in Chicago, the procedure was to pay a courtesy call on the Mayor prior to the function. The Mayor had two offices, the mayor's office and the county chairman's office. The county chairman's office was in the hotel where the function was to take place. I visited with Dick Daley and the visit was scheduled so that after a half-hour to an hour with Daley in his office it was time to go to the ballroom to attend this luncheon. Adlai Stevenson would be the centerpiece as the focus of the luncheon was to be on his candidacy.

Daley escorting you to the luncheon meant down the center aisle through the ballroom to standing applause--not for me, for Daley--to the head table. The program started, Adlai Stevenson spoke and received vigorous applause. There were other speakers, then it became my turn. The Mayor introduced me with all the accolades in his inimitable style. As he went through this litany, there would be applause after every couple of sentences. I detected as I was speaking I was receiving applause for lines I didn't think were that great. I noticed the Mayor encouraged the applause. So these twelve or fifteen hundred people in this ballroom went through this procedure that I'm sure others experienced under similar circumstances. You might think you had made a great speech, but you would be naive if you left Daley and Chicago and thought you had made a tremendous impact.

G: Governors' races?

O: Five governors' races and maybe a sixth one, I don't recall. I had direct campaign involvement with the candidates. I'm not suggesting I contributed to their victories at all. All it suggests is that I was accepted in those states at those events I had been invited to attend. It was a matter of complying with the invitation and being a participant. Those stops were never limited to just appearing at a dinner or luncheon. They always entailed other activities, meetings with county leaders, a reception, a press conference. When you went on the road you were going to be fully occupied. They made sure of that.

G: I wanted to bring LBJ back into the picture. You have been referring to Hubert Humphrey as the titular head of the party, even though he had lost the nomination. You had one living Democratic ex-president who you have not mentioned during this whole period. Why not? What happened to Lyndon Johnson in this?

O: He went home and it was assumed he didn't want to be bothered. Hubert Humphrey was still active in the party. He had his own agenda. He was titular head of the party. The candidate, if he fails, is the titular head of the party. There has been some historic significance to that. But as I indicated early on, that seems to have dwindled into oblivion. Going back to Adlai Stevenson, after his defeat, he was referred to as the titular head of the party. I think it was relatively meaningless then and became even less meaningful in intervening years. As far as President Johnson was concerned, he left for the Ranch and it was a matter of non-involvement and retirement.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 22

- G: Was he consulted at all during this time?
- O: There was a widespread recognition that he had no interest in being contacted on political matters.
- G: Strauss was a fellow Texan. Did Strauss stay in communication with him, do you know?
- O: Not to my knowledge. Strauss--really his association was with John Connally. He had come into active participation in the Democratic National Committee through Connally. In the 1968 convention, Bob was always with Connally anytime you saw John Connally. He was with him when I had the lengthy meetings with John that we have discussed. Bob was politically close to Connally rather than to Lyndon Johnson.
- G: One of the press accounts indicated that you had been helpful or cooperative with LBJ when he was working on his memoirs, *The Vantage Point*.
- O: I have recollection of being contacted from time to time regarding elements of the book as it was being written. I don't recall I was engaged in any in-depth discussions, but I did have contact from the Ranch on occasions, checking a fact or fleshing out a situation. As far as cooperation, obviously, if Lyndon Johnson had said, "I want you to stay at the Ranch for six months and help me with the book," I would have packed my bag and gone down. I owed a lot to him.
- G: The other living Democratic ex-president was President Truman. He was quite elderly at this point. Did he have any continuing interest or involvement in Democratic Party [activities]?
- O: No. While I was chairman I was invited to be the speaker at the annual Harry Truman dinner in St. Louis. We arranged for me to make a stop en route at Independence and I have reviewed that in some detail early on. It was the highlight of that period to have the opportunity to meet with the Former President and Mrs. Truman. It was a memorable occasion for me. He was still vigorous in articulating his views, but he was using a cane, as was the case when we were at the Truman Library for the signing of the Medicare bill. The Former President, of course, was present for that signing ceremony. But 1970 through 1972, there was no thought given to activity on the part of President Truman. That would have been unseemly to even consider. And President Johnson certainly--let me put it this way: among us there was no one that didn't accept and recognize he was retired and wanted it that way. At a time when I contacted him on appearing at the 1972 convention he made it clear to me he had no interest.
- G: Did he seem to appreciate the invitation?
- O: Yes, I would have gotten to that as we discussed the convention but I had a conversation with him. It was fairly lengthy. It was a warm discussion. He said he appreciated the

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 23

invitation but would decline. We discussed members of his family attending the convention and provisions we had made in the event any of the Johnsons cared to come--

Side 2 of 3, Side 1

O: --they would be our guests. He expressed appreciation for that. I finally resorted to asking him that inasmuch as he would not attend the convention would he do the preface of our convention book, which he agreed to.

G: Before we get into the pre-convention questions of the two commissions, I want to ask you about your trip to Russia in the fall of 1971. Can you describe that in some detail?

O: Yes. I had felt I would like to visit Russia. It intrigued me; that's the extent of it. I suggested to my wife that we take a ten-day trip. Russia could be an experience. She had no interest, so I leaned on my son to join me.

In the process of securing the visas, it was brought to the attention of the Russian Ambassador [Anatoly] Dobrynin that I was to be traveling to Russia. He contacted me and suggested dinner at the Russian Embassy to explore what he could do to make my visit comfortable. I explained to the Ambassador that I didn't want to put him out. There was no need for dinner and I preferred that he didn't extend himself. I pointed out my son was going to be traveling with me. We were going as visitors and tourists and that was the extent of it. He said, "I just don't feel right about this. Would you come over and we'll have a little cocktail hour? I'll confine it to a few people on my staff and you can bring some friends. At least we could have a drink together." I was in no position to refuse and I did go.

Clearly, the purpose was to explore why was I going to Russia, what did I have in mind. I reiterated I had no interest other than the interest of a tourist. I was looking forward to it. He asked me if there were any specific areas of interest and I said no. I was going to be in Moscow and Leningrad. He made a couple of suggestions: "You would enjoy seeing Gorky Park," and there was some exhibit emphasizing the Russian astronauts in Moscow that he thought I'd enjoy.

On arrival in Moscow a couple of fellows came aboard the plane and identified themselves as people designated to greet me. We were taken off the plane separately from the other passengers. The other passengers were going in a bus to the terminal, but they had a limousine to take Larry and me. We were extremely tired, anxious to check into the hotel. They were courteous and pleasant; nevertheless, they wanted to discuss some details of my stay. They asked about my schedule which was the typical tourist schedule. Then they asked if I would be willing to appear at a meeting of Georgi Arbatov's group. Georgi was liaison between Russia and the United States. We were aware of Arbatov's role, which is a continuing role to this day.

I preferred not to get into that sort of thing. I'm paying for this trip. I'm a tourist

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 24

and I didn't like to have sightseeing derailed. However, I agreed to do that. I agreed to another group--I don't recall. It was chaired by some professor. I agreed to visit the Kremlin to meet with the second-ranking, I guess, in the hierarchy. The head of government was on vacation. I haven't been able to depart the airport.

However, finally my son and I were back in the car and we checked into the hotel. I wasn't in the hotel long when I received a telephone call from a man who had been a long-time AP reporter in Russia, an American, who asked me what my schedule was and I told him. He had been there for a long time and was about to retire from the Associated Press. He asked me if I was going to be received by the American Ambassador. I told him I was not, and he asked, "Has the American Embassy been in contact with you?" I said, "No." And he expressed disbelief. He said, "I can't understand how this could happen. You are the chairman of the Democratic Party and the Ambassador has ignored your presence." I said, "The Ambassador may be unaware of my presence. I'm here as a tourist." That seemed to excite him and it disturbed me because I didn't want an issue made of something I hadn't even thought of. I had no interest in the American Ambassador. Then he said he'd like to take Larry and me to dinner with a few friends of his, and I agreed to that. We were to meet for cocktails at his apartment and go on to a Georgian restaurant that he described as the best in Moscow.

G: Were these American friends of his?

O: I don't recall who they were. I do recall that when we got to his apartment he made mention of the fact that his apartment was in the building which contained other reporters and it was under surveillance, so I could be sure I had been checked entering. We visited there and went on to dinner in a restaurant that was rather noisy with mediocre food. He was an extremely pleasant fellow. Including Larry and me and the reporter, it probably turned out to be a party of eight, with friends of his, none of them Russians. That was the launching of my long-anticipated trip to Russia. But I did enjoy the evening. He was extremely interesting and recounted stories of a long career of some thirty-eight years representing the AP in Russia.

Meanwhile, it became clear we were going to have at our disposal a car and driver that I hadn't made provision for, and an escort. That would remain the case until our departure from Russia. Escorts were present all the time.

I found myself with Georgi Arbatov and his people at his headquarters. I recall a U-shaped or rectangular, very large table that probably accommodated fifty or sixty people. Georgi greeted me and presented me and I made some brief comments. Then Georgi had asked me if I would take questions. The end result was a rather lengthy Q & A. I had to go through an hour or more of this. There was no difficulty with it and everything was low key. I assumed that terminated my stay with Georgi Arbatov, who I found prior to this visit and in subsequent years to be an extremely bright, able, and interesting fellow who works arduously at ensuring he had the fullest possible degree of intelligence and understanding of our political process and those involved in it. He's an

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 25

expert at it. That's been his life's work, and apparently there is great dependence on Arbatov on the part of whoever is ruling Russia. The position he has removes him a little from Red Square and creates a situation where he is not supposedly part of the apparatus. This gives him some leeway in dealing with American politicians of both parties.

Following that session Georgi suggested that I join him for lunch. You're now occupied for lunch and you haven't seen anything of Moscow as yet. We adjourned to an attractive building a short walking distance from his headquarters to a private dining room. Now we're joined by a dozen for lunch of the sixty that I had just met, which I assume represented the top level of Georgi's group. The lunch began with the usual vodka toast and went on and on. It was at a minimum a two-hour lunch, confined basically to small talk. It began to go beyond small talk in terms of political conversation. But I never at any point opened the door for any meaningful discussions if that's what they had in mind.

What stayed in my mind and caused Larry and me to have a real laugh afterward was the fellow sitting opposite Larry, who had been press secretary in the Russian Embassy in Washington. I could not take my eyes off his necktie because it was a Countess Mara necktie. It seemed incongruous to be in Moscow with this Russian wearing a Countess Mara necktie.

Meanwhile, perhaps the previous night, there was contact from the American Embassy. We were extended an invitation to a reception at the Embassy. It was clear to me this reporter had made inquiry at the embassy because he was intrigued that the national chairman of the Democratic Party could be in Moscow and the American Embassy not recognize his existence. It didn't bother me in the slightest. I wanted to avoid that sort of thing and wander around to see Moscow. But you had to make a decision. The decision would be to drop by. Otherwise you might create a situation that could be misinterpreted. So off we go to this cocktail party. I don't remember the Ambassador's name. He was a career ambassador. A large number of people were there. Clearly the party had not been structured to entertain me. It was really to honor a couple of other people I don't recall. But the Ambassador was courteous and we went through that little charade.

The next thing that occurred was, would I visit a Russian intellectual group, academic group? So here we go again. Meanwhile I have these companions at all times. The only benefit you could derive was transportation. So I visited that group and my son became kind of resentful. This group now is composed of probably fifteen or twenty people. An elderly professor was chairing the group. He obviously headed this entity. He and others started to talk about mistreatment of Russians in New York. At that time there had been incidents at the Russian consulate. I think there had been incidents at their living quarters in New York of a rather nasty nature. They were in high dudgeon: "This is just a terrible way to treat people." I guess I was supposed to apologize for my fellow Americans. I was thinking "I wonder how long this is going on. I don't want to create a scene." But my son created a scene because he suggested that as long as we were on the subject he would like to talk about persons not being allowed out of Russia. The name

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 26

now eludes me but it was a worldwide story. So Larry said, "As long as we're on the subject of mistreatment, I want to know why this man isn't given freedom of movement," and he went on. He was sitting next to me. I kicked his leg but it didn't do any good. This fellow chairing the meeting became awfully exercised. It got into a loud exchange. Finally things settled down. The meeting ended and we departed. I said to Larry, "I couldn't care less about those characters. Why bother?" He said, "Well, I just couldn't stand it any longer." That was the highlight of that meeting.

Then we were to meet in the Kremlin. There were three or four present in this large room at a long table. It was nothing but light exchanges of views in a courteous manner--a discussion of the two-party system, how it functions in the United States. It was not unpleasant but it was time-consuming. But as part of that it was insisted I have a tour of the Kremlin and some of the buildings, which took place and was very interesting. I had my friendly escorts with me throughout all of this, too.

Then it was suggested that I would undoubtedly want to visit Lenin's tomb and we agreed. That was appreciated. We arrived outside the tomb and there must have been ten thousand people, six abreast, waiting to get in. Our car pulled to the front and we entered Lenin's tomb. I made the unfortunate mistake as I descended to the crypt to have my hand in my pocket. I was growled at by one of the guards and I didn't understand what he was saying until he made motions to take my hand out of my pocket. I guess I was inadvertently exhibiting disrespect.

Meanwhile, I do visit this exhibit in Gorky Park and the Russian circus, along with various restaurants and a degree of touring. It so happened that one Sunday I would be in Moscow and the following Sunday in Leningrad. So Sunday arrived in Moscow and I told our guide that I wanted to attend mass. He found that difficult to cope with. Finally, it was resolved that there was a mass at the American Embassy in a room in the basement and we went to mass there with a handful of others.

Then it was decided we would visit a museum and a cemetery where many famous Russians are buried--outside the Wall. Rowlie Evans, before I had departed for Russia, had suggested that if I really wanted to give them a little challenge during my stay in Moscow I should ask to visit the grave of Boris Pasternak, outside of Moscow.

While touring the museum I mentioned to my traveling companion, one of the two that were with me, "By the way, when we finish our tour of the museum I'd like to visit Pasternak's grave." Well, that caused a sudden halt. He said he'd have to check into that and was pointing out reasons why it didn't fit my schedule. I said, "Regardless, I'd like to go there." He departed. We continued through the museum and he was gone for some time. Finally he returned and said that it had been arranged.

As we were driving, we were passing several dachas of prominent Russians in this wooded area and I told the guide I'd like to swing in and take a look. He wasn't enthusiastic. But we did. That's what it amounted to. We walked around this area and

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 27

there were people sitting on porches and strolling.

G: What was it like? Was it comparable to suburbia here?

O: The architecture was considerably different, but it seemed to be a pleasant and obviously quite private area. There were people here and there.

We arrived at the cemetery and there's a little church that was locked. There was no admission there. Then you started down a footpath from the church, a fair distance, not well-tended but you could traverse it. Finally to Pasternak's grave. There were six or eight people huddled around the grave site, and there were three or four modest little bouquets of flowers that looked like they had been recently placed on the grave. I imagine that goes on daily. That was the extent of it, but we had accomplished our objective.

Meanwhile, this "guide" would meet us in the morning and be with us until the close of our day, back at the hotel. He would have Pravda in the car and sit up with the driver. He was young and his English was not perfect but good. Of course, he kept saying he was a member of the Russian tourist entity which I had made no provision for. He apparently felt he had a handle one morning as he referred to a piece in Pravda in which the IRA in Northern Ireland was lavishly praised for its activities. He applauded that vigorously. It was clear to me he had pieced together I was of Irish heritage and thought I would enjoy this camaraderie. I firmly advised him I had no interest in that subject and that ended that conversation.

All in all, Larry and I concluded it was an interesting visit. Of course, the AP reporter had advised us our rooms were bugged, and, of course, we couldn't enter or leave our rooms without checking with the person at the desk on the floor.

We were going on to Leningrad by Euroflot. Our friend is in the car once again en route to the airport, and to my amazement at the airport he is going with us. We flew to Leningrad and when we arrived there is a three-car motorcade to meet us with several of his friends, and we're brought to the hotel.

There was one area of interest in Leningrad we were looking forward to and that was the Hermitage. Larry had a particular interest because he had taken art courses at Harvard and was excited about the prospect. I must say the treatment we were receiving was advantageous in that instance. We were escorted into the director's office and the director served us coffee and cakes. We chatted for a while and then pointed out our stay was obviously too brief to see the Hermitage in its entirety or even remotely its entirety. He asked if there were any particular areas we might want to focus on, which I left to Larry. Then a lady was called into the office to be our escort. The Hermitage was the highlight of our visit to Leningrad.

It was decided we should also see the Summer Palace. We went by hydrofoil. And we were invited to the ballet. I later learned that the people who had our box had

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 28

been ousted to accommodate us.

There was insistence that we attend a reception at a refurbished palace in Leningrad. A woman was its director and it was considered a highlight of any foreigner's visit. I protested a reception and finally negotiated a visit that would not be a full-blown reception. It was a very interesting visit and a very interesting woman who, incidentally, sent me Christmas cards for ten years after that. She was an impressive lady and her English was fine. She mentioned other Americans who had visited, including American astronauts. I suggested this represented heavy investment and asked how she was able to get this great project done. She responded she had a close friend in [Leonid] Brezhnev and he had provided the funding. Then we had probably fifteen to twenty people present and they were serving cocktails.

Next she asked me if I minded being interviewed, as there were two reporters. I was taken to a side room and there was an effort made to have comments that might be newsworthy from their point of view. I refused pleasantly and said I was a tourist enjoying my stay and I would have no comment beyond that.

Sunday is arriving. My local new-found friends plus my friend from Moscow are still with us. I advise that we want to attend mass on Sunday. Some time elapsed before I could get a response. Finally they said that they had made arrangements. So on Sunday morning we joined this motorcade and off we went. We traveled for some period of time. Wending our way out of Leningrad, we come to a suburb and the Catholic church. At this church there were probably forty or fifty people in attendance. What was interesting was that my traveling companions lined up against the wall in the rear of the church almost in military formation and stayed in that position through the entire mass. Nothing was said as we returned to our hotel.

They were anxious, in their own way, to entertain us. They wanted to take us to dinner at the hotel in Leningrad that had been within view of Hitler at the siege and would have been his headquarters on the fall of Leningrad. The dining room was similar to a ballroom and quite crowded. It was pointed out that many occupants were Finns as it was a short trip from Finland by water. They had apparently more opportunity to enjoy themselves in Leningrad and drink to whatever extent they cared to. I got the impression they came over with regularity.

There was a soft drink I was told that was made from bread. The Russians seemed to enjoy it as we enjoy our colas. It came in a little barrel that night. You could have it in a glass. Our host insisted on having a barrel delivered to the table. It had a little spigot. It was horrible. We drank a little as they were very proud of it, and apparently most Russians drank it. In Gorky Park they had a dispenser for these drinks, and my escort had asked me if I'd like to try it. It was a warm afternoon and there were many people in the park. All of them studiously avoiding looking directly at us. They averted their eyes as we were passing. It was a strange experience. You were spotted immediately and you were avoided totally. I realized there was a common glass at the dispenser. They put a

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 29

coin in the dispenser, filled the glass and put it back for the next person. I wasn't about to participate in that procedure.

We were closing out the trip. There is no converting of Russian money and I had some left. I said to my guide, "Here's my remaining money. I'll have no use for it." I was flying to London. He replied, "Let me do something with it." He disappeared and came back with a large container of caviar. He said, "This balances out the money you had left."

At the airport there were long delays. We were placed in a private room. There was checking and rechecking up to and including the steps to the airport. It was a boring and somewhat disconcerting procedure to leave Russia. There again, Larry and I were in this separate room which was like a dungeon, but it was far better there than in the midst of the mess in the airport, until they decided to have the plane leave. We went on to London.

I had no later discussion with Dobrynin regarding the trip. The activities I engaged in with Arbatov and others were probably well-intentioned. I do think they honestly felt as long as I was there they'd like to have some contact and some discussion. They take it all very seriously. There was very little banter or laughter connected with any of this. These meetings were deadly serious and the questions were deadly serious. The climate was not a relaxed climate at any stop.

But I must say I was pleased that I made the trip.

G: You had worked for two presidents. Did they show a particular interest in questioning you about either these presidents or the presidency itself?

O: There was some of that but as I indicated, most of the discussions at these meetings were in the context of the American system--

Tape 3 of 3, Side 1

O: --in the context of the two-party system, in the context of my role as chairman of one of the parties. It flowed that way. I made no effort to turn the conversation to discussion of the Russian form of government. The attitude simply appeared to be one of interest in a political activist from the United States and how that government functions and what his role is.

So, with the exception of the attack on us because of the treatment of Russians in New York, there was nothing spiteful. I must say, I think from the time Dobrynin originally contacted me through the trip, the Russians couldn't understand why the Democratic Party chairman and his son would just take a break for a couple of weeks and go to Russia. There must be some motive, some reason beyond tourism.

O'Brien -- Interview XXVIII -- 30

End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview XXVIII

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 92-40