INTERVIEW XXIX

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INTERVIEWEE: LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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O: I should make a comment on another candidate for the presidency in the context of past discussions we've had, such as the dinner meeting in my apartment in Washington involving the candidates. Another candidate that surfaced for a brief period: Wilbur Mills. Representatives of Wilbur Mills met with me in my apartment in New York and urged me to consider resigning as national chairman to take over a campaign for Wilbur Mills for president. I declined.

At a later date, I was contacted directly by Wilbur. It coincided with a visit I made to Dallas to attend the wedding of one of Bob Strauss' children. Wilbur arranged to have a plane pick Elva and me up at Dallas and fly to Little Rock, where we transferred to a smaller plane to Wilbur's home town. He and I spent some time that day discussing his views on his candidacy. At that time, he didn't ask me to undertake an active role. It was more exploring what potential he had and how he might go about it.

I recall particularly a small cottage alongside the railroad track, with a smaller cottage adjoining where his mother lived. It recalled conversations I had with him over the years regarding his experiences leaving that town and attending Harvard Law School. He couldn't acclimate himself to Boston and New England. I sat in this little living room; his wife Polly joined us at times. But she and Elva spent most of the time in another room. It was an experience to meet with Mills under those circumstances and have a fuller understanding of where he'd come from. The simplicity of it--he had retained his roots and that's where he felt most comfortable.

He ultimately did enter the New Hampshire primary and nothing meaningful came of it. But he was, at one period of time, added to the list of candidates. I did not consider that to be the case when I arranged the initial meeting of the candidates I thought [had the] most potential. Wilbur Mills was not included. That was the extent of his candidacy in any event.

G: What did he say about his prospects for nomination?

O: I think Wilbur felt he had considerable national recognition, that he had a record he could point to with pride and that was clearly the case. But it did not, in my mind, suggest real potential as a national candidate. He was not persuaded; he toyed with it. He felt he had

better credentials or at least as good credentials as anyone seeking the nomination. But all the difficulties of entering primaries and the financing he had a tendency to gloss over at that time. When I left him I felt there was a degree of seriousness, and I wasn't surprised that he did put his foot in the water in New Hampshire. But I had no expectancy that his candidacy, if he went forward, would be effective.

Concerning Wilbur's lifestyle in Kensett, Arkansas, my recollection is his family owned the local bank. I'm not suggesting he was a barefoot boy leaving for Harvard Law School. To sum it up, I was somewhat surprised with his serious approach and that he had gone that far in his thought process, although, as I said, I recall associates of his visiting me in New York several months earlier proposing I resign and take over Wilbur Mills' campaign for president. Wilbur approached it in a serious manner for a period of time until finally reality set in.

G: Did he have an issue that he was going to hinge his campaign on?

O: He felt that he could speak to the economy, to domestic issues, from his position as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and his contribution over a period of years in terms of the economy, with emphasis on the tax side. That was the extent of it. I don't recall having any discussions with him, particularly on foreign policy or social issues.

G: Okay. Do you want to move to the reform movements and the various committees or commissions that were--?

O: When I returned as chairman, I had to focus on reform. The convention had made a specific commitment to reform. There were to be actions taken that would impact on the national convention in 1972. In the intervening year, from the time I left until I returned as chairman, the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection had been formalized. Fred Harris, as chairman, had moved that 1968 mandate to a commission, chaired by George McGovern. The commission had by 1970 put in place with great specificity procedures for delegate selection. There was another committee on rules chaired by Jim O'Hara. Those two committees had determined procedures that would govern the delegate selection process and the rules of the convention. McGovern, when he formalized his candidacy, resigned as chairman of the commission and he was succeeded by Congressman Don Fraser. The vice chairman of the McGovern commission, which was how it was referred to, was Senator Harold Hughes of Iowa. Obviously, the commission was heavily weighted to the liberal wing of the party. But there was a commitment and it was my responsibility to fulfill that commitment as chairman of the party.

And we proceeded to do just that. The delegate selection process would be altered completely. The provisions in the McGovern commission report were difficult to implement. For example, there had to be open, publicized delegate selection. No longer could party bosses just proclaim delegate slates. Beyond that, the delegates were to reflect the population. You had to ensure there was appropriate representation of youth,

ethnics, blacks, Hispanics, women. The concept was that you would have a balanced delegation from each state, consequently, a balanced national convention, representative of the population as a whole. There was a postscript that nothing in the McGovern commission mandate was to be construed as establishing a quota system. How you could carry out the mandate of the commission and not have the end result a quota system was hard to determine. Yet, that is the way the mandate read. We advised Democrats across the country on these procedures and alerted them that these procedures would be rigidly adhered to and full compliance was expected. Failure to fully comply with the mandate would mean barring seating at the convention.

As this unfolded, it was clear that many party regulars were not implementing as directed. Organized labor--George Meany specifically--was very much disturbed with the McGovern procedure and the McGovern wing of the party.

G: Was this because it displaced labor's traditional role?

O: That would be one aspect. But beyond that, Meany felt that McGovern and his cohorts were leading the Democratic Party down a road to disaster. He personally and labor generally did not share the ultra liberal views of the McGovernites. The conflict was there and it was broad and deep. However, the process went forward. The Democratic National Committee formally endorsed the McGovern commission recommendations.

So the role of the chairman of the party was to ensure that these provisions were carried out. The end result, of course, was that you had a convention that had representation, as I recall it, of probably 35 per cent or so women (compared to the 1968 convention it tripled or quadrupled the representation of women) and 14 or 15 per cent representation of blacks (which probably tripled the representation of blacks at the prior convention). You had 20 plus per cent, as I recall, young people under thirty, both men and women. That was far beyond youth representation at the 1968 convention or any prior convention. So, once this delegate selection process was completed, you had achieved the objective of the McGovern commission, which was supported by the national party and the Democratic National Committee.

Meanwhile, you had elected officials of the Democratic Party throughout the country who had regularly attended national conventions, who were simply appointed. They overwhelmingly decided they would not contest for delegate status and would not attend the convention.

G: Was it simply a matter of their own discretion not to subject themselves to the factionalism?

O: That's right.

G: Or was it a fear that they might not be able to get elected a delegate?

O: Both. That was an understandable fear. First of all, there were about twenty-two states, as I recall, that had established primaries. In those primary states you did have a publicized election of delegates. Compliance could not be questioned if you had that kind of procedure. But in the non-primary states, it became an extremely difficult situation. I recall labor representatives deciding they were going to take over a caucus and get their slate elected. They appeared at the site and provided box lunches and all the rest. They were going to prevail. The day wore on, the evening wore on, midnight came and the labor people became tired of the procedure and went home. The McGovern people stayed until the wee hours and wound up having their delegates elected. The organized effort of the McGovernites across the country in this process was impressive. Their willingness to devote all the time and effort that was necessary to get this done was impressive, and they got it done. It's interesting to note, after the process had been completed or toward its close, that Al Barkan of the AFL-CIO proclaimed there would be more labor delegates upcoming in the 1972 convention than at any convention heretofore. It was difficult to equate that with the procedure. They had five hundred plus labor delegates. That was his claim and I had no reason to doubt it.

G: Looking at the representation formula and the whole evolution from deciding not to exclude or discriminate against minorities and women in choosing delegates, going all the way to a requirement that elements be represented in proportion to their percentage of the population. Do you recall the specific decisions that were involved in this progression and did you yourself have a role in it or was it--?

O: No, this was formulated by the commission prior to my involvement. It was a statistical matter. Even those who were not in the McGovern camp developed balanced slates. They wanted a slate that could meet the challenge of balance.

These would be party regulars, Humphrey supporters. Where labor succeeded, if they had over five hundred delegates, was they perhaps were very careful in their delegate selection to ensure they were in general conformity with the McGovern commission mandate. But you can't get away from the fact that this commission took the pains to include in its report that nothing was to be construed as invoking a quota system.

G: Well, wasn't it in fact a quota?

O: Of course it was. The mere fact that the commission had taken the pains to state this was a clear indication that the commission knew they were actually mandating a quota system. That's the way it unfolded.

G: In retrospect, how should it have been handled?

O: Like every situation to correct a basic problem. There's a middle road. The creation of "super delegates" to include a substantial number of party activists and officeholders is a solid example. There's no question the delegate selection procedure of the Democratic Party in 1972 was not democratic. It leaned heavily toward party bosses. That was the

history of party conventions. So 1968, when Humphrey prevailed, the liberal wing of the party was able to enact this mandate. The convention did not think too long or hard on this reform demand and it was accepted by the convention. Once the opportunity was there the McGovern people grasped it firmly and moved aggressively. The Democratic National Committee approved the commission's report and recommendations in toto. We had no alternative but to fulfill this obligation by implementation.That had been mandated by the national committee.

You could see ahead there would be controversy. It was inevitable there would be protests. And there were. The Credentials Committee, which would be an entity of the national convention, would have the responsibility to review all protests and rule on them. Their decisions, of course, would be subject to the ultimate determination of the convention itself. So it became clear to me that, while I'm implementing the commission's recommendations, I have a responsibility to ensure there's a fair and balanced procedure in the Credentials Committee. That resulted in controversy because Harold Hughes made it clear he should be the chairman of the Credentials Committee. I felt this was where I should make a decision. I decided to ensure a chairman of my liking would be elected by the national committee.

That resulted in a bitter contest. Hughes pursued his efforts; literally started a campaign for the post. I was able to persuade Pat Harris to accept the role of chairman if she were elected. She accepted with considerable reluctance. She recognized that this would be very controversial. She was not enamored with the idea of entering a contest for chairman. She did not have any great interest. But I felt she would be an excellent chairman if she could be persuaded to take the post. Bob Strauss and I met with her, discussed it with her at length. She agreed to consider it and ultimately agreed to accept the role with the proviso that she would not be an active candidate. She would not seek Democratic National Committee votes for the post, but if elected, she would serve. That's the position we were in.

It came to a head when I learned that Ed Muskie had decided to support Harold Hughes. I talked to Muskie about this and I was upset. I told Muskie I was not a rubber stamp chairman. I would recommend my choice to the National Committee at a formal meeting and I would vigorously support my choice. Muskie had hoped, apparently, to make a deal with Hughes for his support of Muskie's candidacy, which would be a real plus from Ed's point of view because Hughes was allied with McGovern and was known widely as a co-reformer with him. If Ed Muskie could get his support it would make an impact. So Ed and I had words. My position was made clear and Ed's judgment was Hughes was the ideal choice.

G: I would have thought that Muskie would have opposed anyone that was pro-McGovern at this point.

O: It appeared that Muskie was in the process of weaning Hughes away from McGovern.

G: Really?

O: And the way to do it was to support him for this role, which Hughes was most anxious to secure. The quid pro quo would be the endorsement.

G: Would that have worked, do you think?

O: Well, he endorsed him.

G: So it did work.

O: For what value it was. But, in any event, immediately following that conversation, it was clear to me I had, as chairman, a larger stake, almost to the point that the chairmanship was on the line: support the chairman or oppose the chairman.

G: Was Pat Harris, likewise, aligned behind one candidate or another?

O: No, she was not. Pat Harris was a reluctant participant in this. She was an ardent Democrat, but she had not been involved with candidates, which was a plus. Furthermore, Jim O'Hara, as chairman of the Rules Committee and Don Fraser, as the then-current chairman of the McGovern commission, both agreed that Hughes should not be chairman of the Credentials Committee because it was a clear conflict of interest. The commission had established the rules. They were accepted. The commission in a sense legislated. Now the Credentials Committee was to be the judge and jury. Hughes did not belong in that role. I made a bigger issue of it than it probably was. But following the Muskie conversation, it became clear to me that this battle then had to be won. So I immediately put together a head count, assigned the hundred members of the national committee to various people and I took some of them myself. We proceeded one on one to lobby the national committee.

It became an intense struggle and did divert my attention from other matters I could have been working on. Prior to meeting, we had a luncheon. All the candidates would appear at the luncheon. That included Scoop Jackson, Muskie, Humphrey, McGovern and others. My recollection is that two or three, in their remarks, registered their support for Harold Hughes. Two or three others refrained from evidencing support for any candidate for chairman of the Credentials Committee. Meanwhile, Pat Harris became subject to pressure. She was pressured by Coleman Young, mayor of Detroit, and by a congresswoman from New York.

G: Was that Shirley Chisholm?

O: Shirley Chisholm.

G: What was their motivation?

O: They were strong supporters of Hughes and they were both black. They felt they could persuade Harris, a black, to drop out.

G: But did this have a tie in with the presidential contest? Were they behind one candidate or another?

O: Yes. They were behind McGovern. They didn't know Pat Harris. She resented very much the Chisholm call. She called me immediately and she was exercised about it. She told me she had told Shirley Chisholm she did not appreciate an attempt to pressure her. In fact, she resented it. The call had caused her to move from a position of non-involvement or basic disinterest. The agreement was she'd accept if elected but she'd never ask anyone to vote for her or engage in any politicking, which is exactly the role she played. Pat Harris was elected by a two to one vote in a tense meeting. Following the votes, people filed up to congratulate Pat, including Coleman Young. I overheard Pat say, "Oh, Mr. Young, we've never met before but aren't you the man that called me and tried to pressure me?" which was very embarrassing to Young. (Laughter)

G: What did he say?

O: He sort of smiled and quickly left. Pat Harris was a strong chairman. She was the perfect person, as it turned out, to chair the committee because it did become very controversial.

G: Had you anticipated this outcome?

O: You couldn't avoid it. The resentments were building. You were to have challenges from a number of states: Illinois and the challenge of the Cook County delegation brought against Daley's delegation by Jesse Jackson and others; the challenge to the California delegation, on the unit rule, which was the rule in California. The Humphrey people decided to challenge on the basis that there should be an allocation of delegates.

G: South Carolina was in there.

O: There were a number of states. There were several credentials challenges.

G: What I'm wondering is did you realize in advance that Pat Harris was going to win that selection as the credentials chairman?

O: When I first persuaded her to take it, I didn't envision an intense struggle. I felt she was ideal for the chairmanship. The problem with Pat Harris was to convince her to take it. Once she agreed to serve, you found yourself in a battle to see it through. That was the meaningful role I saw I could fulfill to bring some degree of balance to this process. I had not fulfilled my responsibility as chairman in the implementation of the McGovern commission guidelines. But I also felt that, as chairman, I should ensure there would be a strong Credentials chairman to consider all the protests that were bound to emanate. I didn't think Harold Hughes was that chairman because of his involvement in the

McGovern commission guidelines.

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O: So there were two very significant developments. One was the Credentials Committee's action regarding the California delegation. The Credentials Committee made a decision to allocate the delegates on the basis of the popular vote. That decision was then appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court chose rightly not to become involved in the matter. On procedure, this would be subject to a decision by the convention.

The Illinois or Cook County situation continued to be controversial. On the Sunday prior to the opening of the convention, I received a call from Mayor Daley. It was a low-key conversation in which Daley made clear to me that, with great reluctance, in the interest of the party, he would be willing to compromise with the McGovern people and split the delegation. I thought that was a very positive note. I believe Daley had accepted my role--I was an impartial chairman doing my best in the interest of the party without regard to candidates. He assumed that I would move his suggestion forward. I could not complement it. I did not have control over McGovern delegates or Jesse Jackson or anyone else. But I certainly was not violating impartiality by relaying to the McGovern people Daley's point of view. So I proceeded to contact George McGovern and simply related to McGovern my conversation with Daley.

G: Called McGovern on the phone?

O: Yes. That was obviously what Daley wanted me to do and that was fair enough. I told McGovern that if he were interested in the Daley proposal that he and/or his people should be in touch with Daley's people promptly. It was up to them. I left it with him and he was very enthusiastic about it. He thought it was an excellent idea, that it would go a long way toward containing the animosities that existed. I never heard another word. Whether McGovern was reacting to me in a pleasant manner, whether he was serious--and I think it was the latter--he was derailed by his advisers. It was clear within a day that no contact had been made and a decision therefore had been made by the McGovern people to sink Daley, which they proceeded to do.

On the California situation, I received a number of visits in my suite from supporters of the various candidates. I would have to make a decision, and it would be a parliamentary decision. What constituted a majority of the delegates in determining the California protest? Joe Califano and Jim O'Hara discussed this at great length. There were others in the discussion. Lee White was involved and perhaps Dick Neustadt. O'Hara and perhaps Joe Califano discussed this in detail with Lew Deschler, the parliamentarian of the House of Representatives.

G: Did you use the House in order to get some comparable procedure?

O: That's right. Lew was widely recognized as the pre-eminent parliamentarian in the

country. There was unanimity of opinion and it was obvious what the opinion would be. If there are 151 delegates in the California delegation and they are being challenged, obviously those delegates don't vote on their own challenge. That's step one. Step two is what represents a majority of those present and voting. There were 3,016 delegates at the convention. You eliminate 151 of them from this decision and rightly so. No one could quarrel about their lack of right to participate in the decision affecting their own situation. That meant there would be 2,865 delegates who would have a vote on this protest. And a majority would be 1,433.

G: A majority of those eligible to vote?

O: That's right, 1,433. The anti-McGovern people, which included everybody who was seeking the nomination other than McGovern, opposed the argument. They claimed that even though these 151 couldn't vote, nevertheless, you had to have a total of 3,016. It was hard to rationalize that. But believe it or not, this became a serious situation and no one knew whether McGovern had a majority of the whole. Everyone assumed he had the majority of the whole minus 151. There was that last hope he didn't have that majority.

G: You mentioned in your book the precedent or the example of the Supreme Court if there were only seven justices voting, that it would be a majority of those seven, or four.

O: That's right.

G: Did you have a precedent that you leaned on in this particular instance?

O: No, actually, it was common sense. People were totally exercised. The pressures on me were exerted by representatives of McGovern, Humphrey, everybody involved. Either the principals or representatives or both visited me during that forty-eight hour period. Hubert Humphrey visited me. Hubert, among all of them, did not attempt to pressure me. He said he knew that whatever decision I made would be based on an honest effort to be fair and impartial. And while he hoped for a certain decision, he would certainly accept whatever my decision was. That was typical of Hubert. But that didn't apply to some of his cohorts and it didn't apply to some of Scoop Jackson's friends and others. So when the decision was made that a majority of those present and voting would make the determination, all hell broke loose. There were rumors that I was going to be ousted as chairman, all kinds of things were going to happen. Max Kampelmann was in the leadership of that effort.

Meanwhile, I heard nothing from Hubert. There were no indications of Hubert being a participant in this. I made the decision, the vote was taken and the end result was the obvious one. The convention decided to adhere to the winner-take-all procedures that were historically in place and were in place in that primary.

G: You did describe in your book a pool game with Humphrey before this--

O: Yes, in this suite, this obscene suite in the Fontainbleau Hotel, to which I was assigned.

G: Why do you call it obscene?

O: It was Miami art deco and included the billiard room. Hubert at no time during that conversation attempted to persuade me. He wanted to assure me he felt comfortable because he knew that I would be properly motivated. So we proceeded to the billiard room. Hubert and I played two or three games of pool and had a lot of fun. That was the end of that meeting with Hubert.

The McGovern people had done their homework. They arrived in Miami and they had the nomination. The effort to derail McGovern at the last moment was somewhat reminiscent of the last fleeting moments prior to that first ballot in Los Angeles in 1960 with the Johnson people and others. There were a number of candidates and a degree of unity among them at the moment. They didn't know where they were going if they succeeded in the first step, to stop Kennedy. If they could stop McGovern, then they'd see what would happen. In the case of Kennedy and the case of McGovern, the end result reflected the intensity of the effort that had been expended over a period of a couple of years. It reflected the ability of these people to extend themselves beyond the norm. They were not to be deterred.

Ed Muskie, who had withdrawn as a candidate following the incident in New Hampshire, was still very much in his own mind a candidate.Muskie contacted me and asked that I host a meeting of all the candidates in my suite to see if they could reach some understanding, I guess aimed at trying to open the convention and trying to--

G: When was this? When did they--?

O: This was shortly before the opening of the convention.

G: Is that right?

O: Yes. So, a telegram went forward to everyone imaginable that could be construed as a candidate, actual or potential. I arranged the time of the meeting to include lunch. I had our people provide sandwiches in my suite. The guests began to appear. What you knew was going to take place did take place. There was one absentee.

G: McGovern?

O: McGovern.

(Laughter)

So we sat there for quite a while, small talk and chit chat. A considerable length of time elapsed and it became clear that McGovern was not going to appear. As a matter of fact,

there was a phone call from McGovern. He regretted deeply, due to his heavy schedule, he would be unable to be present. You can envision the climate or atmosphere in the room. Somebody said, "Well, I guess there's only one thing to do. Let's eat the sandwiches."

G: What was Muskie's motivation in it?

O: The general motivation would be: is there something you can do to keep this convention open? It brought to mind, as I sat with my guests, the 1960 last-minute efforts to stop Kennedy. This was a stop-McGovern meeting. Why Ed felt McGovern would join that meeting I don't know. Envision the clear front runner who had a lock on the nomination saying, "I regret this. Let's start all over again." It wasn't a meeting that McGovern had any interest in attending.

G: Was [George] Wallace there?

O: No.

G: Had he been invited?

O: I don't recall but I assume so. My role was to extend the invitations. All Muskie asked me to do was host the meeting. That was an appropriate location for the meeting. I was chairman of the convention.

The Wallace situation was obviously a difficult one from the beginning.

G: Excuse me. I don't want to get you away from the meeting itself, but was there substantive discussion about stopping McGovern?

O: There was no discussion.

G: No discussion. Even small talk?

O: Just small talk. There was nothing meaningful. It was a group of fellows trying to carry on a conversation that probably went to the weather. There was no purpose whatsoever unless Mr. McGovern appeared.

G: Who else was there?

O: Terry Sanford, who was a peripheral candidate. It included Jackson, Humphrey, Muskie, and there might have been others. I don't recall.

G: Was [John] Lindsay there or was he completely--?

O: I don't believe Lindsay was there. A telegram went out immediately when Muskie made

the request so that due notification was given. I wasn't placing any limits on the meeting. I was not going to chair the meeting, although I had a feeling Muskie felt he could move me into that role. It was a side bar--an indication of the extremes people go to. You try to latch onto any angle that might have the desired effect.

The Wallace situation from the outset was troublesome. As this unfolded, I remember Florida, Michigan, and there were others, where he was showing strength. I was reluctant to include Wallace as a legitimate candidate because I was extremely fearful that Wallace would be a third-party candidate. It became controversial. There were articles in the southern press that I was mistreating Wallace, that I was causing harm to party unity in November in the South. As Wallace in some primaries showed strength, it became clear to me that on a roster of candidates, Wallace would have to be included. The problem was I did not ask any candidate for a pledge to adhere to the result of the convention. That was simply that a candidate seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party would not leave the convention and support any other candidate. A fellow could leave and remain mute. I demanded that of Wallace and I thought rightly, because Wallace had a record of being a third-party candidate. He was unique in terms of the candidates and I would not consider him a legitimate candidate for the nomination unless he publicly stated he would not support any candidate other than the nominee.

G: Was there any reason not to have the other candidates make the same kind of pledge?

O: I didn't consider that necessary as there had never been any deviation from the party. Wallace was unique in that regard. I received a request from Wallace asking for housing for his people at the convention. I granted the housing. I found no support within the party for any effort to oust Wallace from the party. In fact, I found no indications of any stop-McGovern move through the course of the primaries and caucuses. Nor was there any indication of any organized attempt to bar Wallace from the proceedings.

G: Did you ever talk to Wallace about this issue of party loyalty during this period?

O: That was formally transmitted to him and he formally responded and accepted the provision, probably to the surprise of some. It was a clear indication that Wallace did not intend to pursue his 1968 course after Miami. He could, but it would have been extremely difficult for him to make that commitment and then proceed to do otherwise. That lessened the tensions to a great extent. There were those who said that I put Wallace's people in a poor hotel. The fact was that by the time he asked for space we had difficulty finding space, but we did. It was then my decision to have Wallace appear at the convention. He had made a request to appear and I decided I would put him on the schedule.

After the attempted assassination took place, Wallace was in a hospital in nearby Washington. I thought it was appropriate for me to pay a visit to Wallace in the hospital. No party official or party leader had visited Wallace. But I did. It was a personal decision. I felt it was appropriate. It was the right thing to do. It had no political

significance. I went and his wife [Cornelia] was obviously very pleased that I came. I had to wait a short time as he was being examined by the doctors and I visited with her in the waiting room. Then she brought me in to George. He was propped up in the bed. We shook hands and chatted for several minutes. In fact, he was in pretty good spirits, amazingly so. It was clear, because he thanked me several times for coming, that he appreciated this gesture. Interestingly, following my visit, a number of party leaders visited George Wallace.

G: What did you and Wallace talk about?

O: He discussed how he felt he was coming along, how appreciative he was that I had come. It was a simple visit. No in-depth discussion on any matter.

G: Was there any discussion of the Kennedy assassinations?

O: No. I was a little taken aback in the sense that I didn't know what to anticipate. Mrs. Wallace seemed pleased that I was there. The doctors did say they wanted the visit to be brief. They indicated he was strong enough to see this through. Indeed he was.

At the convention, the podium contained an elevator. Not for Wallace. It was part of the structure, so you could move from a lower level to the podium. Wallace arrived by helicopter. He was brought in onto the elevator in the wheel chair and the podium was set up so he could speak directly into the microphones. He gave a speech which was not adverse to anyone and it went very well.

G: It's hard to imagine this convention delegation being a Wallace crowd.

(Laughter)

O: They were receptive. There was some concern on my part as to what crowd reaction there would be, but everyone acted appropriately. He was greeted cordially and with reasonable applause. His speech was well accepted. He did not get into controversies that would arouse the convention. It went smoothly.

G: The press accounts at the time, some of them, suggested that you, through the loyalty requirement, were trying to read Wallace out of the Democratic Party and you responded you were trying to read him into the party.

O: That's right.

G: Did you shift in your attitude toward Wallace as he picked up delegate strength?

O: I believe so. At the early stage there was no action on my part or need for action. Wallace was doing his thing. But as this unfolded, Wallace was showing strength in primaries. You were moving past the point where you could validly claim he wasn't as

serious a candidate as several others.

I anticipated there might be some effort to block Wallace from participation, that he should be drummed out of the party officially. None of that occurred. Meanwhile, Wallace was showing considerable strength. Again, in my role, what could be done in the interest of harmony? Have Wallace under the tent; don't drum him out of the party. I said at that time, drum him into the party. The obvious test would come with my demand he adhere to this provision. If he didn't, I was faced with an extremely difficult situation. I, frankly, don't know how I would have played that out.

But the fact is, somewhat to my surprise, he came forward without reservation. I had occasion to send a detailed letter to a senator from Alabama, who had accused me of trying to drum Wallace out of the party. I closed the letter by saying, "The following is the requisite and I believe this is something you should take up with George Wallace. This is not a decision I will be making. He will be making it." Whether it was a result of that letter or it unfolded at a later date, I know that by the time Wallace appeared at that convention, he was not the disruptive force that had been envisioned.

G: Was his strength, let's say particularly in Michigan, a foreshadowing of what would happen in November, do you think?

O: I think so.

G: Did you view that with alarm?

O: Yes, I did. Wallace as a third-party candidate in 1968 in a sense was helpful to Humphrey in some ares, as we know; Texas is a good example. But we are going into the 1972 convention and Wallace is showing, to an extent, the strength he had in 1968. That support for Wallace in Michigan was an indication the so-called blue-collar vote support was still retained by Wallace. This certainly indicated that if McGovern were the nominee, it would be hard for me to envision these Wallace supporters supporting McGovern. And of course, they didn't.

G: You started in 1972, the Democratic Party, with a 9.3 million dollar debt from 1968, really. What did this debt represent to the party in the seventies? How much of a handicap was it? Did it keep you from--?

O: It was a serious handicap. When I returned as chairman in early 1970, Bob Strauss agreed to become treasurer and we would work together. Bob and I had all we could do from that early period of 1970 through the convention in 1972 to keep the Democratic National Committee's head above water financially. It was a terrible drag. We had no illusions about our ability to significantly reduce the nine-million-plus debt. We would have all we could do to maintain an active national committee and fulfill our obligations through the convention. The national committee, of course, has the total responsibility for the conduct of the convention.

All the activities that I engaged in as chairman, all the attacks on the Nixon Administration, all the efforts for equal time, all we've discussed, were not costly. Those are areas you could be extremely active in without incurring additional debt. So within those financial restrictions, I did everything I could to be an aggressive, vigorous, hard-driving chairman. This ultimately caused Watergate. Throughout, Bob just devoted every effort to the financial side. I must say he did an outstanding job under difficult circumstances. We reached the point where John Y. Brown entered the picture. John talked to Bob on several occasions and advocated a telethon to raise money for the national committee. There was no record of a network's willingness to participate in selling time for a telethon for political fund raising. It was unprecedented.

G: Wouldn't it have been terribly expensive?

O: Bob and I discussed it and we felt it was not realistic. But we decided that because of John's enthusiasm, we'd suggest to him he pursue it on his own. If he were successful in persuading a network to sell the time, he would be willing personally to pay for the time, which was a million dollars. We would go forward with the telethon, with the understanding that John had first in first out on the million dollars. He would be made whole, not anticipating this would ever occur.

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O: Well, to John's credit, he continued the pursuit and, to our amazement, arrived one day with a commitment from a network, and it was a million- dollar commitment. We would now go forward with the telethon. We would tie it to the convention proceedings and have it emanate from Los Angeles and Miami--from Los Angeles to secure, hopefully, top celebrities, and from Miami, for those on the scene. John then undertook to promote the telethon, traveling the country. It became to some degree a self promotion. John was doing the promotions, appearing around the country.

Meanwhile, we were able to persuade David Wolper to undertake the production of the show. Well, it was John's show as he saw it, not only as a fund raiser for the Democratic National Committee but the actual production of the show. So John based himself in Hollywood and proceeded to undertake the lining up of stars. Wolper was a volunteer, willing to devote his time with his staff to production. It finally came to a head in my apartment in New York, where Wolper, John Y. Brown, Bob Strauss and I met. John was reluctant to come to New York for the meeting, protesting that he was so busy on the promotion. I told him it was imperative he be at the meeting. We let our hair down. I made the flat statement that David Wolper would handle all aspects of the production of the show and he, John Y. Brown, would have to defer to Wolper in that regard. John didn't like it. He felt this was his show; it was his million dollars up front and that was true. On the other hand, it was clear to me that David Wolper was leaving us. He was not going forward and John was not qualified to produce a nationally televised show. Wolper was. So we finally resolved it. John, with great reluctance,

agreed he would back off that phase of the telethon. Wolper would proceed as planned. It was his show.

The telethon, I think, resulted in pledges of over two million dollars.

G: And it cost a million dollars in terms of--?

O: Yes, and there were some other expenses.

G: But it was, would you say, profitable?

O: We netted about a million dollars from the show. In terms of telethons subsequently, that was not very impressive. But, in our terms, it was extremely helpful as we went into the convention. We had negotiated the best deal we could with the people in Miami. With the money and the goods and services they produced, we still needed significant money to see the convention through. Of course that's no longer the case today. We have government contributions of millions of dollars to each party to aid them in conducting conventions. Then you had nothing but whatever you could produce to conduct that convention.

G: One of the points, I guess, that the network raised was how many affiliates would actually carry the telethon. Did you ever get a reading on how widely disseminated the broadcast was?

O: There was some fall off, but we had a substantial number of stations that carried it, a hundred twenty-five or more across the country. That worked out quite well.

The problem was that Bob and I and the staff had to be involved with the telethon along with the other planning aspects. But the seriousness of our financial situation is underscored by what occurred up to the closing of the convention. We had made provisions, which were typical of conventions, for gifts to distinguished guests. We were to have duplicate gavels. We ordered twenty or so watches to be suitably engraved. We had to provide for music. All of these are normal, widely accepted practices. We had trailers outside the hall. The million dollars derived from the telethon was extremely helpful.

The convention itself extended and extended. When the nominating process was completed, it was time for McGovern to give his acceptance speech. We were faulted for having his acceptance speech in the wee hours. The fact is, we didn't have the financial resources to continue the convention for another day. We could not defray the additional costs. I had Dick Murphy, the convention manager, pleading with the orchestra to stay on. We didn't have the money on hand to pay them for the additional hours. We had a sheriff serving a subpoena on the podium for nonpayment for the watches. We didn't have a penny. We couldn't carry the convention any further. They would have closed the doors on us.

G: The alternative would have been to try to speed up the proceedings so that McGovern could have spoken at a reasonable hour that night. You had a lot of--

O: That was not an alternative because there were a number of candidates placed in nomination for vice president.

G: Right. There was a big dispute in New York, too, about their own regulations or delegate process or something.

O: Yes, there were disputes.

G: Did you get involved in them? Did you try to accelerate the proceedings so that McGovern wouldn't be speaking on--?

O: We tried desperately to.

G: Tell me about that. Go into that whole scenario.

O: I could not close out the nominations because delegates have a right to petition the chair, to place a person's name in nomination. It was endless. I was desperate to close it out. But there wasn't any way. The roll calls were lengthy. This was an open process. We have this electronic equipment to handle the roll calls. On the last roll call, I gave the figures before the roll call had been completed in order to stop it. It was unfortunate for McGovern. But I must say those who contributed to this were his own people.

G: Is that right?

O: The McGovernites wound up vying among themselves for prominence.

G: Did McGovern himself or his key campaign people make any attempt to speed it up so that he could speak at a reasonable [hour]?

O: You were faced with people who couldn't care less. They were going to have their moment in the sun. From the outset, platform debate and motions offered caused considerable delay. At the end of all this and you finally had a nominee for president and vice president, available time had elapsed.

G: What about the New York haggling, the New York delegations; did you make any effort there to--?

O: This convention, incidentally, turned out to be far less rancorous than Chicago. We had wondered about what might occur. We devoted an inordinate amount of time to the security side. We also had the Watergate aspect. There was a group that--

G: National Welfare Rights Organization?

O: That's right. Supposedly, that was an umbrella group. The closest we came to any serious disturbance was caused by that group. I recall we were meeting with the Arrangements Committee. This would be the closing meeting of the Arrangements Committee. In the midst of that meeting, in a ballroom of the hotel, there was a commotion outside. We had security at the doors and suddenly the doors--they were large, double doors--burst open and the security guards were pushed aside. In came this group of a hundred or so people led by Ralph Abernathy and the largest woman I've ever seen.

(Laughter)

They were roaring and they circulated. The security guards recovered. The meeting was totally disrupted and the security guards hustled me out a side door, to an elevator and up to my suite. In the suite I asked, "What are we doing? The guards explained that was their job. I thought a moment and said, "I can't tolerate this." So I went back down.

By the time I arrived in the room, Abernathy was at the microphone. I went up to the podium and interrupted Abernathy and the howling started again. He did step aside. I said I would give Abernathy a chance to finish his little speech as long as it was brief, provided they agreed they would leave the room accordingly and they did. However, he finished his speech by making all kinds of demands for passes, just what you'd expect.But I must say they left. We then reconvened the committee and finished our business. And that was the extent of that.

G: What did the committee agree to do in terms of meeting or not meeting their agreement?

O: There was no agreement. We would see what we could do and that's exactly what we did. We saw what we could do, which was minimal. And that brings me the New York delegation. I must say when you think of all that occurred, the fight over the Credentials Committee, the protest on seating delegates, the parliamentary decision on a majority of those present and voting regarding the California delegation, it was amazing that there wasn't more conflict or controversy or disturbance, in or out of the convention hall. What was disturbing was not a disturbance. The percentage of first-time delegates had to be extremely high, probably 70 or more per cent. They wanted to be full participants. Chairing a convention is not an easy task at best. They were verbose and there were nitpicking discussions that delayed the schedule. That was the disturbing factor. But as for problems such as in Chicago, there weren't any.

I learned later the Abernathy group was grievously disappointed in what Murphy was able to provide them in the gallery. But they didn't cause further commotion. The reason I learned about it was some New York delegates gave their credentials to Abernathy and his friends. A number of them were seated in the New York delegation.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about the campaign debt left over from 1968. I have a note here that AT&T was owed a large amount of money. Did this affect your communications?

O: In those days, there was a tendency on the part of large corporations like AT&T and American Airlines to allow you to incur a great deal of debt. Indeed, in a campaign there were numerous negotiations later on for relatively small percentages of the debt, to clean it up. That has changed over the years.

People submitted bills, including some who had done yeoman work, fellows like Neustadt and a couple of speech writers and others who had incurred expenses. There was some ill feeling created after the convention because of our failure to fully pay some of these expenses. There should have been no question. But Bob Strauss felt he was totally strapped, I guess. Some of this was left unfinished.

G: But until you got to the convention itself, was there ever a question of not being extended credit?

O: Not that I remember, nor was there ever a time when we failed to meet the payroll. In fact, we expanded the staff after I went back. I added a few key people, and we were able to function. We would have the occasional creditor making demands on us. We had to be pretty cold-blooded about it. This was debt that had been incurred over a long period of time. It had grown considerably in the one year of Fred Harris. And we inherited it. It was nine million dollars and you could not function with any degree of competency while trying to defray past debt. We handled our current costs without a great problem up to the convention. That is to Bob's credit.

G: We have, in your papers, a listing of the Democratic Policy Council. What did the policy council do?

O: They engaged in issues-oriented activities. It was a prestigious group. They functioned occasionally to come up with a policy position, issue press releases. That's about it. It was not an entity that impacted greatly on the party.

Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia suggested that I had misled him concerning my feelings about the South. I took the occasion to straighten him out in that regard, pointing out that I didn't feel I had misled anyone at any time on any subject. Apparently, he was referring to an interview in the ***Atlanta Constitution*** in which the writer speculated far beyond the scope of my conversation with him. I gather the crux of this was that he felt we were not focusing appropriately on returning the South to the Democratic Party.

G: What did you see as a potential for the South in--?

O: In evaluating the party at that time and the Wallace problem that existed, you would have to be an utter fool not to realize you would fail in November without significant southern

support. But there was a sensitivity on the part of some southerners. They felt the party had written them off, was not making an effort to re-enlist their support. And I gather this from the tone of my letter, where I review my selection of Ruben Askew to deliver the keynote address and I emphasize my insistence that I want to be chairman of a national party. I point out I felt the record over those two years indicated our keen interest in a unified party and our total understanding of the importance of the South if this was to be accomplished. Beyond that, I don't know what the content was of his note, but then he responded to my letter in which he said,

> I appreciated your letter and certainly did not mean to imply that you had misled me. Your goals and mine are in unison. However, it hurts us Democrats in the South to have our leaders insinuate that our nominee might be wasting his time to campaign down here. I still remember the results of 1960 when your candidate worked in my state. We gave him his biggest victory. I could see clearly the difficulties they had but they can very well be minimized by changing alignments I want to avoid. . ."

I don't know, I can't quite read it. "The continual exchange of information and ideas among us can be of great help. Thank you." I think that was the extent of it. He was governor of Georgia at that time and it's interesting that he chose a handwritten note in response to the letter.

G: Carter would emerge as the next presidential nominee to the party. Did he play a significant role in 1972?

O: He played some role. He was somewhat involved in convention proceedings and he had an interest in his own possibilities on the ticket. I believe he made his availability known in terms of the vice presidency. How vigorously he pursued it, I'm not aware. I was not privy to McGovern's activities in the selection process. But Jimmy Carter was anxious to explore the possibility of national recognition and the word was loud and clear he was interested in being on the ticket. You would think, as the governor of Georgia and recognizing that the candidate was faced with perhaps disastrous defeat, he would forego being a party to that defeat.

But that wasn't the case because that wasn't the nature of Jimmy Carter. Jimmy Carter, as we all know, started from scratch and became president of the United States. He was not reluctant to take on what appeared to be impossible tasks. That would explain the interest he showed in the vice presidency in 1972.

G: Yes. In mid-February you went to New Hampshire for the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. Can you recall that trip? You had a lot of the major players there from George McGovern to Sam Yorty.

O: I recall it in terms of an incident. This was a function rather typical of New Hampshire and Iowa. Several of the potential candidates were present. There was a dinner and these candidates were afforded the opportunity to speak briefly. They were seated on a stage.

Sam Yorty pushed his chair back and fell off on the rear of the stage at some point in the proceedings. That was probably the highlight or the lowlight of the evening.

(Laughter)

G: He was unhurt, right?

O: Yes, he was unhurt.

G: Muskie's campaign stumbled in New Hampshire.

O: His campaign naturally flowed from the reputation he achieved in 1968. The aftermath of 1968 defeat was a recognition across the country of the caliber of Ed Muskie. He had performed exceedingly well in that campaign as we've recounted. In the early stages, leading into 1972, he was widely recognized as a significant candidate. In fact, there was a stage where he was considered the front runner. In the context of Watergate, there was a focus on Muskie by the Nixon people, including efforts regarding his headquarters. As time went on, they left the Muskie effort and moved over to a McGovern effort.

They still occasionally write about and talk about Muskie's appearance before the ***Manchester Union Leader*** building when supposedly he broke down, defending his wife against the attacks of the newspaper. There's no paper in America, perhaps, as vicious as the ***Manchester Union Leader***. [William] Loeb, in his heyday, and Mrs. Loeb still run that paper. They were difficult when we were in New Hampshire in 1960. The Democrats were castigated consistently by the ***Union Leader***. Ed Muskie as a front runner was being particularly maligned by the ***Union Leader***. Whether it was the cold, the snow falling or emotions, it had a tremendous impact on his candidacy in a negative sense. It was grossly unfair for the press to interpret what occurred that day in that way. Nevertheless, they did and it was very harmful to him.

G: Would Muskie have been a contender had it not been for that effort?

O: I believe so. There are contenders and contenders every four years. Muskie at that time would not be categorized as a contender. He would be categorized as a serious contender, and rightly so. The time frame of his departure from the campaign re: the ***Manchester Union Leader*** incident, I don't recall. But, clearly, that did create a story that was repeated and embellished on as time went on. It caused him difficulties and obviously had a great impact on his ultimate decision. But as I pointed out earlier, Muskie never really left the campaign. And as the files indicate, he was the instigator, if you will, of the meeting that was attempted among the candidates and he included himself among those candidates, even though at that time he was not an avowed candidate. The flicker of hope remained.

G: Yes. How would you assess John Lindsay's candidacy?

O: I didn't give that much credence. I became acquainted with him initially when he was a member of Congress. He was a moderate Republican or indeed a liberal Republican. He voted with us on a number of occasions. He became mayor of New York. He engaged in negotiations with the unions in New York, creating a very favorable pro-union position. He apparently felt this would ingratiate him with the national unions. That would stand him in good stead as a candidate for the presidency. My recollection of Lindsay as a candidate probably can be summarized by an experience I had with him when I was touring northern California, primarily San Francisco. I was chairman and I was making these various appearances during the day, starting with the press conference in the morning. I was surprised to find Lindsay standing beside me at the press conference and then appearing at two or three other functions I was participating in that day. He chose these various functions I was engaged in as appearances to include him.

G: You've talked about Wallace. How about Scoop Jackson?

O: I had little contact with Scoop during that period. He was on his own course. He was a fellow who had played a prominent role back to 1960, when he was designated by Kennedy as national chairman after he was not selected for the vice presidency. Scoop's people were very disturbed with my decision at the convention regarding the California delegation contest.

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O: That was made known to me by one of his associates. I believe his associates did engage in some discussions regarding me with representatives of other candidates who were similarly disturbed with my decision and felt that I should pay a price for it.

Nothing surfaced in that regard and I had no direct contact with Scoop of a meaningful nature that I can recall. I believe I recall correctly that he was at the aborted luncheon meeting in my suite that Ed Muskie had requested.

G: In terms of the primaries, was there, as far as you were concerned, a turning point? Wisconsin or California?

O: I think perhaps California was, because there was the direct confrontation between McGovern and Humphrey. It was a highly publicized primary. There was a great deal of effort; the obvious effort by the McGovern people, and the Humphrey effort was extensive. California was, if not the first occasion, one occasion when it came to my attention that Humphrey was showing some organizational grass-roots effort. The result was close. But there again, if Humphrey had prevailed in the California primary, it probably would have changed the course of events. But he didn't and even though it was a close margin, the steam-roller kept going. That was where Humphrey made a stand. So probably, if you could point to a turning point, that California primary probably was it.

G: Did Ted Kennedy ever seriously consider entering the race in 1972?

O: Not to my knowledge. As a matter of fact, I don't recall a Ted Kennedy presence. It was assumed, despite his denials or indications of disinterest from time to time, he would surface. That was the assumption I made.

(Interruption)

G: --negotiations?

O: On the vice presidential selection from day one, it was McGovern's desire and dream that Kennedy join him on the ticket. None of this involved me directly, nor should it in my role as chairman. But I was given to understand that repeated efforts were made to accomplish this. There were others who were involved. There was some promotion of Kevin White, who was mayor of Boston, for running. And there were others. But what I knew was secondhand. The people who seemed to be the closest advisers to McGovern throughout were [Gary] Hart, [Frank] Mankiewicz and perhaps three or four others. But I'm not familiar with the [Thomas] Eagleton selection and how it unfolded.

G: In order to implement the campaign reforms and to inform I guess the local Democratic machinery on how to conform with the reforms, you sent out the actual how-to-do-it kits, instructing delegates. Can you describe these?

O: It was purely informational. It was part of the effort to advise and educate. You detected throughout this process a lack of attention being directed to the reforms on the part of party activists who were not part of the McGovern group, in other words, regulars. It was a combination of disinterest and an assumption this would go away and that the old practices would be accepted in the final analysis. You could envision a point where complaints piled up and frustrations ensued. It was conceivable that the DNC would be faulted, that we failed to fully advise.

So our effort was to spell out the procedure and the requirements needed to comply. There were those who attempted to balance their slates in self defense or in anticipation they might be challenged. That was the motivation more than any real desire to have balanced slates. It's the old story of those who work harder and longer. . . . And they had the vehicle to work with. McGovern was nominated by the Democratic Party to an extent because he was head of the McGovern commission. He was the reform candidate of the new era of the Democratic Party.

G: There was an agreement among the seven contenders to limit campaign spending.

O: Yes, that went back to the dinner meeting in my apartment. To my surprise, there was broad compliance. Some assumed this proposal was rhetoric. It was a good press release. But the fact is, it was adhered to across the board. It turned out to be worthwhile.

G: There was also an effort to have federal financing.

O: Well, that was off-again, on-again. That went back to the Kennedy period.

G: Nixon threatened to veto the proposal and you criticized his action.

O: Yes, and we had problems with our people in the Congress. The federal financing effective date was beyond the 1972 election. It was such a long struggle and I was wedded to this struggle. I was convinced that in terms of the democratic process it resulted in one man, one vote, one dollar. As unsettling as it was to have the effective date moved farther ahead, the fact that there would be federal financing was most pleasing.

It's worthwhile to mention McGovern's financing of his campaign. Maybe I'm jumping ahead, but in the context of lack of federal financing, the highlight of the McGovern campaign was the fund raising. There was a tremendous number of small givers across the country. It was somewhat comparable to the Goldwater situation in 1964. Goldwater and McGovern had enthusiastic, deep-rooted support that unfortunately for both of them was not broad-based. Those supporters of Barry Goldwater were committed. That resulted in grass-roots funding for Barry Goldwater that was spearheaded by Ronald Reagan. And the McGovern period was the same. You had the right with Goldwater and the left with McGovern. But in that dilapidated campaign headquarters, where I spent some of the worst weeks of my life, the flood of mail every day--thousands and thousands of letters with contributions of ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five dollars, an occasional hundred dollars--was nothing short of phenomenal. The devastating defeat of McGovern could not be attributed to lack of reasonable financing. It was not comparable to 1968 when Hubert Humphrey could have probably prevailed if he had been appropriately financed. McGovern did not have that problem, not that he was rolling in money or that he could match the Republicans; no Democratic ever can. But he certainly elicited deep commitment as well as pocketbook assistance from thousands of supporters. However, they had but one vote each.

G: Yes. McGovern also appears to have, in effect, done some fund raising for the Republicans in that they would utilize some of his economic ideas as almost a scare tactic.

O: That's right. In fact, it was a scare tactic and was effective. And I must say, he aided the whole process.

G: Did you make any effort to put these statements in a favorable context or cut your losses?

O: Some of the comments, particularly the one about the so-called thousand dollars per person "grant" was a shocker. Meanwhile, I was attempting to focus the McGovern campaign on Watergate without any success.

G: Yes. Even before the break-in in the convention, you were jousting with the Nixon Administration in the early part of that year, attacking various statements or actions of the

Nixon White House.

O: I tried to seize every opportunity. Some of it was not very effective because Nixon had Russia and China during that period, both of them pluses. I finally resorted to wishing him well on his negotiations with China. My most effective attacks on Nixon really went to his conduct of the office. The exposure of ITT [International Telephone and Telegraph] was really troublesome to them, not to the nation, not to the press, but to them and for good reason. I had really touched a nerve. This was a scandal of the first dimension and the press chose to ignore it as they ignored Watergate later. I was absolutely sure I was on the right track. I had figured these people for what they were. And because of those attacks, I became their mortal enemy.

G: Let me ask you to go into the ITT case and how you became aware of it.

O: It was brought to my attention that ITT was to acquire the Hartford Insurance Company and must have Justice Department approval. In the course of these deliberations in Justice, the ITT made a commitment of four hundred thousand dollars through a hotel they owned in San Diego for the Republican convention, which had been set for San Diego. The Hartford insurance situation smelled to high heaven and it is hard to believe there wasn't a full-blown exposure at that time, not just the lone voice from the DNC. There was one columnist, Jack Anderson, who focused on the Dita Beard aspect of it.

During that time you had no foreign policy issues that could impact. On the domestic side there were problems, and we were trying to spotlight them with limited success. The Democratic candidates were busy campaigning among themselves.

G: Were you getting advice or information from the Justice Department or where?

O: No.

G: On something like this you must have gotten some tips from someone who was privy to--

O: We did a lot of our own research.

G: Did you?

O: Yes. You didn't have to be awfully bright to spot that there was four hundred thousand dollars involved in San Diego re: ITT. Coinciding with that was the approaching decision regarding ITT-Hartford Insurance. A cursory review of the records and some research brought you to obvious conclusions. I must say you had little evidence to prove your case. But you have an assistant attorney general conveniently in Europe when you make inquiries about ITT and you're told he will respond when he returns. Almost in the blink of an eye he is named a federal judge in Chicago. Regarding ITT, he makes a statement that as assistant attorney general he could testify without reservation that John Mitchell and [Richard] Kleindienst knew nothing about ITT and Hartford Insurance. It was just an

absolute disgrace. Yet it was pulled off. But at a later date of course it was all exposed.

G: Do you feel that the ITT thing helped focus the Nixon Administration's operations on you as a target?

O: There's no question about it. There were other things. A review of the Nixon files certainly proves that back to the battle for equal time, my regular attacks caused focus on me. I made these attacks on the administration's policy and its record, its failures as I saw them, at no financial cost. These were areas you could apply yourself to and not be inhibited by financial restrictions. I built a record in the White House of being a pluperfect s.o.b. The record shows that that's exactly the position I was in in the White House. There were two targets throughout 1971, 1972: Larry O'Brien and the front runner of the Democratic Party, for a period Muskie and later McGovern. The objective was to destroy.

G: You ended up as chairman of the convention, temporary chairman and permanent chairman. Let me ask you to describe this arrangement.

O: As you develop plans for the convention, one of the charges is to designate those who will fill key roles. The party chairman is chairman of the convention until a permanent chairman is selected. You have a keynoter and the assignment of members of various committees of the convention, i.e., Arrangements Committee, with concurrence by the DNC. That is all part of the arrangements. A key was permanent chairman and I gave that a great deal of thought.

But there were some members of the United States Senate who I talked to regarding roles they might play in the convention. And in each instance, my suggestion was turned down. I found that no one on the Hill or in statehouses around the country had any interest in a significant role in the 1972 convention. In terms of permanent chairman I tried to persuade Carl Albert, who had had the role, I believe in 1968. I'll never forget one conversation I had with him. He chose, when I brought up the subject, to assume I was engaging in humor. He didn't take it seriously. Finally he realized I was serious. In fact, I was rather desperate. Carl Albert to me was the answer to my problem. By the time we finished that discussion, it was clear to me that Carl Albert was not going to take that gavel under any circumstances. It was in that session that he had a specific suggestion. His suggestion was I be permanent chairman. He thought I was the best choice. In turn, I thought that I was having my leg pulled a little bit by Carl. Carl chose also to publicly state his preference for permanent chairman at some point.

I gave up the ghost. You were not going to get people involved. Jim O'Hara was unusual in that regard. He didn't feel inhibited. But the rest were not interested in being involved. Many of them were turned off by the reforms. Many of them were not going to be at the convention; they were not going to be delegates, they weren't going to be in Miami. The end result was that I took on a dual role; that was a first.

G: Again, going back to the fight over credentials, the seating of delegates. What was Daley's reaction to the Illinois delegation? His delegations not being seated?

O: Bitter.

G: Was he? Did you talk to him after that?

O: I don't believe I had the occasion because shortly, I was no longer chairman. The McGovernites embarrassed, indeed maligned Dick Daley publicly at the convention.Then the nominee, within days, rushed to Chicago to embrace Daley and almost with tears in his eyes, pleaded with Daley to be active in his behalf. I can't recall anything quite as inane in terms of political operation. Daley supported McGovern. So did I. So did a lot of Democrats. We didn't do what some of our Democratic friends did to Hubert Humphrey in 1968. We supported them, but could you envision Dick Daley aggressively working on behalf of George McGovern after what happened in Miami? You can't do that to someone and expect him to say, "Oh sure George, I love you. I won't sleep between now and election day working on your behalf." Of course Daley didn't say, "Don't vote for George McGovern," or anything like that. But his heart couldn't have been there.

G: In terms of the California vote and the whole issue of sustaining the decision or in this case securing their own vote, their own winner-take-all delegation in California: the McGovern campaign apparently had devised a strategy of not bringing any challenges to the floor on any questions until California, making that one the first one while they were at full strength. And as a result, some other delegate challenges like South Carolina were not advanced and they ended up in a position of siding with the opposition on these preliminary matters. And I assume that the opposition understood this strategy and was pushing the other way?

O: That's right.

G: Let me ask you to describe this whole process.

O: You had the gavel and you're going to treat everyone fairly. You're going to recognize without prearrangement. The strategy is divorced from the chair. I remember in the vice presidency in Los Angeles. We did enlist support in the sense that as the roll call flowed, a person was designated to move to make it unanimous. No one enlisted me to become a part of any strategy in any aspect of this.

The strategy developed by the McGovern people was appropriate from their point of view. It was to put the focus on California. They had two objectives in mind. One, ensure they were at maximum strength in the California vote and they prevailed rather easily. The other, which was asinine, was to ensure they kicked Dick Daley out of the convention without any thought to the next day and what you do about Illinois and Cook County.

I was not directly involved. I had no unusual request for recognition. This played out in a normal manner; keep the convention moving, have all sides of an issue fully explored and then call the roll.

G: Anything in particular on South Carolina?

O: I don't recall anything in particular.

I think the California test at that convention, when you weigh the parliamentary procedure and consider how far they were reaching to suggest a vote that would require a majority including those in contest, can only be described as desperation. It doesn't hold up when you evaluate and analyze it. Was there some other action that could have been considered in a stop-McGovern effort? The opposition chose this and they grasped a very weak reed.

So it's like anything that fails: losers aren't very rational. You can't say to them, "How could you anticipate the decision would be other than it was?" The reaction is, "That s.o.b., he really gave it to us. He acted unfairly in the interest of one candidate." I don't know that there was a reporter who indicated there was something unfair about that decision.

G: Right. How did the appearance of the convention differ from the earlier ones that you had attended? You talked about the--

O: It was less structured in this sense: when someone gained the floor in prior conventions, you felt that person's position in the party called for the floor. You didn't have Joe Smith and Mary Brown demanding recognition. Mary Brown might come from Sioux City, Iowa, and has never been to a convention. She's twenty-one years of age and she's been a McGovern activist for a year or two, and probably a McCarthy activist as a teenager. She's got drive and gumption, so if she's of a mind to, despite the chairman of her delegation, she's going to demand recognition.

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There were very few people on that floor who were known to a television audience or indeed known to the chairman. If you review my opening of the convention, it was a reflection of an understanding that this was a first. This was not a convention of party pros. That's why I had to be, with all of the problems, pleased that it had moved as well as it had. There hadn't been any untoward disturbances. To manage that before millions of viewers is not an easy task. In conventions in which I had participated, you knew who the key participants would be and who would be making the moves.

G: Was it noisier than previous conventions?

O: I don't recall it was.

G: Did the specificity of these new rules regarding the selection of delegates, do you think, impair the electorate from choosing whom they wanted to?

O: In twenty-two states, where you had primaries, it was a mini-election. I say "mini" because the degree of participation is far below that in a regular election. Yet the participation's broad enough to be fairly termed a democratic procedure. But caucuses were held in some instances in somebody's kitchen. It got to that small a group in the selection process. Who are the electorate? The electorate are the dedicated enthusiasts with a cause. They overwhelmed the traditionalists, who are not that motivated, but are Democratic Party activists. When you have that kind of a confrontation, the dedicated people with the cause are going to prevail.

G: In the case of California and other primary states, was there subsequently an effort to apportion the number of delegates to the percentage of the vote, rather than a unit rule that you had in California?

O: You mean after 1972?

G: Right. Yes.

O: The unit rule should not have prevailed any more than it should have initially existed. If you're talking about pure reform, the McGovernites were on the wrong side. That was contra to the McGovern commission recommendations in the fine print. Why would you mandate recommendations balance in representation at a convention and then add that the unit rule will prevail? That, of course, was the procedure in California. It's worth noting that the effort on the part of Humphrey, later joined by others to alter this unit rule, was belated. It wasn't the day after the primary or even soon after; neither side made that claim during the primary. (Laughter) It was quite belated. It was one of those last-minute efforts brought to the Credentials Committee. And the Credentials Committee rightly decided that the unit rule shouldn't prevail. But right is not going to prevail. You could be as reform-minded as you want to be but when the chips are down, you play the game like anyone else.

G: Let's talk about your being tendered the chairmanship of the national committee.

O: By McGovern?

G: Urged to continue as chairman, yes.

O: I have a clear recollection of that.

G: Had he approached you at all during or before the nomination?

O: No, up to and including the telephone conversation I had with him regarding Dick Daley,

which was on Sunday afternoon. I do not recall any reference made directly to me by McGovern regarding the chairmanship. I want to focus on that phone conversation because that was probably, in that period, the only time I had a direct conversation with McGovern. I wasn't in the habit those days of having conversations with candidates. I wasn't seeking them out.

The convention closed in those early hours. There were a couple of traditional breakfasts scheduled. I remember deciding on the way back to the hotel not to bother attending. I had one more task and that was to chair the meeting of the Democratic National Committee, to be convened later that morning. From time to time, over the days up to the convention, during it, and perhaps on earlier occasions, there were references occasionally as to whether I would continue as chairman. I was asked on a few occasions, and I chose to have responded that I would not discuss the matter. I had a full plate and I was not going to engage in discussions beyond the convention. I did that for one reason. I wanted to have the strongest hand I could with the gavel, so there wouldn't be some feeling I could be pushed around because I was a lame duck over the last few weeks. Let the status quo be maintained and that was the way it worked out, because no undue amount of interest was expressed or questions asked.

That morning I received a call from McGovern some twenty minutes or less before the opening of the national committee meeting was due. He initiated the conversation by saying he had expected to catch up with me at the breakfasts and he was disappointed that he didn't see me. I told him I tried to get a little sleep. He said, "We've got to talk," or something to that effect. I pointed out to him the Democratic National Committee meeting was about to start and it was necessary for me to go downstairs to the ballroom and convene the committee. That was it. I was relaxed about it because I didn't feel I had anything to talk to him about. I was anxious to get that committee meeting under my belt and leave Miami. That would be the last phase of my activities.

And I did that. I convened the meeting and we were into the first phase when someone came to the podium and said that it was urgent that I contact George McGovern immediately. I thought about it for a minute or two and concluded that it was pretty bare-faced, in view of the conversation I had with him a bit earlier, to ignore this. So I summoned Mary Lou Berg, who was on the platform, and asked her to take over the meeting for a few minutes. I went to a public phone outside the room. I called McGovern at the Doral Hotel which was two or three minutes from where we were. He pursued the earlier conversation. He said, "I've got to talk to you. There's no way out of it. I'm just a couple of minutes away. Isn't there some way that you could join me and let's talk?" I told him, "I'll see what I can do."

I realized that if I broke away from the meeting at that point I'd leave it in disarray, which you couldn't let happen. So I decided to recess the meeting. I stated that Senator McGovern, who was to appear at the meeting, was going to be delayed for a period. In view of that, as we were approaching the noon hour, I would declare a recess for lunch and reconvene, as I recall, at 2:00 p.m.

I decided to take Joe Mohbat, Stan Greigg and Joe Napolitan with me to the Doral Hotel. They were nearby the podium. As we entered the suite, through a doorway to an adjoining room I observed Mankiewicz, Jean Westwood, Gary Hart and Mrs. Eleanor McGovern. We had no conversation and McGovern said, "Why don't we go into this room?" which was beyond. McGovern then asked me to stay on as chairman. There was no equivocation about it. It was flat out. That was, as he said, "his urgent request." We had a discussion regarding my desire to close out with the national committee meeting. McGovern made a strong pitch. He had ordered lunch for us in the meantime through room service. I said, "Let me do this. Let me talk to my associates."

G: Were they in the room with you?

O: It may have been he and I were meeting alone. They were in another room. I don't recall. In any event, he said, "I'll go back with my people and I'll return in a little while, okay?" The sandwiches had been delivered. I said, "Fine." My people and I proceeded to discuss this. What you'd assume would occur did occur: "There's only three months; you could make the deal to go through the election, it looks a little unseemly if you don't, you're kind of stuck," that kind of conversation. No one with any enthusiasm. No one was saying, "Is this a great idea?" It was more what should you do to protect yourself in these circumstances. We finally concluded, all right, drag through another three months, but when we formalize it at the meeting, it's specifically through the election, so there would be no misunderstanding.

As I say--and I remember it vividly--it was almost like some form of punishment, but you couldn't avoid it. If you did, you could be accused of lack of support of the party. So the easier way out was to commit to the three months. Then we sat there for a while and there was no George McGovern. I became concerned because we were beginning to approach this deadline to reconvene the committee. So I was getting a little nervous. Finally George came in and said to me, "I've got to talk to you alone." So my three friends left the room. George said, "I've run into difficulty out there," out there meaning whatever room they were in. He went on, "In my haste, since I've had such a little time to think since the selection of the VP, I've been strongly reminded that I had said I'd consider having a woman as chairman." Then he mumbled, "I have an idea. How about you and Jean Westwood as co-chairmen?" I said, "George, there's no provision for co-chairmen of the Democratic National Committee, nor should there be. That's absolutely ridiculous," something to that effect. "Well, gosh, I just--." I added, "I've got a suggestion." He asked, "What is it?" "We turn the clock back to the call you made to me at the national committee meeting, we wipe the slate clean, nothing occurred since then and allow me to proceed back to the hall, reconvene the committee and conduct the business of the meeting." He said, "That's the--you don't see any--?" I said, "That's my solution," and I got up from the chair and told him, "We need to do this fast." He said, "Probably I should go over--why don't I go over it with you?" I replied, "That's fine."

So into the car with Jean Westwood and Pierre Salinger. Whether Pierre was in

that room I don't know. I reconvened the meeting. Prior to introducing McGovern I announced I would close out my chairmanship at this meeting and thanked them. I did that before McGovern rose so there would be no further foul-up.

McGovern devoted a good deal of time to advising the members that he had made every effort possible to convince me to stay, that he deeply regretted my decision, that he'd have to accept it. He belabored the subject, which aggravated me further. So I stood on the platform until he finished. Then I departed and I believe Mary Lou Berg must have taken over. I went to my suite and I learned later that McGovern had continued to sort of conduct the meeting himself and that he proposed Pierre Salinger for--

G: Vice chairman.

O: Vice chairman, and proceeded to be defeated, which probably never happened to a nominee in history. (Laughter)

I returned to Washington on my flight which had been planned prior to this happening. I felt my last act should be to have a thank-you gathering with the staff of the national committee. Arrangements were made for this I believe on Sunday evening. I went to the national committee office. This would be my last visit to gather some personal belongings.

While I was there, I was notified McGovern was looking for me. Back at my apartment I returned McGovern's call. It was essential he see me immediately. I told him it was impossible that evening, because I was having a party at the apartment. It was a buffet to thank the staff and say good bye to them. He then asked, "When do you think the affair will be over?" I said, "I don't know. Probably around ten-thirty." Then he suggested, "Why don't I drop over to see you at ten-thirty or eleven o'clock." I replied, "Okay."

Everyone had departed by ten-thirty. He arrived later and I offered him a drink, which he declined and asked if I had any ice cream. I served him a dish of ice cream and we began the next go-around. He prefaced the discussion by saying his wife had told him he had made the most serious political mistake of his career, that he had totally goofed, that I should know she fought vigorously in Miami in support of the request he had made of me. She was opposed by his own advisers.

G: Do you believe that?

O: Yes, because I spoke to her at some time later. She was truly disturbed with him.

[L. O'B. postscript: I met George and Eleanor at the 1988 Atlanta convention. He advised me he had recently read the transcript of the 1972 convention and noted how eminently fair I had been. This underscored Eleanor's original position which she quickly repeated. I found this exchange sixteen years later amazing.]

It's eleven p.m. and I told George, "You didn't have to come here to tell me about your wife's disturbance. I have no problem. I'm relaxed and want to focus on my future."

To backtrack, after I left the national committee meeting, I received a call from Tom Eagleton. He had caught up with what had occurred and was beside himself. He said, "There has to be some way of unwinding this. You've got to stay as chairman. This is absolutely ridiculous." He was distressed that George McGovern had not discussed it with him, although there wasn't any obligation for him to do so.

Back at the apartment it's getting late. McGovern advised, "I'm going to the Black Hills early in the morning and you have to commit to me that you'll take over the chairmanship of the campaign." I responded, "What are you talking about? You have a campaign organization." "This would be sort of an umbrella chairman of the campaign." He further said he either had talked to Eagleton or would be talking to him and that he and Eagleton thought this was just a terrific idea.

This was endless. I declined and what you'd anticipate occurred. "Don't finalize it tonight. We've a couple of days here, no more than that. We'll get this straight. I've got to correct this error I made." This sort of conversation went on. "I'll be in the Black Hills. Let's leave it for tonight and I'll be in touch with you. I want you not to say anything to anyone." "Okay. Good night." This was around midnight.

At some point I reconvened my friends and presented them with this new chapter. (Laughter) There again a repeat, "Only three months to go." So what are you going to do? I don't know whether you're motivated by exhaustion or, down deep, concern you're going to look like a louse. You're winding up your political career, but can you wind it up without some controversy?

When contact was made by McGovern, I acquiesced, at which point he said, "We've got to have a press conference. Tom, you and I. I'm coming back tomorrow." And, by gosh, if he didn't schedule the largest hearing room on Capitol Hill for the press conference.

So to the press conference with O'Brien, McGovern and Eagleton and to a mob scene. I don't know what everyone had expected. Of course he is the nominee. He could draw people to a press conference. So there is this crowded room. He proceeded to indicate this was a long-time idea. This was super chairman. (Laughter) So he made the announcement. Eagleton joined in and I spoke about party unity. There we were and I'm chairman of something, I wasn't sure of what.

G: National campaign chairman, was that right?

O: I guess so. This was the corrective measure taken for the grievous error in Miami. What I was faced with now was something that I thought on that plane from Miami had ended

for good: that I didn't have to be concerned about the next three months in terms of the campaign. I had to be concerned about the next three months in terms of Larry O'Brien and what's next. But now I'm going to postpone that for three months. Here I am and I have agreed to do it.

This old broken-down building in downtown Washington was headquarters for the campaign. They had worked out some arrangements with Edward Bennett Williams, who owned the building and intended to tear it down in the near future. It would be used for three months as a campaign headquarters. It was a dump.

G: This was on K Street?

O: I guess so. So an office was set up for Chairman O'Brien and in due course my loyal troops joined me. We march in and try to figure out what I am supposed to be doing, other than putting on a good front proclaiming party unity and party loyalty. It wasn't long before there were indications that perhaps some of McGovern's troops weren't any happier with this development than they had been with his Miami suggestion.I don't know and I had no interest in his troops. But nearby, in adjoining offices, was Gary Hart. Gary Hart showed he was the class of the McGovern group. He asked to sit down and we chatted at some length. Gary pointed out he felt his position was to be under my direction and that's the way it should be. There had to be one head and I was the head; it was clear in the McGovern decision. He had talked it over with George and he wanted me to know there would be total cooperation. I appreciated that and it proceeded that way.

But now we're to the post-Eagleton period and then what transpired in the campaign.

End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview XXIX

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

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

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

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

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