

**Timothy Naftali**

Hi, my name is Tim Naftali. I'm director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda, California. It's May 12, 2008, and I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing Rob Odle for the Nixon Oral History Program. Meghan Lee will be joining me in asking questions in the course of this interview. Rob, thank you for doing this.

**Rob Odle**

Thank you, Tim. I'm looking forward to it.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, let's talk about how you became interested in politics. Let's talk a little bit about Young Americans for Freedom in the 1960s.

**Rob Odle**

Well, I grew up in Port Huron, Michigan, and went off to undergraduate school at Wayne State University in Detroit, and that was kind of a hotbed, if you will, of liberalism in the 1960s. And, you know, it had the influence of the Students for a Democratic Society, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and things like that. And so I was more attracted to the Republican club there, and later Young Americans for Freedom, and at one time or another, I headed both organizations on the Wayne campus. And it was -- those were difficult, those were difficult times, the late '60s. President Nixon said in his inaugural speech a year or so later that we cannot really learn from each other until we stop shouting at each other, and my greatest recollection of those days on that campus were that, sadly, everybody was shouting at each other.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, wasn't there the Port Huron statement? Wasn't SDS strong --

**Rob Odle**

That's exactly right. A few miles north of Port Huron is an AFL-CIO summer camp, and apparently SDS rented the summer camp from the AFL, and used it to form their entity and to put the Port Huron statement together. But interestingly, nobody in Port Huron ever realized that it was the Port Huron statement. It wasn't until I got to Wayne State University that we saw that and realized that it occurred there.

**Timothy Naftali**

So how do you find yourself working for the election of Richard Nixon in '68?

**Rob Odle**

I was in law school by this time. I was most interested in the campaign. I thought that the governor of Michigan, George Romney, who was a candidate, did not have the foreign policy background and credentials. I had followed President Nixon's career, particularly that period between 1963 and 1968 when he was a partner in a large international law firm based in New York and argued a case before the Supreme Court and traveled to the former Soviet Union seeking better business relationships between the two countries. And I just found him, after that experience in New York and around the world, of all of the candidates -- and you have to remember, there were, during that time, four governors that he was running against for the Republican nomination: first, Governor Scranton of Pennsylvania, Governor Romney of Michigan, Governor Rockefeller of New York, and Governor Reagan a little later, just before the convention, of California. And I just found Nixon interesting, intriguing, very bright, and when the campaign came through Michigan one day, I volunteered to go to work for it for subsistence wages in New York, as soon as school ended in June. And I later had a call from one of his assistants, Charlie McWhorter, who was kind of famous in the Republican Party. He had been with President Nixon since the early Vice Presidential days. David Broder once wrote that the Republican Party is a quasi-political institution held together by conventions, which meet every four years, and Charlie McWhorter Christmas card list. Well, Charlie said if I would come down to New York, I would have an interview, so I took the \$70 or \$80 that I had remaining in the bank and flew to New York that afternoon and had the interview and was hired to come back in June. Unfortunately, I didn't have any money to get home, but a few hours later, my parents wired the money, and I was able to fly back to Michigan and finish law school, and then arrived at 57th and Park to work on the Nixon campaign headquarters. Of course at the time, President Nixon lived in New York, and that's where the national headquarters was.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell me, what job did you get when you arrived in New York?

**Rob Odle**

Well, it was very interesting. Of course this is before e-mail and faxes and computers, but -- and this was a contested convention. Today we're arguing about how awful it is that there is actually a prospect that nominees might be -- a nominee might be nominated at a convention, but in those days, that's what conventions were for, to pick each party's candidate. And as I say, recordkeeping wasn't what it is today. And my job was to keep track of each state and the delegates who were elected either in a party caucus or in a primary and get their names, addresses, telephone numbers, spouse's names, interests, that sort of thing. And then we would write them letters from Candidate Nixon congratulating them on their election as delegates, and then we would prepare a notebook for each state, so by the time we got to the Miami convention, we had 50 large notebooks with information on each candidate.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let's talk a little bit about the politics of delegate hunting. Who was the major challenger at this point to Richard Nixon?

**Rob Odle**

I think during the delegate hunting, in that sort of early '68 to maybe June of '68, it was probably Governor Rockefeller. By that time, the Pennsylvania and Michigan governors had kind of receded, and newly elected Governor Reagan of California was saying that he would not be a candidate. So at that point in time, it was Governor Rockefeller, and then by the time we got to Miami, Governor Reagan said, "Well, I've changed my mind, and I'm really going to be a candidate." And at that point, he was a candidate, and he was a serious candidate.

**Timothy Naftali**

Now, in that era, primaries did not determine most of the delegates. Did they or did they not? What role did primaries play in determining --

**Rob Odle**

Well, you're correct in that there were some unpledged delegates, but by and large they did play a role. And they were pledged, but they didn't legally have to vote for the candidate to whom they were pledged. For example, when we were in Miami in the summer of '68 at the convention, there was concern that the South Carolina delegation, which was pledged to Candidate Nixon, might bolt and vote for Governor Reagan on the floor, and if they had, perhaps other Southern states would have followed suit. And if that had happened, the convention might well have nominated Governor Reagan.

**Timothy Naftali**

So you mean to say that Strom Thurmond must have played an important role.

**Rob Odle**

Indeed, he did, because he was really the titular head of the Republican Party then in South Carolina. And there were several others, both party leaders and elected officials, in other states in the South that were also very important.

**Timothy Naftali**

You -- did you put this system together yourself, the books that you conceive, the books -- or did John Mitchell ask you to prepare this operation?

**Rob Odle**

John -- I would call him Mr. Mitchell in those days -- had given me an outline of, conceptually, what he wanted, and then I took it from there. The concept of the books wasn't that difficult, although as far as we could determine, it had never been done in American political history, to have an actual list of every single delegate and their backgrounds and their addresses and phone numbers and who they were pledged to or not pledged to. As far as we can tell, it never happened in the history of either party, but John left it mostly to me to put together. That wasn't the difficult job. The difficult job was getting the information from the people in the states, and under John were several key people who were assisting in the campaign, and if they didn't come back from their states with the information, I would go to

them and try to get it. And if I failed, then Mr. Mitchell would go to them and ask them for it, and they usually provided it to him.

**Timothy Naftali**

Once the roll call took place, were there any major surprises, any delegate surprises that you recall?

**Rob Odle**

No, but we did get a call from the Reagan trailer parked out at the convention hall, and they said you can come back and get your electronic equipment that we've stolen from you.

**Timothy Naftali**

Wow, what had they taken?

**Rob Odle**

Oh, just some 1968-era walkie-talkies.

**Timothy Naftali**

How interesting. Convention happens, it was a success. Candidate Nixon is now of the nominee of the party. What do you do?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I thought my job was over. I was in charge of these books, and the books were there to get the candidate nominated. Now he's nominated, there is no need for the books, nor for me. But Mr. Mitchell said, "We're all going to go to California to a place near San Diego and hole up for a week or so and plan our strategy. Would you mind coming along?" And I said that I wouldn't mind a bit. And so off I went with my one suit, and the books went back to New York, and I basically assisted Mr. Mitchell in a number of ways, getting newspapers and pipe tobacco, and then sitting in on strategy sessions.

**Timothy Naftali**

We've talked to some members of those, but from your perspective, what were the key challenges? By this point, it's clear that the Democratic nominee is going to be Hubert Humphrey. What do you remember being some of the key concerns?

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I think after all, Candidate Nixon had lost two elections, one for the Presidency, one as governor of California. And we had to -- we had to address that issue. The South was still voting Democratic, and we had to address that issue. Democratic Party bosses still controlled states like Illinois and Texas, and we had to address that issue. And I think, too, we had to -- I think people had to really see Richard Nixon as we saw him, as thoughtful, as terribly bright, as very intellectual, very much an intellectual,

and one who was just a terrific political and geopolitical analyst. And the effort was to get America to see -- to see that Richard Nixon, as opposed to the one they remember from the 1960 campaign, where he was tired, where, unlike his opponent, he didn't wear makeup and, you know, the famous 5:00 shadow, and the perspiration around the upper lip. We had to -- they had to -- and also, a man now who, you know, eight years older, even more skilled in his understanding of world events from his many, many trips around the planet during those eight years. We had to try to find a way to get the voters to look at that candidate.

### Timothy Naftali

To what extent were you concerned about the effect of changes in Vietnam?

### Rob Odle

Well, I think that it's clear that our Vietnam policy wasn't working, and it hadn't under President Johnson. The North would escalate a notch, we'd escalate a notch, they'd escalate a notch, we'd do a notch, and it's clear that that strategy wasn't working. I think President Nixon's plan was clear in that -- just like it later was when he and President Reagan were talking about -- in the 1980s, when President Reagan was President, and President Nixon and he were talking about things, to -- President Reagan escalated against the Soviet Union in order to ultimately tear the eastern and central European countries away from the Soviet orb, but I think that's what Candidate Nixon was arguing about in the Vietnam War, and that is to escalate and, if we're going to be in a war, we got to be in it on our terms and not the enemy's terms. And then to a process called Vietnamization, in other words, to get the Vietnamese more involved and could get them to take over the military. And what we forget, Tim, is that -- and there is an interesting exhibit of this at the Smithsonian, today -- but what we forget is that when President Nixon left office, we were down to something like 20,000 American troops, that the war had been won, that the North went to Paris, signed the peace accords. They waved the white flag, and we won. And the north knew that as long as Richard Nixon was in the White House, that they weren't going to mess with him anymore. And then after he left office, and after the 1974 elections when the other party had even larger margins, a series of statutes were passed that -- that addressed -- that controlled what his successor, President Ford, could do. And then, of course, it was Katie bar the door. And then we had the spectacle of the Americans on the top of the embassy waiting for the helicopters. If President Nixon had remained in office, I believe those accords would have held.

### Timothy Naftali

As a young Republican, there are various strains of Republicanism. There is the Ripon Society, and a number of those representative members of that society will come into the administration. You are in the YAF. What put you in the YAF as opposed to, let's say, the Ripon Society? How did you make the choice of what strain of Republicanism --

### Rob Odle

I think, like a lot of my people age, as a teenager, I was, I was influenced by Barry Goldwater's book, "The Conscience of a Conservative," and I thought that the things he was speaking about and writing about made a lot of sense. I was intrigued by Bill Buckley's writings and his lectures and his speeches, and some of the other rising young conservative thinkers, and that kind of thing made a lot of sense to me.

**Timothy Naftali**

You were at these strategy meetings; you're an errand boy, to some extent. You're younger than most everybody else there. Who are the major -- who are the great personalities? You're watching this unfold.

**Rob Odle**

Sure, well, I think the two great personalities were Richard Nixon and John Mitchell, clearly. I mean, they were born in the same year. They had tremendous affection for each other. They had enormous respect for each other. And during the campaign, they were really equals. They were law partners previously, so certainly those two. And then -- but there were some other just remarkably fine people. You know, and that's one of the things that we kind of forget about that, the Nixon team and the Nixon White House. I mean you look around at the team that summer, and then you'd look around at the White House a few months later. And just for example, in the speech writing shop, you've got Jim Keogh, the editor of the "New York Herald Tribune," as its chief. You've got Bill Safire, later "The New York Times" columnist. You have Pat Buchanan, the "St. Louis GlobeDemocrat" reporter and author, and several more people of that quality, just in one office. You have, down the hall from them, people like Pat Moynihan, a liberal Democratic assistant secretary in the Johnson years, as an urban advisor, and next door is Arthur Burns, who would later go on to head the Federal Reserve Board. And down the hall, Alan -- I'm blanking on Alan's last name -- the Fed -- Alan Greenspan. Down the hall you have Alan Greenspan, who was introduced to Lawyer Nixon by a fellow lawyer, Len Garment, because he played a musical instrument as Len did, and that's how Nixon first met Greenspan, because he was part of a Brooklyn band. And George Schultz from the University of -- from Stanford, advising on labor matters. I mean, you know, it was really something to come into the White House mess in the mornings at breakfast time and look around that room and see that kind of quality talent. Henry Kissinger, for example, who had been a foreign policy advisor to Nelson Rockefeller, and then a lot of mid-level people like Marty Anderson, a senior official now at Hoover. It was an intellectual feast.

**Timothy Naftali**

What did you do in the campaign after these strategy meetings at San Clemente? What did they have you do?

**Rob Odle**

I worked for Herb Klein, who I would then later go to work for at the White House. Herb had been with President Nixon since 1946, the very first congressional campaign, as his press secretary. And Herb, understanding that my job had ended, and that there was only so many things I could do for Mr. Mitchell, although I continued to kind of be his aide in terms of assisting him when necessary, asked me to work on setting up the charters for the media. In other words, in any Presidential campaign, you have the logistical nightmare not only of moving the candidate and the staff, but of moving the media. And so I worked on the mechanics of setting up the planes that would follow Candidate Nixon, as well as the Vice Presidential candidate, and all the billing and logistics that go into that.

**Timothy Naftali**

Do you remember any vignettes, any stories of -- and I can imagine a lot went wrong.

**Rob Odle**

It does, it does. But actually they got off -- I remember being sent down to Annapolis to work with Governor Agnew's, the Vice Presidential nominee, staff, and of course I had never been to Annapolis, and, you know, I was 23, 24 years old, and there I was meeting with the Vice Presidential nominee and his key people, trying to figure out how we were going to make all of this happen. But it did happen, although I went back to law school for my final semester in the fall, and I think that vignette is kind of interesting. I was planning to not do that. I was planning to just stay with the campaign, because how many kids this age get to have this kind of excitement? But I got called into Mr. Mitchell's office one day, and he said, "You're one semester away from graduating from law school and taking the bar, and if you don't do it now you're never going to do it, because we're going to win this election, and then you're going to want to work in the administration. I'll make that possible. But you won't be a lawyer, and you'll have thrown away two and a half years of law school." So he opened his drawer and gave me a one way ticket back to Michigan so that I would -- and told me that I was fired -- so that I would finish my last year of law school, take the bar, and then join the administration in early 1969.

**Timothy Naftali**

How did he know that you were -- you know, had you talked to him about your plans?

**Rob Odle**

Well, yeah, I mean, he was one of the finest human beings I've ever met. I mean, he would stop to see me at my little cubicle. I would see him on -- in the hall on the way to the men's room, and he'd want to know what was new, and how his people were doing in getting me the information I needed. And then, as an example, in late October, I was back at -- in Michigan in my final semester, and the phone rang, and it was his assistant, and she put him on the phone, and he said that they were going to have the election night victory party at the Waldorf in New York, and would I like to come down to New York for the party, bring my girlfriend, if I wanted to, and they would be happy to pay for the travel and the rooms. And I said, "Well, of course, thank you so much." But I think that's an example, for a man like that, one of the most successful Wall Street lawyers in history, the first campaign manager that Richard Nixon ever deferred to, to take time out of all of that and call this 23-year-old kid in Detroit and ask him if he wants to come to the Waldorf for a victory party, is an example of the kind of man he was.

**Timothy Naftali**

And did you go to the party?

**Rob Odle**

You bet.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us about the party.

**Rob Odle**

Well, I -- my greatest memory was my girlfriend at the time, later my wife, and I were going down the escalators at the back of the Waldorf, and -- for something to eat. And just as we were doing that, the President and his President -- well, the candidate, that night he would become the President-Elect -- were coming up the escalators. At the bottom, Mr. Mitchell was just getting on the escalators, and I waved, and he saw me, and he backed down three steps, which is sometimes hard to do on an escalator and waited at the bottom, and then when I got off the escalator, he had not met Lydia, and he said, "Well," he said, "Now I know why you agreed to go back to Michigan." But he couldn't have been nicer, and there in the middle, I mean, this is -- he's been working on this thing for a year, and we're going to know in a few hours if Richard Nixon is the President of the United States or if he's been defeated for the third time in his career. And what does he do, he gets off the escalator to say hello to a 23-year-old kid and his girlfriend.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us about the night.

**Rob Odle**

We thought we lost. We thought about 2:00 in the morning that we weren't going to make it. I can't recall the states that were coming in at that time, but there were a couple, and I think from about 1:00 or 2:00 to about 4:00 or 5:00, we thought we weren't going to make it. And then, I think Mr. Mitchell called Mayor Daley and said, "Okay, we'll report our part of the state if you'll report Chicago." And they did, and I believe, if memory serves, we carried Illinois. And then a couple of other states broke for us.

**Timothy Naftali**

You graduate from law school in February.

**Rob Odle**

Yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

And you come to Washington.

**Rob Odle**

Next day, February 13, 1969, my first day on the job. Herb Klein's office, Herb was asked by the President to take a new position, not only in his administration, but a new position, period, called director of communications for the executive branch.

**Timothy Naftali**

And what are you supposed to be doing for him?

**Rob Odle**

Well, Herb's job was, again, something that no one had ever done before. The idea was, I think, two-fold: number one, to make sure the administration coordinated better, spoke with one voice. Each department, Treasury Department, State, Defense, you name it, typically has somebody called something like an assistant secretary for public affairs. And the idea was that Herb, as director of communications for the executive branch, not just the White House, would coordinate that more effectively, leaving the press secretary free to do the day-to-day press briefings, but leaving the bigger picture to someone else. And the second thing that Herb wanted to do, Herb had been both editor and publisher of the "San Diego Union," and then, I think, President of Copley Newspapers, which publishes a lot of newspapers on the West Coast. And the second thing that I think the President wanted Herb to do, and that Herb wanted to do, was have the White House more directly communicate with editors and publishers, not just the White House Press Corps, who were headquartered over in the National Press Building, and really didn't get home very much. I mean X is supposed to represent the "St. Louis Post Dispatch," but X didn't get back to St. Louis very often, so the -- and that was true with the Washington Press Corps. So the idea was that Herb would have a direct personal relationship on the President's behalf with editors and publishers around the country. Could I take a break and use the head for a minute?

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah, sure.

**Rob Odle**

Thanks, I'm sorry. I drank all that water at lunch --

**Rob Odle**

I've got some really original stuff, too.

**Timothy Naftali**

We're in that business. We love to --

**Rob Odle**

All that stuff.

**Timothy Naftali**

We preserve people. Okay, we're with Herb Klein. We've interviewed Herb Klein, but I'd like to know what it was like to work for Herb Klein.

**Rob Odle**

Oh, there again, just the sweetest man. I had a birthday two days after I arrived in Washington, and he gave me a birthday party in his office. I turned 25, I think. And he put on a birthday party for me, you know, one month into the new job in the White House. He just was so nice. I was married in August, and he took the red eye from the speech he was giving in California to Washington, picked up his wife, and flew up to Connecticut, where we were married, for the wedding. I mean, you know, it was just like being part of his family. I felt like he'd sort of adopted me. And he mentored me, and he taught me, and --

**Timothy Naftali**

There will be people watching this who are even high school kids and early college students. Tell us about the, sort of, what it was like to be in your early 20s in the White House, and first of all, how many of you were there?

**Rob Odle**

Well, that's very interesting, Tim, because I think President Nixon had a policy, and he told the senior people that he wanted smart, young -- and I guess I'm the exception there, young, but not smart. But he wanted a lot of people around the White House, and he wanted everybody to hire -- all his principal people to hire somebody. So for example, Don Rumsfeld had this young aide named Dick Cheney. Pat Moynihan had a couple of them. One was a guy named Dick Blumenthal, who is now the attorney general of Connecticut. And John Ehrlichman had several, one of whom was Jeff Donfeld, who became a lifelong friend. So it was sort of the natural, normal thing. Bryce Harlow, the assistant to the President for legislative affairs, who had a young aide named Lamar Alexander, who is now a United States Senator. And Herb Klein had me. And so it was the normal thing, not the abnormal thing. And in fact, it so impressed one of the national magazines at the time, I think it was "Look" magazine, that they actually ran a long photo story on Nixon's youth corps.

**Timothy Naftali**

You observed Herb Klein's relations with Ronald Ziegler. What were they like?

**Rob Odle**

Well, again, I think they defined the roles. Ron was very young, he was the day-to-day spokesman with the White House Press Corps, and Herb had a broader, more policy oriented 1,000- feet-up type of position in the administration. They got on, but Ron had a -- particularly the first year or so, he was a little younger, had a little bit of an edge, and occasionally, there were issues. But Herb was older, softer, more gentle, and he just rolled with the punches.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us a little bit about how this White House dealt with getting the message out. And of course, those of us who saw the Reagan White House knew about, you know, how Michael Deaver and others

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**Rob Odle**

Mm-hmm.

**Timothy Naftali**

In this period, were you thinking about getting the message out every day?

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, I think so. Herb organized what was called the Saturday Plans Committee, and we met in Herb's office every Saturday morning at 10:00, and Herb was there, Ron was there, Bill Safire was there, later Dick Moore. People who had -- usually other people from the -- Pat Buchanan, sometimes, Jim Keogh from the speechwriter shop. And they focused on how to get the message out the following week, and then assignments were made to the younger people like myself to follow up and get things done, and I kind of served as the staff secretary to the Saturday plans meeting. So yes, in that sense, sure.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let's talk -- you were there in this position when Kent State happens. What do you remember -- first of all, what do you remember of the rollout to the President's new policy in Cambodia? What, if any role, did the Saturday group play in trying to prepare the message for the American people?

**Rob Odle**

We tried to -- we tried to explain the strategy, and again, by this time we had a mailing list of editors and publishers. We -- so we sent what I think were thoughtful pieces out to them. Herb and others would telephone some of them. We would arrange for telephonic interviews by editors of some of our key people on the National Security Council staff, and we also would take key people out to different areas of the country and have them meet with groups of editors and reporters and others in the media to explain what we were doing. The President asked Henry Kissinger to do a few of these. Henry didn't like doing those things, so he kept berating his young assistants who would say, "You have to do this," and he would say, "No, you work for me, and I don't have to do it." And so, eventually, it turned out I got called into the chief of staff's office one day, and Bob Haldeman said to me, "Since this is sort of a media thing, and you work for Herb, we're going to ask you to take Henry to some of these events, because he can't get angry at you, because you don't work for him." So I ended up taking Henry to Chicago to talk to some reporters and editors, and then to California to do the same thing in other places. So in that way, we tried to get more directly in contact with the American people to let them know what we were doing. And, you know, and the proof is in the pudding; it worked. Again, by early 1960 -- by early 1973, they were at the peace table in Paris, and the accords had been signed.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us -- I couldn't resist asking -- what was it like to be Henry Kissinger's minder?

**Rob Odle**

It wasn't the most pleasant assignment in the world. He had a bit of a temper, and he would behave in a way that you wouldn't want to write home about. But then, once the door opened and he came in and was introduced, of course, it was a complete change, and it was a very interesting experience to have at the age of 25.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, what was Haldeman like?

**Rob Odle**

There again, what you think you see is not what you see. He was tough, he was sharp, he was quick, but he was never mean. He was actually very kind, and after he had left his position and came back to Washington for some of the investigatory efforts, to respond to those, Lydia and I got to know Bob and Jill even better and stayed in touch with him until he died. Yes, he could be quick and tart, but he was a nice man. And I really enjoyed working for him, and I think I learned a lot. As the chief of staff, or as the chief of advance in the campaign, Bob wanted what he called a zero defect performance, and if there were defects, then he wasn't pleased. But he was a nice man.

**Timothy Naftali**

You will, of course, come to know this man much better later, but did you know Jeb Magruder in this period?

**Rob Odle**

Well, yeah, a couple of years after, I was in Herb's office, Jeb came to Herb's office, and I think his mission was to expand outreach and also to try to make the trains run on time more effectively, and that's when I first met Jeb. And then when it came time to set up the re-election effort, I moved across the street to the re-election headquarters with Jeb.

**Timothy Naftali**

Had you found organizing Herb Klein a challenge?

**Rob Odle**

Well, that wasn't precisely my job; I had my own assignments. I was liaison to three or four Cabinet departments, and then I did a lot of work with the Catholic organizations that we reached out to, as well as I was kind of the unofficial liaison to the young Republicans and that sort of thing. But I didn't sort of -- I wasn't in charge of running Herb's office, so I think Jeb was brought in to do that.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, if you were working with Catholic groups, that would put you in Chuck Colson's territory.

**Rob Odle**

That was a little later. Chuck wasn't there until a little later, when the outreach efforts expanded. He came as -- just a few months, I think, before we went over to the re-election effort. So for the first couple of years, that kind of operation really wasn't -- didn't exist, the outreach.

**Timothy Naftali**

Was the idea, though, of the new majority percolating? Were you thinking about Catholics as a --

**Rob Odle**

Oh, sure.

**Timothy Naftali**

Would you talk to us about that, please?

**Rob Odle**

Well, yeah, I think that that was a real component of the '68 campaign, and to try to reach out to organizations and entities that the Republican Party traditionally had not. I think you saw President Nixon doing that as early as 1952, when he talked about his wife's good Republican cloth coat. I mean, by that time, you know, it -- a lot of people who previously had been Democrats, had voted Democratic, felt that their party had kind of abandoned them. I mean, there's a county in Michigan that everybody says you tell me what's going to happen in that county, and I'll tell you who wins the election. It's Macomb County. It's where the more well-to-do auto workers and other industrial employees gravitated to, the so-called Reagan Democrats. And people used to say if you can tell me how Macomb County is going to go, I'll tell you who's going to be the next President. And I think, sure, we tried to reach out to those kind of people.

**Timothy Naftali**

You were just a couple of years older than the students who were demonstrating outside the White House. Do you remember when the buses were placed around the White House and how you felt, as you were the same age as these demonstrators?

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, I do, but more than that, we mentioned a few minutes ago the young people that worked for all of the senior aides in the White House. President Nixon called all of us together one day, all the young folks, and asked us to go out and start talking to them and bring -- and assuming they weren't carrying weapons or anything -- bring some of them into the White House, and talk to some of his senior aides, and in some cases, him. So I kind of organized that effort, and we all went out between the buses and talked to kids. And when we found some who again were talking and not screaming, we brought them into the White House. And they met with Herb Klein, and Bob Haldeman, and John Ehrlichman, and Pat Moynihan, and Arthur Burns, and the President himself. And later, we -- he sent -- we had another meeting with him, and he said -- and this could be around the time of Kent State -- let's send some of

them, some of these young people out and speak on the campuses, and so we did that. And I was sort of the executive director of that. I stayed behind and found opportunities for them, and then stayed in touch with them, and got them all out to give speeches all over the country, probably a dozen of the younger folks on the White House staff. And then when that effort was all done, the President wanted to see us all, and then we met with him, and everybody explained what they had done and what some of the reaction had been.

**Timothy Naftali**

You didn't actually do -- you stayed behind?

**Rob Odle**

I stayed behind and organized it, yeah. I was sort of the executive director of the undertaking.

**Timothy Naftali**

Who were the people that did this? Do you remember some of the people you sent out?

**Rob Odle**

Well, it was that group, I mean, and I mentioned some of them before. Another one was Chris DeMuth, who is now president of the American Enterprise Institute. John Campbell, who's back in California; Geoff Shepherd, who is actually an executive with a company in Pennsylvania who's writing a book to come out this summer about President Nixon; and some of the folks we talked about a little earlier.

**Timothy Naftali**

When did you hire John McLaughlin?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I didn't hire him; he was referred to me. John was a very accomplished Jesuit priest who decided to run for the United States Senate against John Pastore in Rhode Island, and I think John got about two or three votes, and Senator Pastore probably got several hundred thousand. But John decided he liked politics, so he came down to Washington and started knocking on administration doors. And somebody suggested that I -- because I was sort of this informal Catholic liaison -- this would have been 1970, it would have been right after the 1970 elections, that I sort of take care of him, because nobody knew quite how to handle a six foot tall, blonde, Roman Catholic priest with a clerical collar. And -- but as we talked more, with his Jesuit training, what it appeared is that he was a fabulous writer. So I introduced him to the White House speech writing staff, and he was later hired to be a Presidential speechwriter.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did you -- do you recall any special tasks that you had in the 1970 midyear -- midterm campaign, midterm election?

**Rob Odle**

I can't think of anything that would have been distinctive from -- like any White House, ours had a political office. I was not in that. I was in the communications office. I really can't think of anything that would have been different from the kind of outreach and coordination activities that we were involved with at other times.

**Timothy Naftali**

You were -- you were there when the Federal Government starts to talk very seriously about environmentalism.

**Rob Odle**

Mm-hmm.

**Timothy Naftali**

Do you remember the extent to which that became a message that your shop is putting out?

**Rob Odle**

It was, we -- President Nixon was responsible for both the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Council on Economic -- Council of Environmental Quality. And we did do that, and I remember one weekend, all of the young folks on the White House staff went down to Hunting Creek, south of Alexandria, Virginia, and spent the day cleaning it up. I was more involved with a couple of other initiatives, which most people never associate with President Nixon, and that is lowering the voting age to 18, which I spent a lot of time working on, and which was successful, and a lot of people thought that would threaten his re-election, but he did it any way. And then secondly, getting rid of the draft, and people forget that that's Richard Nixon, and the policy person there that led that effort was young Martin Anderson. Marty always was a bit of a libertarian, and like most libertarians, he didn't think the government ought to have the right to put you in the military if you didn't agree with being in the military, and so he worked on that. And I remember, of the various policy initiatives, environmental, wage/price, and so many others, urban affairs, that sort of thing, I mean, for the first time, you had an urban affairs council. Later we called it the Domestic Council. It was modeled after the National Security Council. But of all of those, the one that I think I spent the most time on was the -- was getting rid of the draft.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let's just talk a bit about lowering the voting age, though. Tell us what role you played in that story.

**Rob Odle**

There again, my role was to coordinate and support, to make sure that all the assistant secretaries for public affairs, not just in the Defense Department nor the Veteran's Administration knew about it, but indeed, they all knew about it, that the Cabinet secretaries all had talking points on it, that we did a

mailing to our editors and publishers around the country, that perhaps in some areas, we had sent administration officials out to brief on it, that sort of thing.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us about your role in ending the draft.

**Rob Odle**

Same sort of thing, yeah, I just -- and my memory, though, of that is that I spent a little -- of all of the policy initiatives, as opposed to the general coordination and support -- is that I spent as much time on that as any project while I was in the White House. And I thought it was historic, because, well, I thought it was historic because it was historic. And I don't know, how long had we had the draft, since the late '30s, maybe?

**Timothy Naftali**

Mm-hmm, yes. Where were the areas of opposition to this? Because obviously this meant this was a public relations initiative.

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think they were in the Pentagon probably.

**Timothy Naftali**

That's what I was thinking. So a lot of it had to be --

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

-- the press officer of the Pentagon on the right side [unintelligible]

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**Rob Odle**

Exactly, and I think, too, maybe the hundreds and hundreds of alumni organizations of retired military officers and those kinds of things.

**Timothy Naftali**

American Legion and --

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, and probably the armed services committees in Congress.

**Timothy Naftali**

Now, before we shift to Committee to Re-elect, so the people compared to today, if you think about the editors in the United States in this era, what percentage were Republican or conservative, newspaper editors in that period?

**Rob Odle**

I'm guessing that more editors and publishers were moderate and some conservative than the Washington White House reporters were. In other words, if you take a hypothetical newspaper, it's going to have a publisher, an editor, and a Washington correspondent, and my sense is that Washington correspondents are probably more liberal, more Democratic leaning than their respective editors and publishers back home.

**Timothy Naftali**

So that's why Herb Klein made an effort to get to the popular people, the publisher's back home?

**Rob Odle**

Not just why, I think that certainly has got to be part of it, but I think he just wanted to get to them to get to them. And remember, he was one of them. That's where he began San Diego. And I think he had the sense that they were ignored, and the White House Press Corps was maybe given too high a pedestal.

**Timothy Naftali**

What about television?

**Rob Odle**

Oh, same thing, we -- one of Herb's first activities was to recruit someone from one of the networks, come down from New York, join our staff, and he would coordinate television appearances. I think we were the first administration, probably, to coordinate who went on "Meet the Press," or what were they then, "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," "Issues and Answers." I guess some of the names are the same, but the formats were very different.

**Timothy Naftali**

And radio?

**Rob Odle**

Same, same, we -- President Nixon, I think, started the Saturday radio talks, didn't he? Yeah, I think he did, and he would use the radio now and then and not use television.

**Timothy Naftali**

Who came to you to ask you to switch jobs?

**Rob Odle**

It probably would have been Bob Haldeman and Jeb Magruder.

**Timothy Naftali**

In that -- did you have any -- what kind of interaction did you have with John Mitchell in this period, when he was attorney general and you were working for Herb?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I would see him, you know. I would see him at meetings, and, you know, the White House is a pretty small place. You'd see him in the White House mess, and I would see him occasionally at social events and things like that, and he continued to be very nice to me. And then when I went over to the campaign, we all knew that at some point he would resign as attorney general and come and manage the campaign. So I looked forward to being with him again and got his office ready at the campaign headquarters and that sort of thing.

**Timothy Naftali**

Why did you say yes to the job with the campaign?

**Rob Odle**

Because how do you say no? I mean, you can't really say -- I mean, if you're asked by the President's chief of staff to do something, it's not something you can say no to.

**Timothy Naftali**

Rob, let's stop here now, please, and Meghan -- It's Meghan's turn.

**Rob Odle**

Okay.

**Timothy Naftali**

Thank you.

**Meghan Lee**

I'm Meghan Lee, and I'd like to ask you some questions about the Committee to Re-elect.

**Rob Odle**

Sure.

**Meghan Lee**

What was your title when you came over?

**Rob Odle**

Well, at the beginning it was only five of us, and my title was director of administration, but with five people, there is not a lot to administer. Later, we would grow to several hundred and then there was. But as one of the five, I also had responsibilities for certain other areas, which is to be the staff person for the planning of the Republican convention. And then I also did some work on direct mail in other programmatic areas like that.

**Meghan Lee**

Who were the initial five?

**Rob Odle**

Well, let's see, we had Jeb Magruder, who was in charge of the political side; Hugh Sloan, at the time who was in charge of the finance side; Bart Porter, who would do the scheduling and the surrogates. Surrogates is a very big issue. You know, the President can't go out on the road every day, he's President, so you find people to campaign, and Bart was in charge of that. A man named Bob Merrick, who worked on polling and statistics and research and that sort of thing.

**Meghan Lee**

What were the initial focuses of the committee when you first all got together?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think first establishing a mechanism whereby people could sign up both to donate for President Nixon and work for President Nixon. I remember during the Senate Watergate hearing, some of the Democratic senators sort of tried to suggest there was something wrong with having a re-election committee, that there was some nefarious objective in setting up a re-election committee separate from the Republican National Committee, when, in fact, although there was never any doubt that President Nixon would get the nomination, he did have two challengers for the '72 nomination. John Ruselo

[phonetic sp]

from the right, and I believe it was -- and I can't think of the person who challenged him from the left.

**Timothy Naftali**

McCloskey?

**Rob Odle**

McCloskey, could be, yeah. And it's obviously obvious that the President was going to be re-nominated. But to have used at that time, before he was the official nominee of his party, to use the Republican National Committee to finance or to further his campaign would have been simply illegal. And so you have to have, and everybody does, but the way it came out at those hearings was that nobody ever has, when in fact they all have, and that we should have worked through the Republican National Committee which, as I say, prior to the convention, would have been unlawful. So it did what all other Smith or Jones for President committees does, and that is to set up a mechanism to raise money and to begin to set ideas and programs for advertising, and polling, and research and the convention, and all the other things the national campaign does, just like Senator Clinton, Senator Obama's, and Senator McCain's committees did many, many months ago. We were doing the same thing. And the fact that we were the incumbent didn't really make any difference. Prior to the convention, especially when you have challengers, even though they're not people who are going to win, you have to do it, and we did it like has been done forever.

**Meghan Lee**

Could you give an overall view of the evolution of the committee, starting, you know, just with the five of you to when it started to gear up more?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think, obviously we set up in May of '71, and I think fundraising probably was a key focus. We didn't -- in those days, thank God, elections really began in even numbered years, not odd numbered years, and we didn't have to put the American people through two years of this torture. But then you would have the primary season, and although he was going to be the nominee, you still had to go through the primary, so then that would mean additional people on the political side, which means regional directors, state directors, and all of that kind of work. The surrogates operation, because he's the President, can't be on the stump every day, grew and grew. We had to have speechwriters who could write speeches for the surrogates. We had to have a communications office and a spokesman for the committee. We had to get really serious, you know, later on about convention planning and everything that went along with convention planning and just the normal facets of campaigns. The interesting thing -- and get out the vote, and then the various citizens for, you know, like firemen for, and police officers for, and veterans for, and lawyers for, and doctors for. I don't think it was a lot -- I don't think it was very much different than any other Presidential campaign headquarters. Although I think we were more effective, and I think, had it not been for Watergate, it would have gone down in the book as one of the most effective Presidential campaigns in history. In fact, even with Watergate, people like David Broder and others would say it's the first time the Republicans have gotten out the vote better than the Democrats. And some of the Democratic senior campaign people, advisers over the years, said the same thing, that this is the first time, one of them said, the Republicans beat us at our own game.

**Meghan Lee**

The two that you just mentioned, the citizens groups and then the political division which you see in the way that collection is breaking down, it does seem to be a new idea. Could you tell a little bit more about how those developed, all the citizens groups, and the political division?

**Rob Odle**

I don't know that it is. One is vertical and one is horizontal. The citizens groups are horizontal. It's men and women around the country who are -- who are in a particular profession or have an interest or something, who band together to support that candidate and try to build support for that candidate with other people in that group. And then the vertical organizations are the state-by-state and region-by-region efforts, the grassroots efforts in order to carry the electoral votes of each particular state. Not really a lot different from what we did in '68. I mean, it was better. It was more professional. It was more scientific. We had an enormous number of volunteers who gave of their time, both sophisticated people and just people kind of off the street. But, you know, it wasn't really a lot different in '68 or '60 or whatever. I think it was better, but I don't think it was a lot different.

**Meghan Lee**

Could you talk about the use of the November Group?

**Rob Odle**

Sure, and again, that wasn't that different with this one exception. Typically, in other campaigns, you had contracted with advertising agencies to -- sometimes one, sometimes many -- to do the advertising for the Presidential campaign. You always have to do that, and you have to get started early, because it takes a long time to produce these. You can't wait until you're the nominee and say to the Republican National Committee or the Democratic National Committee, oh, by the way, it's too late. So you got to start early, and you got to start before you're nominated. But the idea -- and I'm not sure where this came from, it certainly wasn't mine, but it certainly was smart, I thought -- is why don't we just bill it in-house? Let's start really early and put it together in the office here and take this guy from Young & Rubicam and this guy from Ogilvy and this guy from -- and that woman from here and put them in something called the November Group, and they'll all take leaves of absences from where they are, and they'll be in our shop, and we'll do it in-house.

**Meghan Lee**

Were they actually with you?

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, they were. In fact, we were officed at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue. We had offices all through the building, but I remember, I was on the fourth floor, and they were down the hall from me, Peter Dailey, Phil Juano [phonetic sp], and a lot of very, very talented people. The current President of the AARP, Bill Novelli, was part of the November Group.

**Meghan Lee**

When -- by then Attorney General Mitchell becomes the campaign director and everything, did you have an overall organization within the offices? Was there a file plan that everyone followed, or was each department head running their own show?

**Rob Odle**

I would say more the latter. I mean we tried to support everybody, but it's a campaign, and you don't have the opportunity to have the kind of organized central file system that you would in a law firm like mine that evolves over time and lasts for years. Campaigns, uniquely, they start with a few people, they rev up to Election Day, and then they take themselves apart and go out of business. So, frequently, they're quite disorganized. I tried and my administrative staff tried to be a little more organized than usual, and I think we succeeded.

**Meghan Lee**

How did the paperwork flow between offices? I know there is the deputy campaign director, which was Jeb Magruder. Later, there was also Fred Malek. How did the paperwork flow up and back down?

**Rob Odle**

Well, Fred was going to be in charge of the political operation, what you might call the vertical organizations around the country, and Fred was a management wiz. He probably was a management wiz by the time he was 12, and he was so highly regarded at being able to get things done well that that's what he did. And Jeb Magruder, on the other hand, was responsible for the citizens groups and the advertising. Jeb had an advertising background, so he would do that. And their offices were adjacent to each other's, and they shared a conference room where we -- the three of us were all kind of in the same area. And I don't know that there was a huge paper flow. Everybody -- a campaign is something where, you know, it's pretty much 24/7. There were mercifully few disputes that I can recall.

**Meghan Lee**

Was there the set departments that reported through Magruder, and set through Malek, and then they would report to the campaign director?

**Rob Odle**

Exactly.

**Meghan Lee**

How much of the materials were funneled back and forth from the White House, as well?

**Rob Odle**

We'd get memos from the White House, and we'd send people at the White House memos. A sitting President is both a -- only one time in his career, because of the constitutional amendment, a sitting President is both a commander in chief -- head of state, head of the government -- and candidate. So obviously, there is going to be a lot of paper flow back and forth. It was interesting, though, that President Nixon was determined not to have campaigning done out of the White House, so that all of the meetings that involved White House staff, and there is two kinds of White House staff, those who are legally not covered by what was then called the Hatch Act, who are free to be political, and those who weren't. And there was a firm order that anybody who was covered could not. Those who weren't covered could and did. And they would come over to our offices, because the President didn't think it was appropriate to use the White House conference rooms or offices for campaign purposes. And indeed, when I left the White House, we were asked to surrender our White House passes. We surrendered our White House mess privileges, the little dining room that they had which was so much fun and inexpensive. And we were completely cut off, because he just felt that there had to be a bright line, and that was the first time that that had ever happened. Our counterparts in earlier campaigns all retained those kinds of things. In fact, when I was going through a receiving line shortly after that, I said hello to the President, he said, "We had to do these things because it's the right thing. I hope you're comfortable over there." I thought that was pretty neat, that the commander in chief, and, you know, would worry about my comfort, but that was exactly what I could see in his head.

But anyway, the White House folks all came over to our place and had meetings, and I'll never forget that every time he would -- we would declare his candidacy in a state, in a primary, I had to walk over with stamps because we didn't want to use White House stamps to mail in his registration to be nominated in a primary. And my other recollection is the morning of June 17, 1972, when there was a meeting on the convention, and there were some senior officials from the White House who had come over, and some people from the Republican National Committee had come over, and I was still sort of the staff director. I did basically the staff work for this convention task force. And the meeting was about over. It was around noon, and I was standing by the door as people were getting up, and a guard came by and said, "Mr. Odle, have you heard? There's been a break-in at the Watergate at the Democratic National Committee." I said, "No, do we know anything more about it?" And he said, "No, just a break-in there." And I looked at this assembly of people including assistant to the President, and I said, "There has been a break-in at the Democratic National Committee," and they kind of looked funny and froze, and -- well, what about -- do you think they'll come here or something like that? I said, "No, it could never happen here because I've got this great security director working for me named Jim McCord." And, of course, it was a couple hours later that I learned my great security director, Jim McCord, was in jail for burglarizing the Democratic National Committee, which troubled me on two accounts. First, he shouldn't have been doing it, and secondly, I was in charge of the guard force, and I didn't know a thing about being in charge of a guard force.

**Meghan Lee**

Because he was -- security was one of the things underneath you, and so you had to hire a new --

**Rob Odle**

Well, I hired McCord, I think on John Dean's recommendation. I can't recall, I think it was John Dean's recommendation, to run security. But that I never -- and he had this long career in the military,

I think in Langley, and other places in security, so I didn't have to worry about it. And now, if he's in jail, I do have to worry about it. And I don't know what I'm supposed to worry about, so I call together the guards and said, "Okay, what do I do now?"

**Meghan Lee**

You mentioned your hiring, and I know that was part of your job. How was hiring done within the Committee to Re-elect?

**Rob Odle**

We had a person who worked for me who was in charge of personnel, and she would -- she was sort of the executive director of all of the hiring. I mean, obviously, if you're in the November Group and you want to hire an artist, you're going to know who the artist is. But all of the logistical things went through this individual. It was pretty well organized. It worked pretty well. And then every week we had to get together to go through the telephone directory and fix it, because so many people had been added and some people had been moved and that sort of thing.

**Meghan Lee**

Was there a lot of moving from department to department?

**Rob Odle**

Not a lot, but there was some. A campaign is not a stable process; it's a dynamic process.

**Meghan Lee**

You had mentioned White House employees who were not covered, not under the Hatch Act.

**Rob Odle**

Mm-hmm.

**Meghan Lee**

Was Fred Malek one of these?

**Rob Odle**

Yes, he would not have been covered as a Presidential appointee, right.

**Meghan Lee**

The records show a lot of his involvement before he actually became the deputy campaign director.

**Rob Odle**

Sure.

**Meghan Lee**

Would you describe how he was involved, though still working in the White House? Was he at the committee or --

**Rob Odle**

I, you know, I'm a little blurry on that. It wouldn't have been surprising for somebody like Fred, who was a senior assistant to the President, who was not barred under any theory from working on campaigns, to be assisting, particularly since the guy was so -- was then and is now highly regarded for his organizational abilities, which are just legion.

**Meghan Lee**

When Director Mitchell resigned and McGregor came, did the organizational -- or did the staff change? Was there any major changes or minor changes within the committee?

**Rob Odle**

There really weren't, no. It was pretty seamless; yeah, it was pretty seamless. John had reentered his law firm and that, so he had always had an office in his law firm, which is in the same building, and the campaign director had an office, so Clark took the campaign director's office, and John had the law firm office that he'd had.

**Meghan Lee**

Could you describe to me the different offices, like the strategy telephone operations and direct mail under the planning, and what that type of group did? The people who worked in that?

**Rob Odle**

Well, those were -- you know, the normal kind of offices that you'd have in any political campaign. There was a strategy council that would meet Tuesday evenings if I remember correctly, where everything that had a strategic dimension to what would come together, and there were some volunteers on that from Hollywood and from New York who would come in for those meetings, and then the senior person, Bob Teeter from the polling operation, Pete Dailey from November Group, Bob Merrick from the research operation. They would all attend those meetings. But it's not rocket science, and it's nothing that hadn't been done. I do think we did a lot of it better than had been done, because we put a Nixonian emphasis on being well organized and not getting sloppy. But it wasn't all that different from what our opponents were doing at McGovern headquarters or what had been done by our predecessors in campaigns.

**Meghan Lee**

Was there a dramatic difference from the way that the committee ran and the finance committee, especially in regards to the recordkeeping?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think a finance committee, by definition, has to be awfully careful. I mean, you have to log in the money. You have to get it deposited. You have to send receipts out. You have to -- you know, we had a -- if I remember correctly, we had a certified public accountant running that operation at the staff level, and, you know, to be director of administration of the committee, as opposed to the finance committee, I didn't have to be a CPA or an attorney, I just had to be not too stupid. But you couldn't have a finance committee that wasn't run by a CPA, because they all did the accounting stuff, too, and paid the bills, and all of that sort of thing.

**Meghan Lee**

Was there a lot of paper flow between the --

**Rob Odle**

Oh, sure, yeah.

**Meghan Lee**

-- finance committee and --

**Rob Odle**

Absolutely, because everything had to be approved and signed off on and that sort of thing.

**Meghan Lee**

Was the finance committee considered part of the committee or a separate entity?

**Rob Odle**

It was separate. There was the finance committee for the re-election for the President, and the committee for the re-election for the President. Now, we got together on the budget every week to decide what we were going to spend, and I also was the executive director of that. So I brought the paperwork and put it before Clark McGregor, the campaign manager, Maury Stans, the finance manager, and people who worked for them. And then they would discuss how much is going to be spent, and the advertising people would come and say, "We've just got to spend all this money over here," and Maury Stans would say, "Over my dead body," and somehow we would reach a consensus, and that's would be what would be spent, and that's what I would mark down in my book. And then the finance committee staff would be authorized to write checks for that amount.

**Meghan Lee**

You mentioned after the break-in, the FBI started to come investigate the committee. How did you provide access to the materials that they were interested in?

**Rob Odle**

Well, as it turned out, some of the -- a couple of the people at the committee, Jeb Magruder and others, knew what had happened, and the other 98 percent, including yours truly, didn't. So I guess it was decided by Jeb and some others that I should be the primary point of contact with all the investigators. A, because I was the director of administration, so it made sense, and I knew where everything was, and B, because I didn't know that we were doing these kinds of things, so I couldn't say the wrong thing, because I didn't know it. And so Jeb and the rest of my friends -- quote, friends -- made me the primary interface with everybody who decided to investigate this thing. And since I didn't think we were involved or did anything wrong, I had no problem with opening everything up, which I did.

**Meghan Lee**

What was -- when the FBI -- were they interested in files --

**Rob Odle**

Sure.

**Meghan Lee**

-- and everything? Would they just review them there on the premises or did they take them?

**Rob Odle**

Yep, they could have copies of them; they took them again. Again, I just -- my theory was that we had not done anything wrong, so we don't have anything to hide, so have at it.

**Meghan Lee**

Is this when you were quote, unquote, the authorized representative for Director McGregor and Maury Stans?

**Rob Odle**

I don't remember that phrase. Have you seen that phrase?

**Meghan Lee**

Mm-hmm.

**Rob Odle**

It sounds right. Yeah, yeah.

**Meghan Lee**

How would you provide access when both FBI and the subsequent -- if they said they wanted to see so-and-so's files --

**Rob Odle**

I would just go in and talk to so-and-so, and say, "Listen, we can either try to stonewall this thing or we can be open, and I think we ought to be open, and that's what we're going to do."

**Meghan Lee**

But primarily it was photocopies of materials?

**Rob Odle**

Mm-hmm.

**Meghan Lee**

You spent -- I think you spent the most time with the committee than anybody else. Could you describe how you served as a consultant after the election?

**Rob Odle**

Well, yeah, we were -- remember, I said a little while ago that you start here with a few people, and then you go to here, and that's around Election Day. Although, it was interesting, we were so well organized that the day before the election, I left the office for the first time in two years before it was dark, and I had never had that experience. I said to this guy I was driving with, I said, "It's light out." And then you start to ramp down. And I wasn't the last person out, but I -- nor did I shut the lights off. But we did get everything organized and sent offsite, sent to the archives, sent here, sent there, sent to, you know, to be held for the library, which would come someday and that sort of thing.

**Meghan Lee**

Was there a retention plan in place from the beginning? Was there a discussion between you and anyone else about how to maintain these files and what to do with them after the election?

**Rob Odle**

Yes, yeah, because what the President wanted to report on the campaign a few days after the election, and so we did two reports. We did a long report, sort of operation by operation, in other words, convention, scheduling, polling, everybody wrote a chapter. And then my job was to put it all together in one document. Those were the days of the Selectric typewriters where, you know, if you made a

mistake, you had to go back, and the President wanted it in a few days, so we really scrambled for about a week after the election to get that done. And then, separately from that, we wrote a, sort of a strategic analysis of what had done. But to be honest with you, by the time we were doing that, people in the media were doing that better than we could. And it said some very nice things like that earlier quote that, for the first time, we beat our opponents at getting out the vote, because typically, Democrats will get out the vote better than Republicans, and this time we were given credit for doing it well. And then out of all of that came the idea of where everything was going to go.

**Meghan Lee**

How did the numerous investigations, and going through the records -- do you think it affected the collection as a whole?

**Rob Odle**

I think it probably tended to save things rather than not save things. I mean, we didn't throw things out because there were subpoenas and things, so that makes you more careful. I think it probably -- the investigations probably resulted in saving things more than not. I remember in New York, in our headquarters, in the middle of the campaign, I was passing by a trashcan and here was this briefcase. And it didn't look bad. I didn't have one, so I pulled it out, it says "RMN," and I said, "Holy Toledo." And I walked by Rose Woods's office. I mean we -- you know, campaigns were a lot smaller. I said, "Rose, this briefcase is in the trash." She said, "Yeah, he got a new one." Well, I said, "I know, but," -- and I said, "you threw it out." She says, "Yeah, it's all messed -- it's all falling apart." I said, "Can I have it?" She said, "Sure." So I took it, and I took it somewhere and had it fixed up, and then when I got down to Washington, I took it to a professional place and had it fixed up. And there it was, RMN. And years later when President Nixon's grandson, Christopher Nixon-Cox, joined my law firm in New York, I took it in again and this time I had it really fixed up, and gave it to Christopher, who is still using it, as far as I know. But that's an example of a campaign where, you know, this is a briefcase that he would have used all over the globe as Vice President, may have been with him in Caracas when they threw stones at the car. Who knows? Or in Moscow with the famous kitchen debate with Khrushchev, but it's in the trash. I think the subpoenas and stuff probably helped us retain things.

**Meghan Lee**

You mentioned that report that you were putting together that week after the election, and did the finance committee also submit with the report in relation to their records?

**Rob Odle**

I'm sure they did, and I'm sure that would have been wrapped in the big one, but my recollection is a little fuzzy on that.

**Meghan Lee**

And did -- interesting that there has been a little bit of literature written about the use of computers in the '72 campaign. Do you have any recollection of these?

**Rob Odle**

No, we even had trouble getting sufficient telephone switchboards installed. There were so many incoming calls that we hired a retired White House switchboard operator to help us. No, I can't recall any of the computer --

**Timothy Naftali**

Hi, this is Tim Naftali again. This organization that worked for the re-election of the President had a very long name. How did you refer to yourselves?

**Rob Odle**

Well, first of all, it's all Bill Safire's fault. When we were setting up shop, Magruder said to me, "Rob, go down and see Safire. He's good at names, and have him come up with a name." So I walked around the corner in the Executive Office Building and explained what we were doing. He thought for a minute, and he said, "Citizens for the Re-election of the President." And so that's fine, that's Bill, he's our resident wordsmith, and there we are. Later we found that people were confusing it, because citizens meant doctors, lawyers, that sort of thing, for whereas this was really not that. That was an operation that operated out of the Willard Hotel, down here in Washington before -- when it was empty. So we changed citizens to committee. I think we called it CRP. Obviously we weren't thinking about CREEP, but we called it CRP, or the committee.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did any of you call it CREEP?

**Rob Odle**

No, I don't think that started until after Watergate, maybe.

**Timothy Naftali**

I noticed that, at one point, you put in a request -- actually Dwight Chapin put in a request for flag lapel pins. And in the current election, there is a -- as you know, it's been somewhat of a deal of 2008 --

**Rob Odle**

Sure.

**Timothy Naftali**

Was this the era when the flag lapel pin came into vogue?

**Rob Odle**

It is.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us a little bit about it.

**Rob Odle**

I can't recall how -- I think it could have come up in connection with one of the President's -- Nixon's first trips to Europe as President. It also could have come up after the mobilization and all of the marches on Washington. But President Nixon began wearing a lapel pin, and the rest of us, many of the rest of us, followed suit.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us about -- what was the account?

**Rob Odle**

Well, in a book that's being published in the summer of 2008, James Rosen talks about the life of John Mitchell, and he also talks about Mrs. Martha Mitchell. And Martha was a funny, humorous, slightly eccentric housewife in Rye, New York, who I think John feared bringing to Washington because he thought it might upset her too much, and I think that he was right. Martha was just a very emotional person, had just enormous mood swings, got very depressed, and then alternatively could be very happy. But John was desperately in love with her and cared for her deeply, and -- but there was no question that Martha had some severe emotional problems, and she would also, on occasion, drink too heavily. And then she'd get on the telephone and start calling official Washington and just kind of carrying on, on the telephone. And so different secretaries and others had to assist her, but they didn't last very long, because she would fire them. And so, after awhile, if you were assigned to Mrs. Mitchell, you were assigned to the account, and that's how the term came up. And because I was responsible for personnel and security and all of that sort of stuff, I guess, ultimately, I was in charge of the account.

**Timothy Naftali**

McCord, James McCord played a role, didn't he? Wasn't he her security officer for a little while?

**Rob Odle**

I think he did some work. Like, for example, if she would be going to give a speech or something, he might have gone with her, yes.

**Timothy Naftali**

Because when the news came out -- and you were surprised -- when the news came out about McCord, I think she was one of those who also reacted to it.

**Rob Odle**

I think --

**Timothy Naftali**

She had known him.

**Rob Odle**

I think that's right. No, no, she had. And whether it was a lot of people around or something like that, she would have -- he and others on his staff would have gone with her for the purposes of security, and I wouldn't be surprised if she had reacted the way I reacted. I mean, McCord seemed to be the straightest arrow in the world, and very quiet and self-effacing, and the idea that he was in a jail cell somewhere was quite shocking.

**Timothy Naftali**

Could you tell us what you remember of a conversation you had with Mrs. McCord on June 17?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think she's the one that first told me it was him. This was after the convention meeting that I described, where I said how proud I was that Jim McCord works for me, not knowing where he was at the time. And then, one or two hours later, Mrs. McCord called and said, "Jim's in jail, and what are we going to do about it?" And that's really all -- and I said, "I don't know." I said, "I can't believe this." I mean, and "I don't know what we're going to do about it."

**Timothy Naftali**

She actually asked -- didn't she say something about his project, or a project had failed?

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, a project -- his project had failed, yes, yes.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let's talk a little bit more, if we may, about June 17. You were asked to do, to have -- later in the day, you were asked to do something. You have a task assigned.

**Rob Odle**

Well, you're probably referring to Jeb Magruder, who was in California, and he asked his personal assistant, Bob Reisner, and me to take some files home for the weekend. Now, at that point, again, I was concerned, as the person ultimately responsible for security, the same thing. In fact, I had packed up my budget files, because those were the most sensitive to me. If the opposition had learned -- and you got to remember, Tim, there was this history of reporters, particularly Jack Anderson over the years. He just had a fetish about Nixon campaign and Nixon office trash. And that's why we had shredders and secure methods of disposing of our trash, because since, I don't know, time immemorial, Jack Anderson loved to go through Nixon trash. And so we made sure that, instead of the trash going to the trash dump, that the trash went through shredding machines. And indeed, if as a result of all of

this, our stuff was no longer safe, then the most important things I had were these budget files, because this showed between now and Election Day, where our campaign was going to be allocating millions of dollars. And that would have been -- and which states. And, you know, I thought we were going to win, but I didn't want that stuff getting in the hands of the other side. So I packed that stuff up and was going to take it home, and then Bob Reisner came in and said, "Jeb wants you to -- me to take a couple of things home and you to take a couple of things home." So he gave me a couple of things, and I took them all home and put them in the closet. Somebody said I put them with my golf clubs at the Senate hearings, and that I had -- Odle had put all these files with his golf clubs for the weekend. And that would have been a little difficult, because I don't play golf, and I don't have any golf clubs. But I do remember putting them in a closet and then taking them back on Monday.

**Timothy Naftali**

At the Senate, I think it was the senator, must have been a senator, asked you, "Mr. Odle, are you a curious man?"

**Rob Odle**

That was Senator Montoya of New Mexico. Somebody said that when Senator Montoya began asking questions throughout the hearings, that you could hear a great surge of water throughout the United States, because everybody would flush their -- go to their restrooms and flush their toilets. But yes, Senator Montoya was confused about a number of things throughout those hearings. But yes, he asked me if I was confused or if I was curious.

**Timothy Naftali**

Why was he -- come on. Why was he asking you that?

**Rob Odle**

Oh, no, no, no. He just wanted to see, did I go through the files? And obviously I didn't go through the files. I didn't go through the budget files because I knew what was in them, and I didn't go through Jeb's files because I knew they belonged -- I assumed they belonged to him in his role as the strategy chief. And what am I going to do, spend the weekend reading polling data?

**Timothy Naftali**

Later you found out --

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, well, later they -- yeah, I mean, they showed me stuff at one of the hearings where people, you know, were producing these reports.

**Timothy Naftali**

Before you -- I believe it was before you testified -- I'm sure of it. In late '72, before you testified in Congress, I think you describe yourself as a professional witness by this point. There is a story about Al Baldwin. Tell us a little bit about what that story was and where the mistake or error was.

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, well, the professional witness comment that I made is that, again, because of -- for two reasons. A, I didn't -- A, I was the administrative chief of the campaign. It made sense for me to be the primary contact with all the investigatory bodies. And people assume today that it was the Senate Watergate Committee that was doing the investigations, and it was, but it was maybe a dozen others, too. I mean you had the FBI, you had the U.S. Attorney, you had civil suit after civil suits filed by the Democratic National Committee, the McGovern committee, and somebody had to supply all the documents and be the interface. And my friend, Jeb, decided that should be me, because A, I was the administrative chief, and B, I didn't know what my friend Jeb was up to in the dark of night with these nefarious activities. So I couldn't get him in trouble even if I wanted to, because I didn't know enough to get him in trouble. So therefore, that's how I kind of became the professional witness, because I was sent to respond to all these investigators for those two reasons. I guess Baldwin was the guy that worked for McCord; I didn't know him. And Baldwin reported to the newspapers, perhaps, I'm not sure, but it got in the newspapers, that he saw McCord send me documents on -- he saw me, Bill Timmons, who at the time was assistant to the President for legislative affairs, and Glen Saddam [phonetic sp], who was general counsel to the committee. And on that, Al Baldwin was absolutely right. McCord was sending Timmons and me memos about convention security, and Bill and I were in charge of planning for the convention, and Glen was our general counsel. So if McCord hadn't been sending me memos about convention security, along with sending them to Bill Timmons and Glen Saddam, he would have been doing something wrong. He was supposed to do that. But somehow in his interview with Woodward and Bernstein, who were the primary "Washington Post" reporters, it got garbled, and the story that Woodward and Bernstein printed, that they were memos about the break-in that were sent to Timmons and to Odle and to Saddam. Later in their book, "All the President's Men," I think, was the name of the first -- they wrote a couple of books, I believe that's the one. And they recanted and said that they'd wronged us, and they'd hurt us in our hometown newspaper, and that they were sorry for the mistake that they had made.

**Timothy Naftali**

You saw G. Gordon Liddy just after the break-in. Please recount your experience with him and the question he asked you.

**Rob Odle**

Gordon Liddy was one of the most persistent men -- no, the most persistent man I've ever met in my life. If Gordon Liddy had never been born, I think Richard Nixon would have served both terms, because he just wouldn't have kept pushing and pushing and pushing to do something that everybody, it turns out, thought was nuts. Gordon came and asked me where the big shredding machine was, and I told him it was behind the door, wherever I pointed it to him or took him around the hall and pointed it to him. And again, some of the Democratic senators had a lot of fun with this, but the simple fact is that the media wanted our trash, and our trash gave away campaign strategies, and we

didn't want them to have our campaign strategies, so our trash got shredded. And, as I think former senator and former Presidential Fred Thompson observed, he was the minority counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee, some of the largest shredders in world history were purchased and used by the Senate Watergate Committee, which routinely shredded every bit of its trash.

**Timothy Naftali**

What day does he come to you?

**Rob Odle**

Oh, that would have been the 17th. All of these events are happening on the 17th.

**Timothy Naftali**

June 17, he comes to you and -- but he doesn't know how to work the shredder, does he?

**Rob Odle**

No, and I said I don't know how to do it either. I assume there is an on button, just -- you know.

**Timothy Naftali**

And he -- but you actually saw, as you testified, you saw -- he had a file. He wanted to shred a file.

**Rob Odle**

No, I remember him having some soap samples from hotels around the country that people would collect. I don't remember files.

**Timothy Naftali**

So he was shredding -- he didn't want people to know where he had been?

**Rob Odle**

I guess. A lot of the White House news correspondents collected hotel room keys, and Gordon collected soap.

**Timothy Naftali**

Now, since you didn't know what he had been up to -- well, weren't you a little suspicious when he came in? Or did -- when he wanted to use the big shredder --

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, I started wondering what's going on, and is there a link here between Gordon and what's going on, but I really didn't think that he would have been connected. You know, most civilized people do

not go in somebody's office in the middle of the night and steal files or plant bugs and things like that. And even though Gordon was a little unusual, to say the least, I really didn't think that any normal human being who was working for a President's re-election, Nixon's re-election, when we're that far ahead and when we're, you know, on the verge of carrying 40 or 50 states, and when he's just back from China and Russia and doing so well, that you would do something really that, A, wrong, and B, stupid, which is precisely what President Nixon's reaction was. He was vacationing in Florida at the time, and I'm told by a couple of different people, that I think are trustworthy, that when he heard about it, he picked up an ashtray and threw it across the room, because he realized how stupid it was, that his opponent was not going to win the campaign. The only thing that could happen is that we could lose it.

**Timothy Naftali**

Was McCord actually employed by the Committee to Re-elect on June 17th?

**Rob Odle**

Yes, absolutely.

**Timothy Naftali**

So -- and he worked for you?

**Rob Odle**

He did.

**Timothy Naftali**

And you didn't know he was moonlighting?

**Rob Odle**

No, I sure didn't.

**Timothy Naftali**

So he'd just disappear and --

**Rob Odle**

Well, no, I mean, literally moonlighting at night. I'd go home by 7:00 or 8:00 at night, and I guess he was doing some other things. But, no, I mean I -- looking back at it, before I picked up anything or learned anything, I think when I looked at Bill Timmons about 11:00 that morning and said, "This would never happen here, because I've got this great guy, McCord, working for me, and he's got this place absolutely tight." I mean, that was -- I remember saying that, and I said that to the Senate committee. And that wouldn't have been my reaction if I had suspected anything.

**Timothy Naftali**

What was your reaction when you pieced this all together later on? How do you think this happened?

**Rob Odle**

Well, one of sadness, in Jeb's case, the lack of a moral compass. I talked about that in my opening statement to the Senate, and I said, "A few people have gone wrong. They violated the law, and they need to be found out, and they need to be punished." But 99 percent of the people at national headquarters, and practically 100 percent of the people who volunteered in the cause of this President's re-election, did nothing. And I'm proud to be associated with them, and I'm disappointed at those who did wrong.

**Timothy Naftali**

Let me ask you three political questions before we move to your moment in the limelight, the Senate Watergate hearings. Actually, one more Liddy question, did Liddy tell your wife how to kill somebody? [laughter]

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, they -- I was in a meeting, and the door was closed, and Gordon was waiting to see me, and my wife was waiting to get me so we could go out for the evening. And he introduced himself to her and said -- well, I don't know, I wasn't there. But as my wife tells the story, he basically said, "Would you like to understand how to quickly kill somebody with a sharpened pencil?" And my wife said, "No, I don't think so, but I'm sure Rob will be out in a minute and then we've got to leave."

**Timothy Naftali**

And she told you this afterward? Who is that strange man?

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, she said, "I met the most unusual man."

**Timothy Naftali**

All right, a few political questions. Did you continue your liaison to Catholic organizations while you were at the Committee to Re-elect?

**Rob Odle**

No, because there were people in the White House to do that. I mean I'm active in Catholic organizations, but not in a formal way, no.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us a little bit -- you get between \$3,000 and \$4,000 given to you in May of 1972 to gin up some kind of support for the President after he decides to bomb Haiphong Harbor. What do you remember of that, and why would you have been involved in that?

**Rob Odle**

I think we hired some buses, and we got people to come in and -- on the buses with signs and things supporting the President. And there was a newspaper that was having a poll, and I think we bought a bunch of newspapers so everybody on the bus could have a newspaper. And maybe some others had -- and maybe we just filled out some newspapers ourselves. Looking through the telescope, if we did that, that probably wasn't right. I mean, if one person wants to check in and send it in -- but if we bought a whole bunch of papers and checked the boxes, that probably wasn't appropriate.

**Timothy Naftali**

Had you -- was this sort of thing that you had done when you were in Herb Klein's office?

**Rob Odle**

Oh, no, no, he wouldn't have done that in the White House. He would do that in a campaign, maybe, but you wouldn't -- no.

**Timothy Naftali**

The Senate Watergate Committee published some political memoranda, actually in preparation, I think, for talking to Pat Buchanan, but one of them was a memo that you wrote to Bill Timmons about ginning up a fourth party candidate. Do you --

**Rob Odle**

Boy, I don't remember that one.

**Timothy Naftali**

The reason I bring it up is again, it's the context of the era we're in now. It's 2008. One of the suggestions you made was that it would be helpful to President Nixon if there were a black -- an African-American Presidential candidate or Vice Presidential candidate, not on the Republican ticket, but as a way of bringing people over to vote for the Republican Party. Things have changed dramatically since then, but I'm wondering if you remember that and why --

**Rob Odle**

Are you sure it was me?

**Timothy Naftali**

I'm sure it was you.

**Rob Odle**

Boy, no recollection.

**Timothy Naftali**

It was just one of the memoranda that --

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, yeah.

**Timothy Naftali**

I just thought it didn't fit with any of the other --

**Rob Odle**

And I would have written this to Timmons?

**Timothy Naftali**

Yeah.

**Rob Odle**

It's funny, because Bill was the convention guy, not the strategy guy. That's odd.

**Timothy Naftali**

Well, I'll show it to you afterwards. Let's talk about your moment in the limelight. You're the very first person to testify before the Senate Watergate Committee. Tell us about the experience. Were you nervous? And what did you expect to occur?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think what I expected to occur is the key point. Again, I had been -- made myself available to Senator Ervin's chief investigator and chief counsel, Sam Dash, who I found to be a very fine man. And Senator Baker was the minority member of the committee, and his staff director was Fred Thompson, and I got on nicely with Fred, and I provided whatever they all wanted. And then they decide -- they called me one day, and I actually saw it in an old fashioned teletype coming through at the committee offices, that I was, at their request, to spend 15, 20 minutes with a big chart illustrating who was who at the committee and what the relationships were. Some of the questions that had been asked here today between finance and the committee and paper flow and all of that sort of thing, really,

were very similar to the questions we've discussed today. And then I was to be followed by my counterpart at the White House, Bruce Kehrl, whose title was staff secretary, and he would have his White House chart. And then that would be used by the senators and their staffs and by the American people to sort of figure out who everybody was and kind of get everything organized. And to get the relationship in the head so that when the important witnesses could come on, you could relate it back to the particular box, not a bad idea. And so I'm the first witness, because they want to start with the committee. And I do a little opening statement and talk about that the guilty should be exposed and punished, but that the 98 percent of the people who had done nothing wrong shouldn't be and what a great President we've got in the White House, and then I do my box stuff. And as thought, it takes about 15 or 20 minutes, and Senator Baker and Senator Dash -- Senator Baker, the ranking member, and Senator Ervin, the chairman, proceed to kind of thank me for coming and say they want me to come back later when they get on down the road, further in their investigation. And I say, fine, and I start to think, and Senator Weicker, kind of a maverick senator from Connecticut says, "Now, Mr. Odle, I want to talk to you about the events on June 17th." Well, you could see the faces of the chairman, the ranking member and their chief counsels, because that wasn't supposed to happen. It was supposed to go chronologically, and -- but apparently Senator Weicker wanted the newspaper and television exposure, and so we went right into June 17th, some of the questions we've talked about here and everything else. And, you know, what was John Mitchell's role before he resigned as attorney general and all of those kinds of things. So the 20 minutes turned into four, five hours. Poor Bruce Kehrl sat behind me for the entire time and didn't get on until about 5:30 or 6:00. And, of course, I hadn't prepared for any of that; I hadn't read anything. But it was okay, I just answered the questions as honestly as I could and as completely as I could, and, you know, just responded to the questions.

**Timothy Naftali**

At this point, you are at HUD, aren't you?

**Rob Odle**

No, I'm finishing the -- no, I go to HUD a little bit later. I'm now winding down the committee as a consultant. I'm kind of one of the last people out the door. I don't quite shut off the lights, but I get everything organized. And it was kind of -- I kind of enjoyed it, because I was one of the first five and one of the last five, and then I went off to HUD.

**Timothy Naftali**

And why do you go to HUD?

**Rob Odle**

Well, Jim Lynn had been a bright, young senior partner of a law firm and then general counsel to the Commerce Department, and deputy secretary of Commerce and President Nixon asked him to go over to HUD and kind of straighten it out. It had kind of gotten into an unnecessary overdrive during the Johnson years, and several hundred thousand housing units were constructed that were abandoned, and the secretary had acquired title to them, and our job was to try to get those renovated and sold and get people in them and fix public housing and a bunch of other stuff. And Jim had asked a lot of young people from different parts of the administration in Washington to come over with him, and I did as well, as deputy assistant secretary for housing management, and I really enjoyed coming to understand,

after working with so many Cabinet departments in the White House, actually being in one and running a staff, and that sort of thing.

**Timothy Naftali**

You were there -- you were at HUD when President Nixon resigned.

**Rob Odle**

Mm-hmm.

**Timothy Naftali**

Tell us about -- well, first of all, what was your reaction when you learned that there was a taping system in the White House? Did it surprise you?

**Rob Odle**

I was surprised. I was surprised he waited as long to put it in as he did, because all of his predecessors had had them. And I was surprised, but I knew of his interest in history, and -- which we saw with the wonderful books he wrote after he left the White House. I think to have that record is not a bad thing; it's probably a good thing. But to have knowledge of it is a bad thing, because that means you don't get good advice, so once it became known, it obviously had to come out, and now no President can have it again.

**Timothy Naftali**

Where were you on the day that he resigned?

**Rob Odle**

The night before, his daughter, Tricia, with whom my wife and I had been friends since 1969, called us. And we'd stayed in touch and had been over there and things, and she said, "We have made the decision, and we want you to come to a certain place and be with us." So we went over to the White House East Room and were there when the President, Mrs. Nixon, Julie and Tricia, Ed, and David Eisenhower came in the room.

**Timothy Naftali**

What do you recall of --

**Rob Odle**

Next to the death of my parents and the death of loved ones, it was the saddest day of my life; it was just awful. But, I mean, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Pat Moynihan were just sobbing, just out of control. I mean it was -- but then, bless his heart, President Nixon got up there, and everybody said he gave this crazy address, and it was disjointed, how he talked about his mother. You go back and read the text of that thing; it was beautiful. It was really done. And he kept talking about how, if you're

going to have peaks, you're going to have to have valleys, and you can't let that get to you. And he said never hate, because when you hate, you destroy yourself. And he said, "I have been at some of the mountain tops, but if I'm going to be on mountain tops, I'm going to be in valleys, too." And then he quoted Teddy Roosevelt, which is one of his favorite Presidents, and talked about how when something bad in his life happened, he came back. And then he quoted Sophocles by saying, "We must wait until twilight to see how splendid the day has been," making it clear that, for him, the day was not complete, that there was going to be a mission. And if you go to the Smithsonian exhibit on the Presidents, it has a whole area about, in his period after the Presidency, where he never took a dime for a speech, not one penny for a speech, and wrote these just magnificent books. And he ended his speech, his talk that day, by admonishing us not to hate, not to cry, but to remember that life does give you knocks, and you have to take them. And then he said -- he talked, again, a little bit about his family, and then he said, "So I want to say to you today, we don't have the right word in English. The right word is not goodbye; the right word is au revoir. It means, 'We'll be seeing you.'"

### Timothy Naftali

Tell us about your meeting with him in 1978.

### Rob Odle

Sort of the reverse of that. It was a couple of days after -- in Rome, this cardinal archbishop of Krakow, Poland, had gone to Rome to elect a pope, and instead became one, the first time in I don't know how many hundred years, and I went in to see him. I was in -- I was with International Paper Company then, after leaving government, and we -- I'd asked if I could see him, since I was in California, and they said yes. And it was very nice. Julie Nixon Eisenhower was there and her little girl, President Nixon's first granddaughter, was climbing around the office, and it was just a wonderful time. But I had seldom seen him as happy. Well, at Tricia's wedding, of course, but he was just on a cloud. And about five minutes into the conversation, I said, "Mr. President, pardon me, sir, but you seem as happy as I've seen you since Tricia's wedding". And he said, "I am." He said, "You know what I did in Hungary in '56, interviewing all the people that came across the border and tried to get them, the refugees, into the U.S. and Canada and other places, and how I tried to separate China from the Soviet Union. But we never could figure out a way to get Hungary and Poland and those countries out of the Soviet orb, but now something has happened and it's going to change the course of history, this YI," and he pronounced his name in perfect Polish, so I'm told, "has been elected pope. This is going to give the Poles their pride back. It was taken away by the Nazis in the '40s and by the Soviets at the beginning of the '50s. It's going to give them their pride back, and they're going to well up, and he's probably going to come back there and offer mass or something or I don't know what," he said, "what will happen. But he's going to give them a spark, and that spark is going to spread through Poland, and it's going to spread through Eastern Europe, and this is the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union and those countries."

### Timothy Naftali

Tell us what you remember of the wedding, Tricia's wedding.

**Rob Odle**

Well, we were scared to death it was going to -- we were going to have a cloud burst and we were all going to get soaking wet, because she wanted it to be in the Rose Garden, and it had been raining a little bit. And I remember the Account [phonetic sp] arrived wearing a dress that would have made Scarlet O'Hara in "Gone With the Wind" look like she was in blue jeans, and there were some other -- I mean it was quite an event. But we all were kept in the diplomatic reception room until the storm cloud passed, and then we quickly went into the Rose Garden, and it was like a movie set, and everything cleared. There was a drop or two, but, you know, the Irish say that's good luck, and it was just a beautiful, beautiful ceremony. It was very much a family ceremony, but yet it was broadcast to the nation. And then we came into the White House in the East Room for refreshments, and dancing and the President danced, which I had not seen him do in public, and Mrs. Nixon was so beautiful, and it was just so nice. And then, just a few days prior to that, Lydia had been asked to a shower for Tricia, so she went to the shower, and Lydia helped Tricia open her presents. And Mrs. Nixon was sitting there. Mrs. Nixon was just such a wonderful, down to earth person, and they just were, you know, giggling and having fun, and, I mean, they were very elegant, but they were just so down to earth. I remember one day at a White House event, Mrs. Nixon saw us standing there and came across the -- that grand crossing, you know, in the front there -- and came up to Lydia and said, "Tricia brought back your recipe for vermicelli," or something, "and I went up and cooked it last night, and boy, it's good. I wish you'd share more of those Italian," -- Lydia's mom was Italian -- "I wish you'd share more of these with me. They are so delicious." Now, you know -- and I'm sure she did. She was there, she was. Pat Nixon upstairs on the second floor, cooking vermicelli.

**Timothy Naftali**

Did you have any interactions like that with President Nixon?

**Rob Odle**

A few, I mean -- actually, after he left office more so than in the office, but no, in the office, sure. I brought in Young Republican leaders, and some Catholic groups and things like that. I'll never forget, one time I brought in Young Republican leaders, and he didn't realize they were having a convention over in Arlington, and he said, "So who's speaking?" And they told him, and they were kind of junior level White House people. And he said, "Rob, when we're done here, you go get Henry, and you get John, and you tell them they're going over there tomorrow morning." I said, "Mr. President, it's Saturday morning." He said, "Just tell them I told them that they're going to speak." So there I am at 25, knocking on the door of Henry Kissinger to tell him that his Saturday has been changed around, and John Ehrlichman, as well, that his had, too, because the President wanted the chief foreign policy and chief domestic policy person to speak.

**Timothy Naftali**

Compare for us, if you will, the Ford to Nixon administrations, from your perspective. You were at HUD, and you were there until 1976, I believe.

**Rob Odle**

Yeah, I guess in the Ford years and the Reagan years, where I worked in Cabinet departments appointed by the President, in the case of DOE, confirmed by the Senate, you know, I would go back to the meetings and I would be in large meetings, well, I mean Cabinet room sized meetings, and with both President Ford and President Reagan, and Vice President Bush, you know, the first. But there is something very unique and very different about the White House staff, particularly in those days. I mean it was very small. And if you had a badge that said "WHS," you could go just kind of anywhere you wanted. And because I came from the campaign, even though I was much younger, I had that personal relationship with people like Rose Woods, who had been a secretary since 1946, and others who had been around him, and, you know, having lunch in the White House mess, and it was a very personal, very family kind of thing. And then with the relationship with his daughter and later her husband-to-be, it was -- it was a little bit different than an assistant secretary of HUD, or energy, who comes over for meetings.

**Timothy Naftali**

Since I'll share this with the Reagan Library -- two minutes, we'll finish that. Why didn't Ronald Reagan eliminate the Department of Energy where you actually served?

**Rob Odle**

Well, I think he did. I think he did. Ronald Reagan ran against the idea of the government setting prices on crude oil and on natural gas. He ran against the economic regulatory administration of 2,500 people who set those prices. He ran against the Department of Energy, discouraged commercial nuclear development like France has. Forty percent of France's electricity is produced today by commercial nuclear. He ran against all of those things. By the time we left DOE four years later, all of those things were gone. We decontrolled crude oil. We got natural gas started on its way. We got rid of the regulations, we got rid of the bureaucrats, and we restored the commercial nuclear option, although -- and we passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which is now bearing fruit at Yucca Mountain. We didn't know it would take that long, but the point is, the five or six things that Ronald Reagan, from a policy standpoint, wanted to do, we got done. And when I left DOE, the editor of the nice enough -- editor of the "Oral Daily" was nice enough to say that Odle is right when he says the DOE that Ronald Reagan ran against is gone.

**Timothy Naftali**

He learned, though, that DOE did a lot of other things.

**Rob Odle**

Oh, sure, and I think most -- I think 98 percent of Americans think that nuclear weapons and nuclear ships are built by the Department of Defense, and that our wonderful national laboratories, Oak Ridge, Sandia, Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos, Fermi, the one on Long Island, are Department of Defense laboratories. They're not. They're Department of Energy laboratories.

**Timothy Naftali**

Mr. Odle, thank you for your time.

**Rob Odle**

Tim, thank you. I enjoyed it very much.